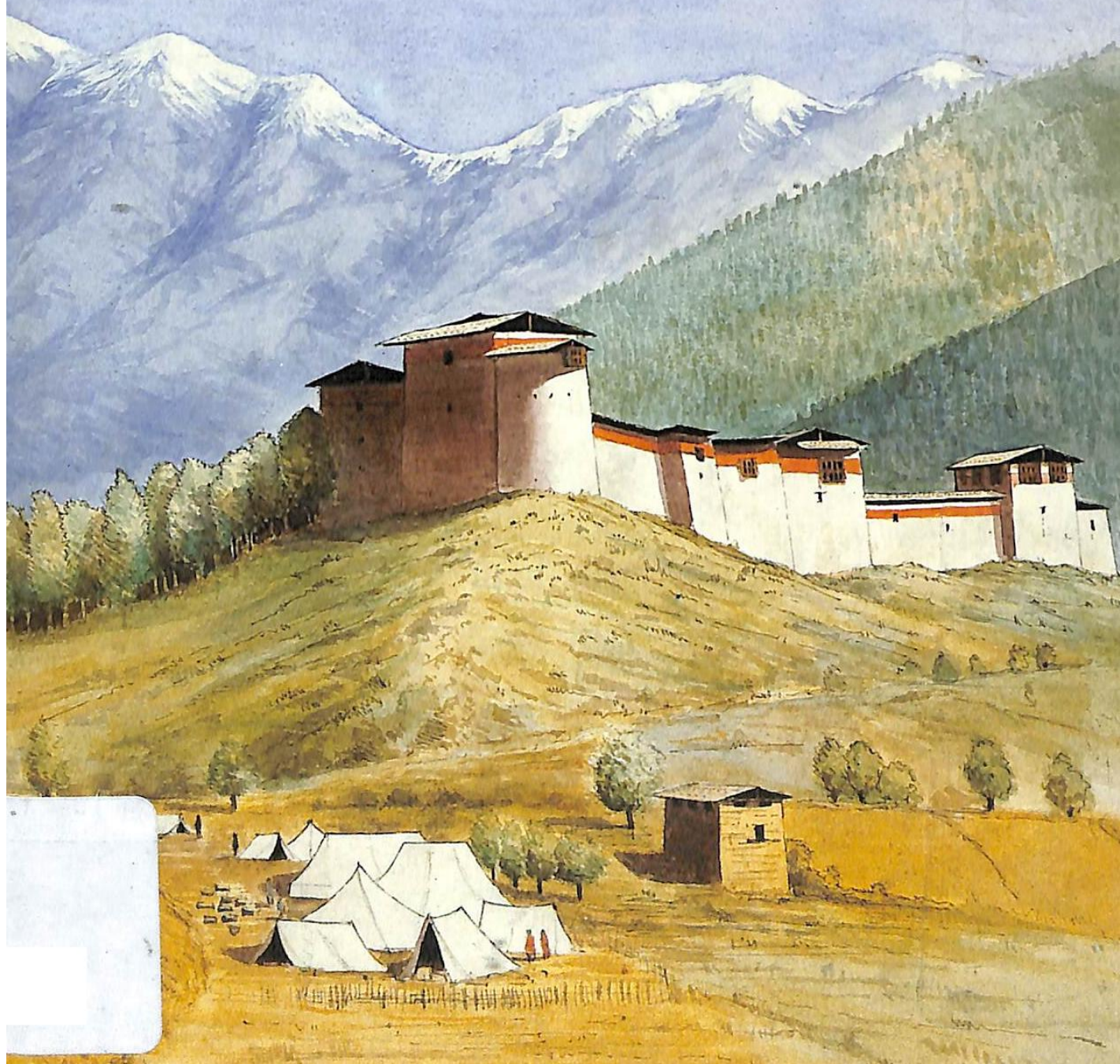
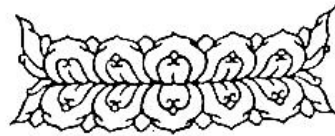


BHUTAN AND THE BRITISH

Peter Collister



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SERINDIA PUBLICATIONS
with
Belitha Press

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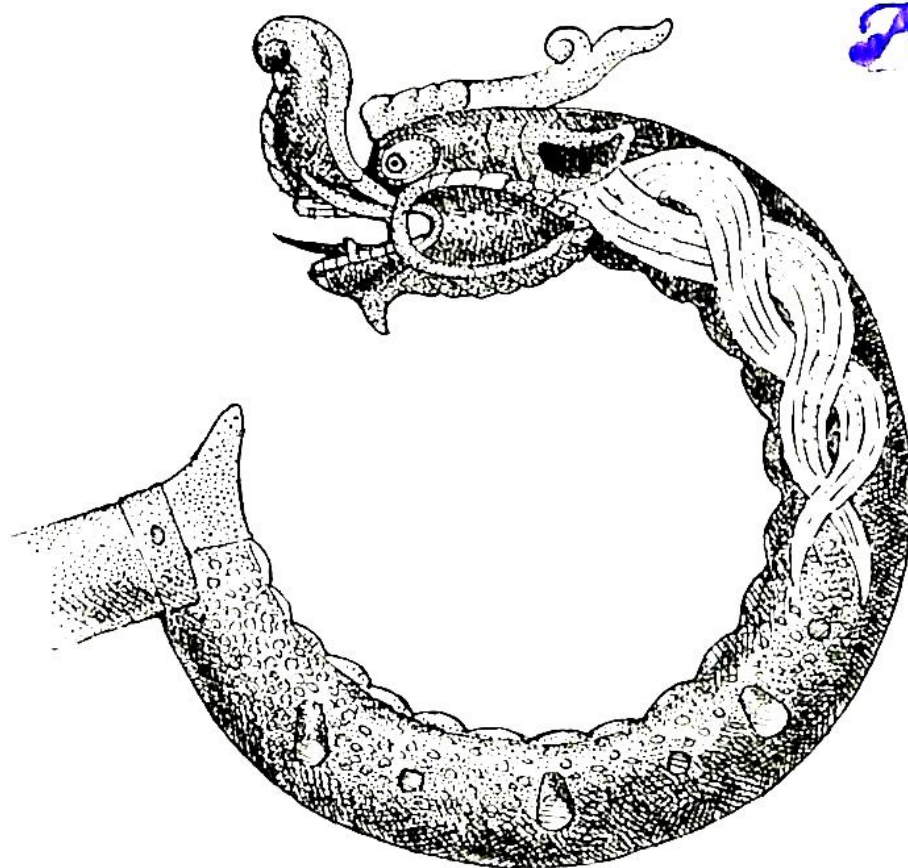
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I am grateful to Mrs A. Commander at the India Office Library for her assistance over the selection of documents; to Mr Yoshiro Imaeda, National Library Adviser in Thimphu, who lent me his extensive bibliography; and in particular to Dr Michael Aris of Wolfson College, Oxford, not only for help with the bibliography but also for much constructive comment; also to Anthony Aris of Serindia Publications whose knowledge of the country, illustrative material and careful editing were invaluable.



Prof. A. C. Sansa

PREFACE

This book is not a history of Bhutan. Very few foreigners, certainly not Westerners, are qualified to write about a country whose history, religious and secular, has been so complex. A few Indian scholars have written books on Bhutan's history and government, but there is no work devoted solely to the two hundred years' association between Bhutan and Great Britain although one or two, published in India, cover parts of the period. There is fortunately, however, a good vein of source material, in the form of travellers' diaries, official reports and governmental correspondence. Unfortunately, though, this is almost entirely confined to the British side, mainly because a series of disastrous fires destroyed some of the Bhutanese archives and others remain inaccessible. Inevitably therefore this is a book about Bhutan as seen through British eyes although I have tried to set the record straight wherever possible.

My interest in Bhutan was first aroused in 1975 when I led a small British mission to discuss possibilities of aid to education and fell in love with the country and its people. On my return I read John Claude White's *Sikkim and Bhutan* and was surprised to discover that the first British mission had been undertaken by George Bogle just over two hundred years before ours and that his was the first of a series including White's own journeys in the early years of this century and continuing until the end of the second world war. I was not surprised to learn that with some notable exceptions the magnificence of the country and the charm of its people had had the same effect on most of my predecessors as on my companions and myself. The exceptions had been those whose 19th century missions had not been welcomed by the Bhutanese during a period of internal dissension and strained relations with the British over frontier problems. Ultimately this led to a war in which the ill-armed Bhutanese soldiers displayed a courage that was the admiration of their enemies.

When I returned to Bhutan on another official visit in 1982 I was a little less ignorant and was able to look at places through the eyes of my 18th and 19th century forerunners and to compare my impressions with theirs. I found the impact of the country even greater than before. In 1984, two years after starting the research for this book, I was fortunate enough to be invited to return, this time for a longer period, to do some work for the government of Bhutan, and to see some of the remoter areas through which one or two of the missions had passed.

Although my main intention has been to introduce the Kingdom of Bhutan to the general as well as the academic reader, mainly through the writings of British travellers and official correspondence and not attempt anything more than a sketchy outline of Bhutanese history, I have had to deal at rather greater length than originally intended with political relationships as these were generally either the cause or the outcome of successive missions. Towards the end of the book I have attempted to summarise the benefits accruing to both sides from this long relationship as this does not seem to have been done before at all objectively and has inevitably been overlaid by the much greater and more obvious benefits to Bhutan from the association with the Government of India since 1947

In the main however this is not a political book. It has the more modest objective of introducing readers to a kingdom whose people have considerable respect for Britain, where increasing numbers of Bhutanese officials and educators are now being trained, and to extending knowledge of a country which has so much in common with our own, including a universally revered hereditary monarchy, respect for the law, tolerance of others and a robust sense of humour. Admiration for these attributes, as well as for the breath-taking beauty of the scenery and the splendour of the architecture, become apparent in the recollections of many of the British officials, soldiers and others whose memoirs form a substantial element of this book.

