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 Kangpur and Ghuraghat dependent on the Suhah 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 and with greater security and
confidence to come into Bengal and carry on traffic as formerly.
Placing on entire reliance on this let them act agreeably there to". (3)

These concessions were further elaborated by the treaty which
Bagle 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:—"Where-
as the trade between Bengal and Tibet was formerly very considerable
and all Hindu and Mussulman 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 voiced in friendship, being desirous of removing these
obstacles, that in 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
to themselves or by theirournastat to all places in Bengal for the
purpose of trading and selling their wares free from duty or hindrance.

"That the duty heretofore exacted at Rangpur from the Bhutan
caravans be henceforth abolished.

"That the Deb Raja shall allow all Hindu and Mussulman 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 4th June, 1775, from Cooch Behar addressed

to the Governor General, Bagle 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 Cammua 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 Pandeen Lama and the Deb Raja would accomplish it. (1) It might have been possible to secure access for Europeans when they were settled in Hindostan 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”. (4) 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 abdication 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 Chodzon. (12) Hastings had written ......... “You may even consent to relinquish the tributes 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
Blutane free from duty and vexation". This concession, Warren Hastings thought, was to be the "groundwork" of Bogle's commercial transactions in Bhutan. Bogle was asked "to build such improvements on it" as his judgement and occasion may dictate. With an unerring insight of the complications that make all the difference between success and failure the Governor General had another clear instruction. Bogle was to "discovery" how "his (Deb Rajo'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 non-politic, commercial privileges of the officials 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" (11) 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 someEARNEST 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 put up the sale of English broadcloth (14), he thought it necessary to encourage the Kadamiri, Goshala, Blutane and Tibetans to visit Calcutta in winter. These merchants would be "able to procure it at the lowest rates" and passports and safe conduct 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". (14)

In 1786 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 1835 a Zou-kaff (Subordinate Official) from Bhutan narrated—

"The Mongol Khans (Kachi?) trade a good deal at Hasa (Lhasa); they occasionally go to Rangpur in Bengal by the Phari and Pordung routes for the purchase of tither skins". (17) Surgeon
Rennie says (1865) that the trade between Bhutan and Rangpur "gradual-ly 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 Calcutta, organized a fair at Tihy which was a "great success while under his control". Subsequently Tihya 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 Cunman Schuyler, was to serve "as a commercial reconnaissance, 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 Rinchhozer. This resulted in a "revolution", which combined with the failure of Deb Juddar's (Turner's Deb Teria) 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 Government" 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" (19). 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 it 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 Bhutaneese. He believed this could never be obtained. Economically as well as militarily the policy of conquest of Bhutan would be blunderous: "two battalions, 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 Cunman Schuyler writes: "whether or not they actively influenced the English rulers of India, they expressed a point of view that was held towards
the norther states for many years to come. In fact they were the first
encouragement 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 Ashhey Eden at
Punakha, to arrive at the conclusion that for security and the Bengal Diaries
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” (15) was never lost
sight of. The Gorkhas had already blocked the “passes through Mustang
and Demjrong (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 Ambsei, Falakas,
and Jalpesh in the heart of the Bhutan diaries. He reported that if “re
stitution was made he would probably be able to induce the Deb Raja
to fulfill his agreement with Mr. Bogle and only to levy moderate
transit duties on merchandise” (14). Hamilton returned “after
obtaining 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 policy between the third Panchen Lama and Chien-Lung
is an eloquent comment on the wisely conceived plans of George Bogle.
Samuel Turner (1786) collected information about this historic meeting
from the Regent in Tashilhunpo. The Lama, in Turner’s words, took
several occasions “of representing in strongest terms the particular
unity which subsisted between the Governor-General and himself”
(15). 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 Paramgir Gosain,
the friend and companion of Bogle and Turner in Tibet—“in
the country of Hrihishan, 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

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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 Du Bysack points out that it is not known who translated the report of Penang. A translation was with Warren Hastings from whom through various channels Alexander Dalrymple obtained it and published it in the *Oriental Repository*. (16)

The possibilities inherent in the relationship between the Panchen Lama and Emperor Chien-lung and in Bogle's attempts were denied, however by the Panchen's death at Peking in 1726 followed by Bogle's in 1724.

The second mission to Tibet was revived for the second time under Samuel Turner in 1781. Turner, like Bogle in 1724, 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 Tashilhumpo 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 1724, 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 losing results of Bogle's mission to Bhutan by settling legitimate interests of Cooch Behar. As an unique event, the historian of Cooch Behar have cited the cession of tracts to Bhutan known as Ambati Fulakata and Jalpen.
in 1783. (19) The transfer of these areas had been recommended by Hamilton to induce the Deb Raja to fulfil the agreement he had conclud-
ed with Bogle. These areas belonged to the Raikan (remnants) of Bakhauhpur under Cooch Behar Raj (13). A temple dedicated to Śiva stood at Jalpesh which was built by Maharaja Pran Narayan of Cooch Behar (1621-64). A recent article seeks to trace the story of the Site at Jalpesh back to the 9th Century A.D. (14), Ashley Eden, a later British envoy to Bhutan, "entirely failed to comprehend the reason" and wrote "I am afraid on this occasion the friendship of the Bhutanese was purchased at the expense of the Bakhauhpur 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 convetempest occurred and all his work was undone" (15). Prof. Sunohba Candra Sarkar has pointed out that there was a "distinct reversal" (16) 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" (17). 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 infractions 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 is a letter from the Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier, to Government (18) is of peculiar relevance in this connection. The letter, dated 9th June 1816, 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 Lama and inhabitants of either country and though the favourable commercial treaty settled by Mr. Bogle in 1774 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 me 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 Tashi Lhunpo.”

The next mission to Bhutan, in the words of R.S. 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) Obviou­ly diplomacy on the northern borderland of India had to concern itself with the meeting of three empires rather than two.

NOTES

1. Youngusband, Francis, India and Tibet pp. 74, 25.
5. Schlagel Camman, Trade through the Himalayas The Early Attempts to open Tibet. Princeton, 1931 p. 50.