



BENGALEE LOWER ASSAM

BHUTAN AND INDIA  
A Study in Frontier  
Political Relations (1772-1865)



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FIRMA KLM PRIVATE LIMITED  
CALCUTTA : : 1976

## FOREWORD

In 1860s, a few years after the transfer of Power in India from the East India Company to the Crown, the British Government in India made a commercial probe followed by a military adventure into Bhutan. The British discovered that a brave people lived inside the closed land; the resistance of Bhutan was as brave and as skilful as that of Nepal five decades earlier and of Afghanistan three decades earlier. The story of the encounter, its beginnings and its results, are described in this slim volume, and much more than the encounter can be found in these pages. From published sources like Surgeon Rennie's *Bhotan and the Story of the Doar War* (London 1866) and the unpublished records in Calcutta, Cooch Behar and New Delhi, the author portrays the events as if with the pen of a contemporary witness. He succeeds in this difficult assignment most creditably. I would attribute this to the author's on-the-spot knowledge of Bhutan, the land and its people and, what is relevant to the principal story here, the author's knowledge of muskets and rifles as a teacher-officer in the National Cadet Corps. A good deal of researches, based on purely bookish knowledge and without any acquaintance with the subject matter, come out in cold print under the patronage of University Grants Commission, Indian Council of Historical Research etc., but a fraction of it should have been ever published. I am happy to find that this publication will uphold the good old tradition of Calcutta University. I would not stand between the book and the reader any longer but for reasons I state at the end of this Foreword. I must highlight three very important points that I have found in this slim volume, for I have read the book not only with great pleasure but with much profit.

The author calls the Anglo-Bhutan or Doar War as Unequal War. "Unequal War" like "Unequal Treaty" is a popular expression with scholars and statesmen of countries which had good beatings from mercenary and mercantile bandits from the West throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Brave Bhutan proved, as the author shows, that morale was more important than Enfield Rifle and Bhutan knew how to organize



logistics in their own terrain. The Drukpa could maul and twist the Lion's tail because the Drukpa had a brave Government.

The British were not certain or sure as to where rested the Sovereignty of Bhutan—in the Austinian sense. Who could deliver the goods? Dharma Raja, Deva Raja or the Penlop? British intelligence thus anticipated anarchy, chaos and rout in the face of invasion. The authorities in Bhutan rose equal to the occasion and offered a systematic resistance which only a systematic political set-up could do. The evolution of a pluralistic system of Sovereignty which governed Bhutan till 1907 had its historical justification in the events of 1860s.

Nothing illustrates better that wise saying "A country possesses the government its people deserves" than the history of Bhutan. In Bhutan both the people and their rulers have been brave. In 1907 the people and their rulers opted for hereditary monarchy and monistic sovereignty. Sixty years later—that is, a hundred years after the Doar War was over—a brave king of Bhutan, His Late Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, renounced the prerogatives of absolute monarchy and ushered in a number of reforms which made Bhutan a constitutional monarchy in truest sense of the term and later made Bhutan a most welcome entrant into the United Nations. Bhutan today is as progressive a country as any Democratic Country.

Dynamism of Bhutan is rooted in its past. Bhutan, its people and rulers for three centuries strove for Wang (Power) as an instrument for Zhi-ba (Peace); and Dorji (Thunder) has been the symbol of that quest. The Doar War was a matter of life and death for Bhutan; for British Government it was a miscalculation not unusual for the heirs of a mercantile organization. So both parties settled down to terms of peace. The British profited even in the matter of administering the annexed Duars. As the author shows the British Government discovered a viable system of government left behind by the Drukpa in the Doars.

Why I anticipate the author's findings in writing a foreword? Because I have grave misgivings about the merits of its layout, production and even printing. I got the machine-proofs, with print orders already issued, and could not inflict my advice. These are the days of Macro-history, Micro-history and History Made Easy. I do not know why the author should—knowingly



or unknowingly—cultivate the style of Frederick William Maitland or Charles Grant Robertson who would presume a knowledge of the secondary sources and also of the outline of events on the part of the readers. Maitland or Robertson wrote for the young intellectuals cloistered in the colleges of Oxford or Cambridge at the beginning of this century. I hope the author would not expect that towards the end of the century from any reader, whether specialist or not. I would therefore advise the reader not to fight shy of the book because of “unattractive” style or “bad” production.

I am thankful to the author, Arabinda Deb, for giving me an opportunity to bear testimony to his research abilities and original work.

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TO THE BRAVE PEOPLE OF BHUTAN



## PREFACE

In 1966 it was the sight of the remains of a stockade in the Duar War on the left bank of the river Torsa in the Duars that first aroused my interest in Bhutan and the people of Bhutan. This silent witness of a forgotten chapter in our Frontier History inspired me to devote myself to a field of study for which I would not claim to be well equipped. By a curious coincidence it was the centenary year of the British Proclamation annexing the Duars; and 1866 was the year of publication of Dr. David Field Rennie's book : *Bhotan and the Story of the Doar War*. To what extent I have succeeded in adding to this pioneering study it is for the readers to say. I have also ventured into reconstructing the political milieu of the Northern Buddhist state in the Himalayas if only to delineate how bravely Bhutan reacted to foreign aggression. Man can do no more than sacrifice his life for what he values and it is on record that the Bhutanese literally faced death before the Enfield Rifle.

This book will bear out that the mountain land of Bhutan was not a closed country. It was only anxiety about their own independence and the fate of the neighbouring states of Cooch Behar, Nepal, Sikkim and Assam that made the Bhutanese apprehensive of British intentions. Nor was Bhutan a mere hermitland. The Drukpa hierarchy had built up a tradition of secular achievements by the nineteenth century though much of the earlier story of this ancient tradition still remains a closed book. The nineteenth century English records regarding Bhutan and her tradition seems to be erratic in view of the tendentious writings of R. B. Pemberton (1838) and Ashley Eden (1864). But their labours have not been in vain, for without them, and without Krishnakanta Bose's account of Bhutan (1815), no specialist today can venture into attempting a secular history of Bhutan.

In the period covered by this book the secular chiefs of eastern and western Bhutan including the Depa or the Deb Raja were the de facto authority. The Drukpa hierarch, the Shabdung or the Dharma Raja looks like a distant observer on the periphery of political power. The documented story of the chronic

civil strife in Bhutan highlights the break-up of the traditional system under the Dharma and the Deb Rajas. These documents also bring into focus the rise of secular authority. Truly speaking it was a period of flux which took another half a century to run its full course. Then it was one of the secular chiefs, the Tongsa Penlop, who ushered in the monarchy (1907) and set Bhutan on the road to modernity. The documents and the reports which I have drawn upon would give an idea of the functioning of the Bhutanese state which arose out of a colony of Tibetans and also how the Bhutanese organised a viable system of revenue administration and official monopoly trade in Bengal and Assam Duars when they took over these areas in the second half of the eighteenth century from the Cooch Behar Raj and the Ahom Raj then weakened by internecine strife.

It is in the context of Bhutan's internal developments that the story of British relations with her can be seen in proper perspective. The book was not intended as an exercise in the history of diplomacy. We can afford to be oblivious of the bitterness and hard words of an Ashley Eden or the personal idiosyncracies displayed by other representatives of a growing imperial power in India.

The First Bhutan War, the Anglo-Bhutan Treaty (1774) and George Bogle's commercial diplomacy laid the foundation of a structure of relationship which was however not nurtured for three quarter of a century. The bitter harvest was the Duar War (1864-'65) after which the old threads were taken up. Earlier fears that a rupture with Bhutan might lead to "nothing less than a war with China" and threaten the consolidation of British position in Assam never disturbed the men who directed the Duar War. The Treaty of Sinchula (1865) visualised a "perpetual peace" and provided for free trade with and through Bhutan. The Treaty gave leverage in British hands in the form of subsidy to influence the de facto central authority in Bhutan. Later events showed that the ideas enshrined in the Treaty of Sinchula conformed to British aims and objects in Tibet and Central Asia.

This is an occasion for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to Prof. Susobhan Chandra Sarkar and the late Prof. Narendra Krishna Sinha (d. 1974) for whatever I learnt of



History from them. Mr. Nirmal C. Sinha, Centenary Professor of International Relations, Calcutta University, and Founder Director, Institute of Tibetology in Sikkim, encouraged me to undertake this work and his pithy remarks in course of numerous discussions saved me from many pitfalls in this field of study. I am deeply grateful to him also for contributing the "Foreword". Dr. Amal Tripathi, Asutosh Professor of Mediaval and Modern Indian History, Calcutta University, extended to me his invaluable guidance and I will respectfully remember it. Among others I am also indebted to Mr. Nirmal Chaudhuri of Jalpaiguri who helped me in tracing old references which were otherwise unavailable. I also express my gratefulness to Mr. N. S. Subbaya and Mr. R. Misra of YMCA, Kesab Sen Street, Calcutta, for their understanding and help throughout my period of research. Last but not least I thank the Indian Council of Historical Research for the financial assistance which only made this publication possible.

University of North Bengal  
15 May 1976.

ARABINDA DEB

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PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
5	7	Reikats	Raikats
—	9	Beikunthepur	Baikunthopur
12	6	NEFA	Arunachal Pradesh
—	29/30	Mangdiphodrang-dzong	Wangdiphodrang-dzong
13	22	Tongas	Tongsa
14	3	The gardens	Tea gardens
—	4	1941	1841
18	3	Delimkot	Dalimkot
38	34	capacity	rapacity
39	9	dhemai	dhemsi
44	35	hospitable	inhospitable
51	5	place	palace
61	14	of other skins	of Mongol, Khasees and otter skins
70	22	North-West	North-East
72	13	Kamats	Kamata
74	31	1722	1772
81	3	Narendra	Harendra
87	17	Banaka	Banska
—	19	Katma	Katbam
98	27	attached	attacked
102	17	confirmed	confined
104	1	arithmettic	arithmetic
108	7	return	nature
118	4	1934	1834
130	3	shutting	abutting
135	17	Mulester	Mulcaster
—	18	Dunsword	Dunsford
—	32	<i>Eyes</i>	<i>Eyes</i>
136	8	much	such
168	16	Ku-ma-pa	Karmapa
—	30	Lenchen	Lonchen



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## INTRODUCTION

In 1865 Dr. Rennie wrote, "hidden as Bhutan has been from public notice, a great deal of official information has been on record about it." More than a century has elapsed and it cannot be claimed that these informations have been systematised, let alone subjected to a searching interpretative study. Indeed, the extant papers in Government archives and the well-known reports on Bhutan in the 19th century furnish a corpus of facts which, justify a study of the traditional structure and functioning of the Bhutanese state. The first Chapter of the present work ventures into this limited field and does not pretend to be a study of the "peculiar evolution of a primitive people". Drukpa Lamaism, the predominant Buddhist sect of Bhutan which determined the character of the early Bhutanese state as it became known only slowly in the 19th century, awaits its historian. The Bhutanese state was a species of theocracy where the Lamaist hierarchy played an important role in the running of the state. Tibetan ideas of government persisted naturally since the Bhutanese state originated in a colony of Tibetans. Perhaps the most significant example is the doctrine of reincarnation adopted by the Drukpa order in determining the line of succession to the first Shabdung (i.e. the first Dharma Raja). It is interesting that our first available report on Bhutan, namely, George Bogle's account, recorded the conflict between the Lamaist and lay hierarchy where the former under Lama Rinpochoy dethroned the ruling Deb Raja, known as Desi Shidariva, whose adventures in Cooch Behar led to the defeat of the Bhutanese forces in the hands of the British. George Bogle also reported that in the internal affairs of the country the Deb Raja enjoyed complete authority. Later records testify that the lay hierarchy and the Deb Raja were really the de facto authority in Bhutan. Since none of the secular posts, including that of the Deb Raja, were hereditary there were ceaseless struggles for power and privilege. The ambition of provincial governors, particularly the Penlops of Tongsa and Paro, plunged the country in recurring civil strifes which have been mentioned everywhere in the records relating to Bhutan. The prize post in the hierarchy and the object of ambition



for the secular aristocracy was of course that of the Deb Raja. The existing tribal loyalties in Bhutan enabled the Penlops to indulge in lawlessness in order to grasp the prize or to make the Deb Raja a puppet. No wonder that British officials of the status of Ashley Eden described the Penlops as "two notorious robber chiefs." Many wondered whether there was any government in Bhutan worth the name. Krishnakanta Bose's account (1815) of Bhutan is perhaps the first to shed light on the nature of the rivalry for Deb Rajaship.

In the 19th century the Dharma Raja and the Lamaist hierarchy in Bhutan were steadily losing ground. When the struggle for advancement among the secular aristocracy laid in ruins many parts of the country the priests appeared as helpless spectators. It is fascinating to read in Pemberton's Report (1838) the story of the decline of the Drukpa hierarchy and the lamentations of the Dharma Raja. Yet the Dharma Raja as a reincarnation was always the superior authority in the eyes of the ordinary Bhutanese, endowed with a pervasive religious charisma. He had sufficient income and influence to unleash a civil strife. One series of records tell the story of a "sanguinary conflict" which devastated a large part of the Western Duars near Mainaguri in 1853 in which the protagonists were the nominees of the Dharma and the Deb Rajas. Income from some tracts in the Duars were reserved for the Dharma Raja and his establishment. Whether this corresponds to the western concept of "religious endowments" is difficult to say. The armed conflicts near Mainaguri show that the Dharma Raja did not hesitate to take the path of war to preserve his estates and privileges. These records have a unique importance of their own.

The officialdom in Bhutan was a mixture of lay and Lamaist elements. The Drukpa creed enjoined celibacy for officials which was ignored by the powerful lay aristocracy. The lay officials married and gradually occupied all political offices. The pre-eminence of the secular officialdom attracted notice of Krishna Kanta Bose. Pemberton's Report testifies this important aspect of the evolution of Bhutanese polity.

Till the outbreak of the Duar War in 1864 the Western Duars under Bhutanese control witnessed what has been described as a "perennial system of petty warfare". It is singular that no published work has probed into the important question

of how the endemic strifes in the Duars were related to struggles for power within Bhutan. There are a number of documents which expose this correlation. In the Bhutanese conditions the system of dual government under the Dharma and the Deb Rajas did not function harmoniously and the chronic strifes in Bhutan had their projections in the Duars. Secondly, the system of landholding and revenue relations in the Duars give the clue not only to events that occurred but also reveal why a particular person behaved in a particular way. To cite examples, Hargavind Katham (a Bhutanese official) of Mainaguri would not have risen in revolt and driven out the Bhutanese had he not been deprived of rent-free mahals and extorted off and on by Bhutanese zinkaffs sent down by succeeding Deb Rajas. He offered fifty thousand rupees annually as a price for British protection. Durgadev Raikat of Baikantapur fought a long war for his hereditary rights in a mahal called Kyranti which he said was worth one and half lakh rupees a year. His claims in the mahal were recognised by one and denied by another Deb Raja. What I have gleaned from papers belonging to the period of the Duar War and later settlement reports of the Western Duars has perhaps resulted in nothing more than a pen-picture of the system of landholding and revenue relations. This can at least claim the merit of breaking new ground. Contemporary British officials aver that the Bhutanese were very jealous in keeping their revenue secrets. I have devoted one section in the first chapter to a study of the impact of George Bogle's mission to Bhutan (1774-75). It is difficult to find Bogle's equal in imaginative understanding of the Bhutanese situation among later observers sent to that country. This is a quality which makes George Bogle a class by himself. His commercial reconnaissances in Tibet were devoid of permanent and profitable results for a variety of reasons over which he had no control. In Bhutan the story was different. He removed the apprehensions of the officers and the Deb Raja who were "in fact the merchants of Bhutan". His treaty with the Deb Raja not only ensured greater commercial contact with the plains of Bengal but also secured facilities for the transit trade of Tibet through Bhutan by means of native agency.

*Chapter II.*—In the 18th century Bhutanese expansion in the Duars was not merely territorial. It directly led, first, to the extension of her political influence and, secondly, to an attempt



at military conquest of the neighbouring kingdom of Cooch Behar. The nature of Bhutan's stake in Cooch Behar is a subject which has drawn scant attention so far. The traditional hold of Koch chieftains in the Duars was seriously menaced by a people who were alien in appearance, language and customs and whose country had been virtually a terra incognita to local inhabitants. The First Bhutan War (1772-74) developed out of aggressions of the Bhutanese ruler, Desi Shidariva, in Cooch Behar which threatened the British district of Rangpur. It is possible that Desi Shidariva, in the isolation of his mountain kingdom, was completely unaware of the significance of the political revolution in Bengal in 1757 and of the transference of the Dewani in 1765. This is to say that the Bhutanese ruler embarked on an adventure without the slightest premonition of its consequences. The Anglo-Cooch Behar treaty of 1772 sealed his fate. The link-up of the Bhutanese forces and the Sannyasis in the First Bhutan War against the English set the stage for what would now be called a guerilla warfare. This was, however, of no avail once the battle for Cooch Behar was won by Capt. Jones. The story of the combined resistance of the Sannyasis and the Bhutanese has been culled from Secret Proceedings papers.

The statesmanship of the redoubtable Warren Hastings lay in that he not only safeguarded the northern frontier of Bengal by transforming Cooch Behar into a viable buffer but dexterously struck a friendship with Bhutan for the furtherance of his Trans-Himalayan commercial projects. In political acumen Warren Hastings' Bhutan policy is unsurpassed in the annals of North-East India. Once British paramountcy was ensured over Cooch Behar, he went out of the way to placate Bhutan, sacrificing in the process legitimate interests of Cooch Behar.

Almost every page of the records in the Foreign Department and Cooch Behar state publications tell the story of the complete alienation between Cooch Behar and Bhutan in the 19th century. Surprisingly, this well-documented topic has been hardly noticed in studies of this part of the frontier. It is remarkable that the paramount British power in Cooch Behar failed to come up with a consistent policy towards Bhutan for decades until the shocks of the Duar War (1864-65) threw time-serving ideas into the melting pot. The enlightened policy of Warren Hastings truncated Cooch Behar but at the same time brought Bhutan



within the periphery of Indian interests. The treaty of Sindhua (1865) took up the threads where Warren Hastings had left them. Three quarters of a century were lost in the quagmire of indecision and mutual recriminations. Viewed in this light the present work may be regarded as a composite study of a forgotten page in the history of the North-East Frontier.

The section entitled "the Reikats and the Bhutanese" narrates the story of how a hereditary branch of the Koch royal house at Beikunthopur preserved its ancient estates in the Duars under Bhutanese control till the protective arms of British paramountcy extended in the areas in 1865. This reduced the Rai-kats to the status of zemindars.