The sturdy personalities of these travellers in a virtually unknown land are matched by the eccentricities of their spelling. Bhutan becomes at times Bootan and Bhotan and its inhabitants Bootaniers, Bootias and Booteahs. For the most part I have only retained their versions of the names of places and people when quoting from source. Otherwise I have adhered to contemporary spelling in the interest of continuity. Even modern maps vary and the few scholars who have written histories of Bhutan differ considerably over the spelling of most proper and place names. I have just had to pursue my own course going for contemporary consensus as far as one exists. In many cases I have accepted Dr Michael Aris' corrections of my original versions.

Another problem has been to identify on the few modern maps available, the locations of smaller places, rivers and mountains, referred to in the memoirs, partly because of the authors' sometimes bizarre phonetic spelling, partly also because names seemed to have changed quite often. On several occasions missions camped in or passed through places mentioned by their immediate predecessors and found different names in use. Quite frequently also villages were abandoned as the forests were cut down or the soil worked out or as a result of the semi-perpetual state of civil war; and it has been impossible to identify them at all. Wherever possible I have tried to avoid mentioning these but have sometimes had to retain them in the text for the sake of the context. I

apologise to readers who look for them in vain on the map.

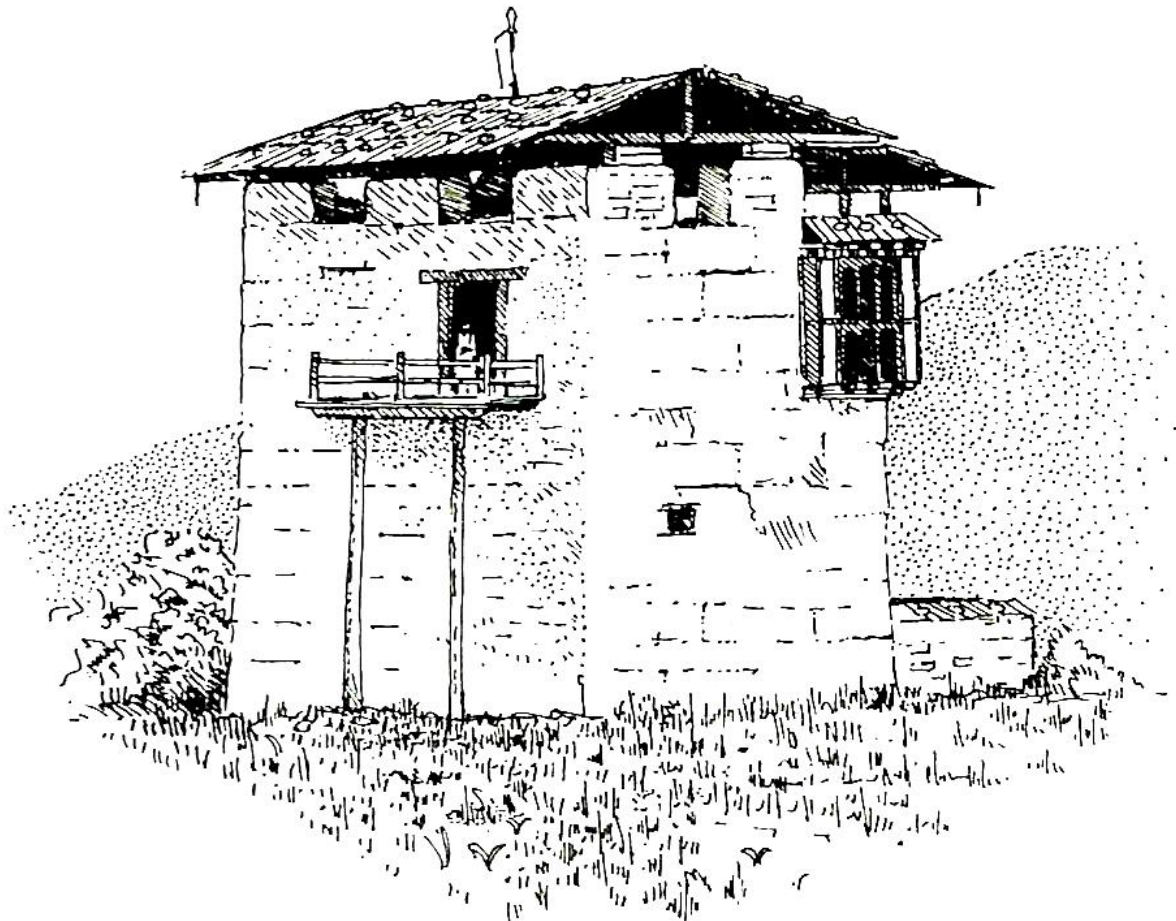
I have also, wherever possible, used the English spelling customary in Bhutan today for the names of institutions and buildings and, for the most part, of official titles where these are still in use. For titles no longer in use but frequently referred to I have often retained the Anglicised versions of the memoirs. Readers are referred to the Glossary for definitions of titles and other words. These were mostly based on the Indian experience common to all the 18th and 19th century travellers, the most important being the names they accorded to the spiritual and secular rulers, the Dharma and Deb Rajas, although Raja was not a Bhutanese term. Dharma is a sanskrit word and Deb was the Bhutanese pronunciation of the Tibetan 'depa' (sde-pa) or civil ruler.

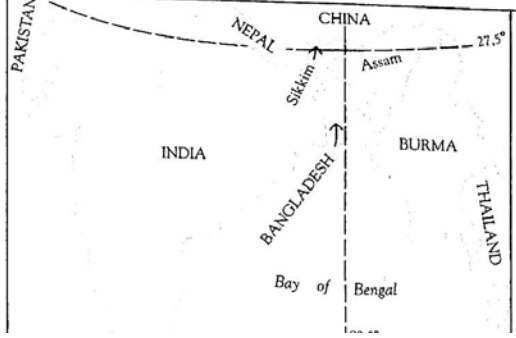
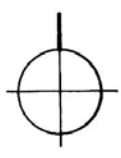
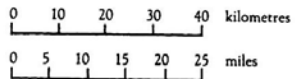
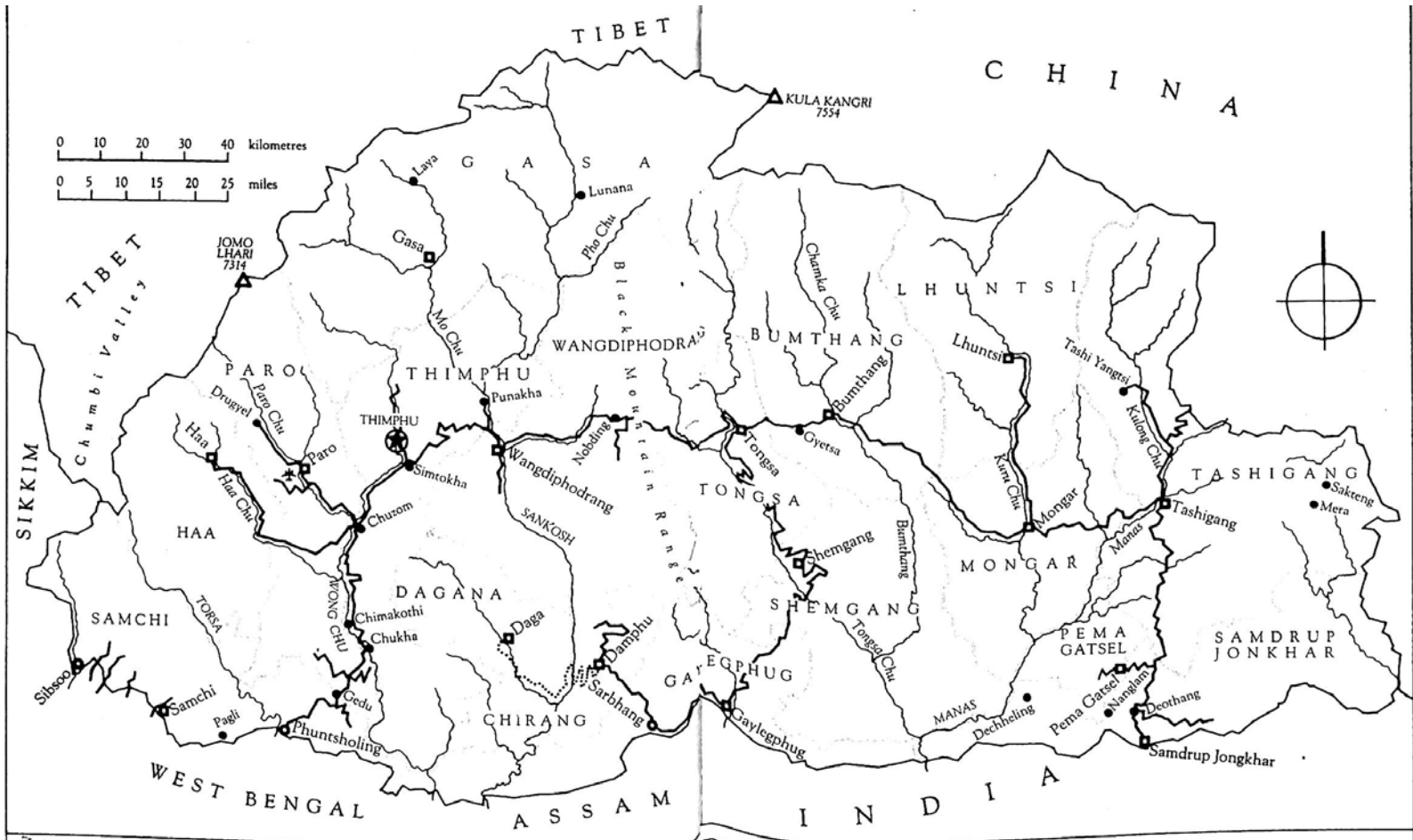
I must reiterate that this is neither a history of Bhutan nor an account of the country's complex and distinctive culture which is woven into the history and religion of the region. Nevertheless in the impressions recorded by visiting Britons, their reactions and their descriptions, varying in emphasis over the centuries, a picture emerges of a unique kingdom. It is interesting to note not only the changes in attitude of the Bhutanese towards these strange intruders but also the differences of approach amongst the British themselves whose descriptions of geographical features, bridges, buildings and artefacts are more trustworthy than their assessments of people and institutions, influenced by their own cultural background, and without much understanding, in most cases, of Buddhist values.

