Sikkim Political Agency and the Development of British Policy in the Eastern Himalaya.

1889 - 1914

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

I, Ruth Marie Lepcha, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any degree in any other University / Institute.

This is being submitted to the North – Eastern Hill University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.

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PREFACE

Residents and Political Agents have played a crucial role in the establishment and consolidation of British paramountcy in the Indian States. Coming under a variety of designations, their functions, powers and status differed widely, depending largely on the importance, political and strategic, of the State in which they were located. By and large interwoven with the techniques of indirect rule, a few of these Residencies and Residents have in recent years received some attention in the broader studies on the making of British Policy in India. Works on specific Residencies are few: notable among these are W. S. Desai's *History of the British Residency in Burma*, and the recent *Brian Hodgson at the Kathmandu Residency* by K. L. Pradhan. However, these two and much of the other writings relate to the early years of British rule in India. Both Michael Fisher's *Indirect Rule in India. Residents and Residency System 1764 – 1857*, on their growth and functioning, and M. E. Yapp's *Strategies of British India. Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798 – 1850* on the importance of the "frontier agency system" in the development of frontier policy, cover only the Company's rule. Little, therefore is known of Residencies and Political Agencies in India under the Crown. The Sikkim Political Agency is one of the least known in India. That virtually nothing is known of its history or the ideas of the men who occupied it and shaped British policy in the region constitute a significant gap in the frontier history of the eastern Himalaya.

The present study aims at a critical analysis of the work done of the Sikkim Agency in promoting colonial interests, both commercial and political, in the eastern Himalaya from 1889 when it was established, to 1914 when it played a decisive role in the Tripartite Conference at Simla and in the resultant Simla Convention. Special attention is being paid to the ideas of the two Political Agents, John Claude White and Charles Bell, and the extent to which they helped shape British policy. It aims, incidentally to throw light on or show in what respects the Sikkim Agency differed from other Agencies or Residencies in the country. The first chapter discusses the

circumstances leading to the creation of the Agency and the establishment of British authority over the State: the various steps taken by the Political Agent, here styled as Political Officer, to reorganise the administration and raise revenues. The second deals with enforcing the provisions of the Convention of 1890 in respect of trade and the Sikkim – Tibet boundary. The addition to the functions of the Agency, when the Political Officer also became the recognized adviser to the Government of India for Tibet affairs, as a result of Curzon's Tibet policy, is the subject matter of the next chapter. The fourth chapter deals with the role of the Political Officer in bringing Bhutan into the British fold. The final chapter discusses how the ideas of the Political Officer, Charles Bell, moulded the North-East Frontier policy of the Government of India. The Epilogue while summarising the results of the findings attempts an assessment of the first two Political Officers. The Introduction, which surveys the East India Company's relations with Sikkim provides the historical background.

This work is based on documents preserved in the National Archives of India, New Delhi, the West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata and in the Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok. Contemporary and semi-contemporary materials have also been used. A select Bibliography is appended.

This work was undertaken under the supervision of Professor Imdad Hussain, and after his superannuation when he remained as joint-Supervisor, it was completed under Professor Mignonette Momin. To both of them I express my deep sense of gratitude: without their constant guidance and encouragement this work would not have been possible.

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Abbreviations Used

FPP	-	Foreign Political Proceedings
FPC	-	Foreign Political Consultations
FPAP	-	Foreign Political 'A' and Proceedings
FSEP	-	Foreign Secret 'A' Proceedings
FSEP	-	Foreign Secret Establishment Proceedings

INTRODUCTION

SIKKIM AND BRITISH INDIA: SURVEY AND RELATIONS

Sikkim until recently a tiny Himalayan Kingdom and now a state of the Indian Union, is located between $28^0 07'4"$ and $27^0 04'46"$ North Latitude and $88^0 00'58"$ and $88^0 55'25"$ East Longitude. It has an area of 7096 sq. km, and is bounded on the North by Tibet, on the East by Tibet and Bhutan and on the West by Nepal. It was, in all probability a large kingdom in former times. Ashley Eden, in 1864 noted that Sikkim though a very petty state was formerly a fair-sized country reaching from the Arun river on the west to the Taigon Pass on the East; from the borders of Tibet on the North to Kissengunj in Purneah in the South. One writer gives a picturesque account of the Kingdom:

> Tibet, Nepal, India and Bhutan all touch its borders. Here, the scenic beauty of mighty snow-capped peaks, such as the 28, 162 foot Kanchenjunga on the Nepal – Sikkim border, mingles with the romanticism of an historic past. There are huge, pine covered forests bordering terraces of rice. Sikkim's simple, sturdy and struggling people have preserved a distinct cultural and historical identity. Its villages of quaint wooden buildings hug rugged Himalayan slopes. Lights of little hamlets glitter like a myriad of glowworms in the evening. Old Buddhist monasteries perch on rocky shelves beneath the eternal snows. A mule train picks its way over the sharp rocks that pave the old trade routes to Lhasa, Tibet; for here in Sikkim, is a past living in the present.[1]

Being mountainous, it consists of a tangled series of interlocking mountain chains, rising range above range, from the south to the foot of the north-most range.

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[1] Pradyumna P. Karan and William M Jenkins, *The Himalayan Kingdoms: Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal*, Princeton, 1963, p. 56.

Most of these mountain ranges are 10,000 to 28,000 feet high. Mt. Kanchenjunga (28,140 ft) is situated in the Singli-la-range, the crest of which forms the boundary between Sikkim and Nepal. The other main mountains are Kinchingham (22,700 ft), Siniolchu (22,620 ft) and Chomioms (22,386 ft). Between these gigantic mountains are a number of passes like Chorten Nyima-la, Naku-la, Kongra-la, Chulung-la, Bom Chho-la and Sese-la.[2] These passes link northern Sikkim to Tibet. The Khungyami-la, Gora-la, Nathu-la, Jelep-la and Batan-la link eastern Sikkim with the Chumbi valley of Tibet. Nathu-la and Jelep-la are found in the Chola range and are of great strategic importance to both India and China. The Dako-la pass links south east Sikkim to Bhutan.