*Chapter III.*—The British conquest of Assam in 1826 projected Bhutan as a major factor affecting peace on the North-East Frontier. For the first time the Bhutanese hierarchy in the Duars of Kamrup and Darrang, where the boundary was now conterminous, became apprehensive of British intentions. They reacted in a manner which British officials described as "delinquency". In fact it was nothing more or less than holding on to the privileges extorted from the declining Ahom Raj. Continuous records are available from this period to the "resumption" of the Assam Duars in 1841. They reveal British anxiety to reach the foothills of Bhutan. Still more interesting is the idea of moulding the "united influence" of the Dharma and Deb Rajas and the Bhutanese officials in favour of "reopening communications between British and Tibetan authorities" which had been so abruptly cut off since the Sino-Nepalese war of 1792. The Tongsa Penlop and the Bhutanese officials thought otherwise and did nothing to remove misunderstanding over payments of "arrear" tributes demanded for the Assam Duars. These arrears increased year after year and in desperation the British resorted to what has been called "temporary attachment" of Bariguma and Banska in 1828 and 1836. It was found that revenues from these Duars were "amply sufficient" to "maintain our acquisitions". These measures were enough to stir up the central Bhutanese government and open new channels of communication. Pemberton (1838) thought it "perfectly practicable" to open dialogue with Tibetan authorities "as long as the Duars continued attached". His report assured that retaliatory measures against an intransigent Bhutan government

would not excite "more than an increased degree of jealousy on the part of the Chinese and Tibetan authorities" who would hardly commit their governments to repel British arms. Pemberton however discouraged "general attachment or resumption" including the Duars of Bengal which was contemplated by Capt. Jenkins, the most powerful spokesman of an aggressive forward policy. The consequence was the "resumption" of the Duars of Kamrup and Darrang which most seriously affected the Tongsa Penlop. This piecemeal measure was intended to prevent the dispute being given a "national" character.

Thus disputes relating to "tributes" and "sovereignty" which developed in the northern Duars of Kamrup and Darrang in Assam were not isolated events. They were intimately related to problems of ensuring tranquillity on the frontier as well as to a greater design of approaching Tibet through Bhutan for commercial ventures in forbidden lands. The critical survey of facts relating to Assam Duars which this chapter presents would fully bear out this interpretation.

*Chapter IV.*—The chapter entitled the Bengal Duars is an integrated study of Bhutan's land revenue administration there and gives an analysis of the motives of British policy towards Bhutan from Dalhousie to the outbreak of the Duar War in 1864. Later settlement reports testify that Bhutan had a viable system of land revenue administration in the Western Duars before the Duar War. There are important gaps which are unlikely to be made good till, if at all, the story is given from the Bhutanese side. It is perhaps best to notice the most remarkable features of the Bhutanese system as they are given in existing reports.

On the structural side the top Bhutanese official in the Western Duars was of course the Paro Penlop. Below him there were the subahs or dzongpons who had a host of subordinate officials like the Zinkaffs, Kathams, Uzeers and Mandals. There were tributary princes and zemindars who received sanads or deeds of grants from the Deb and Dharma Rajas of Bhutan. The class of people who were directly connected with the collection of revenue were the "jotedars" and "chukanidars" with "vested" rights in the soil. The actual cultivators of the soil were the "ryots" and the "prajas". These classes often overlapped as in many instances the "jotedars" were themselves the cultivators. These people in the plains and lower elevation of the hills were



not Bhutanese but Rajbansis, Bengalees, Cacharees, Mechis, Garos, Parbatias, Totos and other tribes. The system of unpaid labour was prevalent in the Western Duars. On the administrative side the system was not so unprincipled as some reports, notably that of Ashley Eden, would suggest. The Bhutanese were like other people, not unmindful of their own interests. On record the Deb Raja from time to time made important concessions in order to ensure continuity of cultivation and residence. Ensign Brodie (1834), who gives the interesting information that Bhutanese officers received payments for allowing their subjects "the right to trade" in the different Duars, is most emphatic in saying that the ryots "in general have no dread whatever" of the Bhutanese. Last but not least, after the annexation of the Western Duars, British land revenue settlements incorporated the rights of the "jotedars" and the "chukanidars" wherever they found them and never entertained the idea of wholesale rejection of the principles of Bhutanese land revenue administration. This study of the Bhutanese system in the Western Duars, though a bare outline, probes into an unexplored field and the interpretation may be taken at what it is worth.

The chief characteristic of British policy towards Bhutan from Dalhousie to the declaration of war in November 1864 is that the idea of retaliation steadily gained ground. In 1856 Dalhousie threatened the permanent annexation of the Bengal Duars. Canning subscribed to the notion of a limited retaliation and his administration sought to divide the eastern and western Bhutan chiefs. He refused to fall in line with the insistence of the Bengal government for permanent annexation of the Western Duars and was determined to keep options open for the Government of India.

In the wake of the holocaust of the Great Revolt of 1857 Ambari Falakata and Jalpesh were "attached" in 1860. On this occasion Col. Jenkins was taken to task for threatening the Bhutan Government with further annexation of territory. Before his departure (1862) Canning endorsed the proposal of sending a mission to Bhutan to explain what the British demands were and what the Government would do if those were not conceded. The next Viceoy, Lord Elgin, permitted the mission under Ashley Eden to enter Bhutan before he died at Dharamsala. A critical survey of Eden's mission to Bhutan (1864) reveals that the Envoy com-



mitted "errors of judgment" at important points and did not adhere to official instructions which envisaged allaying Bhutanese suspicions. The failure of the mission demonstrated the hold of the Tongsā Penlop over Bhutanese affairs and the limits of his arrogance. Eden returned empty-handed and humiliated. The view that the "empire will suffer no loss" if it went to war against Bhutan for the military occupation of the Western Duars gathered momentum in the frustrating situation arising out of the fiasco. Eden and Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, were convinced that the Duars would open up a vast field for European investments in tea, timber and cotton. The income from the rice fields alone and the sale of waste lands would show a profit. Eden also harped on the theory of European settlement on the Bhutan hills. The Bhutan Government as a whole, and not the frontier chiefs, must face the consequence and nothing less than the "permanent annexation of the Bengal Duars" would make the hillmen amenable.

*Chapter V.*—The chapter on the Duār War complements D. F. Rennie's study of the subject in 1866. The monthly proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal from November 1864 to April 1866 preserve the full official records of this episode. Rennie wrote in his preface to "Bhotan and the Story of Dooar War" that he left the front when the war was yet unfinished and prepared his drafts on board the 'Rinaldo' at Sea when he was sailing to England. Obviously the full official version of the war was not available to him. The unpublished correspondence of Sir John Lawrence with the Secretary of State on Bhutan affairs is the only authentic source for delineating the evolution of policy towards Bhutan as it unfolded during the crisis. I have examined microfilms of these correspondence at the National Archives of India, New Delhi. Contemporary reviews in the Anglo-Indian press and the parliamentary papers on Bhutan have also been consulted. It is perhaps appropriate to allude to some important points that emerge from a study of these different sources :—

(1) In December 1864 British forces entered Bhutan territory. The Bhutanese were completely taken unaware by the outbreak of the war. Contemporary reviews say that military-unpreparedness forced the Bhutanese to adopt what has been

labelled as "passive resistance". This could not save the Duars and the hillposts which were taken almost without resistance.

(2) The "nonresistance hopes", held out by Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant governor of Bengal, were belied and at Dewangiri the British forces suffered their "deepest disgrace". It took a thorough reorganisation of the forces and a change in command to resist the Bhutanese offensive all along the line. Dewangiri was recaptured and then evacuated before the rains. Among the regiments that retook Dewangiri was the 29th Punjab Infantry, and Surgeon Rennie ascribes the "unnecessary slaughter" at Dewangiri to Sikh and Pathan soldiers.

(3) The unsuspected resistance revealed that earlier reports on Bhutan were misleading in many important respects and showed an "entire unacquaintance with foreign territory".

(4) By the summer of 1865 military objectives of the Duar War were firmly secured but the Bhutan government was not "humbled down". It was then that an economic blockade against Bhutan was enforced with its tentacles spreading from Tezpur to Darjeeling. Rennie, in tracing the developments after the abandonment of Dewangiri, makes no mention of the blockade. This was presumably because he could not have access to thinking on the subject at the highest level. Bhutan was entirely cut off from the plains. Necessities of life as well as articles of "constant use" were denied to the Bhutanese throughout the summer and rains of 1865. They were entirely deficient in rice, molasses, dried fish, oil, tobacco, betelnut and leaves (pan). The Deb Raja and the western Bhutan chiefs were most seriously affected by the blockade as they were the beneficiaries of trade with the plains. They made repeated overtures for peace from June onwards. Thus the blockade proved to be decisive and a military expedition into the interior of Bhutan was considered unnecessary. The idea of marching upto Punakha was abandoned, much to the chagrin of the Anglo-Indian press in Calcutta. The Viceroy in his correspondence explained that such an operation would require the building of a road across impassable mountains and apprehended that the "costly" war would be prolonged for another year. Once the Duars were secured a military expedition to Punakha would bring nothing "unless we had annexed the whole country". This was never intended, "if only because it



would be an expensive measure and perhaps entail an increase in the native army".

(5) The terms of peace were discussed at Sinchula with the representatives of the Deb and Dharma Rajas. Dr. Rennie's apprehension that, in Bhutanese conditions, it was better to negotiate with powerful chiefs never disturbed the Viceroy or the Secretary of State. On the contrary they were set upon ensuring a hold on the central government in Bhutan for the sake of peace and tranquillity on the frontier. The provisions of the treaty of Sinchula (November 1865) punished Bhutan "very severely" but at the same time sought to strengthen the hands of the de facto central authority which could control its powerful chiefs. The subsidy agreed to was to be paid to the accredited agents of the Deb Raja and was looked upon as an "inducement to maintain peaceful and orderly relations". The provision for free-trade was to benefit the Deb Raja, the Pāro Penlop and other chiefs who traditionally monopolised trade with the plains. The Bhutanese leaders were persuaded to see the "advantages of trading with a hundred million people". Col. Bruce, who negotiated the treaty of Sinchula wrote to the Tongsā Penlop: "It has always been the wish of the British Government to see regular and strong central government in Bhutan which shall be able to control all its subjects whether these subjects be ryots or great and powerful chieftains, and to this end the British government will go so far as to render every aid".

(6) The contemporary English press in Calcutta raised a "great howl" against the treaty of Sinchula which was said to have conceded "suicidal terms of peace". It was remarked that in Bhutan affairs the Bengal civilians had led Lord Canning "to the ruin of his reputation and the empire to the brink of destruction". Sir John Lawrence was told that the terms of the treaty were his "fourth blunder" in the Duār War. To drive their point home the press described nearly 3000 sq. miles of good earth acquired by the treaty as a "slice of marshy territory with a few hill posts". It was claimed that in England all the leading daily and weekly journals condemned the treaty except *The Daily News* and *The Times*. Annexation of Bhutan ought to have been proclaimed a year earlier. The chiefs including the Dharma and Deb Rajas could have been secured in their positions and income and the magnificent plateaux and valleys opened "for



agriculture, trade and civilisation". This was the only "just and wise policy" and *The Friend of India* wondered if the "next generation will not have to adopt it while they marvel at our folly". The Viceroy justified the treaty as "neither honour nor profit" were to be gained by continuing the war. He ascribed all this noise in the press to "planter interests" being angry "as they perhaps hoped to have much land available in a good climate if we annexed the country".

I have adhered to current usage in spellings except in quotations. Spellings of place names in Bhutan are in accordance with the usage in Kuensel, a weekly official bulletin of the Royal Government of Bhutan. The appendix gives the important treaties relating to Bhutan in the period covered by the present work. A glossary of unfamiliar words, and photoprint of a sketch map of Bhutan and the Duars are appended.

## CHAPTER I

### BHUTAN

#### *Section I—The Land and the People*

The kingdom of Bhutan<sup>1</sup> as it figures in modern atlas lies between 26°41' and 28°7' north and 88°54, and 91°54 east. Known as the land of the thunderbolt Bhutan is picturesquely set within the folds of the eastern Himalayas. It is bounded on the north by the Tibet region of China, on the east by India's North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), on the south by Assam-Bengal plains of India, and on the west by Chumbi Valley in Tibet and the Indian State of Sikkim. At present the state comprises an "area of 18,000 sq. miles with a population of 700,000"<sup>2</sup>.

For the most part Bhutan's northern frontier follows the crest of the great Himalayas. Between "the Chomo Lhari and Kulā Kangri peaks it follows approximately the line of the watershed"<sup>3</sup>. In describing his journey through Bhutan and southern Tibet, Bailey (1924) mentions a series of "subsidiary" ranges which run south from the main range. He further writes that in "each of the main valleys between these ranges is one of the large dzongs or castles from which the country is governed"<sup>4</sup>.

1. The name Bhutan is derived from "Bhot" the Sanskrit word for Tibet. It was so called in the belief that it was "the end of Bhot" which is the literal meaning for the full Sanskrit form "Bhotanta". L. A. Waddell, 'Place and river-names in Darjeeling District and Sikkim', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LX, Part I, (1891), pp. 55-56.

2. K. K. Moorthy, 'Bhutan : Thoughts on Sovereignty', *Eastern Economic Review*, xxxi, Feb. 16, 1961, p. 295.

3. P. P. Karan, *Bhutan*, Lexington, 1967, p. 9.

4. F. M. Bailey, 'Through Bhutan and Southern Tibet', *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 64, 1924, p. 292. The major Bhutanese dzongs are : (i) Punakha dzong, (ii) Tashichhodzong, (iii) Parodzong, (iv) Mangdiphodrang-dzong, (v) Simtokadzong, (vi) Tongas dzong, (vii) Tashigang dzong, (viii) Ha dzong. These dzongs have lost their historic role as feudal strongholds since the consolidation of Bhutan under the monarchy in 1907. But still they function as combined administrative centres and monasteries. They are the focal points of the social, religious, economic and political life of the surrounding country.



The Merung La separates Bhutan from the Chumbi Valley of Tibet. From the Kula Kangri group of high peaks the "traditional border cuts across the Lhobrak drainage basin,"<sup>5</sup> and runs north to the high peak of Khar Chu. Numerous rivers and their tributaries flow through the mountainous territory of Bhutan. Eventually they emerge in the Duar plains and drain into the Brahmaputra. In western Bhutan the Amo Chu cuts across in a south-easterly direction and passes by the market town of Phuntsoling on the Indo-Bhutan border. In the plains it is familiar as the wayward Torsa. The waters of Ha, Paro and Thimbu Chu unite as the Wong Chu and reach India as the Raidak. The territory in between the Torsa and Raidak leads up to the Buxaduar and above it the fort of Sinchula. The Mo Chu or Sankos runs for more than two hundred miles within Bhutan and passes by historic Punakha and Wangdiphodrang. The swift flowing Manas and its tributaries drain eastern Bhutan. The valley of the Manas harbours a wild game sanctuary and is on the tourist map of eastern India. Important trade routes run along the valleys of principal streams. The Black Mountain, a very well-defined range midway between Punakha and Tongsa dzong extends from the great Himalaya to the foot-hills. It forms the watershed between the Tongas and the Sankos<sup>6</sup>. The route linking Punakha and Tongsa dzong crosses the Black Mountain range at Pele La.

Bhutan proper lies within the inner Himalayan zone. But at an early period of their history the Bhutanese had descended into the Duar plains and extended their sway over the ruling Koch chiefs. According to Dalton (1872) the conflict between the Koch and the Bhutanese had taken place "three hundred or four hundred years ago"<sup>7</sup>. The eastern Duars of Kamrup and Darang in Assam had gone under Bhutanese control during the decline of the Ahom Raj in the 18th century<sup>8</sup>. The present Western Duars in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar are a strip of submontane country which wears a "mantle of perennial green" and consists mostly of "flat arable plains". In

5. Lhobrag is the Tibetan district bordering on the north of Bhutan.

6. P. P. Karan, *Bhutan*, p. 27.

7. E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, 1872, p. 96.

8. E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, Calcutta 1967, p. 3.

the north they rise to meet the "flat slopes" of the Himalayas which begin with a series of plateaus "varying in elevation from 500 to 2000 ft."<sup>9</sup> The gardens now cover these plateaus and spread down into the plains below. In 1941 the eastern Duars from the Manas to the Deoshan rivers comprised an area "roughly measured at 990 sq. miles"<sup>10</sup> In 1865 the Western Duars were supposed to comprise "about 2,800 sq. miles"<sup>11</sup>.

A recent study shows that the population of Bhutan comprises four major cultural groups. They are the Tibetans, the Nepalese, the Indo Mongoloids and the Indians<sup>12</sup>. People of Tibetan origin are the most numerous and it is they who are politically dominant and have given Bhutan her peculiar cultural identity. The Bhutanese of Tibetan stock speak a language which has been described as a "corrupt dialect of the Tibetan language" and, as Csoma de Koros noted, the people of Kham, U, Tsang and Bhutan all understand each other though they differ in their way of pronouncing the language<sup>13</sup>. Classical Tibetan, however, remains paramount in several religious establishments and in a large part of literature. The variety of Tibetan Buddhism called the Drukpa sect spread into Bhutan in early 16th century and eventually led to the rule of monastic and lay hierarchy epitomised in a dual system of government under Dharma and Deb Rajas.

The people who settled in the "central portion of more extensive valleys" in the eastern portion of Bhutan have been separated from their western counterpart by a natural barrier "in the form of a high sharp crusted ridge in Bhutan". In 1933 Cooper Edgar remarked that the "people of the two areas are different in appearance and language". However, they "seem to link in their features and dress the people of the north (Tibet), with

9. J. A. Milligan, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District 1906-1916*, Bengal Secretariat, 1919, p. 11.

10. R. M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*, Calcutta 1954, p. 216.

11. Bhutan Political Proceedings, Oct. 1865, p. 43, para 7, State Archives, Government of West Bengal.

12. P. P. Karan, *op. cit.* p. 65.

13. C. Wessel, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*, The Hague 1924, p. 145.



those farther south (Upper Assam and Burma)"<sup>14</sup>. Claude White says that the bulk of the population living beyond the Pele-la "is not of Tibetan origin, nor do they speak Tibetan". They are "allied to the people of the Assam Valley and to those living in the hills to the east beyond Bhutan"<sup>15</sup>. They are of a different type to those in the west, smaller in stature, the complexion is darker and features finer cut, and their dress is different. They also profess Buddhism but are not so observant of its customs. There are not so many monasteries and Lamas to be met with as in the other part of Bhutan. As distinct from the Tibeto-Mongoloid there is an Indo-Mongoloid zone in south eastern Bhutan<sup>16</sup> who represent earlier migrations of the Mongoloid people. In south-western Bhutan there is a broad belt representing Nepalese culture. Nepalese and Indo-Mongoloid culture occupy the "area between the narrow fringe of Indian culture along the southern border and the extensive Tibetan cultural zone of central and northern Bhutan."<sup>17</sup>

Bhutan's economy is based on the patterns of its agriculture and animal husbandry. In the high-altitude environment agriculture in some spots is more favoured by nature than others. Farming is concentrated in the low and well-watered valleys of central and western Bhutan and the humid Duars at the foot of the mountains. In the eastern part of the country excessive rainfall and dense vegetation limit the use of land for agricultural purposes. The Bhutanese farmer lays out his land in a series of terraces that are supported and separated by embankments. The precipitous nature of the country and the scarcity of arable land have made the practice of terracing almost universal throughout Bhutan. A good deal of ingenuity is displayed by the Bhutanese in the mode of conveying water for the irrigation of their fields. Pipes and troughs made from hollowed trunks of trees and bamboos supported on cross sticks are laid out. These extend in some places for miles together from the fields to the fountain head of a stream. Because of great variations

14. Cooper Edgar, 'The influence of their Neighbours on the Bhutanese', *Man*, Vol. XXXIII, 1933, pp. 87, 88.

15. J. Claude White, *Sikkim & Bhutan, Twenty-one Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887-1908*, 1909, Reprint, New Delhi, 1971, p. 13.