Their attitudes reflected not only their own societies but also the current relationship, at the time of their visits, between British and Bhutanese authorities and the state of the frontier. The eighteenth century visitors wrote as agents of an expanding trading company, scholarly accounts of privileged visits, which aroused enormous interest in the west, where the age of enlightenment comprehended a thirst for knowledge about far away places. Early twentieth century officials represented a great imperial power with benevolent but, on the whole, empty-handed intentions towards a country from which there was nothing to fear. The nineteenth century missions were very different. The British Indian governments which they served were usually at war somewhere or other on the Indian sub-continent or in Asia, either within India itself, in the complex and shifting alliances of Princely states or on the periphery, in places as far apart as Afghanistan, Persia, Burma and Nepal. There was an ever present fear of Russia and preoccupation with the north western frontiers, and anxieties about China. The perpetual feuding between Bhutanese and British Indian subjects in the border areas, the interminable civil wars within Bhutan and the resultant power vacuum were seen therefore within a wider framework of imperial diplomacy. This affected, in their official capacity, the outlook of

nineteenth century visitors, who were also influenced in their personal reactions to Bhutan by the evangelistic and moralising spirit of the times. They represented a nation whose interests clashed with those of the Bhutanese; and official criticisms of Bhutanese actions were reinforced by personal moral judgements on a society so different from their own. Their uninvited missions occurred during periods of internal crisis and they were not made particularly welcome. Consequently, they were, not unnaturally, prejudiced against their reluctant hosts.

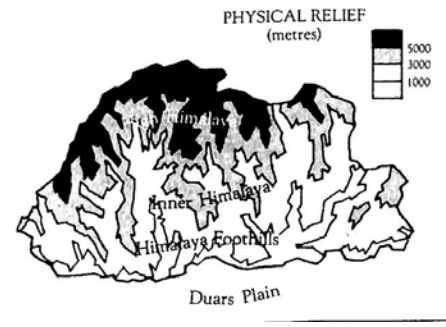
In normal, times however, the Bhutanese are the most hospitable people. The century of Anglo-Bhutanese tension, culminating in war in 1864, has long since been forgotten and the modern traveller is assured of an almost embarrassingly friendly reception. Although they are indebted to the Government of India for assistance in almost all fields of economic aid, without which they could not play a proper role in the modern world, nevertheless they also welcome help from other sources and it is good to know that the British hostility of the past has been replaced by co-operation in the field of education and that the English language now provides a major tool for development and international contact.





MAP OF BHUTAN

- Paved roads
- Roads under construction
- Rivers
- Elevation points (metres)
- Airport
- National capital
- District capital
- Other towns
- Selected villages
- District boundaries
- International boundaries



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Amban	Chinese representative in Lhasa.
Amlah	Council of State, a term found only in 19th-century records.
Dasho	Title of all senior government officials (= Red scarf officer).
Deb Drönyer	Senior government official (orig. Deb Raja's Guestmaster).
Deb Raja	Head of secular government, Regent.
Deb Zimpön	Chamberlain to the Deb Raja.
Dharma Raja	Former spiritual ruler of Bhutan, successive incarnations of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal; the Bhutanese equivalent of the Dalai Lama.
Druk Gyalpo	King of Bhutan.
Drungpa (Doompah)	Government official with authority over a group of villages, junior to Dzongpön.
Duar	Mountain pass, leading from Indian plains to the Bhutanese interior, and adjoining territory.
Dzong	Fortress-monastery, administrative centre of a valley-district.
Dzongpön	Fort commander with authority over a civil district, junior to Pönlop.
Gap	Village headman.
Gelong	Fully-ordained Buddhist monk.
Gosain	Hindu pilgrim-trader.
Jemadar	Viceroy's junior commissioned officer, Indian Army.
Jingal	Primitive form of shotgun.
Lama Khembo (Je Khembo)	Head Abbot of Bhutan.
Lama	Spiritual 'superior', equivalent to 'guru', sometimes with high position in hierarchy.
Lopon	Senior monastic teacher.
Nyerpa	Government bailiff with responsibility for taxation in the 18th and 19th centuries.
Paharias	Hill dwellers (Indian term).
Pönlop	District governor, largely autonomous.
Sanyasis	Hindu ascetics, a term here referring to a group of mendicant traders, moneylenders and mercenaries who were in conflict with the British in the area of Bengal adjoining Bhutan in the second half of the 18th century.
Shung Drönyer	State treasurer.
Subadar	Viceroy's senior commissioned officer, Indian Army.
Tshogdu	National Assembly.
Zemindar	Landlord with extensive property (Indian term).
Zimpön	Chamberlain or Master of Ceremonies in the service of Dharma Raja, Deb Raja, Pönlop, or Dzongpön.
Zingap	Court attendant or messenger.

INTRODUCTION

Drukyul—Land of the Thunder Dragon

Embedded beneath the snow white folds of the high Himalayas the ancient kingdom of Bhutan has preserved its independence from time immemorial, untainted by the baser aspects of the outside world. Although today it is classified as one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, it has, unlike most others, retained its integrity and distinctive way of life virtually intact.

Only 250 miles long and 90 miles wide, landlocked and bordered by its powerful neighbours, India and Chinese Tibet, as well as Nepal, Bhutan's main line of communication is southwards to the Indian border although the development of a road suitable for wheeled traffic is comparatively new. Until a hard surfaced road was completed in 1962 the only means of transport between the capital, Thimphu and the town of Phuntsholing near the border was by pony or mule and the journey took up to ten days.

Geography has exercised a stronger influence over national history than in most countries. The great natural barriers of this rugged land led to such a physical isolation that the Bhutanese have developed national characteristics which have remained unchanged throughout the centuries. These include self sufficiency, determination, an unaggressive pride, good humour and courtesy. Even their one great national import, the Buddhist faith, has been moulded to a distinctively Bhutanese form.

Although the mountain ranges of the north and the forests of the south contributed to inaccessibility, the river valleys provided links with the outer world and so there developed a few regular trade routes to neighbouring countries which were utilised by everyone, be they merchant, lama or private traveller.

Three great lateral divisions divide the country geographically and so determine the centres and nature of population: the lowlands north of the Indian border, the central highlands and the snowy heights. In addition to these, a mountainous spine down the centre has also, until recently, effectively separated west from east reinforcing existing linguistic and ethnic differences for which, and for whose continuance, it was in large measure responsible.

The first of the three lateral zones lies to the north of the plains, adjoining the Brahmaputra basin, fed by rivers rising high in the Bhutanese Himalayas. It is a land of dense tropical vegetation in places and an average rainfall of 100 inches a year. Although mostly in the

plains the area also includes some high peaks arising out of the foothills, in between which lie lush tropical valleys with evergreens and bamboo clothing the hillsides which, in places, are bright with huge pink and blue rhododendrons, snow white magnolias and wild orchids of many sizes, often growing from trees. In the hot steamy jungle, laid back from the roads, there is an abundance of wild life including elephant, buffalo, tiger, bison, rhino, musk and barking deer. It is the only known home of the golden langur monkey and is a paradise for butterflies of every shape and hue, some of them as large as small birds.

The main centres of population, such as they are in this underpopulated kingdom, lie in the central area, like the filling in a sandwich. No less than nine rivers flow through it coming down as mountain streams from the north, through narrow valleys forming enormous rocky gorges in places and in others broadening out into fertile valleys where a large range of crops and vegetables is grown. There are terraces of rice and fields of maize and wheat as well as orchards and pasture land. Home of the Himalayan bear, of wild boar, of pheasant and partridge, it is scenically magnificent with tempting and well stocked trout streams tumbling their way through blueish purple mountains before widening out into emerald green valleys, flowing sedately past solidly built villages, little townships and ancient monasteries, before narrowing and tumbling again through rocky defiles. Some of the hillsides are covered in vegetation, including oaks and giant rhododendrons, but there are occasional patches where the forests have been cleared for cultivation. In the fertile valleys lie most of the major towns: Thimphu, the capital; Punakha, the old capital, marvellously sited at the confluence of two rivers; and the townships of Bumthang, Paro, Ha and Tashigang. Most of them are situated on the routes taken by traders who, although not numerous, from earliest recorded times passed between India and Tibet. The same routes into Bhutan were taken by the Buddhist monks who so changed the course of national history, as well as invaders from Tibet.

The third and most impressive of the three lateral regions is one of vast mountain formations, rising to 24,000 feet, where in the great Himalayas the ancient Gods are enthroned in icy splendour. Many of peaks remain unexplored and most of them never lose their snow white mantles, including the sacred peak of Chomolhari. All but two of Bhutan's rivers rise amongst these peaks before cascading down to the valleys below. In these high places there are enormous and forbidding rock faces and glistening glaciers, at the foot of which lie the blue glacier lakes, an area of dwarf rhododendrons and azaleas, the home of the snow leopard, musk deer and the Tibetan white eared pheasant.