While the mountain passes link Sikkim, territorially the rivers contribute in defining the territorial limits of Sikkim. The Teesta, described as the 'life line', is the chief effluent river that seperates Sikkim from the present state of West Bengal. The Teesta which flows in a generally southerly direction is joined at Tsiinthang, by its main tributaries the Lachen, Lachung and Rungeet and at Ringen, it is joined by Rungnu-Chu. All these rivers run through mountainous terrain and over rapids and are therefore un-navigable.

The climate of Sikkim ranges from sub-tropical in the south to tundra in the northern parts. Most of the inhabited regions of Sikkim, however, enjoy a temperate climate with the temperature seldom exceeding 28^0C in summer or dropping below 0^0C in winter. To be precise, Sikkim enjoys a gradation of climatic types with the inner and more land-locked valleys possessing a relatively dry climate. The lower an outer Sikkim which is on the whole ravine-like, with the rivers flowing in deep gorges, has a temperate climate. In northern Sikkim the vegetation becomes much bolder and the valleys open out into wide grassy meadows such as Lachung and Yumthang. In general, the greater part of Sikkim has a climate which favours evergreen forests, these are spotted with small lakes and gifted with a large variety of avi fauna. The state enjoys five seasons viz,

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[2] See Edwin H Pascoe, *A Manual of the Geology of India and Burma*, Delhi 1950, P 318; S C Bose *Geography of the Himalaya*, New Delhi 1976, pp. 11ff.

winter, spring, summer, monsoon and autumn. The monsoon season is between June and September. The average annual temperature for most of Sikkim is around 18^0C. She also receives regular snow fall during the winters. During the monsoons the state is lashed by heavy rains that leads to landslides. Dense fogs also affect many parts of the state during the winter as well as the monsoons.

Since Sikkim is situated in the ecological zone of the lower Himalayas, the forested region of the state exhibits a diverse range of flora and fauna[3]. Owing to its altitudinal gradation the state has a wide variety of plants from tropical to temperate, to alpine and tundra. The flora of Sikkim includes the rhododendron, orchids, figs, laurel, banana, sal trees and bamboos, which are found in the lower altitudes which enjoy sub-tropical climate. In the temperate elevations above 1,500 meters, oaks, chestnuts, maples, birches, alders and magnolias grow in large numbers. In the alpine zone, vegetation like juniper, pine and firs are found. Over 424 species of medicinal plants are found in Sikkim. Similarly, Sikkim has a variety of fauna, like the snow leopard, the musk deer, the red panda, the Himalayan marmot, the barking deer, the Himalayan black bear, the Tibetan wolf, the civet cat and the yak. The avifauna of Sikkim comprises of the impeyan pheasant, the snow partridge, the snow cock, the lammergeyer, the golden eagles, quail, babblers, robins and wood peckers. However, the most beautiful birds of the state are the five species of sun-birds or honey suckers. Sikkim is also a treasure house of butterflies and moths, the number exceeds two thousand varieties.

Sikkim does not only have a variety of flora and fauna but also a variety of minerals like copper, zinc, lead, mica, coal, graphite and limestone. Deposits of copper are found at Rhenock, Dikchu, Barmiak, Rinchinpong. These minerals were not exploited during the period under review. Sikkim's wealth therefore was not derived from its mineral resources but from agriculture. Sikkim's economy remains largely

[3] J D Hooker who is considered the greatest authority on the vegetation of Sikkim, in his *Essay to the Flora Indica*, divides the country into three zones. The lowest level upto 5000 feet above the sea, he called the tropical zone, thence to 13000 feet the upper limit of tree vegetation the temperate and above to the perpetual snow line at 16000 feet the Alpine.

agrarian, based on traditional farming methods on terraced slopes. The majority of the population grows crops such as rice and maize or monsoon crops like millet, barley and buck wheat. Cardamom and potatoes are today among the main export items. Fruits like oranges, pineapples and passion fruits are grown in abundance.

Trade Routes

It was, however, not these resources, but the India-Tibet trade route that passed through Sikkim, that gave the Himalayan State its importance to the British. The formidable mountains rising out of the clouds prevented large scale trade and commerce. There were several routes from the Tibetan plateau to the plains of India through which passed pilgrims and a limited trade. One of the best known of these lay through the Kathmandu valley, its terminus being Benares. From Sikkim easily traversed passed which gave access to the Chumbi valley the comparatively low (1520 feet) and easy gradient to the Nathu La, leading directly to the core areas around Lhasa. The Kingdom occupied a commanding position on the traditional Kalimpong – Lhasa trade route. In neighbouring Bhutan the trail through the Paro valley connected the plains with the Chumbi valley and Tibet. Eastward of Bhutan lay the historic Tsona-Tawang-Assam route. Through these routes and mountain passes into Tibet, traders carried cloth, spices, grain, small manufactured goods and brought back salt, wool and often yak herds; the famed Tibetan gold dust and silver was said to constitute a considerable part of it.

People

The major communities in the state are the Lepchas, Bhutia and the Nepalese. The Lepchas[4], it is believed, are the aborigines of Sikkim. They call themselves 'Rong Kup' which means Children of the Snowy Peak. The name Lepcha is the anglicised

[4] For a study of the Lepcha, Geoffery Grover, *The Lepchas* , Their origin is still doubtful. According to the Lepcha folklore and belief, in the beginning of creation, the first primogenitors of their tribe were Fodongthing and Nazaongnyo who were created by 'Rum' or God of the Pure Snow of Kingtsoomzaongboo Choo's or Mount Kanchenjunga's pinnacle. Thereafter they were sent down to live and prosper in Mayel-Lyang which lies in the lap of Kingtsoomzaongboo Choo. Apart from the Lepcha folklore the most accepted historical theory of the origin is that they came from the East along the foot of the hills from the direction of Assam and Upper Burma. The *Gazetters of Sikkim* will also be found useful for the ethnic composition of Sikkim.

version of the Nepalese 'Lapche' said to mean 'vile speakers.' It is also suggested that 'Lepcha' refers to a certain kind of fish found in Nepal and is known for its submissive nature, very similar to the Lepcha people who are also known for their timidity. The Lepchas had their own name for the country.