16. P. P. Karan, *op. cit.* p. 65,

17. *Ibid.*

of elevation and climate, most crops can be produced in Bhutan. Within the boundaries of a single village terraces are found at heights from 3,000 to 9,000 ft. Rice and buckwheat grow up to 4,000 ft. Barley alternates with rice to about 8,000 ft; wheat grows up to 9,000 feet. Potatoes, buckwheat and barley grow at altitudes up to 14,000 feet. It is interesting to note that Warren Hastings desired George Bogle (1774-75) to plant some potatoes at every halting place. Thus a valuable new product was introduced in Bhutan. The practice of the Bhutanese farmer has been described as "subsistence crop farming", a habit which has changed little during the past two centuries. His tools are antique and techniques primitive. Indeed the pattern of farming has changed so little that 19th century descriptions of agriculture have still a topical interest. In south-eastern Bhutan people depend largely upon the slash-and-burn type of farming. They clear the land by burning the vegetation, grow dry rice on it for three or four years and then abandon it when the soil is exhausted. Some groups have, however, settled permanently in large clearings in the forest. In south-western Bhutan settled by the Nepalese there is acute shortage of good arable land and the Nepalese are banned from living in the central inner Himalayan region. In the Inner Himalayan valleys communities of "drukmi" (meaning genuine Bhutanese of Tibetan descent) agriculturists consist of small hamlets and isolated homesteads. It is reported that in some places a settlement consists of a single household surrounded by primeval forests. Individual settlements are separated from one another by formidable geographic barriers and people living in one valley have little contact with those in another.

Though pastoral activities are common in most parts of Bhutan the chief pasture lands lies in the northern part of the country. Below the zone of alpine vegetation there are considerable grassy and which affords excellent pasture during the summer for herds of yak, cattle and sheep. The animals are driven down the mountains during the winter to inner Himalayan valleys, where they graze on leaves of trees and uncultivated land. Fodder crops are seldom grown in Bhutan. Cattle raising is particularly prevalent in the valleys of the Amo Chu and Wong Chu in western Bhutan. The main product of cattle raising is butter which is lavishly consumed both as food and for



rituals in temples. Large amounts of butter from the Amo and the Wong valleys find their way to the settlements at Paro, Tashichho Dzong and Punakha.

In the mainstream of Indian history Bhutan's earliest links were with the kingdom of Kamrupa in Assam. Gait cites the authority of the *Yogini Tantra*<sup>18</sup> in showing the extent of Kamrupa which included Bhutan and says that "in ancient times, Bhutan seems, occasionally at least, to have formed part of the Kingdom of Kamrupa"<sup>19</sup>. During Hiuen Tsang's visit Kamrupa comprised "the whole of the Brahmaputra valley as well as Cooch Behar and Bhutan"<sup>20</sup>.

Any authentic history of Tibetan settlement of the Bhutan hills begins with the origin and spread of the Drukpa school of Lamaism founded at Ralung by Yeses Dorji in the 12th century of the Christian era. There were, however, earlier waves of Tibetan migration of which the chronology is uncertain. In the hey-day of the empire of the early kings of Tibet there are notices of Tibetan hold on Bhutan. During Ralpachen's reign (815-36) his brother Lang Darma secured the removal of a rival prince to Paro in Bhutan<sup>21</sup>. Pemberton speaks of the tradition in Bhutan that Tibetan officers were resident in it and all places and castles of the Dharma and Deb Rajas and the Penlops "were constructed by Chinese and Tibetan architects."<sup>22</sup>

The people whom the Tibetan settlers displaced in Bhutan hills were the "Koch"<sup>23</sup> whom the Bhutanese called "Tephoo"

18. The *Yogini Tantra* attempts to describe "Kamrupa Pitha" but the description is hazy. It requires a good commentary which has not yet been found. There are expressions which hint at the inclusion of Bhutan and part of Tibet in Kamrupa; but "pitha" can hardly be identical with kingdom.

19. E. Gait, *op. cit.* pp. 11, 51,

20. S. N. Bhattacharya, *A History of Mughal North East Frontier Policy*, Calcutta 1929, p. 48.

21. Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 1967, p. 51.

22. R. B. Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, (1838) *Indian Studies*, 1961, p. 89.

23. Grierson's study of the fascinating field of Himalayan philology corroborates the suppression of earlier forms of speech by Tibeto-Burman languages which crossed the Himalayan watershed "at a comparatively late period" (*Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. I. Part*



and "they are generally believed to have been people of Cooch Behar."<sup>24</sup> In describing the 'Koch' Brian Hodgson writes: "In the northern part of Bengal, towards Delimkot, appears to have been long located the most numerous and powerful people of non-Aryan extraction on this side of the Ganges and the only one which after the complete ascendancy of the Aryans had been established was able to retain or recover political power or possession of the open plains. What may have been the condition of the Koch in the palmy days of Hinduism cannot now be ascertained but it is certain that after the Muslim had taken place of the Hindu suzerainty, this people became so important that Abul Fazl could state Bengal as being bounded on the north by the kingdom of the Koch which he adds 'includes Kamrup' "<sup>25</sup>. The advent of the Koches as a dominating political factor in Kamrupa ushered in a new epoch. The era of "myth and legend finally passes and that of sober history definitely begins"<sup>26</sup> The Koch kings are well-known personages in modern times and the greatest of them, Biswa Singha, made himself king about 1529-30. The coins of the second Koch monarch Naranarayan dated "Saka 1477 or 1555 A.D.", are the "sheet anchor of Koch chronology"<sup>27</sup>. It is important to notice that the rise of the Koch dynasty to political pre-eminence with their metropolis at Cooch Behar roughly coincided with the expulsion of the Koch tribe from Bhutan by Tibetans under the first Dharma Raja. The assertion of Koch chroniclers that prince Narasinha, the brother

I. Chapter VI. p. 55). According to him the name Koch, in fact, everywhere connotes a Hinduised Bodo". The latter once spread over the whole of Assam west of Manipur and "one branch of the family, popularly known as Koch extended their power to far wider limits and overran the whole of northern Bengal at least as far west as Furnea" (*Linguistic Survey, Vol. I. p. 61-62*). There is a sharp difference of opinion among scholars whether the "Koch" were of Mongoloid or Dravidian stock. The Koches are classed as members of the great Mongoloid people by Waddell, Hodgson and Latham. This is disputed by other scholars like Risley and Dalton.

24. *Eden's Report on the State of Bhutan, Part III, (1865) Bengal Secretariat, p. 108.*

25. Brian Haughton Hodgson, *Miscellaneous Essays, 1880, pp. 106, 107.*

26. S. N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 77.



of Naranarayan went to Bhutan and made himself ruler there appears to have been staking claims for a lost ground. In any case modern scholars discount the view as "No definite evidence is available in support of this tradition"<sup>28</sup>. However, the historic fact of long struggle between the Koch and the Bhutanese for primacy over the plains of the Duars has a ring of continuity with the earlier confrontations of these two peoples in the hill territory of Bhutan.

The early British envoys, Bogle<sup>29</sup> and Turner were impressed with the Bhutanese people and their social manners and customs. "The more I see of the Bhutanese, the more I am pleased with them" wrote Bogle in 1774 and the "common people are good humoured, downright and, I think, thoroughly trusty"<sup>30</sup>. Their "simplicity of manners" and "strong sense of religion" were praiseworthy. They were "strangers to falsehood and ingratitude". The envoy poignantly wrote that in this Buddhist land the barbarous Hindu custom of burning the widow (sati) was absent and the institution of the caste and every other hereditary distinction was unknown. There were no bloody sacrifices though appliances of tantric (ritualistic) practice which included "beads of skulls of men" were unedifying. Bogle makes illuminating remarks about the domestic life of the Bhutanese and the position of women. "Every family is", he writes, "acquainted with most of the useful arts and contains within itself, almost all the necessaries of life. Even clothes which is a considerable article in so rude a climate are generally the produce of the husbandmen's industry". Thus as in other primitive communities where necessities are few the family was largely an independent economic unit. Since priests and officers of government led a life of celibacy the women were "degraded" and were married only to "landholders and husbandmen"<sup>31</sup>. They were employed in "most laborious" works, were "dirty" and addicted to "strong liquors". Celibacy of a large number of

28. A. C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, Calcutta, 1964, p. 2.

29. C. R. Markham, *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*, Bibliotheca Himalayica Reprint, 1971.

30. *Ibid.* p. 51.

31. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 31,



people was "productive of many irregularities" and coldness of climate "inclines" people "to an excessive use of spirituous liquor"<sup>32</sup>. Turner also speaks about celibacy in the same vein<sup>33</sup>. Among later observers Pemberton and Eden were writing under a sense of failure and therefore viewed Bhutanese life in less favourable light. Ronaldshay says "comparing these various accounts carefully with one another one has little difficulty in perceiving that if the earlier writers displayed a tendency to lay stress upon the good points of the people and to gloss over certain of their less creditable characteristics, the later observers drawing their conclusions under less favourable circumstances viewed all they saw through glasses distorted by the lack of success of their respective missions. And one has little difficulty in drawing an intelligible mean between accounts which at first sight appear irreconcilable"<sup>34</sup>.

Krishna Kanta Bose's account of Bhutan (1815) besides giving a wealth of information on polity, economy and social customs testifies to pervading sense of religion of the people and their dignified attitude towards all living creatures. The "chief maxim of religious faith among the Bhutias is that of sparing the life of all animals"<sup>35</sup>. All classes of people "from boyhood to old age" repeat the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. They mutter these mystic syllables while circumambulating monasteries and altars. Literally these words mean "Hail Jewel in the Lotus"! and symbolises not only the Dharma but even the "formula" of creation<sup>36</sup>. The people put up flags inscribed with these words and a person passing the place ought to put up another.

32, *Ibid.*, p. 37.

33. Samuel Turner, *Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama in Tibet*, London, 1800, p. 83.

34. Earl of Ronaldshay, *Lands of the Thunderbolt*, London, 1923, p. 214.

35. Krishna Kanta Bose, 'Some Account of the Country of Bhutan, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, pp. 146-147.

36. "The ubiquitous presence of the Six Mystic Syllables—on rocks and boulders, stupas and temples, prayer wheels and altars—is, in the present writer's observation, a thanksgiving for the precious gift of human life, an opportunity for working towards Buddhahood" Nirmal C. Sinha, *Prolegomena to Lamaist Polity*, 1969, p. 38.



The Tibetan practice of polyandry thrived in the peculiar socio-economic conditions of Bhutan. Samuel Turner (1783) thought that "superabundant population in an unfertile country" dictated the necessity of preventing a "too rapid increase of population"<sup>37</sup>. Krishna Kanta Bose (1815) ascribes the custom to poverty and kinship and says "A rich man may keep as many wives as he can maintain, and when poor, three or four brothers club together, and keep one wife amongst them"<sup>38</sup>. Pemberton (1838) recorded that polyandry prevailed "far more extensively in the northern and central portion of Bhutan than in the Southern"<sup>39</sup>. His conclusion that the "true cause may be found rather in the political ambition and spiritual pride"<sup>40</sup> seems to link the practice with extensive celibacy among officials, lay and clerical. Such a situation would, however, seem to encourage polygamy rather than polyandry. Modern researches have discounted "demographic reasons" for polyandry—in lands where no census of population exists and the "number of men to women is anybody's guess". A recent study based on Rockhill's scientific and sound account of polyandry in Tibet ascribes it to a desire to prevent fragmentation of holdings where land is scarce and the need for "peace and concord under the same root"<sup>41</sup>. The present king of Bhutan has "abolished polyandry and restricted polygamy to a maximum of three wives per man"<sup>42</sup>.

### Section II—The Drukpas and the First Dharma Raja

The Lamaism prevalent in Bhutan has a long and chequered history. It is believed to have been founded by Guru Padmasambhava (the Lupon) in the 8th century of the Christian era. Bailey says "Near Bumtang is a holy temple called Kuje meaning in the honorific language of the country 'body print'. Here about twelve hundred years ago the Indian saint

37. Samuel Turner, *op. cit.* p. 351.

38. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.* p. 148.

39. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 58, para 30.

40. *Ibid.*, para 27.

41. Rifaquet Ali, 'Why People Practice Polyandry', *The Statesman*, Calcutta, June 13, 1971.

42. K. K. Moorthy, 'Bhutan—the Economic Scene' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, XXXI, February 23, 1961, p. 333.



Padma Sambhava, called Lopon Rinpochoy in Tibet and Bhutan spent sometime when he was converting the country to Buddhism. He lived in a cave and for a long period would come out and sit up against the rock meditating; the result was a deep imprint of his body against the rock<sup>43</sup>. In the wake of Padma Sambhava's propagation of the Doctrine a number of Nyingmapa sects flowered in Bhutan and were competing for pre-eminence for several centuries. In the eleventh century the great Kagyudpa sect was founded in Tibet by Marpa who was a contemporary of Atisa. The Kagyudpa branched out later on into the Karmapa and Drukpa<sup>44</sup> schools of Lamaism. These various schools including those of the Nyingmapa are commonly labelled as the Red Hats. The Kagyudpa tradition, as embodied in the Drukpa, the prevalent form of Lamaism in Bhutan, has a continuity still unexplored. Any attempt to unfold the "mystery" of the early history of Bhutan must begin with a probe into this very important tradition. The spread of the Kagyud-Drukpa from Tibet represents a new dispensation as distinct from the older strand of Buddhism linked with the presence of Padma-Sambhava in Bhutan. In the new context it has been observed that "the first country in the eastern Himalayas to receive Buddhism from the Tibetans was Bhutan"<sup>45</sup>.

The rise of the Gelugpa (yellow hats) in Tibet since the fifteenth century is a landmark in the history of northern Buddhism. There begun, what has been described as a "hundred years' struggle" between the Gelugpa and the Karmapa<sup>46</sup>. Early in the sixteenth century increasing Ge-lug-pa pressure forced the Drukpa sect of the Karmapa to find a new home in Bhutan. This occurred

43. F. M. Bailey, *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 54 (1924) 'Through Bhutan and Southern Tibet', p. 293.

Also, C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*, 1924, p. 140.

44. Though worship of the Thunderbolt is so peculiar to Lamaism in Bhutan, Waddell points out that the word for Thunderbolt is 'Dorje' and not 'Duk'. The Sanskrit translation of Lbrugpa is 'Meghaswara' or 'Cloud-voice'. L. A. Waddell, 'Place and river names in Darjeeling District and Sikkim', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Part I*, 1891, p. 56 fn.

45. D. Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford 1957, pp. 212, 213.

46. Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, Yale University Press, 1967, p. 86.



✓ after the Drukpa resistance, though by no means the last, collapsed at Tashilhunpo which was "plundered and occupied by the Gelugpas"<sup>47</sup>. A Drukpa Lama known as Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal moved into Bhutan<sup>48</sup> from the Ralung monastery. With the help of Tibetan migrants he organised the peculiar polity of Bhutan after displacing the reigning 'Koch' prince<sup>49</sup>. In the seventeenth century the Gelugpas firmly established their temporal as well as spiritual sovereignty in Tibet with Mongol help. Flushed with victory in Tibet they made several attempts to crush the Kagyud in Bhutan<sup>50</sup>. These ventures into the "humid southern regions" failed and the Kagyud resistance saved Bhutan ✓ from going under the Ganden Phodrang<sup>51</sup>.

The Shabdung of Bhutan is known as the Dharma Raja. The latter term is of Indian origin generally used by European scholars. The antiquity of the usage Dharma Raja is uncertain though it in all likelihood was in vogue among the people bordering Bhutan long before Ralph Fitch's visit to Cooch Behar in 1583. Fitch wrote: "there is a country four days' journey from Cooch or Quichu, before mentioned, which is called Bootanter and the city Bottea, the king is called Dermain"<sup>52</sup>. While Bootanter is admittedly Bhutan, Dermain can be no other than Cacula's Droma Raja (1626) or the Dharma Raja of Bhutan.<sup>53</sup>

Comparing the legends collected by Krishna Kanta Bose (1815) with the "traditional account furnished Eden by Cheboo Lama" (1864) Surgeon Rennie observes that these two accounts

47. J. D. Hooker, *Himalayan Journals*, Vol. I (1854) p. 366, Note.

48. Aitchison's date for this event is 1557 A. D. *Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads etc.* 1928, Vol. XIV p. 79.

49. Krishna Kanta Bose, 'Some Account of the Country of Bhutan', *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, p. 129. According to this source the Koch prince with his family went underground while those who remained "above ground" were converted to the "faith and custom" (Sic.) of the first Shabdung.

50. Charles Bell, *Religion of Tibet*, p. 126. Also Shakabpa *op. cit.* pp. 112, 113, 118.

51. The system of government in Tibet under the Dalai Lama, the Gelugpa hierarch. The foundations of the statecraft of the Gelugpas have been discussed in a recent study. Nirmal C. Sinha, *Prolegomena to Lamaist Polity*, Calcutta 1969, pp. 28-42.

52. Hakluyt's Voyages, Vol. 2, London Anno. 1955, p. 257.

53. C. Wessels, *op. cit.* p. 140,



agree so far as to "specify the people of Cooch Behar as those who originally possessed Bhutan" and to "indicate Tibet as the place from which the first Dharma Raja came"<sup>54</sup>. The first Dharma Raja came to Bhutan "two to three hundred years ago" took possession of Punakha displacing the Cooch prince and devoted himself to the task of "introducing law in lawless Bhutan". He sent "armed men to roam over mountains and forests, rocks and caves" to hunt down "robbers" and "thieves"<sup>55</sup>. Instead of setting himself on the throne and exercising temporal authority "he sent to Lhasa for a Tibetan"<sup>56</sup>. He made him his prime minister, and, according to a later authority, "called him the Deb Raja"<sup>57</sup>. The usage Deb Raja seems to have originated from Tibetan Depa. Charles Bell, quoting a Tibetan official, says that Depa was the "manager" elected for the Ne-chung Oracle temple near Lhasa. His duty was to "manage all its secular affairs"<sup>58</sup>. The Ne-chung practice seems to have been familiar at Ralung from where the first Shabdung emerged. In the Bhutanese system of government the Deb Raja came to be vested with the secular administration while the Shabdung concerned himself entirely with the cares of religion. The first Deb Raja made Bhutan a "land of security so that even an old woman might carry a load of gold in safety"<sup>59</sup>. Eden's version based on disputed facts, however, ascribes the separation of religious function from the secular to the third of the line of Tibetan adventurers rather than to the first. The second Dharma Raja is said to have built the forts of Mangdi-Phodrang, Punakha and Paro, to have drawn up a code of laws for the protection of the cultivators and to have appointed officials styled Penlops and dzongpons to administer the country<sup>60</sup>.

