

GEORGE BOGLE'S TREATY WITH BHUTAN (1775)

—A. DEB

Attention of several observers has been drawn by the lack of impressive results flowing from Bogle's mission to Tibet in 1774-75. 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" (1). 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.

In the context of hopes raised by the "Design" of Warren Hastings (2) a sense of disappointment is understandable. Nevertheless a study of the impact of the mission in other respects is amply rewarding. Bogle's transactions in Bhutan is relatively a neglected episode though it merits more than a passing attention. Accompanied by Alexander Hamilton the envoy left Calcutta in the month of May, 1774. The mission travelled by way of Cooch Behar and Buxa to Tashi Chhodzong. It was detained there till October 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. This commercial treaty with Bhutan can appropriately be looked upon as complementary to the Anglo-Bhutanese treaty of April, 1774 which ended the First Bhutan War. The treaty of 1774 had already initiated the policy of wooing Bhutan in the interest of trans-Himalayan trade as is evident from the remarkable territorial concessions made to Bhutan at the expense of Cooch Behar.

On Bogle's recommendation Warren Hastings addressed a letter to the Deb Raja in November, 1774 and enclosed a "parwana" therewith. It reads:—

"Notice is hereby given to all merchants of Bhutan that the strictest orders have been issued to the officers at Rangpur and Ghoraghat dependent on the Subah of Bengal (the paradise of nations) that they do not obstruct the passage of Bhutan merchants to those places for the purpose carrying on there trade as formerly, but that they afford

every assistance to their caravans. They are therefore required not to entertain the least apprehension but with greatest security and confidence to come into Bengal and carry on traffic as formerly. Placing an entire reliance on this let them act agreeably there to". (3)

These concessions were further elaborated by the treaty which Bogle concluded with the Deb Raja in May, 1775. The treaty distinctly encompassed commercial relations with two countries. The preamble was intended for promotion of trade with Tibet. It runs:— "Whereas the trade between Bengal and Tibet was formerly 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" (4).

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 also be allowed to proceed either themselves or by their goomastas to all places in Bengal for the purpose of trading and selling their horses free from duty or hindrance.

"That the duty hitherto exacted at Rangpur from the Bhutan caravans 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 merchants shall enter the Deb Raja's dominions.

"That the exclusive trade in sandal, indigo, red skin, 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". (5)

In his letter dated 9th June, 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 in his country and to that extent, as Camman Schuyler says, his mission had "in a measure" failed. (6) But the envoy carefully explained that the entire trade with Tibet was in the hands of native agency "before Europeans had anything to do with it". (7) Bogle believed trade in this region could be promoted "without the establishment of English factories and the employment of English Agents". Trade through Nepal was in the hands of this 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. (8) 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 the objects of jealousy to all their neighbours". (9) 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 . . . "what is now consumed a large portion is of French manufacture . . . I never could meet with any English cloth". (10) Conceivably, the French had more effectively utilised the native agency in getting to the Tibetan market and thus 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". (11)

Bogle noticed that the Deb Raja and his officers were "in fact the merchants of Bhutan". He had to calm 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" were aimed at removing official opposition.

In his treaty Bogle carried out the instructions he had received from the Governor General while at Tashi Chhodzong. (12) Hastings had written -----"You may even consent to relinquish the tribute or duty which is exacted from the 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 transaction in Bhutan. Bogle was asked "to build such improvements on it" as his judgement and occasion may dictate. With an unerring insight of the compulsions that make all the difference between success and failure the Governor General had another clear instruction. Bogle was to "discover" how "his (Deb Raja's) personal interests may be affected by the scheme" and to "encourage any hopes of advantages he may entertain" provided it did not interfere with the general plan. Thus a dramatic concession combined with an assurance to the monopolistic commercial privileges of the officialdom in Bhutan were the two powerful levers with which Bogle was armed before his negotiations. The envoy extended the privileges further as he was "aware" (13) that some of the Bhutanese would wish to proceed further than Rangpur and even to Calcutta. The first Bhutan War had "enlarged their minds" and they now hoped to purchase many articles on better terms and would be "glad" to get some firearms at 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 broadcloth (14), 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 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; intended commercial intercourse would follow. As he put it:—"Merchants left to themselves naturally discover the most proper manner of conducting their trade, and prompted by self interest carry it on to the greatest extent".(15)

In 1780 Bogle himself organised the fair at Rangpur. Having "excused all duties" there was a great concourse of Bhutan merchants. "who after buying and selling freely went away very well satisfied". (16) Bogle's treaty with Bhutan ensured the continuance of ancient trade with trans-Himalaya through native agencies, though perhaps on a diminished scale, for the next half century. In 1833 a Zeenkaff (Subordinate Official) from Bhutan narrated:—

"The Mongol Khasees (Khachi?) trade a good deal at Hassa (Lhasa); they occasionally go to Rangpur in Bengal by the Phari and Parodzung routes for the purchase of otter skins".(17) 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”. 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”.(18)