The Lepchas are Mongoloid in appearance, with oblique eyes, fair in complexion and small in stature. By nature they are amiable and hospitable. As they live in the mountains, they are a hardy people, capable of walking long distances and working in very difficult conditions. They also possess an extraordinary rich zoological and botanical vocabulary of their own. They are good craftsmen and are known best for the expertise in bamboo handicrafts such as baskets, mats, and bamboo rafts and bridges. Before their conversion to Buddhism and Christianity, the Lepchas followed their own religion called 'Boongthingism' and "Munism'. Their religion was simple. They believed in the existence of 'God' whom they called 'Rum'. They also believed in spirits – both good and evil and attributed all sickness, calamity, and pestilence to the evil spirits which were to be exorcised and propitiated. Plentiful harvest, timely seasons and healthy offsprings were all considered to be the work of good spirits who were to be constantly humoured with prayers and offerings. Agriculture and hunting formed the main source of livelihood. They had a pathological dislike for riches and wealth because they believed that the devil or the evil spirits out of jealousy would harm the rich and prosperous. Therefore, they never accumulated more than their immediate needs.

The pre-colonial history of Sikkim, based on Lepcha oral tradition, states that before the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty, the Lepchas were organized into a loose type of tribal set up under elected chieftains. In the course of time a certain Turve who the Lepchas gave the title 'Punu' or king brought all the Lepcha clans under one fold. He was said to have been killed in a fight with the Limbus. Turve was succeeded by another three Punus but after the death of Tubh Athak Punu, kingship came to an end. Thereafter the Lepchas went back to their old tribal setup.

The Bhutias are a people of Tibetan origin: from 'Bhote' the Sanskrit name for Tibet. Sikkim was unknown to the Bhutias till the 11th Century. Legend has it that Khye-bum-sa the first Tibetan refugee visited Sikkim in the 14th Century in search of the Lepcha patriarch and wizard Thikung Tek to invoke his blessings for the birth of a son. A son was indeed born to him and as a sign of appreciation Khye-bum-sa returned to sign and swear a blood brotherhood treaty whereby eternal friendship was sworn between the Lepchas and the Bhutias. The Kazis are a product of this brotherhood. The establishment of the Bhutia foothold in Sikkim is generally traced to about 1641, when three Tibetan monks, namely Lhatsum Chembo, Sempath Chombo and Rigdzin, came to Sikkim to spread Mahayana Buddhism. They established the Nginmapa or 'red-hat' sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Large numbers of red hat lamas came to take refuge in Sikkim and Bhutan in the 17th Century in order to escape persecution by the Gelupa or the yellow Hat sect which under the fifth Dalai Lama had become very powerful not only in the religious sphere but in the political sphere as well. They summoned and consecrated Phuntshog Namgyal[5] as the first Buddhist Chhogyal, or King who rules according to Chho i.e. righteous law, at Yoksam in west Sikkim. The consecration of Phuntshog Namgyal established the Namgyal Dynasty that ruled Sikkim for nearly 332 years. After the consecration of Phuntshog Namgyal, large Bhutia migration took place in Sikkim and they came to call it 'Beyul Demazong' or Denzong meaning 'The Hidden Land of Rice.' Their monasteries today occupy a predominant place in their socio-cultural life. They settled in higher altitudes, thus driving the Lepchas into the forests and lower valleys. The Bhutias are tall, well built with a good physique. They have retained the Tibetan culture, dress, ornaments, language and script. The early Bhutias were traders and herdsmen. They are still known for their weaving skills, art and painting. The three lamas who consecrated Phuntshog Namgyal also fled Tibet and sought refuge in Sikkim. Of the three lamas, Lhataun Chhembo is considered to be the patron saint of Sikkim. He is said to have been responsible for the conversion of Sikkim to Buddhism. He is also

[5] The ancestors of Phuntshog Namgyal had migrated from Eastern Tibet to the Sikkim region sometime in the early 15th century

credited for having laid the foundation of the state and ushered in a period of social and religious consolidation.

The Nepalese are relatively new comers, having largely migrated from Nepal in the last two decades of the 19th century, owing to the employment opportunities given to them by the British. They came as labourers and cultivators and introduced terrace farming in the kingdom. The Nepalese community have their own tradition, culture and language. The majority of them profess Hinduism, and are stratified into a number of castes such as Bahuns, Chhetris, Newera, Mangars, Murmis, Rais, Tamangs, Gurungs, Limbus, Sarkis and Kaamis. Since the Lepchas and Bhutias preferred to settle in the higher regions which were cooler, the Nepalese therefore settled in the lower regions which were hotter. Being hardy, thrifty, persevering and enterprising they began to rise in status. Gradually they came to form the majority in the population of Sikkim.

Among the Nepalese, there is a certain section of the community who are believed to have been the contemporaries and neighbours of the early Lepchas. They call themselves 'Yakthumba' or Yak herdsmen. The Nepalese call them Limbus meaning 'archers' while the Lepchas and Bhutias call the Tsong[6]. They followed their own religion known as Kirant Mundhum which is distinct from Hinduism and Buddhism. The Limbus claim to have belonged to the Kirant or Kirat race which include the other ethnic groups of Nepal, like the Rais and Sunuwars. It is said that for over two millennium a large portion of the Eastern Himalayas had been the home of the Kirant people.[7]

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[6] The Bhutias claim that the Limbus came to Sikkim from the region formerly known as 'Tsong-Pa' valley in Tibet.

[7] In ancient times, the entire Himalayan region was known as the Kimpurusha Desha, a phrase derived from a Sanskrit term used to identify people of Kirant origin. The Kirants had also inhabited Kathmandu Valley, where they installed their own dynasty. As time passed, the Kirants, now known as the Limbus, settled mostly in the Koshi region of present day Eastern Nepal and western Sikkim. However, from about the 8th century, the areas on the northern frontier of the Kirant region came under the domination of migrant people of Tibetan origin. Later the Sikkim kings were also able to subdue the entire far-eastern part of the Kirant region, historically known as Limbuwan for at least a short period of time. The quest of the Sikkimese rulers for greater control over the eastern Himalayas led to many wars between the Limbus and the Bhutia rulers. The second threat faced by the Limbus was at the hands of the Gurkhas. After the completion of the conquest of the Kathmandu calley in 1769, the Gurkha army marched east towards the Kirant territory. The Gurkhas, after occupying the Kirant territory adopted a harsh divide and rule policy.