The awe-inspiring hand of nature is almost matched by the works of man, for in every part of Bhutan can be seen perched on the highest of

peaks, tiny shrines, isolated temples and towering dzongs – monasteries which are usually also the seats of local government. They were nearly always sited in commanding positions on high ground at strategic points and were heavily fortified. The oldest, at Simtokha, was built in 1629, (some say 1627 but the most authoritative sources prefer 1629) by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the founder of modern Bhutan. It was the first seat of government and became the model for all the others. Constructed of wood and hard earth, no nails were used, a pattern that was followed everywhere.

The people of Bhutan, who number no more than 1.3 million in an area of 18,000 square miles, have been so cut off from the world by natural barriers apart from their comparatively slender religious and commercial contacts with Tibet and India, that they have developed a unique lifestyle extending not only to religion and government but also to architecture, dress and even sport, in which archery is the national pastime and is as much in evidence in township and hamlet as in medieval England.

Until the beginning of the last century very few travellers had penetrated the country, apart from Tibetan monks, a few holy men up from the Indian plains, a trickle of hardy Indian traders and the Portuguese Jesuits, Cacella and Cabral, in the early seventeenth century; and from the late eighteenth century onwards official missions from British India. All travelled on foot or with mules or ponies.

Most Bhutanese still live in ways that would be recognised by those early travellers; in small hamlets beside the rivers and in isolated and surprisingly large farmsteads similar in appearance to those in Austria and Switzerland. They are usually made of wood, stone and clay, without any nails, and have shingled roofs held down by large stones. Animals occupy the ground floor.

The people are meat eaters, enjoying pork and beef with rice, fresh vegetables and herbs, accompanied usually by incredibly hot spices, especially chillies and red peppers. They are also great chewers of betel and enjoy local liquors called chang and arak (and more recently a quite congenial whisky).

Physically, they are, with some notable exceptions, not particularly tall but almost all of the hill dwellers are very sturdy. The plains men are thinner and look more like Indians of Bengal. Like the descendants of the 9th century Tibetan immigrants and the Indo-Mongolian inhabitants of the Eastern border, they are of a different ethnic origin to the Bhutanese of the central zone. The typical Bhutanese of this area which includes the major centres of population and government, is of medium height, well built, with mongoloid features, a well developed sense of humour and an absence of 'hang-ups' over alcohol, sex or other aspects of social life, unusual in the sub-continent. There is no caste or class

system and women do not have to live in seclusion. Their costume, of blouse and long finely woven dress formed by a multi-coloured square of cloth secured at the waist by a belt and at the shoulders with silver buckles, is the most attractive of any national dress and is universally worn except on the plains (and nearly always adopted by the few European women in Bhutan). The men's dress is a sort of highland plaid with a huge fold above the belt forming a pouch which becomes a resting place for cigarettes, tobacco, car keys, even the office file. Under it is worn a silk or cotton vest with broad white cuffs. On special occasions men wear knee length boots of embroidered cloth. Ministers and government officials also wear scarves of different colours denoting their rank and no official will ever call on a senior without wearing his scarf. Most respected of all, after the orange of the Royal Family is the red silk scarf of the Dasho, a title conferred by the King on the most senior officials.

The national language is Dzongkha, a polished version of the speech of Western Bhutan, originally a dialect of central Tibet. The classical written language taught in the dzongs is literary Tibetan. Nepali is generally spoken in the south and there are about eleven or more different dialect languages in the east. Consequently the development of Dzongkha as a unifying force is a national objective and about 80 percent of people speak it although it is native only to about 25 percent of them.

Another unifying force is the use of English as the medium of instruction in the schools from the infants school upwards and those who emerge from the top of the system are highly articulate in English and freely use it as a means of communication within the country and for international contacts.

The great unifying forces are cultural, for art and drama, music and dance, all have a religious foundation in Bhutanese Buddhism. To the music of traditional instruments, including drums, trumpets and shawms, there are many occasions for religious dances whose performers wear colourful costumes. These are not, as in some countries, merely quaint revivals but living manifestations of a long tradition and a national faith. Almost all representation in art or music is designed to show the perennial struggle between good and evil. Ever present is the contemplation of enlightenment through the medium of painted scrolls in temples and wall paintings in monasteries.

Although nothing is known of the religion of Bhutan before the 8th century it is said by some writers to have been animistic and for elements to have been retained even after the introduction of Buddhism by Guru Padmasambhava, a monk from Swat (now in Pakistan) who is credited locally with introducing the Mahayana school of Buddhism. Over the centuries a distinctive faith developed and this process was accelerated when some members of the older monastic schools took refuge in Bhutan from political strife in Tibet. The greatest of these and the

founding father of modern Bhutan, both ecclesiastical and civil, was Ngawang Namgyal who entered the country at the age of 23 in 1616. After many struggles and much opposition he became undisputed spiritual and temporal head of the land. He laid down its code of law based on Buddhist principles and established an independent theocracy which continued after his death, with ten incarnations of his spiritual successors, lasting nearly three hundred years until the foundation of the modern hereditary kingdom in the early years of this century.

Although Bhutan is no longer a theocracy, Buddhism is still woven into the fabric of society in a way for which there is no modern western comparison. Buddhist perceptions of non-violence are integral to the way of life (although this has not prevented the Bhutanese from being determined and successful soldiers when their country has been threatened and from giving Tibetan invaders and troops from British India a good drubbing on occasion). Monks still play a leading role in Bhutanese life and have an honoured place in the state with statutory representation in the national assembly and the royal advisory council. In every part of Bhutan the physical aspects of Buddhism can be seen: great dzongs, temples, small shrines, prayer wheels, and prayer flags straining and fluttering in the almost permanent winds of the highlands.

The history of Bhutan is inseparable from religion. After the time of Guru Padmasambhava there followed a difficult period of constant Tibetan incursions before the arrival of the refugee lamas which was followed by the spread of their faith and the establishment of powerful monastic overlords in various parts of the country. There was no central authority until Ngawang Namgyal imposed it after decisively defeating the Tibetans in 1639. It was after this time that he took the title of Shabdrung. He was the supreme authority in both spiritual and temporal matters and only after his death were the two powers separated between the 'Deb' (temporal) and 'Dharma' (spiritual) rulers. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's rule lasted 35 years until his death, said to have been kept secret for 50 years in an attempt to prevent disruptions when the civil war he had suppressed broke out again and the attacks from Tibet were resumed, until in 1647 the Bhutanese defeated a combined Tibetan and Mongolian army. Ngawang Namgyal's work was to stand the test of time and the many dzongs that were built at his behest are a physical reminder today of his rule. These include the Tashichodzong in Thimphu, which remained intact until rebuilt in traditional style between 1962 and 1970 in order to house the government. Of no less importance was his introduction of a system of local government through the 'Pönlops', the rulers of regions, and the Dzongpöns, the district administrators. He established the rule of law and the collection of revenue. By the time of his death all the western part of Bhutan was united and not long afterwards the eastern area was incorporated to form a state whose boundaries did not

differ greatly from those of the modern kingdom, apart from the frontier territory later annexed to India by the British.

The history of Bhutan throughout the 17th and 18th centuries was of the struggle for supremacy between the spiritual rulers, The Dharma 'Rajas', successive incarnations of the Shabdrung, chosen after a long search to find the right child, and the Deb 'Rajas' who, in Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's time had only been his appointed subordinates; and the increasing power of the Pönlops, some of whom used the Deb Rajas as their pawns in a power struggle. Although the secular suzerainty of China and the spiritual overlordship of Tibet were always claimed and at times acknowledged, the conflicts remained internal and there were fewer invasions from Tibet and an increase in traders from India. After the disclosure of the death of the founding Shabdrung in 1705, who had in fact died in c.1651, power in the 18th century passed increasingly to the Pönlops who indulged in endless civil wars.

The main external cause of conflict in this period was not in the north from Tibet but on the southern border with the Indian state of Cooch Behar which had been periodically invaded by Bhutanese whose actions were often neither known by nor approved of by the central authority. The government of Bhutan paid an annual tribute to the Raja of the state, but by the end of the 18th century they had become powerful enough to neglect this obligation and even, in 1772, to abduct the Raja. It is at this point that Britain enters the story for the first time.



CHAPTER ONE

1771–1775: Conflict and Reconciliation: George Bogle and the First Mission

In 1757 Clive's victory at Plassey opened a new chapter in Britain's relationship with the Indian sub-continent, an association that had begun in the 16th century with delegations from the courts of the Tudors to those of the Moghul Emperors who had agreed to the founding of the East India Company in 1601 as a staging post on the west coast for the spice trade from the East Indies. India only became the Company's main area of operation after the Dutch had driven the English away from the East Indies and they in their turn had defeated the Portuguese in sea battles off the west coast of India. In 1674 the Company's Headquarters moved from Surat to Bombay which Charles II's Portuguese bride had brought in her dowry. The Company had by then already set up a 'factory', as the trading depots were known, at Madras in 1640; and in 1690 they moved from Hughli to Calcutta which later became their main centre. By the turn of the century, therefore, although still subject to the Moghul Emperors in Delhi from whom they received their permission to trade, the British were not only well established on both coasts but had also been granted rights of administration within the area of their factories from which they exported cotton goods, indigo, pepper and spices from the west coast and cotton, sugar, silks and saltpetre from the east.