Bogle’s mission to Bhutan, according to Camman Schuyler, was to serve “as a commercial reconaissance, concerned almost entirely with trade rather than diplomacy”. The envoy also became seized with the task of probing the political situation obtaining in Bhutan. He recorded the “rooted enmity” and “opposition of interests” between the ruler and a “junto of priests” led by Lama Rimbochay. This resulted in a “revolution”, which combined with the failure of Deb Judhur’s (Turner’s Deh Terria) Cooch Behar expedition led to the flight of the latter to the neighbourhood of Lhasa.(19) The Deb Raja was entrusted with the secular affairs and “executive part of the Governement” and had extended his grip more and more during the preceding two centuries and, as Bogle noted, the Deb Raja’s authority “in the internal Government of the country appears to be very complete” (20). These observations were of great relevance in locating the de facto sovereignty in Bhutan and in prescribing British protocol in the following century.

Bogle elaborated on the futility of a military conquest of Bhutan. He thought that even if a military expedition to Bhutan were successful he saw no great advantage to the Company “beyond what it already enjoyed”. The Anglo-Bhutanese treaty of 1774 had secured the possession of Cooch Behar and was a guarantee against future Bhutanese aggression. He ruled out possession of any part of Bhutan for the purpose of settlement unless done with the consent of the Bhutanese. He believed this could never be obtained. Economically as well as militarily the policy of conquest of Bhutan would be blunderous:—“two battallions, I think, could reduce the country. But two brigades could not keep communication and if that is cut off conquest could be of no use” ——— There is a view that “if conquest was effected, all the rest would follow of course; but that I am convinced would not be the case”.(21)

Regarding the impact of these objective observations Camman Schuyler writes:—“whether or not they actively influenced the English rulers of India, they expressed a point of view that was held towards

the northern states for many years to come. In fact they were the first enunciation of what was to become almost a permanent policy". It took a few decades of raids faithfully recorded by British frontier officials, two official missions to Bhutan and the humiliation of Ashely Eden at Punakha, to arrive at the conclusion that for security and the Bengal Duars an invasion of the Himalayan Kingdom was worth undertaking (1864).

During Warren Hastings' administration the importance of Bhutan as a "Gate on the South that prevents entry"(23) was never lost sight of. The Gurkhas had already blocked the "passes through Morung and Demijong (Sikkim). The road through Mustang was "uneconomical and distant". 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".(24) 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 as envoy to Tibet a second time. The journey was never undertaken as the Panchen Lama had left for Peking to meet the emperor.

The parley between the third Panchen Lama and Chien-Lung is an eloquent comment on the wisely conceived plans of George Bogle. Samuel Turner (1784) collected information about this historic meeting from the Regent at Tashilhunpo. The Lama, in Turner's words, took several occasions "of representing in strongest terms the particular amity which subsisted between the Governor-General and himself" (25). His conversation so influenced the Emperor that "he resolved upon commencing through the Lama's mediation an immediate correspondence with his friend". Such indeed was the confidence and esteem which the Emperor manifested for the Panchen Lama that he "promised him a full compliance with whatever he should ask."

A similar account of the meeting was given by Purangir Gosain, the friend and companion of Bogle and Turner in Tibet;—"in the country of Hindustan, which lies on the borders of my country, there resides a great prince or ruler for whom I have the greatest friendship. I wish you should now regard him also, and if you will

write him a letter of friendship and receive his in return, it will afford me the greatest pleasure, as I wish you should be known to each other and that a friendly communication should in future subsist between you”.

Gour Das Bysack points out that it is not known who translated the report of Purangir. A translation was with Warren Hastings from whom through various channels Alexander Dalrymple obtained it and published it in the *Oriental Repertory*.(26)

The possibilities inherent in the relationship between the Panchen Lama and Emperor Chien-lung and in Bogle’s acumen were denied, however by the Panchen’s death at Peking in 1780 followed by Bogle’s in 1781.

The second mission to Tibet was revived for the second time 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 of “encouragement to all merchants, natives of India, that may be sent to traffic in Tibet on behalf of the Government of Bengal” (27). Every assistance “requisite for the transport of their goods from the frontier of Bhutan” was assured. The merchants would be assigned place 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 will prove “its best encouragement”. It was necessary to “let merchants first learn the way, taste the profit and establish the intercourse....” “Turner did not insist on written treaty with the Regent at Tashilhunpo because such a treaty might become “revocable” by the new Panchen Lama when he came of age. 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”.(28)

Warren Hastings not only prevented the opening made by Bogle from again being closed but also sought to preserve the lasting results of Bogle’s mission to Bhutan by sacrificing legitimate interests of Cooch-Bihar. As an unique event, the historians of Cooch Behar have cited the cession of tracts to Bhutan known as Ambari Falakata and Jalpesh

in 1787. (29) The transfer of these areas had been recommended by Hamilton to induce the Deb Raja to fulfil the agreement he had concluded with Bogle. These areas belonged to the Raikats (zemindars) of Baikantipur under Cooch Behar Raj (30). A temple dedicated to Siva stood at Jalpesh which was built by Maharaja Pran Narayan of Cooch Behar (1625-65). A recent article seeks to trace the story of the Siva at Jalpesh back to the 5th Century A.D. (31). 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 Bhutanese was purchased at the expense of the Baikantipur Zemindar". This historic transaction is an example of how the claims of history or geography, religion or language were subordinated to the company's own motive: securing access to Tibet and through Tibet to China.