54. D. F. Rennie (Surgeon), *Bhotan and the Story of the Dooar War* (1866), p. 41. *Bibliotheca Himalayica*, Reprint, 1970.

55. Charles Bell, *People of Tibet* (1968) p. 145. Quoting from Bhutanese history Lho-hi-Chhojung.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.* p. 129,

58. Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, (1968) p. 250, Eastern Tibet had its chiefs styled Deba, Gyalpo & Co. Both are familiar usages in Bhutan. Also, W. W. Rockhill, *The Land of the Lamas*, p. 243.

59. Charles Bell, *People of Tibet*, University Press, Oxford, 1968, p. 145.

60. Ronaldshay (Earl of), *op. cit.* p. 204,



Besides founding the historic dual government in Bhutan Shabdung Nga-Wang Namgyal promoted the Drukpa sect throughout the country to the exclusion of all rival sects. After his death his spirit became incarnate in a child at Lhasa who was conveyed to Bhutan. While the Dharma Raja succeeded by incarnation the Deb Raja was elected by a council<sup>61</sup>. The usage in Bhutan and Tibet to describe an incarnation is "Tulku". Krishna Kanta Bose (1815) noted how incarnations of the Dharma Raja began in Bhutan instead of in Tibet: "the present Dharma Raja was not regenerated in Lhasa reason of which was as follows:—previously to the death of the late Dharma Raja, the Deb Raja and other counsellors of State entreated the Dharma saying 'you have hitherto been regenerated in Lhasa and in bringing you here a great expense is unnecessarily incurred'. Upon which the Dharma replied 'I will become regenerated in the Shasheb caste and in Tongsa' and accordingly he reappeared in Tongsa and is one of the Shasheb caste"<sup>62</sup>. Risley wrote that these incarnations "occur in the families of the chief officers of the State"<sup>63</sup>. Records show that in the 19th century the most powerful chief of Bhutan, the Tongsa Penlop, was often related to the Dharma Raja. In 1838 William Griffiths wrote that the Dharma Raja who was a boy of eight or ten years old was "good looking; particularly when the looks of his father, the Tongsa Penlop are taken into consideration". To him the fact that the Dharma Raja was the son of the Tongsa Penlop was a

61. In a recent monograph H. E. Richardson shows that the idea of a succession of reincarnating Lamas as head of a religious sect was familiar with the Karma-pa for some two centuries before the Gelupas were building up their church in Tibet in the 15th century. The Gelupas in adopting the practice of a reincarnating hierarch had taken a "leaf out of the book of the successful karma-pa". The Drukpas of Bhutan who were a sub-sect of the Karma-pa naturally introduced the idea of reincarnation to determine the line of succession to the first Shabdung. H. E. Richardson, 'The Dalai Lamas', *Shamphala*, Occasional Papers of the Institute of Tibetan Studies No. I, January 1971, Tring, Herts, England, pp. 20-22.

62. Krishna Kanta Bose, *Account of Bhutan*, Bengal Secretariat (1865), p. 189.

63. H. H. Risley, *History of Sikkim and its rulers*, 1894, p. xiv,



"curious coincidence"<sup>64</sup>. In 1866 a telegraphic despatch ran "the Lama Guru says—the Tongsa is the master of the Deb Raja, that the Dharma and most of the Rajas are his relations and that he is the greatest man in the country"<sup>65</sup>. In the above context Risley's observations win an amount of credibility. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Deb Raja extended his grip over the internal affairs of the country. In 1774 "his authority in the internal government of the country appears to be very complete"<sup>66</sup>. In subsequent records the Deb and Dharma Rajas appear in clearer light; the former as the secular head of the government of Bhutan and the latter as vested with spiritual supremacy.

### *Section III—The System of Dyarchy in Bhutan—The Dharma and the Deb Rajas*

Hamilton (1812) recorded that the Subahs on the passes "represent the Deb Raja in his judicial, military, financial, municipal and mercantile capacities"; and the Deb Raja "occupies every branch of public economy unless it be spiritual, which he perhaps relinquishes to the supposed incarnation of the Deity"<sup>67</sup>. Krishna Kanta Bose's (1815) account of the perquisites of the Deb Raja's office makes an impressive reading. He used to receive "customary tributes" from the different governors of districts and "disburse the established charges" of the state. Secondly, when a person was appointed Penlop or Zimpe (Councillor) or to any office of the state he used to present something to the Deb Raja. Thirdly, when the Duars came under Bhutan he received the "whole revenue" of the lowland estates of Mainaguri and other tracts "about rupees thirty thousand per annum". Fourthly, he received a fine in all cases of murder and homicide. Fifthly, he traded with a capital of "about rupees forty thousand".

64. William Griffith, *Journal of the Mission which visited Bhutan in 1837-38 under Capt. R. B. Pemberton*, p. 25.

65. Telegram from H. Grey, Dewangiri, to the Private Secretary, June 17, 1866, *Bhutan Political Proceedings*, April, 1866, p. 171, No. 276, State Archives, Govt. of West Bengal.

66. Markham, *op. cit.* p. 36,

67. Francis Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Reprint, Gauhati, 1963, p. 69.



Sixthly, he was entitled to property of servants of government on their demise unless "they may have been dependents of the Dharma Raja" who in that case succeeded to their property. Lastly, "he presented horses, silk, salt and hoes to petty landholders and farmers and received much more than the value in return"<sup>68</sup>. Evidently, the Deb Raja had extraordinary powers of patronage, the keystone in widening the area of effective political support. The Deb Raja could not "deviate in the smallest degree from the observance of established customs". It was the custom that the office of the Deb Raja was tenable for three years. An ambitious person who could muster the support of powerful chiefs could ignore it.

George Bogle's remarks about the importance of the office of the Deb Raja determined British protocol in the 19th century. In their correspondence with central Bhutanese authority approaches were made almost invariably to the Deb Raja. One interesting fact is that British knowledge of Bhutanese polity was far from perfect as late as 1857. A despatch to the Court of Directors runs: "we did not know where the jurisdiction of the different subordinate rulers along our frontier begins or ends. Col. Jenkins stated that the contention for the supreme government which appeared to have existed for many years among the principal families of the country still continued, but that he was not certain how far the authority of the Dharma Raja and Deb Raja (who seemed to be colleagues with co-ordinate powers) extended. He was not sure that there were no two Deb Rajas"<sup>69</sup>.

The effective hold which the Deb Raja secured over the secular administration of Bhutan did not, however, reduce the Shabdung (Dharma Raja) to the position of a mere titular head of the Bhutanese dyarchy. His concern in things spiritual as the head of the priestly order raised him in popular estimation. In fact "Bhutan's history during the past three hundred and odd years since Dugom Dorje (the first Dharma Raja) could be scarcely understood without unravelling the nature of the relationship between the Dharma Raja on the one hand and the

68. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.* *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, p. 134.

69. Despatch to the Court of Directors, No. 56, Sept. 8, 1857, para 187.



Deb Raja on the other"<sup>70</sup>. The Dharma Raja was regarded as a high incarnation. Krishna Kanta Bose's account says that "he was the spiritual guide, incarnate Deity and sovereign prince"<sup>71</sup>. In Bhutanese eyes the Deb Raja always held a subordinate position. One Zinkaff (subordinate official) sent from Bhutan on deputation to the Governor General's Agent, North East Frontier, in 1833 gave informations which has a relevance of its own as emanating from an internal source. The Zinkaff stated that in Bhutan the Dharma Raja was called "Meha Lama, Noa Nam-dee and Thebo Rimpochay". That there were twelve hundred gylongs with the Dharma Raja at the monastery at Talo where "prayers are offered up day and night". That all "important matters of the country are reported to the Dharma Raja" whose "principal employment however is in religious rites". That "Tipa is the title given to the person in office at Hassa (Lhasa) whose duty it is to carry on the affairs of the country as the Deb Raja does under the Dharma Raja in Bhutan"<sup>72</sup>.

The image of the Dharma Raja portrayed here is that of a learned recluse held in high veneration to which the Deb Raja could never aspire.

The eminence of the priestly order in Bhutan had a bearing in non-spiritual spheres recognised by the powerful secular aristocracy. George Bogle stated how the revolt against Desi Shidariva (Bogle's Deb Judhur) after the failure of his Cooch-Bihar expedition (1774), was organised by the priests under Lama Rimpochay. Pemberton wrote that the cause of the Tongsa Penlop who revolted against the Deb Raja was espoused by the Dharma Raja and the priests<sup>73</sup>. Perhaps it is relevant to elucidate this "bearing" in some mundane terms. The titles and attributes of the Dharma Raja in his seal describe him as the "spiritual and temporal chief of the realm" and "above all the Lamas of the Drukpa (sic) creed"<sup>74</sup>. It is on record that zemindars in the

70. P. L. Mehra, 'Lacunae in the Study of the History of Bhutan and Sikkim', *Indian History Congress, Proceedings of the Twentythird Session*, Aligarh, 1960. Part II (1961) pp. 195, 196.

71. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.* *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, p. 131.

72. Foreign P. C. Dec. 12/33 No. 76, NAI,

73. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 91,

74. J. D. Hooker, *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. I, 1854, p. 372.



Duars had their title deeds both from the Deb and Dharma Rajas though there were exceptions. The Dharma Raja "possesses lands in the low country south of the hills of the annual value of seven or eight thousand rupees and traded with a capital of twentyfive or thirty thousand rupees . . . The Deb Raja has no authority over the Dharma Raja's people"<sup>75</sup>. Presents from officers of state on appointment and receipts from religious and funeral ceremonies were two other sources of income. The expenses of the Dharma Raja were considerable. He had to maintain "supernumerary gylongs" and to defray the expenses of religious ceremonies and charitable donations "so that little remains of his annual receipts"<sup>76</sup>. The revenues of the Assam Duars were used to defray the expenses of the priestly order under the Dharma Raja. One representation to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal runs . . . "Sometime ago you seized our seven talooks in Assam, from which the provisions for the Dharma Raja's puja (worship) were brought and you paid some rupees in exchange which we consenting reserved them"<sup>77</sup>.

It would seem that the Dharma Raja had the resources, power and patronage to unleash a civil strife and at times to play a decisive role. Perhaps such considerations led Col. Jenkins, the Governor General's Agent, to think that the Dharma and the Deb Rajas "seemed to be colleagues with co-ordinate powers".

The papers on British political relations with Bhutan in the period 1772-1865 are replete with references to chronic instability and civil strife in the Himalayan principality. These papers can be conveniently divided into two categories. First, are the reports of envoys sent to Tibet or Bhutan and, second, the official papers consisting of letters, memoranda, minutes, despatches, proceedings of government (India and Bengal) and also telegrams resorted to with great advantage in the days of the Duar War (1864-65).

The earliest British envoy George Bogle (1774-75) associated with Warren Hastings' Tibetan design has recorded the events

75. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.* p. 132.

76. Krishna Kanta Bose, 'Account of Bhutan', *Political Missions to Bhutan*, Bengal Secretariat, 1865, p. 190.

77. Bhutan Political Proceedings, Nov. 1864, No. 5069, dated simply "Chand Ke Tarikh", State Archives, Government of West Bengal.



of the reign of "Deb Judhur"<sup>78</sup>, the dethroned Bhutanese ruler and the "rooted enmity" and "opposition of interest" between him and a "junta of priests" led by Lama Rinpochoy. The conflict resulted in a "revolution" which combined with the failure of Shidariva's Cooch Behar expedition led to the flight of the latter to the neighbourhood of Lhasa.<sup>79</sup> Messrs Mercer and Chauvet entrusted with the task of enquiry into the disturbances in Cooch Behar (1788) spoke of a "late revolution" and subsequent "tranquillity" in Bhutan in a letter to Government.<sup>80</sup> In 1815 Krishna Kanta Bose was sent to Bhutan to settle boundary disputes and has "left us an intelligent account of the country".<sup>81</sup> In this account he noted that the Deb Raja after a time is "liable to be thrust out, on some such pretence as that of his having infringed established custom; and unless he has the Tongsa or Paro Penlop on his side he must, if required to do so, resign his place or risk the result of civil war"<sup>82</sup>. R. B. Pemberton in his celebrated Report (1838) has narrated the story of one of the most protracted rebellions that convulsed Bhutan in which the dramatis personæ were Dorje Namdee (the Tongsa Penlop), Suje Gasse, Deb Tille and Daka Penlop. Suje Gasse retained the office of the Deb Raja "for nine years instead of three". The Tongsa Penlop revolted and in the emergency applied to Lhasa for assistance and got himself intalled as Deb Raja.<sup>83</sup> Ashley Eden before his departure for Bhutan (1863) collected information that the country was "thrown into a state of anarchy and general confusion by one of the frequent struggles for Deb Rajaship".<sup>84</sup> The Tongsa Penlop emerged triumphant in this struggle. When he,

78. Shakabpa in his political history of Tibet has given us the Tibetan name of this Bhutanese ruler as Desi Shidariva. His source is the Nyimai 'od-zer, an anonymous biography of the third Panchen Lama, W. D. Shakabpa, *op. cit.* p. 154,

79. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-41.

80. Misc. Records, Revenue Deptt., Dated June 10, 1788, p. 18, State Archives, Government of West Bengal.

81. *Friend of India*, March 16, 1865.

82. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.* p. 150,

83. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, pp. 91, 92,

84. Foreign Political A. No. 3 dated Nov. 10, 1863, Proceedings, January No. 82, 83, para 3, N.A.I.



smarting under the loss of the Assam Duars, (1841) humiliated the envoy in open Darbar (1864) the Deb Raja "was frightened and did not speak".<sup>85</sup>

One series of papers consisting of correspondence between British frontier officials and Government relate that the Bengal Duars of Bhutan knew no peace from the early 1830's right up to the outbreak of war with Bhutan in 1864. In the first instance rivalry between powerful landlords in the plains who were also Bhutan officials was responsible for ceaseless disturbances. The struggle between Hurgovind Katham, a Bhutanese official and Durgadev Raikat, the zeminder of Baikunthopur for ascendancy in the Duars has been described in another Chapter. A very remarkable fact is that the claims of the Raikat and the Katham were supported by officers of rival Deb Rajas and the long conflict in the Duars was a repercussion of the contention of two parties in Bhutan itself. Eden noted that "whilst the struggle was going on in the hills there were two parties fighting in the plains" and that Durgadev was "backed by the Angdu Phodrang Deb on one side and Hurgovind Katma (sic) backed by the other Deb (who was at Tashi Chho dzong with the Dharma Raja) on the other"<sup>86</sup>. Records reveal that very often the Bhutanese Subabs, who were high officials in charge of different Duars, were loyal to one authority against the other. In 1853 Chaia Penjor who claimed to be the Subah of Buxa Duar did "all he could to destroy the authority and injure the revenue of the Dharma Raja".<sup>87</sup> Kham Jhampe "a loyal servant of the Dharma Raja arrived by way of Madari", encountered the forces of Chaia Penju, "fought him for three days and at last turned the scale in his favour".<sup>88</sup> Khan Jhampe stated that the object of Chaia Penju's forays in British protected territory was to involve "his country and sovereign" in a quarrel with the English which would lead to the annexation of the Dharma Raja's land and open advancement of the Deb Raja and his followers.

85. No. 45 dated Darjeeling April 21, 1864, Eden to Durand, para 12, N.A.I.

86. A Eden, Report on the State of Bhutan, Darjeeling, July 29, 1864, pp. 20, 21.

87. Foreign Political Nov. 18/53, No. 153, N.A.I.

88. *op. cit.*



British officials also suspected that Chaia Penju's aim was "to get the Dharma Raja embroiled in a dispute with the British government"<sup>89</sup>.

These events are a pointer that in the 19th century the institution of the Dharma Raja had sufficient impact and influence in mundane affairs to unsettle an accomplished fact. This is one reason why the secular aristocracy regarded the Dharma Raja's support as invaluable. They also show that very often the religious hierarchy crossed the path of aristocratic ambition. The system of dual government in Bhutan organised since the days of the first Dharma Raja did not ensure political harmony. The tension between the Deb and Dharma Rajas at times easily degenerated into armed conflicts among their followers causing misery in the hills. Their disputes "furnish the chronicles of Bhutan—which bear accounts of bloody struggles for power among the nobility on almost every page—with an additional grim chapter"<sup>90</sup>. These disputes also turned the fertile plains of the Bengal Duars into a cockpit for factional fights. The equilibrium arrived at between the two institutions, the Deb and Dharma Rajas, was evidently unstable. In Bhutanese eyes the Dharma Raja was always superior to the Deb Raja who was only a de facto sovereign. The status of the Dharma Raja has been clearly shown in a letter of the Tongsa Penlop in 1865. The Penlop had forced a humiliating retreat on the British forces from Dewangiri. He learnt that the latter were preparing to recapture the hill post and made the following enquiry :—

"You want Dewangiri again, but from whom did you receive permission to take possession of it? You will either have to fight us or write a letter to the Dharma Raja, if you are desirous to recover Dewangiri. If he gives it to you then we must yield" . . .<sup>91</sup>.

The social and political milieu in Bhutan and its economic backwardness rendered the operation of prescriptive rules nug-

89. Letter from W. Dempier, Supdt. of Police, Lower Provinces to Cecil Beadon, Secy. to the Government of Bengal, dated Patna the 17th January 1854. Foreign Political April 28/54 No. 115, dated January 17, 1854, N.A.I.

90. Rene Von Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Where the Gods are Mourn-tains*, London 1956, p. 165.

91. Rennie Surgeon, *op. cit.* p. 290



tory. Tribal loyalty, aristocratic ambition, pre-eminence of priesthood, ethnic peculiarity and foreign intervention in favour of the de-facto sovereign are among the multiple forces that determined Bhutan's destiny in the 19th century. These are the forces that rendered the harmonious functioning of an uncrystallised dyarchy impossible. "Theoretically the government is well organised"<sup>92</sup> and as Pemberton very pungently observe "the form of government is in itself, if fairly administered, quite sufficient to produce far more favourable results to the people than are now perceptible".<sup>93</sup>

#### *Section IV—The Bhutanese Hierarchy and the System of Administration :*

Subordinate to the two authorities of government there were two councils. The council under the Dharma Raja consisted of twelve gylongs.<sup>94</sup> These priestly councillors were not solely concerned with religious or literary pursuits but at times exercised an "efficient control over less spiritual objects"<sup>95</sup>. Though they professed "abstinence" from secular affairs they had "no small share in exciting and fomenting the contests for the rank of the Deb." The council of which the Deb Raja was the head consisted of six zimpes and was called Lenchen. In addition the Tongsa and Paro Penlops, the two most powerful chiefs of the eastern and western division of Bhutan, were entitled to seats in the council whenever they were present in the capital. The composition of the council as given by Pemberton shows that it consisted of lay and Lamaist elements. The Lam and the Kalling Zimpe were devoted to the interests of the Dharma Raja while the Deb Zimpe was faithfully attached to the secular chief and has been described as the "private Dewan" of the Deb Raja looking after his trade and other concerns, while the Donnay (sic) Zimpe was his "public Dewan".<sup>96</sup> The members of the Council were eligible for the

92. E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, 1872, p. 96.

93. Pemberton, *op. cit.* p. 57, para 22.

94. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit. Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, p.