Political Evolution

Phuntshog Namgyal was born in 1604 at Gangtok. He claimed his descent from Minyak House[8] in Kham, Eastern Tibet. Gutu Tashe the grandson of Khye Bumsa was his grandfather. In fact Guru Tashe historically can be considered the first ruler of Sikkim as it was he who shifted his family from Chumbi to Gangtok and established the ruling house in and around Tista Valley adjoining Gangtok. Phuntshog Namgyal, after being consecrated in 1642 established his capital at Yoksam and organized a central administration. He divided the country into twelve districts or dzongs each under a Lepcha chief or dzongpon. He was assisted by a council of twelve ministers drawn from the leading Bhutia families. The Limbus and a small group of Magars recognized him as their king and offered him a nominal annual tribute in return for their internal autonomy. His son and successor Tensung Namgyal, 1670, shifted his capital from Yuksom to Rabdantse but the only change he introduced in the administration was the reduction of the number of the councilors from 12 to 8. His third marriage to a Limbu princess gave the state its present name of Sikkim or Sukhim which means 'New Home.' The marriage also led to the strengthening of ties between the Limbus and the Bhutias.

Sikkim was not free from internal troubles owing to disputes over the question of succession to the throne. With most rival claimants turning to either Tibet or Bhutan for assistance, their intervention of these countries in Sikkim became a regular feature. In the last decades of the seventeenth century and the opening years of the eighteenth such intervention had been particularly frequent. This apart, appointment of Tibetan officials to key positions in Sikkim tended to reinforce the Tibetan connection. The appointment's of a Tibetan Lama, Jigme Pao as regent in 1717 during the minority of Chogyal Gyurmel Namgyal led to marked increase of the Tibetan influence. It should be noted that the Bhutias, that is Sikkimese of Tibetan extraction, the community to which the Chogyal himself belonged, wielded considerable authority in the kingdom, occupied some of the

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They divided the Kirants into two groups – the Sampriti and the Niti. The former were those who had surrendered to the Gurkha power and cultural traditions, while the later maintained their own traditions. Thereafter the Nitis fearing persecution , migrated towards Sikkim.

[8] Claims its ancestry to the descendants of the legendary King Indrabhodhi of ancient Udayan in India.

most important positions of State. It is hardly surprising, therefore that the Bhutias should oppose the natural son, by a nun, Phuntshog Namgyal (namesake of the first ruler) as Gyurmel's successor in 1733 on the grounds of his illegitimacy. The royal treasurer, one Tamding, actually led a revolt of the Bhutias against the infant Chogyal. The Lepcha under Chandzod Karwang deeply attached to the latter opposed the protestors. The conflict ended with the Bhutia faction worsted, and the departure of Tamding to Tibet. Chandzod Karwang took over the regency.

From Tibet came an emissary, Rapden Sharpa, to mediate in Sikkim affairs; for the elevation of the Lepcha Chandzod caused a rift among the Limbus. Interestingly, Rapdu Sharpa himself became regent, and remained as such till Phuntshog Namgyal came of age. His ability to defend Sikkim against a Bhutanese invasion added to his strength. These events clearly showed that Sikkim remained faction ridden, despite the first Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyals attempts to weld together the ethnic diversity through political institutions in which all could participate and through matrimonial alliances. The Bhutia faction, with the Chogyal and its aristocracy was to remain predominant and maintained close links with Tibet.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Sikkim had to contend with aggression from the west which helped to paper over the cleavages in its polity. The rise of the Gorkha power under Prithvinarayan Shah in the Katmandu Valley led to their absorption during 1771-74 of Limbuwan, the Land of the Limbus, on Sikkim's western frontier. The Gorkha ruler soon carried out a series of campaigns against Sikkim with a view to annexing the State into his growing kingdom of Nepal. In 1788 he even succeeded in capturing Rabdantse, the then capital, forcing the Chogyal and his family to seek shelter in Tibet. Nepal's conflict with Tibet in 1792, in which the Manchu-Chinese first appear in the Himalaya, halted Gorkha adventurism in Sikkim. In the event it was Nepal's war with the East India Company that saved Sikkim from almost certain extinction.

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Restoration of territories was thus an important lever which the Company was prepared to use in order to establish close friendly relations with Sikkim. There were other reasons of political and military expediency. There were rumors that Nepal and Bhutan, separated only Sikkim, were about to conclude an alliance against the British. "British assistance to Sikkim", Alistair Lamb rightly observes, "had military as well as political objectives, not only did it promise to open a line of communication with Lhasa and keep the Gurkhas and the Bhutanese from intriguing together, but it also constituted an attack on the Gurkha flank."[12]

The Company's policy towards Sikkim enunciated during the Anglo-Gorkha war saw its fruition after its conclusion. It was then decided to "conclude an engagement with the Raja of Siccim, for defining and recording the conditions of our future connections with that State." This engagement, the Treaty of Titalia, concluded on 10 February 1817, met all that the British had wanted. By the restoration of the territory between the river Mechi and the Tista to Sikkim the British established a sound buffer between Nepal and Bhutan. Sikkim was guaranteed protection against Gorkha expansionism, and in return, the Company acquired a measure of control over her foreign relations. Sikkim undertook to return fugitives from British justice who might seek shelter in her territories and assured protection and freedom to traders from India from unjust exactions and exorbitant taxation while carrying on their business in and through Sikkim.[13] The Company thus acquired a clearly defined right to trade upto the Tibetan border through a country under its protection, "a more ready communication with Lhasa and China." Lord Hastings the Governor General considered the treaty a remarkable

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[12] *Ibid*, P.42

[13] C. U. Atchison. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and neighbouring countries*, Calcutta 1909, Vol XII, p. 322- 4; See Appendix A for full text. Two months after the signing of the Treaty, the Governor General on the recommendation of Captain Barre Latter, who had negotiated the Treaty, gave Sikkim an additional territory of the Morung, the fertile lowlands lying between the Mechi and Mahanadi rivers. This was of course a part of the policy of turning Sikkim into a buffer against Nepal. According to Latter the Company could achieve that objective by ceding to the raja the Morung, so that he could "Subsist the garrisons he must maintain for the protection of the passes" from Nepal. S. R. Rao, *India and Sikkim (1814 – 1970)* New Delhi, 1972, P. 5.