Soon after the departure of Warren Hastings, in the words of a modern Tibet explorer, "a contretemps occurred and all his work was undone" (32). Prof. Susobhan Chandra Sarkar has pointed out that there was a "distinct reversal" (33) of policy with the arrival of the Earl of Cornwallis. The humiliation of Nepal in the Gurkha-Tibet war of 1792 completed the disruption of the course of Anglo-Tibetan relations. 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 Tibetans or to conquer their country" (34). Without going into the question of the status or authority of Tibet to pursue her own policy after 1792, it is necessary to underline that the Company's Government regarded Chinese exclusiveness as the prime reason for rendering infructuous Bogle's pioneering work not only in Tibet but also in Bhutan. Indeed Bogle's treaty with Bhutan was regarded as in a state of suspended animation. The following excerpt of a letter from the Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier, to Government (35) is of peculiar 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 it was found that the Company’s treaty with Bhutan was never abrogated. Only Manchu exclusiveness deprived the East India Company the benefits of trade in a legitimate manner. Proposing a new mission to Bhutan the same letter stated that such a mission “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 Tashilhunpo.”

The next mission to Bhutan, in the words of R.B. Pemberton, the leader of the mission, tried to “ascertain the nature of the foreign relations of the Tibetan government.” The envoy learnt from Tibetan merchants that “there were foreigners residing there” who “sat at tables and were constantly writing and reading books.” He came to believe that agents of Russia had found their way to Lhasa. (36) Obviously diplomacy on the northern borderland of India had to concern itself with the meeting of three empires rather than two.

NOTES

1. Younghusband, Francis, *India and Tibet* pp. 24, 25.
2. Sarkar, Susobhan Chandra: Some Notes on the Intercourse of Bengal with the Northern Countries in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. *Bengal Past & Present*. Vol. XLI, Jan-June, 1931 p. 120.
3. Markham C.R. *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*. London, 1879. pp. 53, 54.
4. Markham C.R. *Op. Cit.* p. 184. 5. *Ibid* pp. 184, 185.
6. Schuyler Camman, *Trade through the Himalayas: The Early Attempts to open Tibet*. Princeton, 1951. p. 50.
7. Markham C.R. *Op. Cit.* p. 188.
8. *Ibid* p. 189. 9. *Ibid* p 203. 10. *Ibid* p 204. 11. *Ibid*. Fn. 2.

12. Ibid p. 186. 13. Ibid p. 52. 14. Ibid p. 13. 15. Ibid p. 206.
16. Ibid. Introduction cl iii
17. National Archives of India, New Delhi. Foreign political 12 Dec-1833 No 76. Memorandum on the conversation with Cheety .eenkaff sent on deputation to Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier.
18. Rennie, Surgeon *Bhutan and the story of the Duar War*, London, 1866 p. 160. Fn. Quoting from *Calcutta Englishman*.
19. Markham C.R. Op. Cit. pp. 37-41; 20. Ibid p. 36. 21. Ibid p. 57.
22. Cammans. Op. Cit. p. 38.
23. Bell, Charles, *Tibet Past & Present*, Oxford, 1968 p. 106.
24. Markham C.R. Op. Cit Introduction pp. lxx.
25. Turner Samuel; *Account of an Embassy to the Court of Teshoo Lama in Tibet*, London, 1800. p. 363.
26. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* LIX. Part I 189 pp. 78-79.
27. Turner Samuel, Op Cit. p 374. 28. Ibid p 376.
29. State Archives, Government of West Bengal, Bhutan Political Proceedings, Oct 1865. p. 2.
30. Ghosal, Sarat Chandra, *A History of Cooch Behar* (Translated from original Bengali) State Press, Cooch Behar, 1942 p. 420.
31. Nirmal Chandra Chaudhuri. *Bharatvarsha* (Bengali Monthly), Calcutta Agrahayan 1376 B.S.
32. Younghusband F. Op. Cit. p. 30.
33. Sarkar, Susobhan Chandra : Some Notes on the Intercourse of Bengal with the Northern Countries in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. *Bengal Past & Present*. Vol XLI, Jan-June 1931.
34. Shakabpa Tsepon W.D. *Tibet: A Political History* p. 169.
35. National Archives of India, P.C. Jun 1836 No 52.
36. Pemberton R.B. *Report on Bhutan*, Calcutta, 1839: Indian Studies 1961, p. 98.