151. The gylongs or ordained priests were "often possessed of wealth, which they collected as charity, and as fees of office and by trade."

95. Pemberton, *op. cit.* p. 53.

96. Krishna Kanta Bose, 'Account of Bhutan', *Political Missions to Bhutan*, Bengal Secretariat, 1865, pp. 190-191.

office of the Deb Raja though by no means exclusively. Thus the Daka Penlop who apparently for the insignificant extent of his jurisdiction had no seat in the council; fought his way up and was the Deb Raja at the time of Pemberton's visit. It is difficult to be firm about any regional consideration in the composition of the council. The chiefs who sat there and participated in deliberations came from the Dzongs of intramontane Bhutan. The Subahs in charge of the southern passes and the Duar plains were left out. They are mentioned simply as officers under the Paro and Tongsa Penlops. That physical geography of the eastern Himalayas was a positive barrier to viable administration is clear from the report that the term 'Subah' was not known in Bhutan except to those who had occasion to visit the plains. The Bhutanese equivalent for the term was Dzungpon who were in charge of hill districts.

The two broad administrative divisions of eastern and western Bhutan became apparent only through greater contact. The country was "divided among six provincial Governors, that is, those of Paro, Daka, Tongsa, Tashichhodzong, Wangdu Phodrang and Punakha"<sup>97</sup>. The earlier missions of Bogle and Turner had travelled through the Buxa Duar and the jurisdiction of the western chief known as Paro Penlop. Turner says that the Paro Penlop's "jurisdiction is of first importance in Bhutan; it extends from the frontier of Tibet to the borders of Bengal"<sup>98</sup> at the foot of the Lucki Duar. The chief of the eastern division of Bhutan, the Tongsa Penlop, emerges as a historical figure in the records after the annexation of Assam in 1826. Territorial contiguity in the extensive Duar plains of Bengal and Assam helped to ascertain that the Tongsa Penlop ruled over an extensive dominion from the river Manas eastward. It is the opposition of the Tongsa Penlop since the "resumption" of the Assam Duars in 1841 which denied de jure recognition to cession of territory in Darang and Kamrup till the end of the Duar War in 1865. However, in view of the shifting sands of tribal loyalty and in the absence of Bhutanese records it is frustrating that this high drama must remain untold. A few telegrams in the last phase of the Duar War are perhaps our only source revealing that the Paro Penlop and the western chiefs of Bhutan along with the Deb

97. Pedro Carasco, *Land and Polity in Tibet*, Seattle, 1959, p. 201.

98. Samuel Turner, *op. cit.* p. 177,



Raja became an effective counterpoise to an uncompromising Tongsa Penlop and thereby hastened the Treaty of Sinchula (1865).<sup>99</sup>

The provincial governors were endowed with ample power. The policing of the country, the levying of taxes and the administration of justice were committed to them.<sup>100</sup> They kept the machinery of the Bhutan government in motion with the help of a host of subordinate officials like the Dzongpons, the Subahs, the Zinkaffs and, in the plains of the Bengal Duars, the Kathams. In the Assam Duars a class of officials known as the Doompas with the Dewarngiri Raja at their head ensured the hold of the Tongsa Penlop. In elucidating the laws of the Dharma Raja, Claude White mentions the names of some local officials<sup>101</sup> known as Kuchangs (sic); Karbaris or Mandals. The appellations Karbari and Mandal are distinctly usages prevalent in the plains of the Duars. Pemberton's list of six Dzongpons under the Tongsa Penlop and six under the Paro chief including the Subah of Buxa Duar gives an idea of different administrative jurisdictions in the hill portion of Bhutan territory. However, British frontier officials in those days do not seem to have been in a position to identify the dzongs from which the title of the Dzongpons was derived. In the region between the rivers Tista and Manas the same authority mentions six Subahs among whom the Subah of Chirang ruled over the most extensive territory and who commanded the best pass leading to the hills from the plains of Bengal.<sup>102</sup> In the Duars of Kamrup and Darrang there were Bhutanese "uzeers" and "kazis" among the Subordinate officers.<sup>103</sup> Like the appellation subah these words were usages in Perso-Turkish administrative system of the Mughals. They also

99. Telegram from Lieut. Governor to Col. Bruce at Buxa, dated Nov. 21, 1865, *Bhutan Political Proceedings* : April 1866, p. 143.—"Bear in mind that we should have to act as the ally of the Bhutan Government not as invaders and that the Tongsa Penlop stands alone". This is an example.

100. Markham, *op. cit.* p. 36, Also Claude White *op. cit.* p. 246,

101. Claude White, *Sikkim & Bhutan, Twentyone Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887-1908*, London, 1909, Reprint, New Delhi, 1971, p. 306.

102. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

became established usages in the Nepalese system of administration built up by Prithinrayan Shah in the 18th century.<sup>104</sup> The official title Katham did not exist east of the river Gadadhar.<sup>105</sup> The titles of subordinate officials as narrated above underline the interesting fact that some are distinctly of Tibetan origin while others, specially in the plains, indicate a continuity since the days of the Mughals. The point of uninterrupted tradition was not merely a matter of form. The functioning of the old system in the Duar plains appears to have been undisturbed. Certainly the Bhutanese found it most suitable as they did not have sufficient man-power and dreaded the lower heights and the humid jungles of the Duars. When the British took over after the Duar War they found it wise not to do away with age-old practices rashly and venture into the unknown. Surgeon Rennie attempted a balanced view of things. According to him Ashley Eden who was writing under a sense of "personal insult and political failure" suffered from a "tendency" to "overstate Bhutanese defects".<sup>106</sup> Commenting on the revenue system prevailing in the Duars Rennie writes : "It would seem doubtful whether the Bhutanese mode of collecting their revenue from the Duars was so unsystematic as Mr. Eden's notice of it implies ; because since our recent annexation of them it has been determined, in the first instance, to continue collecting it in the same manner as the inhabitants had been accustomed to under Bhutanese rule."<sup>107</sup> Since the annexation of Assam British and Bhutanese territories became contiguous in the Duars of Kamrup and Darrang. Thereafter contact with Bhutanese frontier officials convinced the British that the central Bhutanese government had a very loose control over their subordinates in the Duars. Letters addressed to the Deb and Dharma Rajas often did not reach their destination and were suppressed by officials at Dewangiri or Tongsa. Pemberton's mission in 1838 threw a flood of light on the admi-

104. Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*, 1966.

105. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

106. D. F. Rennie, Surgeon, *op. cit.*, p. 23 fn.

107. D. F. Rennie, *op. cit.*, p. 23 fn. In the matter of revenue administration of the Western Duars application of new principles began with the settlement of Mr. Sunder in 1893 after a number of topographical and cadastral surveys of the area.



ministrative system of Bhutan. In the following year Robertson, member of the Supreme Council, commenting on Pemberton's Report noted in a minute: "We are now for the first time put in possession of a positive account of the system of internal government in that province (Bhutan) . . . and furnished with informations to guide our conjectures as to the influences that regulate its foreign relations"<sup>108</sup>. As a result of garnering of more informations by the time of the Great Revolt (1857) quite objective appraisals could be made regarding the effectiveness of the central Bhutanese government. In 1857 it was recorded that the central government of Bhutan at Tashichhodzong does "under ordinary circumstances exercise an effective control over the subordinate provincial governors or subahs, but that the degree of this control is liable to variation according to the state of the parties at the seat of the central government"<sup>109</sup>. It was seen that the Tongsa and the Paro Penlops though they exercised virtually independent authority invariably acted in the name of the Dharma and Deb Rajas and acknowledged the supremacy of these rulers. In 1861 it was recognised that "all attempts at placing our relations with the Bhutan Government on a satisfactory footing will be ineffectual unless we contrive to open an uninterrupted communication with the Deb Raja"<sup>110</sup>. In 1864 Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, stated that it was futile to negotiate with Bhutanese provincial governors for reparation and wrote: "The only intelligible policy which in my judgment the government can pursue is to regard the Bhutia nation as a whole and to look to its ostensible government and to that alone for reparation and security"<sup>111</sup>. It seems that the effectiveness of an ostensible government was not in doubt.

In Bhutan offices of power were the only source of pre-eminence. Hereditary distinction was unknown<sup>112</sup>. An aristo-

108. Foreign P. C. March 27, 1839, No. 81, dated January 31, 1839, N.A.I.

109. 507 Foreign Political, April 17, 1857, No. 62, para 5, From Secretary to the Government of Bengal to Secretary to the Government of India, dated Kurseong March 5, 1857.

110. *Annual Report on the Administration of the Bengal Presidency*, 1861-62, p. 74.

111. No. 42, Minute by Cecil Beadon, dated Darjeeling July 22, 1864, N.A.I.

112. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

cracy rooted in the ownership of big landed estates was absent. Rugged terrain and harsh environment not only restricted the size of farms but also determined the pattern of ownership of land. George Bogle observed in 1775 that the people of Bhutan "may properly be divided into three classes: the priests, the servants or officers of government and the landholder and the husbandman"<sup>113</sup>. The lumping together of landholder and husbandmen in one class is not without meaning. Landed aristocracy as a distinct class from the peasantry did not seem worthy of classification in the eyes of a foreign observer. The landholders referred to were small and medium farmers who held land on farming terms. Krishna Kanta Bose observed in 1815 that the ✓ Deb Raja ... "presents horses, silk, salt and hoes to the petty landholders and farmers, and receives much more than the value in return"<sup>114</sup>. Thus absence of big landed estates and hereditary privilege ensured greater mobility within the official classes. There are cases on record where persons of ability though they were of humble or "low" origin fought their way up. Krishna Kanta Bose mentions of a Zinkaff, the lowest official in the hierarchy, who rose to be the Deb Raja of Bhutan<sup>115</sup>. During Pemberton's visit to Bhutan (1838) the Daka Penlop, ineligible for the rank of the Deb Raja, had elevated himself through a ✓ successful rebellion to the high dignity.

Officials of old Bhutan, monk and lay, held offices for short terms. Only the Dharma Raja was a "functionary for life miraculously vested into supreme spiritual authority from infancy"<sup>116</sup>. The Deb Raja as it has been noticed, could hold office for three years. At the annual festival "removal and changes" of officials was a normal occurrence. The Deb Raja strove to fill the offices with men devoted to his interests. As the bulk of the revenue was received in kind there was no system of regular payment of salary from the treasury. Short tenure and no fixed emolument are the prime reasons which explain the sickening story of ✓ official capacity recorded by observers in the 19th century: "Whenever any ryot or landholder or servant has collected a little money the officers of government under whose authority they happen

113. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV, p. 34.

114. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.*, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, p.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

116. Foreign Political April 17/57, No. 62, para 7, N.A.I.



to be placed find some plea or other for taking the whole. On this account the ryots are afraid to put on good clothes, or to eat and drink according to their own inclination, lest they should excite the avarice of their rulers. Norwithstanding this the latter leave nothing to the ryot... whatever rice they grow is taken almost entirely for revenue by the government and they are also obliged to deliver the grass and the straw. Of wheat they retain a large portion and do not give to government any part of their dhema. All the colts that are produced from mare and all the blankets they make are also taken by the officers of government at a low price"<sup>117</sup>. The descent of a party of Bhutanese Zinkaffs in the Duars was regarded as a calamity by local inhabitants and British Frontier Officials urged the necessity of putting an end to the extensive "predatory system". It is perhaps apposite to locate the sources of harassment and misery in the institutional arrangements in Bhutan itself rather than ascribe them to the wickedness of a number of border chiefs, as has been done almost invariably by British officials in the 19th century. Pemberton is forthright in saying that every official "endeavours to amass as much property as possible during his tenure of an office which he is aware is likely to be but of short duration and as the removal of the superior is generally attended by the dismissal of every subordinate under him at the same time, the incentive to speculative industry exists in every grade"<sup>118</sup>. The cultivator was the victim of the system which deprived him of the rewards of his labour. It is significant that every report on Bhutan highlights the officialdom and not an entrenched aristocracy as the source of oppression.

Perhaps the most important phenomenon which sheds light on the hold of officialdom was the fact that the hold of the bureaucracy was clinched by tying the peasantry to the soil. The rigours of cultivation in the hills and dearth of agricultural labourer led to ingenious devices to ensure the continuity of cultivation and a reasonable fixity of income for the state. It was reported that at Punakha grants of land were made to women which assured supply of farmhands. In northern and central Bhutan where

117. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.*, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, pp. 151-152.

118. R. B. Pemberton, Report, p. 57.

polyandry prevailed such agreements meant "three or four males would be enchained by the fetters which bound one female"<sup>119</sup>.

A few thousand slaves picked up from the Duar plains of Assam and Bengal were "forced into connubial union with Bhutia women of inferior grades of society"<sup>120</sup>. The women were made responsible for their continuance in the country. It was almost impossible for the ryots to migrate from one region to another without the consent of Subahs and dzongpons. The permission to do so "could be obtained by the payment of a sum so large, as to render the raising of it at all, almost hopeless"<sup>121</sup>.

In popular belief the Dharma Raja, through his rebirth, was endowed with the wisdom of ages. Governors of provinces, collectors and all their train of dependents, both lay and cleric, went through a process of training and education and seldom arrived at "places of trust and consequence till far advanced in life"<sup>122</sup>. They were "not quite recruited from the peasant population at large but only from some groups, and the higher positions could be reached only by members of dominant families"<sup>123</sup>. Among these "at least one group was clearly a descent group"<sup>124</sup>. Krishna Kanta Bose wrote that "in Bhutan there are fifteen tribes, the chief of which are the Sha and Waa. The Deb Raja and the officers of state used always to be of these castes". Though, as has been seen, it was not uncommon for a forceful person to make his mark in spite of kinship and status. Turner found that the governing class was educated in the monasteries. Having received a religious or semi-religious training they "elected afterwards to enter the secular posts"<sup>125</sup>.

Like the priests the zinkaffs were received young from families in the country. They were brought up in the dzongs and palaces at public expense. They looked after the supply of provisions, firewood and other necessities from the country people. They could seldom reach any office of importance. These were the preserve of the priests. In fact the object of

119. R. B. Pemberton, *Ibid.*, p. 95.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

121. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

122. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

123. Pedro Carrasco, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

125. Claude White, *op. cit.*, p. 246.



“utmost ambition” to every parent was to have his son enrolled in the rank of the priests. This could be obtained by an application to the Dharma and Deb Rajas accompanied by a stipulated fee. A candidate remained in the palace or castle where he was provided with food and clothing for a time varying from two to six years<sup>126</sup>. If a priestly candidate was found to possess abilities adapted to public business he took leave of the monastic life and entered upon a career of greater activity. But there was no bar in his continuing to reside in the palace if he preferred that arrangement. These favoured elite of Punakha, Tashi-Chhodzong, Tongsa, Paro and other less distinguished places filled up the vacancies in monasteries and temples throughout Bhutan. Each of the main forts was connected with a monastic establishment where the state monks resided. It must not be supposed that the lay officials were divorced from the religious side of Bhutanese life. In at least two respects their life had a monastic quality. First, the Drukpa creed in order to fulfil its errand of peace and happiness and with the interest of the hierarchy in mind had enjoined celibacy though one of the earlier Dharma Rajas is known to have married and had children before assuming office. All available reports show that celibacy was sought to be enforced in the case of lay officials too. Bogle recorded that when they rose to any post of honour and trust they were separated from their families. Thereafter they were not permitted contact or intimacy with the families. This was used to be done lest their attachment to their children should induce them to attempt rendering the government hereditary in their families<sup>127</sup>. Powerful secular chiefs ignored the restriction without much ado. Pemberton speaks of the “late” Tongsa Penlop who had a family before he obtained that rank. For a time he complied with the injunction of the priests but soon violated it. The priests who formed a very large proportion of the establishment of his castle remonstrated, but he was too powerful to be removed summarily from office. The priests refused to allow him to share in their meals. He was also excluded from the castles of Punakha and Tashi-Chhodzong and also from the presence of the Dharma

126. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

127. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 57.

and Dab Rajas<sup>128</sup>. Secondly, Drukpa monks who renounced all connection with women and cultivation lived in close intimacy with lay officials in all the important dzongs where they were fed from state storehouses<sup>129</sup>. They shared their meals in common with lay officials.

A remarkable feature in the evolution of the traditional polity of Bhutan was that all through the 19th century the lay officials strengthened their position. They gradually occupied all political offices, married and kept all positions within their control<sup>130</sup>. George Bogle was not very clear in his definition of the position of the Lamas and the distinction which he intended to draw between the priests and the Lamas was, as Claude White conjectures, "probably that the Lamas were those who, having received a religious or semi-religious training in the monasteries elected afterwards to enter the secular posts of government retaining at the same time a close connection with the religious side of national life, especially in the matter of celibacy. They were represented by the Deb Raja, his governors, ministers and councillors in contradistinction to the priesthood, who, with the Dharma Raja as its head, concerned itself, primarily, with the religious administration of the country<sup>131</sup>. This interpretation would suggest that the Lamas in secular posts strengthened the grip of the Deb Raja and the secular arm over the administration though the Deb Raja would take no measure of consequence "without their (the priests) advice and approbation" and, as Bogle found it, the priests were appointed to the government of provinces, employed as ministers or entrusted with offices of first consideration in the state<sup>132</sup>.

✓ The pre-eminence of secular officialdom attracted notice of Krishna Kanta Bose in 1815. He wrote that "in respect of the

128. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

129. That lay officials and monks resided in the dzongs together is clearly brought out in Philip Denwood's study of the architecture of the dzongs. He says that the Bhutanese dzong combined "military, governmental and religious functions in a single ensemble"—*Sambhala*, Occasional Papers of the Institute of Tibetan Studies, No. I, January, 1971, p. 14.

130. Pedro Carrasco, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

131. Claude White, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

132. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 35.



internal administration of the country or its relations with foreign states, he (the Dharma Raja) has no authority whatever; and with the exception of spiritual and religious matters, the administration of the government of the country is conducted by the Deb Raja, with the advice of Korjis and councillors, and in some cases with the concurrence of the Dharma Raja. From the cares of government the Dharma Raja is almost entirely free and he has no great number of attendants for purposes of state"<sup>133</sup>. Pemberton says that the "blind and implicit veneration with which the Dharma used to be regarded is on the decline"<sup>134</sup> and gifts expressly meant for the incarnation were appropriated by the Deb Raja "even after they had reached his presence". The story of a decade of political convulsions and civil strife which Pemberton's Report unfold show that the powerful secular chiefs were untrammelled by any priestly interference. The Dharma Raja and his followers look like distant witnesses to the struggle and unable to affect its disastrous course, Griffith's diary of the visit of the mission to the boy incarnation states that "he had fewer attendants and his room was less richly ornamented than that of the Deb"<sup>135</sup>. If protocol arrangements project facets of state power Griffith's brief note on the indifferent discretion displayed before a foreign mission tells the tale of the decline of religious hierarchy in Bhutan. In the context of the rise of secular aristocracy the lamentations of the "last Dharma" as recorded by Pemberton, is highly instructive. On the eve of his "temporary withdrawal" from the earthly scene the Dharma Raja was reported to have spoken to his followers about the "demoralisation of the country" and "the disrespect and want of reverence exhibited to the priests". He was determined that "his next appearance on earth should take place in some other country, more worthy of his presence"<sup>136</sup>. The English enquirer comments that this "sagacious resolve" rekindled the slumbering piety of the followers of the Dharma Raja. Their entreaties,

133. Krishna Kanta Bose, *op. cit.*, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV,

p. 131.