The decline of the Moghuls in the 18th century led to the establishment of many emergent states ruled by former vassals of the Empire. Chief amongst these were the Rajput Princes in the north, the Mahrattas in the south west, the state of Hyderabad in the south and later on the Sikhs in the Punjab. It contributed also to the rivalry between the French and English companies not confined to the periods of war in Europe, to their political support of rival states and ultimately the extension of the areas under their direct administrative control. Despite French successes under Dupleix the British East India company had by 1757, after Clive's victory at Plassey, established a supremacy that was only really endangered again by the French during the war of American Independence (1776–1783). By then also the British company had become so involved with the succession-problems of the Indian rulers of Bengal in the east that it had already begun to administer areas outside the factories. Although nominally ruled by the Nawab, Bengal was

virtually controlled by the Company because of the military and fiscal powers delegated to it by the decaying Empire. Warren Hastings, who succeeded Clive, continued the process of reforming the administration, of revenue collection and of curtailing the money grubbing activities of the Company's servants. He was arguably the greatest of all British administrators in India although his position, as ostensible representative of a merchant company, still mainly concerned with profitability, was far less secure than that of his 19th century successors. He was well aware of the distaste of his Court of Directors in London for anything that did not lead to profits. Consequently his correspondence with them on the subject of Bhutan was understandably cautious.

The court was no respecter of persons and the abrasive tone of some of their letters to a man whom posterity was to remember long after its own collective oblivion, is in striking contrast to the euphemisms of modern bureaucracy. For example, in response to Hastings' promotion of a military officer in the Company's service, they wrote: "We cannot suppress our indignation at your conduct . . ." and a number of their letters contain phrases such "We cannot but be displeased with . . ." and display a remarkable tetchiness towards their chief representative in India. No wonder therefore that Hastings had to probe very carefully their likely reactions to possible involvement with Bhutan and to emphasise the profit element so dear to his masters, who took the bait and replied, on April 4th 1771: 'It having been presented to us that the Company may be greatly benefited in the sale of broadcloth, iron and lead and other European commodities by sending proper persons to reside at Rungapore to explore the interest of parts of Bhutan and Assam and other countries adjacent to Gualporah and as you well know our earnest desire to extend the vend of the staples of this kingdom to as great a degree as possible we are surprised you have not already made an attempt to carry so desirable an object into execution. You are therefore required to procure the best accounts possible and give us your opinion thereon.'

Even before the abduction of the Raja of Cooch Behar by the Bhutanese there had been frequent border incidents; and in writing to the Court about possible trade with Bhutan Hastings had anticipated a future need to turn his attention northwards. Local Bhutanese officials were becoming powerful and increasingly independent of their divided spiritual and temporal rulers many days march away in the central highlands. Consequently when the rulers of small Indian border states were weak they invited attention from marauders, sometimes with the connivance of minor Bhutanese officials. This situation was accentuated by the geographical location of the 'duars', a series of mountain passes, whose name like the English 'door' and the Hindi 'dwar', (a gate or entrance) has a common Indo-European origin. This is precisely what

they were: gateways to the more fertile plains; and as such were to prove a source of contention over the next hundred years when the term came to be applied to the whole area of level plain into which the duars opened.

Whilst the Bhutanese held captive the ruler of Cooch Behar, the Nazir, or Regent, of that state, installed the Raja's son on his father's throne, to the annoyance of the Deb Raja of Bhutan, Deb Yadhur, who again invaded the state. After an initial reverse he was successful, with assistance from the ruler of another small Indian state, the Raikat Darp Deo of Baikunthpore, and installed his own nominee as king. The Nazir fled and appealed to the Company for assistance, offering to pay half the state revenues in return. Hastings accepted the offer and in December 1772 a force of four companies of Indian troops and two field guns was sent to Cooch Behar under Captain John Jones. After a battle in which Jones was wounded and only after considerable losses amongst his sepoys were the Bhutanese forced to withdraw, deserting their ally. The boy king returned with the Nazir to his capital and ratified a treaty with the Company acknowledging its supremacy, accepting annexation to Bengal, agreeing to pay the expense of military operations and making over half the annual revenue; the other half was to be retained only so long as the state's loyalty was assured. This was a fierce price to pay, especially as there was no end to the frontier incidents.

Now, nearly two years after the Court had first written about trade with Bhutan, Hastings was able to report the expulsion of the Bhutanese from the Company's territory, but even so took care to justify his actions on the grounds of security, writing on January 15th 1773 about 'Boutanners (sic) a nation who inhabit the mountains of the north of that province (Cooch Behar) . . . who have of late years, partly by force and partly by treachery, obtained a dangerous influence in those parts . . . In deliberating on these affairs we had more in consideration the peace and security of our present possessions than any advantage to be derived from the new acquisition we were flattered with; for as your district of Rungapore [Rangpur] has been frequently exposed to the incursions of the Boutanners and the collection of revenue drawn from part of Cooch Behar which depends on Rungapore thereby rendered very precarious, it became a matter of direct interest to embrace any opportunity which offered of expelling these people from these countries and confining them within the limits of their mountains . . .'

He went on to describe the success of the military operations in Cooch Behar and reported his intention "for the better protection of the districts of Rajanal and Boglepoor from the depradations of the banditti who inhabit the neighbouring mountains, to raise a new corps of light infantry under Captain W. Roberts".

The following month a new war broke out as the Darp Deo had now allied himself with the Sanyasis, a lowland people who had long been in

league with the Bhutanese and had, at the Company's insistence, been dismissed from the service of the Raja of Cooch Behar. In a letter of 1773, Hastings had described them to the Court as people who 'under pretence of religious pilgrimage have been accustomed to traverse the chief part of Bengal, begging, stealing and plundering wherever they go'. Captain Jones was again successful, reaching Baikunthpore in the middle of February and capturing Dalingcote. Meanwhile Mr George Purling, the Collector of Rangpur, an administrative and revenue official, decided to go on the attack, having had intelligence reports of a renewed Sanyasi – Bhutanese alliance, on the grounds that the Darp Deo could not be crushed until his allies were defeated. He therefore accompanied Lieutenant James Dickson and a detachment of Indian troops to Chichacotta where the Sanyasis retreated from the fort and fought their way into Buxa Duar. They were closely pursued by Purling and Dickson who then found themselves in danger of being cut off. They had to withdraw, losing fourteen sepoy and an English sergeant.

Shortly after this, marauders from Bhutan once again entered the Rangpūr district. This time the Collector sent Captain George Thomas with a small party of 'Pergunnah' sepoy, a locally recruited paramilitary force, normally only used for revenue collection, who unsuccessfully attacked the Bhutanese 'imprudently expending their ammunition', Thomas being killed.

Other military operations showed up the inadequacy of the Company's border troops as well as the robustness of the Bhutanese. From a camp near the border Captain Robert Stewart wrote, in an order to his command on February 2nd, a few weeks after Thomas' death: 'From the behaviour of the troops this morning in front of the united army of the Raja and the Sunassie, Captain Stewart is sorry to say that his utmost efforts to their honour and safety must fall far short of their interest', a garbled way of telling them they had not done well. He went on to impress on them the importance of obeying orders . . . '400 disciplined men would have defeated the battalion as it behaved that day . . . As regularity and obedience are our grand and only superiority they cannot be too rigorously enforced'. However, in a covering letter to Warren Hastings he said that the enemy had been completely routed although they had got to within 50 yards of the Company's forces, of whom he wrote, rather surprisingly in view of his strictures, 'never did men behave with nobler or steadier resolution'. He had, nevertheless, chosen to upbraid them for 'being ambitious in pursuit as the smallest tendency to irregularity in soldiers cannot be too palpably stigmatised'.

This little victory was described to the Court of Directors on March 1st 1773: 'We have the pleasure of informing you that everything has succeeded to our wish. The Bhutanese retired before Captain Jones and Captain Stewart took the capital of the Zeminder of Bycunpore (sic) in

league with the Bhutanese'.

The Court's response, received many months later, was to order Hastings to report 'in what manner and to what extent the Company may be benefited by opening trade to these countries'.

In the meantime however, Hastings had realised that he had been rather too sanguine and wrote on March 31st to report that the Sanyasis were still active and that 'despite severe orders to Zemindars [landowners] and farmers', they were assisted by local people. 'We meet obstacles every day', he wrote, 'in the superstition of the inhabitants'. Captain Timothy Edwards had met the same fate as Thomas and had been deserted by his sepoys . . . 'We fear that the revenue may suffer . . . ' Describing the events in Cooch Behar however, he wrote that the operations had 'gone on with the same success with which we began . . . express orders had been given to Mr Purling not to listen to any overtures of negotiation from the Boutanners till he has obtained entire possession of the low countries . . . ' He was directed to 'regard the hills as the boundaries of Bengal'.

Ten days after the despatch of Hastings' letter the Bengal government ordered Mr Purling to take over the low lying cultivated land right up to the foot hills which were to be regarded in future as the frontier of Bengal and would thus be secure from attack. The Bhutanese were informed that no treaty would be signed until this land was in the Company's hands. Although the Dharma Raja professed a desire for peace the Deb Raja, Deb Zhidar, sent a force to attack Chichacotta which was defended by Dickson and over two hundred sepoys. The Bhutanese charged with great ferocity and the defenders fought for their lives, losing five killed and thirty three wounded before the Bhutanese withdrew into the hills after losing more than two hundred men.

The Deb Raja was forced out of office after this set-back, and his successor sued for peace; the emissaries asking only for the return of some of the lowlands. Purling recommended agreement as much of this country was said to be very unhealthy.