achievement, "which we never could have imposed by force of arms, from the extreme difficulty of the country."[14]

Sikkim Politics: Controlling Tibetan Influence

The goodwill engendered by the Treaty turned out in the long run to beshort lived. The injudicious handling of Sikkim's border dispute with Nepal was the first of a series of events that undermined that goodwill.[15] More serious was the acquisition of Darjeeling in 1835; not "voluntarily" given up by the Chogyal as it was made out to be but obtained through direct and indirect pressure. The bickering over compensation to Sikkim for the loss of this territory dragged on for years, and even in 1841 when a sum was decided upon, the date from when it was payable by no means lessened the bitterness. The development of Darjeeling, once the obscure and tiny settlement, Dorje Liang perched on a ridge, and the migrations from the kingdom tended to put the Raja capital in the shade. This apart, there were local irritants such as over the extradition rights that further affected the ruler's position in the eyes of his subjects.

The relations between the Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal and Dr A Campbell since the latter's appointment as Superintendent of Darjeeling in 1839, was far from cordial. In June 1846 Campbell took upon himself to address the Chogyal charging him with violation of the terms of the Treaty; in particular, of causing "vexatious delays and exactions" upon traders going to or crossing Sikkim from Darjeeling, Bhutan and Tibet[16]. Campbell also took exception to the raja's demand for the surrender of slaves from his territory who had settled in Darjeeling. The problem could, however, be sorted out because the Dewan Ilam Singh was amenable to British persuasion. It was with the appointment as Dewan after Ilam Singh's death in 1847, of the Bhutia or Tibetan Tokhang Donyer Namgyal and the ascendency of the Tibetan faction in the politics of

[14] Lamb, *op cit*, P. 43

[15] In 1827, a dispute arose between Sikkim and Nepal over a hilly tract east of the Michi River. By the terms of the Treaty Sikkim referred the matter to the Company for arbitration. On the findings of a British officer the disputed tract was assigned by the Governor General in Council to Sikkim. On an appeal subsequently by Nepal, and a reexamination of the case the Company reversed its entire decision and gave its verdict in favour of Nepal, S. R. Rao, *op cit*, P. 19, fn.62

[16] FPC 22 August 1846: No. 21; Campbell to Raja of Sikkim. 8 June

Sikkim that matters drifted from bad to worse. Related to the Chogyal by marriage (through an illegitimate daughter) the hostile Tokhang wielded considerable authority.

The Dewan had been opposed to the movement of Europeans into Sikkim. In 1848 he put a good deal of obstacle to the visit of the distinguished English naturalist Joseph Hooker. Campbell suspected that his letters to the Chogyal was intercepted by the Dewan, and concluded that no satisfactory business with Sikkim could be conducted unless he had direct access to the Chogyal. His first visit to Sikkim turned out to be a fiasco. The Dewan made every effort to prevent him from meeting the ruler, and when he finally met the Himalayan potentate it was a timid affair[17]. It seemed evident to Campbell that the Sikkimese were "woefully ignorant' and "misinformed" about the real nature of the British power in India[18]. The second visit in late 1849 in the company of Hooker proved to be a personal disaster. Campbell, and Hooker, suffered the ignominy of arrest and detention at the hands of the Sikkim authorities.[19]

The Dewan Namgyal's position in Sikkim was, however, not unchallenged. He was opposed by the Lepchas who supported the Vakil at Darjeeling, Aden Chebu Lama. The factions headed by these two were in constant intrigues; but it was the Dewan's Tibetan party that still retained its grip in Sikkimese politics. The result was the continuous virulent opposition to the British, and attempts to remove whatever influence it had in the Himalayan kingdom. Border incidents including kidnappings by the Sikkimese, all at the instigation of the Dewan became of frequent occurrence. The deterioration between Sikkim and India was largely due to the retaliation by the British on account of the Superintendent's arrest and the humiliation of the British: the compensation, which in 1846 had been raised from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 6,000 was promptly stopped and the Morung resumed. The climax was reached in March 1860 when thirteen Sikkimese raided a British village and carried off two women, an action it soon transpired

[17] FPC 15 December 1849: No. 140, *Journal of a Trip to Sikkim in 1848*
[18] Rao, *India and Sikkim*, *op cit*, pp 23 - 24
[19] See lamb, *op cit*, for an account of the entire episode, pp 94 -99, also Rao, pp 24 - 27

was the handiwork of the Dewan's relatives. Demands and threats by Campbell[20] proved of no avail, and in November that year the Superintendent himself proceeded to Sikkim with a large force to enforce his demands and exact reparation. This too proved to be a misadventure; Campbell and his troops were attacked *en route*, and though they held out for some time were ultimately forced to retreat ignominiously to Darjeeling.[21]

Both the Government of India and the authorities in London remained ambivalent: on one hand was the desire to cultivate Sikkim for a trade route to Tibet, and on the other was the need to punish her for the outrage upon an officer of the Government. In the end the need to uphold British prestige took precedence, and it was decided to dispatch a military expedition to Sikkim, as proposed by the Bengal Government. Its immediate objectives were (1) the release of captives seized by the Sikkimese in their recent attack (2) enforcement of its earlier demands for the restoration of the kidnapped British subjects (3) infliction of punishment on the Raja and (4) security against future aggression and "treachery". These were in fact what Campbell had suggested, but smarting under his 1849 humiliation he actually wanted the annexation, in part or in full, of Sikkim. This was opposed by Bengal and their list of what could be sought from the kingdom was accepted by the Government of India. The latter's instructions to Ashley Eden the Political Officer to the expedition to be commanded by Colonel J C Gawler, were clear enough: the punishment of the Chogyal was to be clear to all, the Dewan was to be dismissed and banished and another more "peaceable and justly" disposed towards the British appointed. Sikkim was to be made to enter into a treaty of friendship and alliance with the Government of India, the Treaty being signed in the presence of the Sikkim officials and British forces. In the event of the Raja and his Dewan escaping, their residences were to be destroyed. Eden was however expressly

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[20] FPP November 1860: Nos 393 – 416, Correspondence between Campbell and the Chogyal, and with Cheba Lama., 25 October 1860.