134. Pemberton Report, p. 62.

135. William Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

136. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

professions of regret and promises of amended moral succeeded to induce "a change in his resolutions"<sup>137</sup>.

A Despatch to the Court of Directors in 1855 gives the rather unique information of a rebellion against the Dharma Raja. Certain persons on behalf of the Dharma Raja arrived at Cooch Behar on their way to Gauhati to meet the Governor General's Agent, and narrated that the "Dharma Raja had been deprived of his property and seal by the rebellious Subahs and that he was anxious to make over Bhutan Duars to the British Government and put himself under its protection". At Gauhati they offered "Izara (lease) to the British Government of the 13 other Duars which lie on the west of the Manas river and east of Darjeeling". These lands could be taken over and the amount of revenue "reserved for the (Dharma) Raja or remitted direct to him". Dalhousie's administration, burdened as it was with pressing and important problems of the empire rejected the offer as the "Government of India did not desire to interfere in the internal disputes of Bhutan or to take the Dharma Raja under protection"<sup>138</sup>. In between the lines it is permissible to read that a mere offer from the Dharma Raja without the seal of approval from the secular administration of Bhutan was not considered guarantee enough for a smooth transference of a rich tract of Bhutanese territory. Ashley Eden (1864) found the government of Bhutan "virtually seized by the Penlops whom he bitterly described as 'two treacherous and notoriously unscrupulous robber chiefs'"<sup>139</sup>. In the context of the decline of the religious hierarchy it is important that the British, consciously or not, worked towards upgrading and recognising the de facto ruler, the temporal authority of the Deb Raja.

Rent and revenue relations in the early Bhutanese state are to be examined in two different orders. Those of intramontane Bhutan or Bhutan proper and secondly, rent and revenue relations in the Duars when these tracts came under Bhutanese control. Earlier Tibetan settlers had to grapple with cultivation in hospitable land and problems of steady expansion of farming.

137. *Ibid.*

138. Political Despatch to the Court of Directors, No. 64, dated Nov. 22, 1855, Paras 165, 170, 171.

139. Pol & PA 1864, Sept. No. 41-49, No. 45, Eden to Durand dated Darjeeling the 12th April 1864, Para 22, N.A.I.



The fulfilment of these objectives were sought not through inducements but the application of laws "enacted by successive Bhutanese rulers"<sup>140</sup>. As it was in Tibet "the chief item in both rent and revenue is that of service rendered without pay". The state organised by the first Shabdung was especially concerned with the maintenance of the tax roll and prescribed succession to property. The earlier laws as quoted by Charles Bell show that a tendency had developed to combine two or more holdings or estates into one "with the result of rendering only one quota of service"<sup>141</sup>. Thus it came to that "the dry tax (grain and money) alone is paid, while the labour tax is evaded". The laws prescribed that if a family has sons and daughters they should each maintain separate holdings and pay taxes due from each. If a family holding ran short of workers "it should be compelled to transfer a portion to any individuals that it may select from a large neighbouring family". It was thought that by these means "the number of real workers will be kept at the full". Further the slave population of Bhutan arising out of people condemned for various criminal offences and later on of people lifted from the plains reinforced agricultural labour<sup>142</sup>. The prescriptions regarding holdings dictated by shortage of farmhands and requirements of tax roll prevented the growth of big and hereditary estates noticeable in well-known reports on Bhutan. Laws of succession ensured lifetime assignment of land to the peasants and though in theory land was resumable after his demise, in practice it was transmitted undivided to his successors. That resumption of land was not the

140. Charles Bell, *People of Tibet*, Oxford, 1868, p. 88.

141. Charles Bell, *People of Tibet*, p. 89. In recent times the tendency to coalesce holdings has been checked by the reforms of King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. He has restricted individual ownership to 30 acres and himself owns only so much. K. K. Moorthy, 'Bhutan...the Economic Scene', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, XXXI, Feb. 23, 1961, p. 333.

142. (a) The present king has declared serfdon illegal and freed "about 5000 slaves who were mostly captives seized from the plains". K. K. Moorthy, *op. cit.*, 'Social Progress', p. 333.

(b) At present in the Western Duars there are Rajbansis living in several villages who are known as "Dobhasias", that is, people speaking two languages. It is said that during their long stay in Bhutan their ancestors acquired knowledge of Bhutanese language, *Jaipalguri District Centenary Souvenir*, 1970, p. 50.

practice is also clear from Claude White's summation of the laws of Bhutan. Therein it is stated that a ryot who is aged and has neither daughter nor son may be asked only to render such labour and service for revenue as he is able to perform alone as long as he lives. Upon his or her decease "the same holding shall pass to the nearest kith or kin who will thenceforth be expected to render both labour and cash and kind revenues"<sup>143</sup>. According to Pemberton the Bhutanese landholder could invest the "little capital" that might have accumulated only in the erection of a good house. Like every other property it was "liable to resumption by government" on the death of the person who constructed it. However, the prescription of law was obviated by presents to the Penlops and dzongpons "in whose jurisdiction the house is situated"<sup>144</sup>. There are only occasional glimpses regarding landed endowments for monasteries. The Dharma Raja is reported to have been possessing landed estates in the lowlands. In 1836 it was learnt that the Bans Ka Duar in Kamrup was "assigned for the maintenance of the Dharma Raja's family and the priests in attendance upon him". Due to the attachment of the Duar they were suffering considerably "being interdicted from intercourse with the plains"<sup>145</sup>. In 1864 the Bhutanese insisted that the British subsidy of Rs. 10,000 paid for the Assam Duars since 1841 were always forwarded to the Darbar of the Dharma Raja and spent for "eight or nine thousand Lamas" and the "pooja" (worship) of the Mahakal at Punakha and Tashi-Chhodzong. The Tongsa Penlop and his officials never "spent a single pice" on their own account"<sup>146</sup>. In fact throughout the 19th century assignments of revenue and landed endowments for monasteries are well authenticated features of the Bhutanese economic landscape.

A characteristic Bhutanese custom is that "for the most part the husbands live in the houses of their wives, the latter

143. Claude White, *op. cit.*, Appendix I, p. 307.

144. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 64.

145. From Agent to the Governor General to Secretary to the Government of India in the Political Deptt. Para 2. Foreign P.C. June 27/36, No. 52, N.A.I.

146. Translation of letters from Deb and Dharma Rajas, Bhutan Political Proceedings, Nov. 1864, No. 5069, State Archives, Govt. of West Bengal.



seldom going to their husband's house"<sup>147</sup>. This has been sought to be explained in a recent article which stated that "It all depends on the strength of the two families as an agricultural labour force". The present situation is "the groom comes over if the bride's family's labour needs are greater but if both families have ample labour than the couple may stake out their own plot of land and home"<sup>148</sup>. George Bogle found the taxes "moderate in themselves" and less oppressive for the "simple manner of gathering them"<sup>149</sup>. Krishna Kanta Bose's description implies that the state took a determined share of the grain crop but the basis of assessment is not stated specifically. Pemberton says that the revenue contributed "by the population of the hills" consisted of grain, goats, sheep, ghee, fowls and clothes. These were paid by the cultivators to their chiefs who forwarded them to the Penlops. A portion of them was transferred to Punakha and Tashi-Chhodzong in winter. The immediate requirements of the state were met from these central stores and the remainder were employed in trade by the "Deb, Dharma, Poona and Tassi Zimpes". As "nearly the whole of the revenue" was paid in kind and there was nothing like public records, neither the valuation of articles nor the principles of assessment could be obtained<sup>150</sup>. Eden's report stated that assessments made at an earlier, albeit unspecified, period were on the basis of the capacity of seeds. This was familiar in Tibet and shows, as in many other forms, Tibet's intimate connection with Bhutan on the "secular side"<sup>151</sup>. Eden wrote: "the lands of each village were estimated many years ago as being capable of being sown with a certain number of measures of seed, the estimate was placed on record and the demand standing against the village was fixed at forty measures of grain for each such measure of seed". Even in villages where population was decreasing "no allowance is made and the remaining villages were expected

147. Pedro Carrasco, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

148. K. K. Moorthy, 'Bhutan...the Economic Scene', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, XXXI, Feb. 23, 1961, p. 333, Social Progress.

149. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

150. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, pp. 63, 64.

151. A study of the mode of assessment of land revenue in Central Tibet occurs in W. G. Surkhang's article entitled 'Tax Measurement and Lag'Don Tax', published in *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. III, No. I, Gangtok, Sikkim, Feb. 21, 1966.

"to make up the deficiency". Thus a "constant screw is applied to extort the quantity of grain leviable under the old settlement made in the days of Bhutanese prosperity"<sup>152</sup>. Charles Bell, a later authority, however, in contrasting the Tibetan and Bhutanese "unit of land taxation" says that the basis of the "former system" of assessment in Bhutan was the number of members in each household<sup>153</sup>. The herders who did not render un-paid labour unless they owned land were assessed in cash at the rate of six narayanee rupees for each milch cow and also had to give two seers of butter per month.

The seven Duars in Kamrup and Darrang in Assam with an area of nearly a thousand square miles had been annexed by the Bhutanese "long before the British came into possession of Bengal". These Duars were held by the Ahoms "until Gourinath's reign, when they were surrendered to the Bhutias in consideration of an annual tribute of Rs. 4,785"<sup>154</sup>. It has been noted that the Duars had been conceded "to the Dharma Raja of Bhutan" to enable him to carry on religious services. However, collection from these Duars on the part of Bhutanese Subahs and Penlops consisted of "almost every article of consumption"<sup>155</sup> not available in the barren mountains and the amount entirely depended on the generosity of Bhutanese officials. Whereas the tribute which the Bhutan government paid for these Duars were obtained from their "own country or from Tibet"<sup>156</sup>. A glance at the list furnished makes this clear. The articles of tribute consisted of "24 tolas of gold dust, 36 ponies, 24 pieces of musks, 24 cow-tails, 24 daggers, 24 blankets and 2,400 rupees in cash having an estimated value of 4785 Narayance rupees"<sup>157</sup>.

The Ahom Raj had surrendered its territorial rights in the Duars and had purchased a "doubtful security". Further, the tenure by which Bhutan held these tracts was complicated by

152. A. Eden's Report on the State of Bhutan, Part III, para 51.

153. Charles Bell, *People of Tibet*, Reprint, 1968, Appendix I...the Unit of Land Taxation, p. 301.

154. E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 364.

155. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 13.

156. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 14.

157. R. M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*, (1824-'54), 1954, p. 216.



"divided jurisdiction, payment of tribute in kind and money and unsettled boundaries"<sup>158</sup>. As late as 1841, the year in which the Duars were "resumed" the British authorities in India were not clear about rights of tenure. A letter from Government states "the Governor-General in Council sees at present... little hope of obtaining a valid opinion of the rights of Bhutan in the Assam duars"<sup>159</sup>. To the extent that these rights remained unknown and unknowable the hapless Cacharee peasants were rackrented and subjected to an "extensive predatory system" and the Duars were threatened with depopulation. It does not seem rewarding to be overwhelmingly concerned with innumerable recorded Bhutanese raids once the source of the malady is even tentatively located. More remarkable is the fact of oft repeated "forbearance" towards Bhutan. Evidently Warren Hastings' policy of wooing Bhutan had not died with his departure. In 1836 the Governor General's Agent wrote in his reply to the letters of the Dharma Raja's father and the Tongsa Penlop: "... when the British government between whom and the Bhutan Government there has existed an undisturbed alliance in the strictest friendship since the year 1775, conquered Assam from the Burmese the British government continued to allow the Bhutias to hold the duars on customary tribute"<sup>160</sup>.

The principal officers in the Duars of Assam under Bhutanese control were "Kacharees, Assamese or Bengalis"<sup>161</sup>. They were appointed by Sanads of the Deb Raja on the recommendations of Penlops or dzongpons. These latter generally resided in the hills and were "chosen from among the most favoured class of Bhutias"<sup>162</sup>. To the west of Kamrup were the Koch chiefs of Bijni and Sidli described indifferently as Rajas or Zemindars whose territories extended to the river Sankos. In 1792 there had been a dispute regarding the succession to Bijni. On that occasion the Deb Raja of Bhutan asserted his right of nomi-

158. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

159. Foreign P.C. July 26, 1841, No. 82, N.A.I.

160. Governor General's Agent's reply to the Zeenkaffs deputed with letters of the Dharma Raja's father and the Tongsa Penlop, dated 1st and 16th Baisakh, 1243 B.S., Foreign P.C. June 27, 1836, No. 52, N.A.I.

161. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

162. *Ibid.*

nation with success and the incumbent was "permitted" to remain. After 1826 the Chiefs of Bijni are shown on records as holding possession of "Chota Bijni" and some tracts south of the Brahmaputra as "tributary mehals" and they did not like to register themselves as "mere proprietary zemindar" under the British. For the northern portion of their territory extending to the confines of Bhutan they had been subjected to pay annual tribute to the Bhutanese government consisting of "dried fish, cloth and other articles". In a document of 1833 Bijni then under Indranarayan is shown to consist of 100 villages with a "supposed" population of 10,000 and a "supposed revenue" of Narayanees rupees 2000/-<sup>163</sup>. In describing the status of the chiefs of Bijni and Sidli Pemberton says in 1838 that they were "in a degree tributary both to the British and Bhutan government"<sup>164</sup>. In 1865 Eden wrote "the zemindaree tenure in Goalpara was conferred on the Raja (of Bijni) by the Mughal government and was recognised and confirmed by the British government in the Permanent Settlement, but in regard to the Bijni Duars the Rajas have always been regarded as chiefs dependent on the authority of the Bhutan government and not as zemindars in the same sense in which we have constituted them proprietors of the soil"<sup>165</sup>. At best such definition of the terms of tenure would mean dual control and at worst the rights and obligations of three parties namely, the British, the Bhutanese and the local inhabitants involved, remained undefined. In either case cultivation suffered and the frequent raids of the Bhutanese Subah of Chirang in Bijni and Sidli territories spread horror and a sense of insecurity among the inhabitants. It often happened that the Chiefs of Bijni and Sidli resided in British territory in order to avoid payment of tribute to and irregular exactions of the Subah of Chirang. Hamilton speaks of Udayanarayan, the Raja of Sidli, who dodged payment of tribute causing "seve-

163. The Paper on Bhutan is No. 23 along with which a Chart (No. 24) is enclosed. The figures about Bijni occurs in this Chart. Foreign P.C. Jan. 7/1833, No. 82, N.A.I.

164. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

165. Bhutan Political Proceedings, July, 1865. From Eden to Commissioner of Assam, No. 3549, dated on board the Yacht Rhotas 13th July, 1865, p. 48, para 5, State Archives, Government of West Bengal.



ral incursions, and the ruin of the country"<sup>166</sup>. For these reasons no flourishing settlement grew up in the area and Bijni wore a deserted look. In the days of the Duar War (1964-6') a high ranking official found Bijni as a "miserable collection of huts without fort or bazar (market). The Rajbari (place) consists of a brickwall enclosing some fifty thatched houses. I know no such a desolate position in Bengal as that of Bijni". He further noted that Bijni was acknowledged "as de facto Bhutan territory" and the Raja is "tehsildar (collector of revenues) of the produce of the land or duar". In consideration of his paying "a portion of his collections to the Deb Raja of Bhutan he receives a sunnad of appointment from the Deb Raja". The "last sunnad given is about two years back"<sup>167</sup>.

A memorandum on Sidli in 1865 states that the "earliest authority on the subject of Sidli seems to be Dr. Buchanan" according to whom the possessor of the rank of the Raja of Sidli in the year 1809 was the "tenth or eleventh person of the same family" who held these lands conjectured to have received as an appanage in virtue of the descent from Viswa Singha, the Cooch prince". The name of the Sidli chief in that year (1809) was Surya Narayan and the same family "appear to have held Sunnads of appointment from Bhutan government from that period to this"<sup>168</sup>.

In 1864 important informations about Bhutan's revenue administration in the Buxa and Balla Duars were collected by officials with the Bhutan Duar Field Force, Capt. Lance, Civil Officer, made enquiries regarding the revenue system in these Duars. He found that taxes were imposed on "each ryot's house on the estate". In addition they had to pay certain "fixed tributes" and "presentation of nuzzars" (presents to officials). In "a great number of cases sunnads are given in the Buxa Duar" allotting a "fixed jummah" (deposit) on the estate payable by

166. Francis Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Reprint, Gauhati, 1963.

167. No. 14 Travelling Diary of the Civil Officer with the Right Column, Dooar Field Force, for the week ending Dec. 29, 1864, Bhutan Political Proceedings, Feb. 1865.

168. Nos. 5-16 Memorandum on the newly acquired territory north of Goalpara district in Lower Assam, Bhutan Political Proceedings, July, 1865, p. 39.

the zemindar "irrespective of fluctuations in the number of ryots, cultivation etc." The Mechis and the Toto tribes living on the outer spur of hills used to pay rent in kind "to the Subah". The items alluded to are elephant's tusk, stag's skins besides rice<sup>69</sup>.

✓ An extensive system of forced labour or corvee was prevalent in this area and soldiers had to be fed while passing through the districts. It would appear that in some cases there were zemindars whom the Bhutanese empowered to collect taxes and defined their rights and obligations in sunnads or title deeds. In others the ryots (cultivators) paid their rental to Bhutanese officials. That the mode of collection of taxes was both through tributary chiefs and also direct from ryots was recorded by Hamilton who wrote: "The hereditary chiefs, so far as I learned, pay a fixed tribute, and the Bhutia officers collect the land rent on account of the government"<sup>170</sup>. This is borne out by later revenue records. The British found in some areas that "middlemen already exist and have acquired prescriptive right" and these were to be "respected and maintained". In other tracts "the sole right holder in the soil are the ryots and the state" and it was considered "inexpedient to create a new class of right holders intermediate between these two"<sup>171</sup>. Away from the lower elevation of the hills there were powerful landholders in the heart of the Duar plains, Members of the Raikat family of Baikunthopur and the Kathams of Mainaguri enjoyed prescriptive right over stretches of territory under Bhutanese control. Durgadev, the "son of the Raikat of Baikunthopur" fought a long drawn war against the Kathams claiming "hereditary right" in the "mehal called Kyranti"<sup>172</sup>. Fortunately there are records which show that land relations in the Duars easily entangled these chiefs with contending factions in Bhutan itself and fair districts in the Duars.