A few days before this, on 29th March 1774, the Panchen Lama of Tibet (called 'Teshoo Lama' by the British) wrote to Hastings. He was probably aware of Hastings' reputation for fair dealing and was prepared to be surprisingly frank over the shortcomings of subordinate rulers such as those in Bhutan over whom he was supposed to exercise a degree of spiritual overlordship, despite Bhutanese military success in repelling invaders from Tibet. Consequently the Bhutanese had asked him to mediate in their conflict with the British. 'I have been repeatedly informed', he wrote, 'that you have been engaged in hostilities against the Dah Terrea (The 'Deb Raja', as the British called him) to which it is said the Dah's own criminal conduct in committing ravages and other outrages on your frontiers, has given rise. As he is of a rude and ignorant race, past

times are not destitute of instances of the like misconduct which his own avarice tempted him to commit. It is not unlikely that he has now resumed those instances, and the ravages and plunder which he may have committed on the outskirts of Bengal and Behar provinces have given you provocation to send your vindictive army against him; however his party has been defeated; many of his people have been killed, three forts have been wrested from him, and he has met with the punishment he deserved; and it is evident as the sun your army has been victorious; and that if you had been desirous of it you might have entirely extirpated him, for he had not power to resist your efforts. But I now take upon me to be his mediator, and to represent to you that as the said Dah Terrea is dependent upon the Dalai Lama who rules this country with unlimited sway, (but on account of his being in his minority, the charge of the government and administration for the present is committed to me) should you persist in offering further molestation to the Dah's country, it will irritate both the Lama and all his subjects against you. Therefore from a regard to our religion and customs, I request you will cease all hostilities against him and in doing this you confer the greatest favour and friendship upon me. I have reprimanded the Dah for his past conduct, and I have admonished him to desist from his evil practices in future and to be submissive to you in all matters. I am persuaded that he will conform to the advice which I have given him, and it will be necessary that you treat him with compassion . . . ”

Warren Hastings wasted no time and on the 25th April a treaty consisting of ten articles was agreed to by which Chichocotta province was restored to the Deb Raja who was to pay the Company a tribute of five Tangun horses (described on page 14). Bhutanese merchants were allowed to send an annual caravan to Rangpur and in return they promised not to shelter Sanyasis or harbour criminals from the Company's territory and to allow Company troops to pursue over the border if necessary. Hastings' hand was strengthened by the knowledge that the Court of Directors was prepared to support limited military action and to leave ultimate responsibility to him as they had already written to that effect, saying 'Although we shall by no means depart from the rule laid for confirming our view to our present possessions, yet as the peace and security of them appears to have been the chief object of our President (i.e. Hastings) and Council in agreeing to the proposals of Nazir Dev, minister to the young Raja of Cooch Behar, we approve of the measures they have taken to drive the Boutanners from the Raja's country and consider the advantages proposed to the Company as an equivalent only to the charges we may incur in assisting him. At the same time we are pleased with the attention our President and Council have paid to our declared sentiments respecting new acquisitions, in referring to us the ratification of the treaty they thought it advisable to make with the Raja

upon their affording the assistance he desired; but as you have the local means of enquiring how far such an alliance may be necessary we leave this matter to your final determination and permit you to rectify the said treaty as you shall find most for the interest of the Company'.

By the time this letter was received the treaty had been signed, military action taken, and agreement reached with the Bhutanese. Only two months later the first and possibly the most significant British mission set off into the unknown country of Bhutan. Its leader was George Bogle of the Bengal civil service who was accompanied by Alexander Hamilton, as assistant surgeon. Warren Hastings wrote to Bogle on the 13th May 1774 to say "The design of your mission is to open a mutual and equal communication of trade between the inhabitants of Bhutan and Bengal and you will be guided by your own judgement using such means of negotiation as may be most likely to effect this purpose".

A more fundamental purpose of the mission was to take advantage of improved Anglo-Bhutanese relations by establishing contact and consequently trade with Tibet, as Hastings told the Court of Directors, ever mindful of their commercial interests. Bhutan was then regarded as little more than a means to an end.

Bogle was also commanded to take sample articles for commerce, to ask about the acceptability of other commodities and to inform himself about Bhutanese goods 'especially such as are of great value and easy transportation.' Hastings' letter ends on a familiar civil service note: 'you will draw on me for your charges and your drafts will be regularly answered . . . I need not recommend to you to observe a strict frugality and economy when the good of the service on which you are commissioned shall not require a deviation from these rules'. On his return he was commended for the meticulous accuracy of his accounts, not only for the maintenance of daily expenses, but also on his accounts for the bestowal of presents which included a string of pearls said to be worth 4500 rupees, a snuff box, a pair of pistols, a spy glass, as well as mathematical instruments made in Bengal and 'samples of Birmingham ware'.

He was also asked to undertake a number of private commissions for Warren Hastings; for one or more animals called 'turs' which produce 'shawl wool', one or two yaks and 'any curiosities, whether native production, manufactures, painting or what else may be acceptable to persons of taste in England.' The mission was also bidden to find out all they could about Bhutanese modes of government, 'areas of excellence, climate; roads, manners, customs, building and cookery, to bring back samples of coins and to report on the main characteristics of the people'.

In May 1774 at the hottest time of the year, Bogle and Hamilton set forth, crossing the border river between Cooch Behar and Bhutan in canoes. Once on the far bank they had little idea of what to expect and Bogle wrote 'As none of the Company's servants, and I might say almost

no European, had ever visited the country which I was due to enter, I was equally in the dark as to the road, the climate or the people'.

They passed the recently destroyed Chichacotta fort and spent their first night in a thatched house built on stilts four foot off the ground. The walls were made of reeds tied with slips of bamboo without any iron or rope used in the building; 'the space below being turned into a hogstye contributed little to its pleasantness'. Nevertheless the evening was not uncongenial for they drank a bottle of rum with the headman and his neighbours and a female pedlar who lived with the headman and shared his taste for rum.

They set out early the next morning towards a chain of mountains about eighteen miles away which seemed to be looming over them. The people in this low lying area looked more like Bengalis but as they approached the hills there were marked signs of climatic changes. Here were forests, beautifully clear rivulets flowing over sandy river beds, and little springs to drink at; and they halted at 'a grand natural amphitheatre with the noise of waterfalls'. Continuing on their way they reached Buxa Duar where the local official, the Subha, visited them with presents of white scarves, butter, rice, milk and tea.

On 9th June they entered the hills where they were now well away from the Company's jurisdiction and were in Bhutan proper where the people looked very different from the plainsmen and where they were furnished with a pass from the Deb Raja, by whose orders they were provided with carriers who were pressed into service at each village, and with a couple of Tangun ponies. Bogle thought they had rather a mean appearance but changed his opinion of them when they turned out to be patient and sure footed and could 'climb a monument'. Most of this hardy breed were piebalds of about thirteen hands. Their tails were usually docked when sold at Rangpur, unless the English purchasers specially requested otherwise.

They wound their way up Mount Peachokum climbing steadily up a steep, narrow and winding path and felt chilly even at midday. Before crossing the pass at the top they turned to look back at Bengal and Bogle commented: 'It is impossible to conceive any change of country more abrupt or any contrast more striking'. To the south was a vast tract of lush flat land but to their north were mountains, glens, valleys and hills covered with 'lofty and luxuriant trees'. Before descending there was a religious ceremony and 'standards or banners were set up of white cloth with sentences written upon them'.

At every halt Bogle carried out Warren Hastings' instructions to plant potatoes, the first batch of ten being at a place called Jaigugu which consisted only of three houses. At Maridzong which they reached after a journey including many descents and steep climbs, passing three waterfalls, he planted fifteen.

From thence they went by six difficult stages to Chuka and on towards Tashichodzong with the air growing colder at each stage. They were now climbing steadily through country whose vegetation was surprisingly familiar including huge walnut trees, elderberries, holly, willow, ash, aspen, sweetbriar, roses, brambles, juniper, wormwood, turnips, leeks, shallots, water and marsh melons, cucumbers and brinjals. The houses were made of stone and rammed earth, several storeys high, and there were numerous wooden cantilever bridges carrying tracks across the streams, as well as an iron suspension bridge built by the great Tibetan saint Thantong Gyalpo (1385-1464).

At one point they had to cross the Chuka river by a bridge 150 foot long, which consisted of five iron chains stretching from one side to the other, covered with bamboo matting placed on top of laths for the floor which swayed when stepped on. More often they encountered rivers which could only be crossed by a couple of ropes, of which one was for the feet or knees and the other for hand hauling.

At last after a march of over 150 miles, most of it following river courses, they reached Tashichodzong where the party was accommodated in a substantial house near the dzong (which Bogle referred to as 'the palace') where they felt so cold that they had to hang up Bhutanese blankets round the walls for insulation. Looking out from their residence they could see that they were in a valley about five miles long and a mile broad surrounded by mountains. On the low ground near the river there were rice fields and the area looked fairly prosperous and well populated with villages also scattered on the hill tops.

Not long after Bogle's arrival the Deb Raja returned from a journey and all of the balconies of the dzong were crowded with priests wearing red robes of Bhutanese woven cloth. 'The character of a Fakir is held in great esteem in this country' wrote Bogle, using the terminology of Muslim India. The loud playing of castanets, tabors, fifes and trumpets signalled the arrival of a procession saluted by the firing of thirty matchlocks. First came twelve led horses, then about a hundred and twenty men dressed in red and blue, thirty matchlock men, thirty archers, thirty horses laden with cloth, forty men on horseback, some wearing bushy hats, and six musicians, all preceeding the Deb Raja, also on horseback in scarlet cloak and large yellow hat, men waving fly whisks on either side of him and others carrying a white silk umbrella with coloured fringes which protected him. As the procession reached them the onlookers lit roadside fires of aromatic pine needles before prostrating themselves.

Two days later Bogle was sent for and his entry to the dzong was watched by about three thousand people as he was led through the three courts of the great building. After climbing a couple of iron plated ladders he came to an antechamber hung with weapons and from there was led into the audience chamber where the Deb Raja, in scarlet satin

and wearing a mitre on his head, sat on a throne like a gilded pulpit surrounded with silver ewers and vases, whilst a servant twirled an umbrella over him. Twelve high officials were seated on cushions near the wall. Bogle bowed, although aware that according to the custom of the country he should have prostrated himself, before laying his presents in front of the Deb Raja and seating himself on a cushion in the centre of the room. No one spoke whilst copper platters of rice, butter and treacle were brought in, as well as tea, walnuts, Kashmiri dates, apricots, cucumbers and other fruit, all of which were set out before him in silence. Then a man with a silver kettle of buttered tea poured some into his own palm before filling the dishes of the Deb and the officials who provided their own wooden cups which were glazed black on the inside and wrapped in cloth as they were carried in the owners' tunics next to the skin. Bogle was given a china cup.