[21] *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India*. Vol 4, *North and North-Eastern Frontier Tribes*, Intelligence Branch, Army headquarters, Simla 1907, P. 40

told against action and words which could "give ground for the supposition that British rule is to be planted permanently in any part of Sikkim."[22]

From the political and military point of view Colonel Gawler's expedition was a success.[23] Gawler entered Sikkim in March 1861 with no serious opposition. The Dewan fled from Tibet the moment the British troops crossed the Tista, leaving the Raja to conclude peace with the invading force. The Treaty was signed on 28 March 1861 at Tumlong[24]. The Government of India resisted the pressure of annexation , urged upon it from several quarters since Campbell first suggested[25] it in 1850. By the Treaty India gained all that it would have obtained by annexation, but with the additional advantage of not being saddled with the responsibilities of Sikkim's administration. British control over the kingdom implicit in the treaty of 1817 was now virtually made explicit. The author of *Britain and Chinese Central Asia* not inaccurately sums up what the British had achieved:

> The Dewan was forced to flee into Tibet, though he was received here with some distinction. By a Treaty with the raja all the British requirements were met. Namgyal was never again to set foot in Sikkim; free trade routes between Sikkim and British India was assured; Sikkim was to be opened to European travelers; the Sikkim Government was to assist the British in developing trade through the country between India and Tibet, and for this purpose they were to help build roads to the Tibetan border. The Raja was not to reside in Tibet for more than three months in any one year and to devote himself more earnestly to the affairs of his state.

The Sikkim Trade Route

The treaty thus gave the British substantial benefits. On the core issues of the promotion of trade with Tibet through Sikkim Ashley Eden's report ended on an optimistic note:

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[22] FPP December 1860: No. 148, Instructions of the Government of India to Ashley Eden, Political Officer, Sikkim Expeditionary Force

[23] For details see Colonel J. G. Gawler, *Sikkim, with Hints on Mountain and Jungle Warfare*, London 1873

[24] Atchison, *Treaties*, *op cit*, Vol XII, pp 61 -66; Appendix B for text

[25] Lamb, *op cit*, P. 102

> A very considerable trade will spring up between Lassa (and) Darjeeling. The Tibetans will only be glad to exchange gold dust, musk, borax, wool and salt for English cloth, tobacco, drill, etc. and the people of Sikkim will gain as carriers of this trade, and their Government will raise considerable revenue from the transit duties.[26]

Failures to promote direct trade with Tibet in other parts of the Indo-Tibetan frontier soon gave the Sikkim route a greater importance. In 1863 one Captain E Smythe who was authorised to enter the remote regions opposite Kumaon, was stopped on the border by Tibetan officials. He was told that he could not proceed further and enter Tibet without passports obtained from Peking. At the other end of the frontier, in the Mishmi hills of Assam, the intrepid English traveler Thomas Thornville Cooper, was making similar efforts.[27] In 1867 he obtained permission from the Szechuan authorities to travel to India through Lhasa, but on the border was stopped from entering Tibetan territory. Two years later he made an attempt to enter Tibet, but with the same result. The Tibetan border guards refused to let him enter the country.

The suggestion that Tibet's friendship should be cultivated first came from Colonel John Haughton, the Commissioner of Cooch Behar, who was also incharge of the Bengal Government's relations with Bhutan. Haughton who had a leading role in the Anglo-Bhutan War (1864-65) had realized the importance of Tibet in any dealings of the Government of India with the Himalayan Kingdoms. In October 1869 he sought permission to open communications with Tibet. The Bengal Government was dismissive, as such attempts "might excite suspicious as to our motives and do more harm than good."[28] The Government of India was more receptive to the idea and

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[26] FPP May 1861: Nos. 270 -86; Eden to Bengal, 29 March.
FPAP April 1864: Nos. 133-34; also Rao, *op cit*, P. 49

[27] For details, T T Cooper, *Journal of an Overland Journey from China Towards India*, Calcutta 1869; *The Mishmi Hills*, London 1873 and *Travels of a Pioneer of Commerce*, London 1871.

[28] FPAP January 1870: Nos. 123 – 124; Bengal to Government of India, 15 November 1869. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir William Grey, thus told the Government of India, that: "These relations (between India and Tibet) are at present so satisfactory that the Government of that country (Tibet) have always, it is believed, declined to take any action in matters relating to frontier politics when applied to for its interference by its two quasi-feudatories, Sikkim and Bhutan, for the fear by so doing, it should be

Haughton accordingly submitted two specific proposals to remove the trade barriers with Tibet: (i) That Peking should be approached to remove all restrictions on the movement of merchants, British and Indian, and travellers to Tibet (ii) that the Raja (of Sikkim should obtain from Tibetan authorities information as to the duties levied by them and if there were any particular item of trade that was prohibited. This would begin communications with the Tibetans. And if the barriers were removed "a very important increase to commerce by way of Sikkim and Bhutan would take place" and "a brand of traffic (viz. in tea) of much importance to Darjeeling might be developed".[29] Some of these were followed up but there was little improvement in the situation.

The prospect of trade with Tibet had early caught the imagination of the merchants in London who had been lobbying for Government action in the matter. In April 1873, the *Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, presented a Memorial to the Secretary of State for India, the Duke of Argyll, in which they pleaded for access to Tibet. About the Sikkim route, specifically, the Memorial made a number of suggestions.[30] (1) early completion of the Calcutta-Darjeeling railway (2) the establishment of a frontier mart on the Sikkim-Tibet frontier (3) opening of consular agencies in Lhasa and Shigatse, and (4) that the British minister at Peking should endeavour to get that Government to "grant full permission to trade along the whole frontier of Tibet." The Memorial, says Alistair Lamb, pointing out its significance, "marked a decisive step in the history of British attempts to open Tibet in that it concentrated attention in England and in India on the Sikkim route, almost to the exclusion of all other ways across the Himalayan border".[31] Lamb is of course not wrong in his assessment. The Memorial had emphasized that the best commercial approach to Tibet lay through Sikkim. It was the shortest and most direct road between British territory and the Tibetan capital which had become open as a result of the Treaty of 1861,

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brought into collision with the British Government. Their reply to application from these frontier states has always been that so long as the British Government does not attempt to interfere with the frontiers of Tibet proper they have no desire to intervene."