169. These informations about the Bhutanese revenue administration in Buxa and Balla Duars are culled from a communication from Capt. W. H. J. Lance to Col. Haughton, Political Agent and Chief Civil Officer, Dated Camp Balla, The 20th Dec. 1864, Paras 10, 13, 16 and 23. *Ibid.*, January, 1865.

170. Francis Hamilton, *An Account of Assam, Gauhati*, 1963, p. 69.

171. J. A. Milligan, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District*, 1906-1916, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1919, p. 134.

172. Foreign P.C. No. 64, Sept. 14, 1840.



were laid waste<sup>173</sup>. Arung Sing of Gooma whose abduction by the Bhutanese in 1856 raised a storm has been described as a "hereditary zemindar"<sup>174</sup> and evidently belonged to the family of Pran Singh whom Ensign Brodie found settling new ryots in Gooma Duar in 1834<sup>175</sup>. Very often zemindars in different Duars like the Rajas of Bijni and Sidli evaded payment of dues to Bhutanese authorities and escaped to British territory. The result was chronic border forays on the part of the Bhutanese the records of which almost border on dull uniformity.

In the western or Bengal Duars prescriptive rights were also enjoyed by "jotedars" under the Bhutanese government. They were the "original reclaimers" of the soil and were strong enough to "maintain on the principle laid down in the laws of Manu, full rights over the fields they have made". Later enquiries revealed that jotedars really had a "vested transferable interest in the land"<sup>176</sup>. It was found by the British that the jotedari system in the Western Duars did not interfere with the "enhancement of revenue". On the contrary "attempts to introduce landowners by granting large estates under the name of jotes to the late Col. Hedayet Ali and others has not proved successful". It had retarded reclamation and the revenue was collected with more difficulty from such proprietors and the "actual cultivators are lowered in position"<sup>177</sup>. Findings of this nature give the lie to overcharged minds thundering that the Bhutanese cared for nothing except "grain, pigs, spirit and money". This observation does not come in the way of subscribing to the view that "all rights, whether to real or personal property must be taken as subject to this limitation that they were continually violated, par-

173. This is dramatically exposed in the long struggle between the Raikats and the Kathams described in Chapter II. The rivalry of the factions in Bhutan and its repercussion in the plains is further elaborated in analysing the functioning of the Bhutanese dyarchy in Chapter I.

174. Despatch to the Court of Directors, No. 97, Sept. 20, 1856, Para 278.

175. Foreign P.C. No. 53-54, Aug. 28, 1834.

176. D. H. E. Sunder *Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri*, Calcutta, 1895, pp. 15-21.

177. D. H. E. Sunder, *op. cit.*, p. 20, Para 17. Hedayet Ali was the Commandant of the Cooch Behar contingent which fought against Bhutan in the Duar War (1864-65). He was appointed Assistant Commissioner of the Western Duars.

ticularly during the civil war which immediately preceded our annexation"<sup>178</sup>.

The foregoing paragraphs venture to make a case that Bhutan's revenue system in the Duars under its control deserves study as an administrative category by itself. It would be impermissible to dismiss the subject with remarks like "strictly speaking there is no system"<sup>179</sup>. The broad outline of the picture which emerges are :—The Duar plains inhabited by non-Bhutanese people were under the control of a number of chiefs of Koch origin. The chiefs of Bijni and Sidli as also the Raikats of Baikunthopur besides numerous zemindars were accustomed with old traditions and customs in every sphere including revenue relations and rights of property. So long as the Bhutanese could obtain what they wanted through tribute, revenue, trade and last but not least irregular exactions they left the old customs undisturbed. It had to be so because they dreaded the Duars for purposes of residence. There were insurmountable physical difficulties, problems of communication and contact and lack of manpower. While every early report on Bhutan emphasises that there were no "rights of property" and the "hereditary system" was unknown, these very important principles were not interfered with in the Duars. On the contrary the Bhutanese are recorded to have backed up hereditary landholders against powerful entrenched interests in the Duars in order to ensure the permanence of their control of the fertile plains. In the Assam Duars local agents of non-Bhutanese stock were employed for the collection of revenue and tributes were collected from ruling chiefs and zemindars. It is for these reasons that land and revenue relations in the Duars are to be studied in a separate order and not to be confused with such relations in Bhutan within the hills. The categories may well be labelled as the Tibetan and Indian zones.

#### *Section V—Bhutan's Trade and British Commercial Diplomacy :*

In describing the early trade of Bhutan, Ralph Fitch, the merchant-traveller, who visited Cooch Behar in 1583, says that

178. D. H. E. Sunder, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

179. Eden's Report on Bhutan, dated Darjeeling, the 20th July, 1864, Para 51.



"there are merchants which (who) come out of China, and they say out of Muscovia and Tartary"<sup>180</sup>. Among the items of trade he mentions musks, blankets, turquoise (agates), silk, pepper and "saffron of Persia". Fitch did not enter the mountains but his narrative evidently shows the commercial importance of the route from Tashilhunpo through the Paro Penlop's territory to Buxa and Chamurchi north of Rangpur. This was the westernmost of the three routes mentioned by Pemberton through which intercourse was carried on in his time between the people of Tibet and the plains of Bengal and Assam<sup>181</sup>. Fitch speaks highly of the prosperity of Cooch Behar and its "distant trade relations with China"<sup>182</sup>. Markham takes his description as a "correct account of the intercourse which then prevailed between India and Tibet through the passes of Bhutan and Nepal"<sup>183</sup>.

Cacella and Cabral, who were the first Europeans to penetrate the mountains of Bhutan in 1626 throw light on Bhutan's commercial intercourse not only with the plains of Bengal and Assam but also with Tibet and China. Cacella noted that in those days Hajo (Ajo) in Assam was "very populous and rich". It was the seat of the Koch king Laksminarayan (Liquirnarane). The "Nabob of Mogor" to whom the country paid tribute also resided there. One factor which explains the importance and prosperity of Hajo in those days was that it was at the terminal of two important trade routes through the Manas valley and Towang. The latter did not pass through Bhutanese territory and was a direct commercial artery with Tibet. Pemberton found (1838) that Khampas of eastern Tibet carried on traffic along these two routes. In Cacella's description Cooch Behar appears as a flourishing trade mart. The town was "very populous and plentifully provided both with things which the country itself possesses and those which came from . . . Patna, Rajmahal and Gaur"<sup>184</sup>. Both Hajo and Cooch Behar were undoubtedly focal points of Bhutan's trade with the plains. At the Court of the

180. Hakluyt, *The Second Volume of Principal Navigators' Voyages*, London, Anno 1599, p. 257.

181. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 78.

182. S. N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

183. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, Introduction LIV.

184. C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia, 1603-1721*, The Hague, 1924, pp. 127, 128.

Dharma Raja (Droma Raja) the missionaries were entertained with Chinese tea and lodged in a tent "lined with Chinese silk and adorned with a canopy"<sup>185</sup>. Cacella noted that Bhutan was "well provided with Chinese merchandise such as silk, gold and porcelain"<sup>186</sup>. It is noticeable that in Turner's list (1783) of the articles of trade flowing from Tibet to Bhutan tea is mentioned as second to gold dust<sup>187</sup>, whereas English broad cloth was the first item among Bhutan's export to Tibet.

In 1771, before Warren Hastings became the Governor of Bengal, the Court of Directors enquired about the "possibility of the northern trade and of sending explorers to Bhutan and Assam"<sup>188</sup>. The rising Gurkha power had blocked the "passes through Morung and Demi Jong (Sikkim). The road through Mustang was uneconomical and distant". Therefore the ancient route through Bhutan and Chumbi Valley gained a new importance as a commercial artery towards the north. The "drain of money from Bengal being alarming it was necessary to supply that money by opening new channels of commerce"<sup>189</sup>. The disastrous effects of the great famine of 1770 accelerated the search for new commercial ventures in the north. The famine caused "enormous financial losses, especially in the export of grain and the cotton industry on which the economy of Bengal so much depended"<sup>190</sup>. Already before the famine the Court of Directors had recommended enquiry into the vendibility of European commodities in Tibet and West China by way of Nepal. It was a "late measure"<sup>191</sup> as the Gurkhas themselves had become aware of the value of Tibetan trade and were not favourably disposed towards the English.

Hasting's ideas about the Tibetan trade crystallised in course

185. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

186. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

187. Samuel Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

188. S. C. Sarkar, 'Some Notes on the Intercourse of Bengal with the Northern Countries in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. XLI, Jan.-June, 1931, p. 121.

189. S. C. Sarkar. *op. cit.*

190. Schuyler Camman quoting from Gour Das Bysack's *Notes on the Buddhist Monastery at Bhot Bagan (Howrah)*, J.A.S.B LIX (1891) 59, Text and Note I.

191. Schuyler Camman, *Trade through the Himalayas: The Early Attempts to Open Tibet*, 1951, p. 33, fn. 28.



of the First Bhutan War (1772-74) and he responded with alacrity to the mediation of Palden Yeshe (the third Panchen Lama) in 1774<sup>192</sup>. The Governor-General could afford to be more liberal as Bhutan had been militarily defeated and he had secured his prime objective, namely, complete control over the state of Cooch Behar (The Anglo-Cooch Behar-Treaty of 1772). The clauses of the Anglo-Bhutan Treaty of 1774, which ended the First Bhutan War, make it amply clear that Bhutanese territorial interests in the Duars were favourably considered and in some cases concessions were made at the expense of Cooch Behar as it was "deemed politically expedient to conciliate the good disposition of this State (Bhutan)"<sup>193</sup>. In fact the treaty of 1774 initiated a policy of wooing Bhutan in the interest of trans-Himalayan trade. In the month following the conclusion of the treaty George Bogle left Calcutta, accompanied by Alexander Hamilton on the first mission to Tibet and Bhutan (1774-75) which was an exercise in commercial diplomacy par excellence.

Bogle's transaction in Bhutan is relatively a neglected episode though it merits more than a passing attention. Francis Younghusband wrote, "as regards personal relationship he was eminently successful and that was about as much as he could have expected to establish at the start"<sup>194</sup>. This obviously refers to the rapport Bogle had established with the third Panchen Lama who was held in high esteem by Emperor Chien-Lung and who had admittedly a decisive influence over the Lhasa pontificate. A sense of disappointment is perhaps understandable in view of the hopes raised by Warren Hastings' Tibetan "design"<sup>195</sup>. Nevertheless a study of his remarkable achievements in Bhutan is amply rewarding. The mission travelled by way of Cooch Behar and Buxa to Tashichhodzong. It was detained there till October 1774, while the Panchen Lama was seeking entry permits from the Tibetan government. During his return journey Bogle concluded a treaty with the Deb Raja in May, 1775 conceding important privileges to traders from Bhutan. The treaty distinctly encompassed commercial relations with two countries.

192. The Third Panchen's letter to the English government was received on March 29, 1774 and has been reproduced several times.

193. *Cooch Behar Select Records*, Vol. I, 1882, p. 8.

194. Francis Younghusband, *India and Tibet*, 1910, pp. 24, 25.

195. S. C. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

The preamble was intended for promotion of trade with Tibet. It runs : "Whereas the trade between Bengal and Tibet was very considerable and all Hindu and Mussalman were allowed to trade into Nepal which was the centre of communication between the two countries and whereas from wars and oppressions in Nepal the merchants have of late years been unable to travel into the country the Governor as well as the Deb Raja united in friendship, being desirous of removing these obstacles, so that merchants may carry on their trade free and secure as formerly"<sup>196</sup>. The operative part of the treaty with Bhutan contained the following provisions :—

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

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

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

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

✓ "That the exclusive trade in Sandal, indigo, redskin, tobacco, betelnut and pan shall remain with the Bhutanese and that the merchants be prohibited from importing the same into the Deb Raja's dominions; and that the Governor General shall confirm this in regard to indigo by an order to Rangpur"<sup>197</sup>.

In his letter dated June 9, 1775 from Cooch Behar, addressed to the Governor General, Bogle informed that he had "settled matters with the Raja" excepting the "article of Europeans".

In later historical literature the treaty was regarded as an essay below expectation. Bogle failed to secure the Deb Raja's consent to allow Englishmen into his country and, to that extent, as Schuyler Camman says, his mission had "in a measure failed"<sup>198</sup>. But the envoy carefully explained that the entire trade

196. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

197. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, pp. 184, 185.

198. Schuyler, Camman *op. cit.*, p. 50.



with Tibet was in the hands of native agency "before Europeans had anything to do with it"<sup>199</sup>. Bogle believed trade in this region could be promoted "without the establishment of English factories and employment of English Agents". Trade through Nepal was in the hands of native agency before the rise of the Gurkha power. Bogle would consider it an achievement to restore it "back to that point" and he believed that the "connection" he had established with the Panchen Lama and the Deb Raja would accomplish it<sup>200</sup>. It might have been possible to secure access for Europeans when "they were settled in Hindustan merely as merchants", but the "power and elevation to which the English have now risen render them objects of jealousy to all their neighbours"<sup>201</sup>. He foresaw that, without soothing the misgivings of the hillmen about Europeans "it was impossible to obtain a communication with Tibet". Again, the sale of broad-cloth, the most important commodity in the traffic with Tibet, had decreased and "of what is now consumed a large portion is of French manufacture... I never could meet with any English cloth"<sup>202</sup>. Conceivably, the French had more effectively utilised the native agency in getting to the Tibetan market and Bogle saw no reason to underrate it. An illuminating comment from Brian Hodgson is:—"let the trade be in accustomed hands and those hands be rendered more effectually operative by the co-operation at Calcutta of English merchants"<sup>203</sup>.

Bogle noticed that the Deb Raja and his officers were "in fact the merchants of Bhutan". He had to allay their apprehension, and it would appear that the exclusive privileges which he guaranteed in respect of the import of "valuable sorts of goods" (including indigo) and the abolition of duty on horses (amounting to "six annas in the rupee") was aimed at removing official opposition.

In his treaty Bogle carried out the instructions he had received from the Governor General while at Tashichhodzong<sup>204</sup>. Hastings had written, "... you may even consent to relinquish

199. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

200. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

201. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

202. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

203. *Ibid.*, p. 204 fn.

204. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

the tribute or duty which is exacted from Bhutan caravans which comes annually to Rangpur. To that place all their goods for trade, of whatever kind, may come at all times free from any duty or impost whatever, and exempt from stoppage, and in like manner all goods shall pass from Bengal into Bhutan free from duty and molestation". This concession, Warren Hastings thought, was to be the "groundwork" of Bogle's commercial transactions in Bhutan. Bogle was asked to "build such improvement on it" as his judgment and occasion might dictate. With unerring insight into the factors that make all the difference between success and failure the Governor General gave another clear instruction. Bogle was to "discover" how "his (the Deb Raja's) personal interests may be affected by the scheme" and to "encourage any hopes of advantage he may entertain", provided it did not interfere with the general plan. A dramatic fiscal concession and an assurance to the monopolistic commercial privileges of the officialdom in Bhutan were the two powerful levers with which Bogle had been armed before he entered into negotiations. The envoy extended the privileges further as he was "aware" that some of the Bhutanese would wish to proceed beyond Rangpur and even to Calcutta. The privilege of permitting the Bhutanese into the interior parts of Bengal, as Bogle confessed, was "one engine I hope to avail myself with some advantage. I shall have need of them all to bring me to a point in which their own particular interest is concerned". To push up the sale of English broad-cloth<sup>205</sup> he thought it necessary to encourage the Kashmiris, Gosains, Bhutanese and Tibetans to visit Calcutta in winter. These merchants would be "able to procure it at the lowest rate" and passports and escorts to the northern frontier would make them prefer the Company's cloth to any other. The treaty Bogle concluded aimed at "freedom and security" for traders. As he put it: "Merchants left to themselves naturally discover the most proper manner of conducting their trade, and prompted by self interest carrying it on to the greatest extent"<sup>206</sup>. On Bogle's return the Governor General thanked the Deb Raja of Bhutan for "very kindly" receiving his envoy on his way back from Tibet and for the fact that the Deb Raja "has agreed to allow

205. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.* p. 13.

206. *Ibid.*, p. 206.



the merchants to carry on their trade between Bengal and Tibet<sup>207</sup>.

In 1780 Bogle himself organised the fair at Rangpur. Having been "excused (of) all duties", there was a great concourse of Bhutan merchants "who after buying and selling freely went away very well satisfied"<sup>208</sup>. Bogle's treaty with Bhutan ensured the continuance of ancient trade with trans-Himalayan regions through native agencies, though perhaps on a diminished scale for the next half century. In Turner's list (1783) of Bhutan's export to Tibet English broad-cloth is shown as the first item<sup>209</sup>. In 1833 a Bhutanese zinkaff (subordinate official) narrated:—"the Mougol Khasees trade a good deal at Hassa (Lhasa); they occasionally go to Rangpur in Bengal by the Phari and Paro dzong routes for the purchase of other skins"<sup>210</sup>. Surgeon Rennie says (1865) that the trade between Bhutan and Rangpur "gradually fell off" in the time of William Bentinck when the privileges enjoyed by Bhutanese traders were abolished "for the sake of economy". Pemberton's list of imports from and export to Bhutan shows this decline of trade between Rangpur and Bhutan. Even then, broad-cloth was first in respect of value and indigo, second in the list of exports to Bhutan<sup>211</sup>. Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling, organised a fair at Titalya which was a "great success while under his control". Subsequently Titalya was included within Rangpur and the "fair then gradually languished and is now one in name only"<sup>212</sup>.

During Warren Hastings' administration the importance of Bhutan as "'gate on the south that prevents entry'"<sup>212</sup> was never lost sight of. The rapport Bogle had established with the third Panchen Lama exceedingly pleased the Governor General. In compliance with a request from the Lama for building a monastery Warren Hastings "granted to him hundred bighas of land on the

207. *Calender of Persian Correspondence*—Vol. IV, 1772-75, Calcutta, 1925, p. 348, Dated October 20, 1775.

208. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, Introduction.

209. Samuel Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

210. Memorandum on the conversation with Cheety zeenkaf, Sent on deputation to Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier, Foreign P.C. Dec. 12, 1833, No. 76, N.A.I.

211. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 77.

212. D. F. Rennie, *op. cit.*, p. 160 fn.

213. Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 1968, p. 106.

bank of the Ganges opposite Calcutta"<sup>214</sup>. Missions were sent to Bhutan under Alexander Hamilton in 1776 and again in 1777. One of the duties of Hamilton was to examine the claims of the Deb Raja on the districts of Ambari, Falakata and Jalpesh in the heart of the Bengal Duars. He reported that "if restitution was made he would probably be able to induce the Deb Raja to fulfil his agreement with Mr. Bogle and only to levy moderate transit duties on merchandise"<sup>215</sup>. Hamilton returned "after insisting upon the agreement between the Deb Raja and Mr. Bogle being faithfully observed". Hamilton was sent on a third mission in 1777 to congratulate the new Deb Raja. In April 1779 Bogle was appointed envoy to Tibet for the second time. The journey was never undertaken as the Panchen Lama had left for Peking to meet the emperor.