After the Deb Raja had said grace he spoke a few words to Bogle whilst the tea was being drunk and then Bogle was dressed in a flowered satin gown which he subsequently likened to the 'water tabby gown' worn by his aunt and a red 'handkerchief' was tied round his waist. He was then conducted to the Deb who bound his head with another handkerchief, squeezing his temples and placed on his head an image of Buddha, intoning prayers as he did so. Then, tying two silk handkerchiefs together he threw them over Bogle's shoulders before leading him back to his cushion.

Two or three more dishes of tea, two glasses of a spirit that Bogle referred to as whisky but was probably arak and betel nut, were passed round before the presentation came to an end and he was ushered out of the chamber.

A similar reception took place with the acting Regent, in his room at the top of a tower in the middle of the dzong; but after the first visit subsequent meetings with him were conducted without any of the formalities and he showed much more intelligent curiosity in the visitors than his secular counterpart or anyone else in the country. Bogle and Hamilton, with whose microscope he was fascinated, dined with him on several occasions, usually on stew made of pieces of kid with cucumber, seasoned with red pepper and served with boiled rice, sugar and butter.

One of the very few available accounts in Tibetan of Anglo-Bhutanese meetings has been translated by Michael Aris and his wife and quoted in his *Views of Medieval Bhutan*. It is a letter of rebuke sent to the Regent by the retired head abbot, on his return from pilgrimage in Tibet. He attributed recent disasters to the Regent's forgetfulness of a fundamental Tantric rule. The initiate must never have relations of any sort with those who oppose his teachings. 'The barbarian demons have disturbed your mind, Holy Being, to the extent that you are enamoured of the goods of the English . . .'

Bogle was very interested in the dzong and its inhabitants and described both in some detail. The building was divided into several courts, flanked with galleries supported on wooden pillars all the way round, which he

likened to the architecture of an old English inn. The monks lived in a monastery within the dzong and from a gallery their ceremonies could be watched by visitors. He saw some of the dances which were performed daily. About twenty 'gelongs' (priests) dressed in many-coloured satin cloaks, sat on a bench, each holding a large tabor or a drum, beating time which they took from a priest who stood in the middle clashing two silver cups against each other, whilst other monks, wearing masquerade dresses, with visors like the beaks of birds, horses' heads, and other grotesque figures 'danced and capered with whimsical gestures'.

The walls of the dzong were two or three storeys high, inclining inwards and were entirely made of wood. Consequently the hills around were stripped of timber. At dusk the gates were shut and no one could enter until the following morning. Once every eight or ten days a string of five or six hundred monks left the dzong to bathe in the Chinchu river. 'They seem to lead a joyless, and I think, an idle life' wrote Bogle. A Bhutanese visitor to 18th century Britain might have said the same of the Dean and Chapter of most English cathedrals.

According to Bogle, Bhutanese social life was very democratic as masters lived on a friendly footing with their servants and dependants; and life was organised on common-sense lines. Marriage was easy and entailed no ceremony and if there were no children divorce was equally simple. Polygamy was not allowed.

The obsequies of death were rather more ceremonious, especially when the corpse was burnt. Bogle attended the burning of the body of a priest at which forty of his fellows recited offices whilst tea was served, bells tinkled and tabors and trumpets played. Keeping a respectful distance, old women counted beads and repeated the prayer 'Om mani padmi hum' which Bogle translated as 'Oh the jewel of the lotus, Amen', the lotus being the symbol of highest perfection. When night fell the body was wrapped in a linen sheet and laid on a funeral pile for which workmen had all the time been cutting wood. The dead monk's relations set fire to the pile which two priests fed with more wood whilst another threw spices, salt, butter, oil, betel and leaf. On the third day the ashes were collected and thrown into the Chinchu. There was no suttee, as in Hindu India and wives could not only outlive their husbands with impunity but were also free to marry again.

Other aspects of Bhutanese social life Bogle thought worthy of mention were that all the inhabitants of the country were dirty in their persons with the exception of the Deb Raja. On the other hand he found them remarkably free from the many taboos which distinguished Muslim as well as Hindu India and they had no caste system. Families were mostly self-contained, bartering their produce in exchange for wool from Tibet which was spun, woven and dyed by the women of the family. They ate bread made of unsifted flour, and coarse lean beef which was hung up to dry. The main food, however, was pork, and dried fish which came from Bengal and was

eaten with rice and butter. As well as salt, fish and hogs the returning caravans from Rangpur brought coarse linen, broadcloth, dyes and spices.

Bogle reckoned that there were three classes in Bhutan: priests, government officers and people who worked on the land, land holders and husbandmen. The priests were trained from an early age, took a vow of chastity and swore also never to kill any living creature. Hence the Regent's horror when he thought that Hamilton was going to kill a fly that he wished to show him under the microscope.

Unlike the priests, government officers took no vows of chastity, but as marriage seemed to be a bar to promotion many remained single. They too were trained from a very early age and, according to Bogle, 'seldom' arrived at places of trust or consequence till far advanced in life; and having passed through all the difficult gradations of service, it is no uncommon thing to see a minister as expert in mending a shoe or mending a tunic as in settling the business of the nation'. How admirable.

However the priests were the most important members of society and even the Deb Raja was accountable to them for the exercise of power and held office at their pleasure for they were responsible for electing him in the first place. They often became the governors of provinces; and the path to high office lay more in the priesthood than in the secular bureaucracy, as in the England of Cardinal Wolsey two centuries earlier.

Provincial Governors (Dzonpöns) had considerable powers, including those of policing their areas, levying taxes and the administration of justice. Taxes were very moderate, each family being rated according to their means and paying in kind; of which Bogle wrote: 'This mode of collection, however repugnant to the refined ideas of European policy, leaves them unencumbered with a heavy expense for tax gatherers and precludes the necessity of employing a numerous body of subjects in a vocation so useless to the state and so vexatious to the people'. In accordance with its limited revenue the expenses of government were small. Officers received no salaries and lived on the proceeds of presents and patronage. There was no standing army; but, as in medieval Europe, troops were called out to follow their landlords, and were all trained in the skills of archery. The main drain on the economy was the annual payment to the Panchen Lama in Tibet.

Of the people, Bogle wrote; 'The simplicity of their manners, their slight intercourse with strangers, and a strong sense of religion, preserve the Bhutanese from many vices to which more polished nations are addicted. They are strangers to falsehood and ingratitude. Theft, and every other species of dishonesty to which the lust for money gives birth, are little known. Murder is uncommon and, in general, is the effect of anger, not covetousness. The celibacy of a large part of the people however, is naturally productive of many irregularities; and the coldness of the climate inclines them to an excessive use of spiritous liquors'.

During his stay in the country the political situation was in a state of turmoil. The previous Deb Raja had been ambitious for more power, at the expense of the Dharma Raja, and had strengthened his connections with the Panchen Lama in Tibet and the Raja of Nepal as well as with the Emperor of China; but he over-reached himself when he attacked Cooch Behar and was repulsed by the Company's troops. This and his attempt to rebuild the dzong in a single year after it had been burnt, imposed great burdens on the people; and during his absence with the army the Dharma Raja's party took control and the current Deb Raja elected. However, some of the former ruler's supporters were still in the dzong and although some were prisoners many others were allowed their freedom and were in touch with their former leader, now living in Lhasa. They had attempted to regain power and rebel forces had reached Simtokha where they were reinforced by others before advancing towards Tashichodzong where Bogle and his party were still awaiting permission to go on to Tibet.

Just before the rebels were routed on the edge of the town he received the long awaited letter brought by a messenger from the Panchen Lama. This was to the effect that he would not be permitted to go to Lhasa as the Emperor of China would not like it and desiring him to return to India. Meanwhile a Gosain (a trading Hindu pilgrim), who acted as an intermediary between the Company and the Tibetan authorities, had received quite different information, that the prohibition was due to an outbreak of smallpox. Bogle refused to accept the presents brought by the Lama's emissary or the letter addressed to Warren Hastings on the grounds that it would constitute acceptance of the refusal. He was also disappointed in the attitude of the Deb Raja who put further difficulties in his way. He now placed all his hopes on the Gosain who was permitted to go on to Tibet. Bogle thought that the Tibetan attitude was due to a deep rooted suspicion of Europeans and detected a similar approach in Bhutan where he suspected that some of his journeys had been made unnecessarily difficult by the Deb Raja's people in order to discourage him. Consequently, although he had many questions to ask, he tried not to appear publicly curious in order not to arouse suspicions, especially in the vicinity of the Deb. However, when the ruler went off with his troops because of the civil war Bogle felt much freer to carry out his mission of enquiry into the details of Bhutanese life. Amongst other things he learnt that most of the trade between Lhasa and the low lands in the south of Bhutan was by way of Patna and Nepal and was carried out by Moghuls and Kashmiris.

At length his persistence paid off and the Deb Raja read out a letter from the Panchen Lama to say that the Dalai Lama, the spiritual ruler of Tibet, had agreed to his continuing his journey provided he took only a few attendants with him. Even then the Deb Raja, who Bogle now

regarded as the main opponent of his going, still tried to dissuade him, possibly because his predecessor, the rebels' chief, had fled to Lhasa where the Lama was acting as intermediary for peace. Bogle was convinced that he would find the Panchen Lama more receptive to Hastings' proposal for trade and that the Deb Raja would then also accept them. He decided therefore not to press anything until his return to Bhutan, especially as he had learnt that the Deb was the main beneficiary from the existing trade and therefore had a vested interest in the status quo. The annual caravan sent by the Bhutanese to Rangpur in the Company's territory was mainly subscribed by him together with some of the ministers and provincial governors. Each sent an agent with Tangun ponies and a selection of musk, cow tails, coarse red blankets and striped woollen cloth in half yard widths. The imported goods, consisting of broadcloth, spices and dyes, were mostly sent on to Tibet, either as part of the annual tribute or for trading in return for Tibetan handkerchiefs (Bogle probably meant the scarves required for all official occasions) flowered satins, tea and wool.