[29] FPAP October 1870: No. 70; Haughton to Bengal, 22 July 1870.

[30] FPAP October 1873: No 134; Memorial dated 25 April 1873.

[31] Lamb, *op cit*, P. 134.

and led up to the Tibetan plateau by way of the Chumbi valley. This was a region which offered an ideal site for a trade mart and promise to be of great importance to the future of the Tibetan trade. One of the difficulties of this route, however, was its susceptibility to sudden stoppages, the precise reasons for which British officials never quite understood.[32] It was, *inter alia*, for this reason that Bengal decided to send one of its senior civilians, John Ware Edgar, on a mission to Sikkim to ascertain facts.[33]

Sikkim's consent to the proposed visit was easily obtained. The Raja or Chogyal Sidkeong Namgyal was in Darjeeling to meet the Lieutenant Governor to press for an increase to the subsidy from the Rs. 9,000 to Rs. 12,000. This the Lieutenant Governor was prepared to concede, provided the Chogyal would give assistance to British officers when they visited Sikkim, helped them in opening and developing trade with Tibet and keep the Government of India informed of what went on beyond his northern frontier. These were not unreasonable conditions and Sidkeong Namgyal was a much more amenable personage than his pro-Tibetan predecessor.

The Superintendent of Darjeeling, the highly regarded John Ware Edgar was deputed to Sikkim with instructions to acquaint himself with:

> The present state of things there (the Sikkim – Tibet frontier) – the actual condition, extent and prospects of trade with Tibet – the best line for the road to take, and the advisability of opening one – and all the matters likely to enable the Government to act with certainty on this important question[34]

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[32] *Ibid*, Lamb suggests, p. 136, that this was the result of anti-Nepali demonstrations, in 1871, in Lhasa and Nepal's reaction to these: "In the following year (1872) the Amban helped the regent prepare fortification along the Nepalese border, and this martial preparation produced the inevitable reaction in Kathmandu, whereby in March 1873 the arsenals were working day and night. By then the crisis had progressed almost to the point of war. The Dalai Lama kept the Nepalese resident waiting for several hours when that official made a courtesy call on the Titular head of the Tibetan State. Sir Jang Bahadur broke off all relations with Tibet, withdrew the Resident and closed the Nepalese frontier to Tibetan traders. The Tibetans, in the belief that the Indian Government stood behind Sir Jang Bahadur, then stopped all trade on the Sikkim – Tibet border."

[33] FPAP October 1873; No. 492; Bengal to Government of India, 17 June.

[34] J Ware Edgar, *Report on a visit to the Sikkim and Tibetan Frontier*, Calcutta, 1874, P. 4

Edgar entered Sikkim in October 1873.[35] He visited the passes into the Chumbi valley and held parleys with Tibetan officials and even the banished ex-Dewan Namgyal. The Phari Dzongpon, the leading Tibetan official he met and who had received him cordially, would, however, not allow Edgar to set foot on Tibetan soil. Worse still, the Amban at Lhasa, on learning Edgar's visit to Sikkim and to the borders of Tibet, remonstrated with the Maharaja. His letter of warning to the latter brings out not only China's, and thereby Tibet's, policy of exclusion, but also its attempts to reassert its authority over Sikkim. It reads:

> Your state of Sikkim borders on Tibet. You know what is in our minds, and what our policy is, you are bound to prevent the peling (English) sahibs from crossing the frontier; yet it is entirely through your action in making the roads for the sahibs through Sikkim that they are going to make the projected attempt.[36]
>
> If you continue to behave in this manner it will not be well with you.

Edgar made no attempt to cross the frontier and returned with the impression that Tibet and Tibetan trade had to be approached through Imperial China.

The report he submitted on his return to Darjeeling in December contained a number of suggestions, the first and most important being based on this impression.[37] This was that the British minister in Peking should obtain from the Chinese Foreign office a promise that the obstacles in the way of Indian traders entering Tibet could be removed. He even suggested that such an undertaking could take the form of an edict from the Chinese Emperor, as an "expression of the Emperor's disavowal of the interference of his representative at Lhasa". Next, that without showing undue eagerness British officials should waste no opportunity in cultivating his friendship of the Tibetan officials; a trade mart should be established on the Sikkim – Tibet border. Finally,

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[35] Details in *Ibid*.
[36] Quoted in *Ibid*, also Rao, Sikkim, *op cit*, P. 58
[37] *Ibid*.

referring to the Sikkim – Tibet border road Edgar said when completed "friendly relations with Tibet and a trade singularly advantageous to both countries would follow almost of themselves." He expressed surprise that action had not been taken on it since the treaty of 1861.

As with all reports and recommendations in the past Edgar's report was endlessly discussed and noted to and fro between Bengal and the Government of India. The British minister in Peking was written to on the need to approach the Emperor, which he promptly shot down as inexpedient. Even the Government of India was now rather lukewarm towards the road, a far cry from the position it had taken in 1861, that so long as Tibetan and Chinese opposition to opening up Tibet to British trade remained, there was no sense in prosecuting the road project. There the matter virtually remained for another decade. The Government of India conscious of the ignorance of the conditions in Tibet and the temper of lay and monastic officials decided to overcome this shortcoming by other means. The dispatch of Sarat Chandra Das to Tashilhunpo, the seat of the Panchen Lama was one such attempt. Not that opportunities were wanting. The Chefoo Convention[38] of 1876 contained a separate Article by which the Chinese agreed to grant passports for a British commercial, political and scientific mission from British India into Tibet. The Tibetans who came to know of this Article from the Amban were alarmed but the British never followed it up.