On Hamilton's recommendation, Warren Hastings, in order to preserve the lasting results of Bogle's mission to Bhutan, decided on the cession of tracts known as Ambari Falakata and Jalpesh which were eventually transferred to Bhutan in 1787<sup>216</sup>. These areas belonged to the Raikats (zemindars) of Baikunthopur under Cooch Behar Raj<sup>217</sup>. Ashley Eden, a later British envoy to Bhutan, "entirely failed to comprehend the reasons" and wrote, "I am afraid on this occasion the friendship of the Bhutaneese was purchased at the expense of the Baikunthopur zemindar". This historic transaction is an example of how the claim of history or geography, religion or language, were subordinated to the Company's own motive :—securing access to Tibet and through Tibet to China.

The second mission to Tibet was revived under Samuel Turner in 1783. Turner, like Bogle in 1775, fully appreciated that commerce with Bhutan and Tibet could be promoted only through the native agency. Turner sought to extend the scope of Bogle's treaty with the Deb Raja by securing a promise from the Regent of the Panchen Lama for "encouragement to all mer-

214. Calender of Persian Correspondence, Vol. B, 1776-80, Calcutta, 1930, p. 31.

215. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, Introduction, pp. lxx.

216. Bhutan Political Proceedings, Oct. 1865, p. 2, State Archives, Government of West Bengal.

217. Sarat Chandra Ghosal, *A History of Cooch Behar*, Cooch Behar, 1942, p. 420.



chants, natives of India, that may be sent to traffic in Tibet on himself of the government of Bengal"<sup>217a</sup>. Every assistance "requisite for the transport of their goods from the frontier of Bhutan", was assured. The merchants would be assigned places of residence for vending their commodities "either within the monastery, or, should it be considered as more eligible, in the town itself". Like his predecessor, Turner thought that "security and protection were the essential requisites" in commercial intercourse and profit would prove "its best encouragement". It was necessary to "let merchants first learn the way, taste the profit and establish the intercourse". Turner says that "regulations" for trade through Bhutan by means of native agency were "settled by the treaty entered into by Mr. Bogle, in the year 1775, the Deb Raja having acknowledged to me the validity of the treaty, it became unnecessary to insist on the execution of another"<sup>218</sup>.

Soon after the departure of Warren Hastings "a contretemps occurred and all his work was undone"<sup>219</sup>. There was a "distinct reversal"<sup>220</sup> of policy with the arrival of the Earl of Cornwallis. The humiliation of Nepal in the Sino-Nepalese war of 1792 completed the disruption of the course of Anglo-Tibetan relations. Forrest writes, "So completely was the policy of opening commercial intercourse between India and trans-Himalayan regions abandoned that the very history of Hastings' negotiations was forgotten, and most of the valuable records of Tibet and Bhutan missions have been lost"<sup>221</sup>. A recent work on Tibet by a Tibetan scholar shows that under the "patron-Lama" relationship China's role in the war of 1792 was that of "an ally of long standing and that the imperial troops did not enter Tibet to attack the Tibetans or to conquer their country"<sup>222</sup>. Without going into the question of the status of Tibet or her authority to pursue her own policy after 1792, it is necessary to underline that the Company's government regarded Chinese exclusiveness as the prime

217a. Samuel Turner, *Account of an Embassy to the Court of Teshoo Lama in Tibet*, London, 1800, p. 174.

218. Samuel Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

219. F. Younghusband, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

220. S. C. Sarkar, *op. cit.*

221. G. W. Forrest, *Selection from State Papers of the Governor General of India*, Vol. I, London, 1910, pp. 313, 314.

222. W. D. Tsepon, Shakabpa, *Tibet : A Political History*, p. 169.

reason for rendering infructuous Bogle's pioneering work not only in Tibet but also in Bhutan. The following excerpt of a letter from Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier, to Government<sup>223</sup> is of particular relevance in this connection. The letter, dated 9th June, 1836, runs :—

"I believe, Bhutan is now as it was in the time of Turner's mission a dependency of Tibet, but I am not able to state any particulars as to their connection. 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. An envoy might possibly be able to restore to our subjects the privilege of conducting their trade in Bhutan... It will not be presumed that the Chinese will be long allowed to exclude British subjects from the privileges granted to other foreigners and to totally interdict them from all the vast possessions that acknowledge their authority".

Thus, as late as 1836, Bogle's treaty with Bhutan had not been abrogated. Only Manchu exclusiveness deprived the East India Company the benefits of trade in a legitimate manner. To Aitchison's comment that Bogle's venture was an "unsuccessful" commercial mission<sup>224</sup>. Claude White replied that this was a "misapprehension" and it was "not fair to say that it (the mission to Bhutan) was unsuccessful"<sup>225</sup>. The Agent's letter, quoted above, proposed a new mission to Bhutan which "should be made the medium of conveying dispatches to the Dalai Lama—referring probably to the circumstances which broke off our intercourse with Tibet, the misunderstanding that our government was connected with the attack of the Nepalese upon Tashilh-umpo".

The proposal of sending a new mission was taken up in the same summer (1836) after the attachment of the Banska Duar

223. National Archives of India, P.C. June, 1836, No. 52.

224. C. V. Aitchison, *Treaties, Engagements and Sannads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. XIV, 1929, p. 80.

225. Claude White, *op. cit.*, p. 241.



in Assam and the discomfiture of Bhutanese troops. The intention of deputing an envoy was communicated to the Deb and Dharma Rajas. After much delay a reply was received in April, 1837. On April 17, 1837, Bhutanese zinkaffs left the presidency with replies from the Governor-General of India "announcing the intended deputation of an envoy after the rainy season"<sup>226</sup>. Among other things the mission was to endeavour "to renew our acquaintance and commercial relations with countries from which we have been so long excluded". It appears that a letter addressed to the Dalai Lama had been drafted in June 1836 which contained the following paragraphs :—

"Events having recently occurred on the frontier of Assam which rendered it desirable that a personal negotiation should be held with the Bhutan government, I have despatched an envoy to that court.

Upwards of 53 years have now elapsed since a mission was (had been) despatched on the part of the British government to the court of Tibet and I am anxious to avail myself of the favourable opportunity which the presence in Bhutan of my envoy affords to renew to Your Highness after so long an interval the expression of regard and attachment which are still entertained towards you by the British Government.

When so long an interval has been suffered to elapse without the renewal of friendly demonstrations on either side it is not surprising if suspicion of neglect or cause of misunderstanding should have arisen.

My sole motive in making this overture is to perpetuate and consolidate a friendship the foundations of which were laid so happily and so long ago and as I think by presence of my envoy he will be able to explain all matters to your satisfaction. I shall be very glad to hear that you have honoured him with an invitation to attend you"<sup>227</sup>.

Read in the context of the Agent's letter of June 9, 1836, the "motive" was obviously to reopen the overland trade route to Tibet through Bhutan and the Chumbi valley. In fact, as Bogle had observed earlier . . . "the Company's view in a communication with Tibet are only to an extension of commerce"<sup>228</sup>.

226. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, pp. 36, 37, paras 3-6.

227. Foreign P. C. June 27, 1836, No. 56, N.A.I.

228. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

There is nothing to show that the letter addressed to Dalai Lama reached its destination. Pemberton found that the Bhutanese were most determinedly opposed to "reopening a communication between the British and the Tibetan authorities"<sup>229</sup>. They "shrunk from the very discussion to send a letter to solicit leave to advance (to Tibet) as his predecessor Capt. Turner did in 1783 into Tibet"<sup>230</sup>. Pemberton's negotiations with the Deb Raja failed and the latter refused to sign the proposed treaty "as the Tongsa Penlop objected"<sup>231</sup>. The Court of Directors admitted the failure of the political objectives of Pemberton's mission though they commended it for the collection of "valuable miscellaneous information"<sup>232</sup>. It was observed that "for the first time" the British government was put in possession of a "positive account of the system of internal government obtaining in that province (Bhutan)" and "furnished with informations to guide our conjectures as to the influence that regulates its foreign policy"<sup>233</sup>. In his concluding observations Pemberton recommended the attachment of the Assam Duars, which would enable the British to dictate terms, and refuse to treat with any but the "paramount authorities at Lhasa"<sup>234</sup>.

### *Section VI—Bhutan and Her Neighbours*

In the 17th century eastern Himalaya witnessed a "religious rather than a racial" war between Tibet and Kagyud Bhutan. The Mongol-Tibetan combination attempted a political dominance, in the southern lands under the cloak of religious leadership of the reformed church (Gelugpa). They succeeded in Tibet but had to retrace their steps in Bhutan. Shakabpa, in his political history of Tibet, has mentioned at least five confrontations between the Tibetan and Bhutanese forces in the 17th century. It was something more than a Thirty Years' War<sup>235</sup>. It is remarkable

229. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 98.

230. Robertson's note, Foreign P.C. March 27, 1839, No. 81, N.A.I.

231. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 97.

232. Despatch from the Court of Directors No. 13 of 1839, File, July 10/39, No. 13, N.A.I.

233. Foreign P.C. March 27, 1839, No. 81.

234. R. B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, pp. 97, 98, para 7.

235. W. D. Tsepon Shakabpa, *Tibet : A Political History*, pp. 98, 112, 113, 118, 122.



that the peculiar dual government in Bhutan came out of the test successfully. In 1676 when the trade between Bhutan and Tibet had come to a halt the Bhutanese attached Sikkim and occupied large areas in the Chumbi valley<sup>236</sup>. Tibet, however, was able to retain its hold over Chumbi valley and Sikkim and the Bhutanese forces withdrew. According to some modern scholars, the "crisis" between Tibet and Ladakh in 1680 was "caused by Ladaki support of a red sect Lama who held spiritual and temporal sway over Bhutan"<sup>237</sup>.

During Chador Namgyal's reign in Sikkim (1700-1716) Bhutanese forces again entered Sikkim on the invitation of Phedi Wangmo, the daughter of the Sikkimese ruler Tensung Namgyal by his Bhutanese Queen. Chador Namgyal fled to Tibet and the Bhutanese forces captured the Rabdentse palace and held it for eight years. They took possession of the areas now known as Kalimpong and Rhenok. In the wake of Bhutanese military exploits<sup>238</sup> the Kagyud spread out in Sikkim in the reign of Gyurmed Namgyal (1717-'33).

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century Tibet was under the strong administration of Miwang Pholhanas who has been described by Richardson "as one of the best rulers Tibet has had for he gave the country 18 years of prosperous and peaceful government"<sup>239</sup>. Bhutan fell into the grip of a civil strife around 1730. Tibetan troops entered Bhutan to settle claims of two rival Lamas to be regarded as reincarnation of Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal. Bhutanese chiefs were forced to recognise the claim of one of the Lamas. The terms of settlement required that an official Bhutanese representative would go to these and pay respect and give presents to the Tibetan government. This custom "known as Lochak was continued till 1950"<sup>240</sup>

In the second half of the eighteenth century the smaller states of the eastern Himalaya were threatened by the ambition of the

236. W. D. Tsepon Shakabpa, *Tibet : A Political History*, p. 122.

237. Margaret Fisher, Leo Rose and Robert H. Huttenback, *The Himalayan Battleground, Sino-Indian Rivalry in Ladakh*, London, 1963, p. 37.

238. *Sikkim—A Concise Chronicle*, Gangtok, 1963, pp. 6-8.

239. H. E. Richardson, *Tibet and Its History*, Oxford, 1962, p. 53.

240. W. D. Tsepon Shakabpa, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

newly risen Gurkha power in Nepal. Sikkim felt the brunt of Gurkha attack during the reign of Namgyal Phuntsog. The Gurkha thrust was resisted by a remarkable Sikkimese General, Chandzok Chutup, also known as Satrajit. He is said to have beaten back the Gurkhas seventeen times. Although the Nepalese suffered heavy losses they occupied Elam, Topzong and a large part of Western Sikkim. Gurkha power extended across the Mechi river and, during the reign of Tenzing Namgyal in Sikkim, the Nepalese occupied the entire lower Tista. George Bogle raised the issue of Gurkha aggression against Sikkim in his audience with the Panchen Lama on December 28, 1774. He expressed the apprehension that if the Gurkha Raja succeeded in conquering Sikkim, "he would attempt Pari dzong or the Deb Raja's country" and that "having assumed the title of the King of the Hills (Parbat-kai-Raja) he wished to be so in reality"<sup>241</sup>. Bogle's view that only the "knowledge of a connection" between the governments of Tibet and Bengal would make the Gurkha Raja desist from his war against Sikkim was appreciated by the Lama Statesman. The Panchen Lama admitted that the war had prevented the importation of sugar, spices and tobacco and other things into Tibet and the "people complained loudly of it". Obviously the Lama was much pleased with Bogle's proposal and "he had no doubt of carrying the point I wished but that it might require a year or two to do it effectually". Bhutan at first joined forces with the Gurkha to keep her hold secure east of the Tista. However, she became aware of the danger posed by the Gurkha power, and, after 1780, co-operated with the Sikkimese in resisting the Gurkhas. Nepalese adventure in Tibet (1788-92) combined with the earlier British penetration of the eastern Himalaya (Anglo-Bhutan Treaty of 1774, and George Bogle's commercial treaty with Bhutan in 1775) put a stop to Gurkha expansion in these regions. The East India Company went out of its way to ensure Bhutanese friendship after the First Bhutan War (1772-'74). Similarly, after defeating the Gurkha (Treaty of Sagauli, 1816), the Company's government propped up Sikkim as a barrier to the eastern progress of Gurkha power in the interest of trans-Himalayan trade. The treaty of Titalya, 1817, ceded the territory "eastward of the Mechi river and to the westward of the

241. C. R. Markham, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 150.



Tista river"<sup>242</sup> to the Raja of Sikkim "in full sovereignty". These territories had been recovered from the Gurkhas and a portion of them around Titalya was lost to Sikkim for good. British acquisition of the hill station of Darjeeling in 1835 was a further deterrent to restless Gurkha ambition.

For the first time in 1826 Bhutan came into direct physical contact along a long line of frontier with the growing British power. With the British annexation of Assam her hold on the Duars of Kamrup and Darrang was threatened. Already her suspicions about the ulterior motives of British policy had been confirmed. British grip over Cooch Behar was too firm and Maharaja Harendra Narayan was fighting a lost battle to preserve a vestige of independence for his Raj. Nepal had been beaten (1816) and compelled to cede territory. Sikkimese territorial claims in the Terai were ignored to the extent they came in the way of British aims (Treaty of Titalya, 1817). The aggressive attitude of an expanding empire could not be easily concealed from the peoples of the surrounding nations. And it would "probably have been difficult to convince the Bhutanese or the Tibetans that a policy directed against others might not some day be directed against them. Especially as the former had already enjoyed a somewhat too intimate experience with it"<sup>243</sup>. Suspicion and fear culminated into positive hostility and characterised the attitude of even the lowest official of the Bhutanese hierarchy. Viewed in this light the "delinquencies" of Bhutanese officials mentioned on almost every page of the records after 1826 could be set in perspective. Before long the persistent hostility of the Tongsa Penlop, the governor of the eastern division of Bhutan and his subordinate officials became evident. Revenue relations in the Assam Duars led to bitter controversy and the problem of "arrears" of tribute in all the ramifications worked up a situation by 1841 when it was felt that a drastic measure was called for. Already Pemberton (1838) had recommended that a "distinction" ought to be drawn between the Tongsa Penlop and the other Bhutanese chiefs"<sup>244</sup>. This view was endorsed by Robertson in a minute in 1839 wherein he plainly admitted "the difficulty which must be felt by the rulers of Bhutan in

242. C. U. Aitchison, *Treaties, Engagements etc.*, Vol. I, p. 157.

243. Camman Schuyler, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

244. R. B. Pemberton, Report, p. 97, Para 5.

accommodating their demeanour to the great change effected in Assam by our conquest of that valley"<sup>245</sup>. It was essential not to antagonise the Paro Penlop and other chiefs for the "faults or provocations of the other chief (i.e., The Tongsa Penlop)"<sup>246</sup>.

The Duars under the jurisdiction of the Tongsa Penlop in Darrang and Kamrup, were "resumed" in 1841. There are certain peculiarities in the circumstances in which this important step was taken. Aitchison recorded that the whole of the Assam Duars "were annexed to British possessions and a sum of rupees 10,000 was allotted to be annually paid to the chiefs as compensation which sum was considered to be equal to one-third of the revenue of the Kamrup and Darrang Duars. *No written Agreement was made regarding this arrangement*"<sup>247</sup>.

The decision to take possession of the Assam Duars does not appear to have originated with the supreme government in India. Lord Auckland's Afghan adventure had sparked off serious events by the autumn of 1841. Disasters followed in rapid succession till the British troops began their tragic retreat in January, 1842. It was in these circumstances that "later in the year (1841) in consequence apparently of instructions from the Court of Directors orders were issued for the resumption of the whole of the Assam Duars"<sup>248</sup>. For about a decade past North-West Frontier officials had struck a cautious note in dealing with Bhutan. In 1833 Robertson had written that a "rupture with Bhutan may lead to far more momentous results than the little we can gather regarding the internal power of that state...". It may involve nothing less than an "eventual war with China"<sup>249</sup>. In 1836 Jenkins warned that in case of a war with Bhutan, China would "probably" come to the aid of the latter. Pemberton spoke of "imperial mandate" from China requiring the Bhutanese "to quell promptly all internal tumult or rebellion and to report immediately on pain of the infliction of a heavy fine, any apprehended invasion from external foes"<sup>250</sup>. The following year Robertson

245. Foreign P.C. March 27/39, No. 81, N.A.I.

246. *Ibid.*

247. Aitchison, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 143.

248. Eden's Memorandum dated Darjeeling, May 6, 1864, para 21.

249. Foreign P.C. Dec. 12/33, No. 75, N.A.I.

250. R. B. Pemberton, *Report*, p. 90.



expressed the fear that if straitened Bhutan would be supported by China with whom "it could never be our interest to come into collision"<sup>251</sup>. The first Opium War (1839-42) had shaken the power of the Manchus. The better firearms of the British made their victory easy enough. The loss of Manchu authority in Tibet was manifest. In the Dogra War of 1841-42 the Tibetans faced the Dogra threat alone and no Chinese troops rushed to their aid. Indeed in the Asian system the erosion of Manchu authority coincided with the growth of the British imperial system in India. In this context of Chinese inability to cross the Himalayan barrier the decision to strike at Bhutan seems to have been taken on the instruction of the Court of Directors. Bhutan persistently refused to recognise the cession of the Assam Duars for the next quarter of a century.

The next great step towards reaching the Himalayan barrier was the Duar War (1864-65) and the annexation of the Bengal Duars. The rupture with Bhutan came in the wake of the Second China War (1856-60) when the "barbarians" were again victorious. The Treaty of Sinchula (1865) which ended the Duar War brought within the purview of British arbitration Bhutan's relations with the neighbouring states of Sikkim and Cooch Behar. Curiously enough her relations with Tibet and China remained an undefined area. It had serious political implications which came into focus when Bhutan was again rocked by civil war in 1885-86.

251. Foreign P.C. March 27, 1839, No. 81.