Despite his disappointments Bogle wrote, 'The more I see of the Bhutanese, the more I am pleased with them. The common people are good humoured, downright and I think, thoroughly trusty. The statesmen have something of the art which belongs to their profession. They are the best built race of men I ever saw; many of them very handsome with complexions as fair as the French.'

Whilst waiting at Tashichödzong for further news, he began to suffer from the increasing cold and the Regent gave him a yellow satin gown lined with lambskin and the Deb Raja a dozen blankets. Meanwhile in India Hastings was acting in response to Bogle's comments about the encouragement of trade and issued a notice to the effect that officers in Rangpur and district should offer every assistance to the caravans.

At last, the long awaited permission arrived and as the insurrection seemed to have ended with the rebels abandoning their siege of Simtokha, Bogle was free to leave, taking with him only Hamilton, Mirza Setta, a Kashmiri who had come up from Rangpur and spoke the language, the messenger from the Panchen Lama and an attendant of the Deb Raja. En route they met an officer and some soldiers in pursuit of rebels and Bogle was able to observe the Bhutanese military system. The hall of every public office in the land was hung around with matchlocks and shields with which the retainers were armed in time of war. Other weapons included: broadswords with shagreen handles, 'targets', or shields made of coiled cane, bamboo bows and quivers and arrows made of reeds, often with poisoned tips, and a few pikes. Soldiers wore quilted caps, iron netted hoods or helmets; some had coats of mail and most wore woollen hose soled with leather and gartered under the knee. Over their tunics they carried several striped blankets. They slept in the open keeping themselves warm with their plaids and their whisky.

Before leaving Tashichodzong Bogle set down his thoughts on future trade possibilities remembering that the main objective of his mission was to establish free trade between Tibet and Bengal. 'The foreign trade of Tibet is considerable', he wrote, but there was a need for more imports to pay for the many commodities the country was able to export. Trading conditions were good and many merchants settled in Lhasa, especially Kashmiris who fulfilled the same functions in the Tibetan, Nepali, Bhutanese and Bengali trade as the Jews in Europe. They had agents everywhere, especially on the Coromandel coast, in Bengal, Benares and Nepal, who sent supplies up to them. There were also the Gosains, who adopted a humble manner, procuring them easy entry into Tibet, of whom Bogle wrote; 'Though clad in the garb of poverty there are many of them possessed of considerable wealth'. The Chinese were also large scale traders. However, little of this trade benefited Bhutan. The Tibetan merchants who managed to get to Paro, were only allowed to exchange their salt and wool for Bhutanese rice; any trade in more valuable goods was entirely for the benefit of the Deb Raja and principal officers. Consequently if permission were to be obtained for Bengal merchants to travel only as far as Paro, a place well suited geographically to be a centre of communication, their goods would only be purchased by the same people and, with the exception of tobacco, betel and bacon, on a fairly modest scale. The only real difference would be that Paro would become the market for Bengal goods instead of Rangpur, which would not lead to increased trade with Tibet.

Unfortunately the fear of another insurrection by the former Deb, possibly with Tibetan support, was such that Bogle could not ask for the Deb Raja's consent for Tibetans to trade freely at Paro without incurring the suspicion that he was implicated. He decided therefore to refer everything to do with the Tibetan merchants to the Panchen Lama and to try and obtain permission for Bengali merchants to have freedom of passage, selling their goods in Paro as well as in Tibet. He therefore proposed that in addition to the existing caravan arrangement in Rangpur, for which all duty should be abolished, the Bhutanese should be free to sell their horses anywhere in Bengal free from duty or any other hindrance, as already suggested in Hastings' letter to the Deb Raja; and that in return the Deb should allow 'all Hindu and Mussulman merchants freely to pass and repass through his country between Bengal and Tibet'; but that no English or European merchants should be given permission, as Bogle knew that this would never be granted. He was convinced that if the Bhutanese could be encouraged to trade freely, seeing all the goods available in Calcutta, and finding the price of broadcloth, coral and spices, to be lower than in Rangpur, they would start trading there. This would increase the sale of English broadcloth and reduce the large amount of French cloth purchased by the Bhutanese for the Tibetan market.

Meanwhile, two weeks before Bogle was writing down his thoughts on

trade, Hastings had written to him on much the same lines stressing his willingness to abolish all duties. He was also astute enough to suggest that Bogle should find out where the Deb's personal interests lay and how far they might be affected by the new proposals: 'an encouragement of any hopes of advantages he may entertain, provided his particular profits from it will not interfere with or obstruct the general plan may greatly facilitate your negotiations; and for this purpose you will be equally solicitous to remove his objections and calm his apprehensions of detriment to his interests or danger to his country, should any such arise in his mind'. Hastings went on to say that the Deb should be shown the great advantage of his capital becoming the centre of a lucrative commercial link between Bengal and Tibet.

Bogle replied that until the fear of insurrection was over little could be done but that when this had been lifted he was sure that permission for Tibetan merchants to go to Paro could be obtained from the Panchen Lama.

Bogle's mission to Tibet is another story but suffice it to say that the Panchen Lama did respond as anticipated and issued instructions to the merchants of Lhasa and Tashilhunpo. A number of Kashmiri and Gosain merchants then told Bogle that they intended to send agents to Calcutta to purchase goods as soon as the rains were over; and a wealthy Gosain merchant took the opportunity to accompany him back to Calcutta on his homeward journey.

Hastings' compliance with the Panchen Lama's wish to found a monastery ✓ on the banks of the Ganges helped Bogle in his mission. It was hoped that it would remove Tibetan and Bhutanese fears about the heat and unhealthiness of Bengal; and that pilgrimages could lead to the development of a substantial trade. The Lama also offered to use his good offices with the Emperor of China to procure leave for the Company to send a deputation ✓ to Peking.

Although he spent all his time at the Panchen Lama's palace and was never able to go to Lhasa partly because of the jealousy of officials there and also because he would have had to incur great expense in procuring presents for them, Bogle compared the Panchen Lama of Tibet favourably with the Deb Raja of Bhutan. He was more accustomed to dealing with strangers, enjoyed negotiating, spoke Hindi and was therefore easier to converse with; and he knew of the reputation of the Company, with which apparently he had long wanted to be associated. He supported Hastings' and Bogle's plans for trade which he realised would increase his own influence. He was very candid and told Bogle all about the opposition to his journey by the people in Lhasa and even gave him the correspondence to read. Although a spiritual leader, he seemed to Bogle to be a more understanding and enlightened administrator than the Deb Raja of Bhutan, who, despite being a secular ruler, was difficult of access, 'stiff and ceremonious in his manners and indecisive in business. He is guided entirely by his officers who are reserved,

suspicious and evasive'. All important matters had to be discussed, not only with the Lama Rimpoche but also with several hundred priests. Consequently the Bhutanese authorities made many objections to merchants passing through their territory, insisting, not unreasonably, that their people were not used to strangers and that if a merchant was robbed it would cause problems with the British. Bogle thought that this was just a pretext in order to keep the Tibetan trade in their own hands. No doubt motives were mixed but throughout their recorded history the Bhutanese have always welcomed those whom they wished to see and been wary of others who invited themselves. The result has been the preservation of national independence.

However, when Bogle was able to reassure the Bhutanese that no Europeans would be allowed in – a step most assuredly leading to ultimate take-over, as was to happen to their neighbours in Assam and further afield in Burma and had already occurred in parts of India – and that the concession would be for Indian merchants only, the Deb Raja was at length persuaded to agree. Bogle admitted that he was much indebted for this outcome to the Panchen Lama's people who had accompanied him back to Bhutan and he sent a copy of his proposed treaty to the Lama who replied, approving of it.

Before returning to India Bogle wrote again to Hastings to say that there was now a great opening for the sale of English broadcloth to the wealthier Tibetans and that Tibetan merchants might also act as carriers for selling it to their neighbours, the Tartars, to the detriment of the French, with whose East India Company the English had been at war for much of the century, and were to continue so for another forty years. He also thought that a new trade could be developed in cutlery and glassware and that the best way to increase both the existing trade in cloth and coral beads as well as starting new kinds was to encourage Kashmiris, Gosains, Bhutanese and Tibetans to go to Calcutta in the winter months where they could buy English broadcloth at the lowest prices in addition to other goods, and for them to have passports and escorts to and from the Bengal frontier.

Bogle's return journey to India by the same route as his outward journey was uneventful. After his return he continued his Bhutan connection, becoming Collector of Rangpur where the Bhutanese caravans traded in sight of what he called 'my Bhutan hills', but died in 1781 at the age of thirty five. He was to have joined his friend the Panchen Lama in China in order to pursue trading possibilities at the court of the Emperor but the Lama also died whilst in Peking. Bogle was a gentle, good humoured and tolerant Scot who believed in adapting himself, as far as possible, to the custom of any country he was in. His mission could be said to have been successful in its main objective for in 1786 the Company's agent in Tibet, Purangir, a Gosain, reported that many Bengal merchants had made their way through Bhutan to Tibet. Given the slowness of communication

between the Bhutanese central authorities and lesser officials and the length of time it took to mount trading caravans this was more likely to have been the result of Bogle's mission than that of the next British expedition to Bhutan in 1783.