The Abortive Macaulay Mission

In 1883 trade with Tibet once again suddenly stopped[39]. The Bengal Government after obtaining the approval of the Government of India, sent its Financial Secretary, Colman Macaulay, on a mission to find out what had happened. Apart from going into this Macaulay was to enquire into the possibility of a direct or indirect route through The

[38] Lamb *op cit*, pp 145ff; Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, London 1962, p. 199. In 1874 a British exploring party crossed the Burma – Yunan frontier to examine the prospects of trade. The following year one of its members H R Margery was murdered by tribesmen, but the local Yunnan administration was strongly suspected of complicity. In the negotiations at Chefoo with the Chinese to prevent similar outrages in the future, the outcome of which was the Chefoo Convention, 1876. Care was taken to insert a separate article relating to Tibet, but it only in 1886, as will be seen, that it was ratified.

[39] See Rao, *Sikkim*, *op cit*, P. 69, n 13 for reasons for the stoppage of trade.

Lachan Valleey into the Tsang province, south of Lhasa, noted for its superior quality of wool. For this he was to try to get in touch with officials of the Tashi Lhumpo monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lama at Shigatse in Tsang.

Macaulay accompanied by Saral Chandra Das arrived in Sikkim in October 1884. He met Chogyal Thothab Namgyal. But could elicit no information about the trade stoppage; rather he was told that trade had resumed that month itself. In the following month, on 8 November, he met the Dzongpon of Khambajong, but in Sikkimese territory. Macaulay was received cordially, just as Edgar was received by the Phari Dzongpon, but the Khamba official was more communicative. What he told Macaulay was in effect what the Phasri Dzongpon conveyed to Edgar eleven years earlier; that China was entirely responsible for Tibet's isolation. The monks for fear of losing their spiritual influence and commercial monopolies had endorsed Peking's directive. There was however, a lay faction which would welcome closer relations with the British. Many Tibetans had lately came to appreciate British goods and would welcome an increase in trade. And so, if the Indian Government could obtain an order from the Chinese Emperor expressing a wish for an improvement in the conditions of the Indo – Tibetan trade, then he, the Dzongpon, would cooperate with Macaulay and do his best to promote trade. Until then he was obliged as a Tibetan official to oppose the British officials entry into Tibet or to endeavours at prosecuting trade[40].

So far as Macaulay was concerned his mission to Sikkim was an eminent success. He appears to have been much impressed by the Khamba Dzongpon, especially since he was instrumental in Macaulay's exchange of letters with the Tashi Lhumpo authorities, even if nothing came out of this. From his dealings with the Tibetan official Macaulay came back with the impression that the people of Tibet would welcome the prospect of trade with the British. His lengthy report[41] on his mission recorded, as did

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[40] Colman Macaulay, *Report on a Mission to Sikkim and Tibetan Frontier*, Calcutta, 1885, pp. 43ff; also Lamb, *op cit*, pp 155ff; and FSEP May 1885: Nos. 752, Memorandum on "British Relations with Tibet", by Macaulay.

[41] Macaulay, *Report*, *op cit*, pp. 57ff.

Edgar after his visit to Sikkim, all this in some detail, though in tone and optimism it far exceeded the level-headed Edgars's. The commercial advantages would be great he emphasized. The import of India tea into Tibet on which the Darjeeling and 'Dooars' companies had set such importance, would sweep the Chinese product off the market. There would be growing demands for English broadcloth, piece goods, heffield cutlery and Indian indigo would in turn bring in Tibetan gold – "there appears to be little doubt that gold is really plentiful", and wool, the quantity for export "is known to be enormous". All that was necessary was to develop the route through the Lachen valley in northern Sikkim and through the Chumbi valley for British goods to enter Shigatse and ultimately Lhasa. It was the Chinese and the entrenched monks who were the obstacles. But the monks could be won over by bribing the great Geluka monasteries of Sera, Drupung and Ganden, who "represent the national party in permanent opposition to the Chinese" and would be glad to see a development which would inevitably lead to the decline of Chinese influence in Tibet.[42]

Macaulay's recommendation was simple enough: Chinese permission, in Peking, should be obtained for a mission to Lhasa. It would confer with the Amban and Tibetan officials about the freedom of Indian traders into Tibet and the removal of trade blocks on the Darjeeling – Sikkim – Tibet route. If the Chinese were reluctant to permit a mission to Lhasa, as feared by the Khamba Dzungpon, it should only aim at Shigatse or Tashilhunpo monastery.[43]

Bengal's Lieutenant Governor, Sir Rivers Thompson, endorsed Macaulay's recommendations,[44] but not quite the Viceroy who was not so easily to be persuaded. Lord Dufferin's hands were full. The Afghan situation was entering into a dangerous phase[45]. And in Burma, the Bombay- Burma Trading Corporation was exerting pressure

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[42] *Ibid*
[43] *Ibid*
[44] FSEP May 1885: No 75; Minute by Sir Rivers Thompson, 19 February
[45] The crisis in Afghanistan began with the advance of the Russians into Afghan territory, terminating in the defeat of the Afghans at Panjdeh, a small town which was claimed by the Russians. The Panjdeh incident almost led to war between Russia and England, but was resolved, through the mediation of the Danish

on his Government for action against Thibaw: it was ultimately to lead to the third and final Anglo – Burmese war and the annexation of Upper Burma, an event that was to have a decisive impact on Macaulay's scheme. Dufferin in short was not prepared to risk confrontation with the Chinese over such a small matter as trade across the Himalaya.

Dufferin apart, the British legation in Peking too were averse to Macaulay's ideas. The *Charge d' affaires* was convinced that the Chinese would not relent and it would be unwise to press the matter as the Tibet trade was "at best a poor trade with no prospect of increase."[46] In England there was misgivings among an important section of the public after the *Times* published accounts of Macaulay's Sikkim visit. A question was asked in Parliament whether the Government of India was preparing to "throw opium" into Tibet.[47] As if upon cue, the Society for its suppression at once set upon the question expressing abhorrence at the very idea of close British relations with the Tibetan Lamas. The Secretary of the Society wrote to the *Times* saying that no European should be proud of Macaulay's attempt "to curry favour with the Tibetan Buddhists by pretending that the British Queen and people do not heartily disbelieve and repudiate the imposture of the re-incarnate Lamas."[48]

Understandably, Macaulay had support among the merchants of England. The Drewsbury Chamber of Commerce petitioned the Foreign Secretary in May 1885 to expedite the opening of the Tibetan markets to British commerce. It would help alleviate, they said, "the depression in trade which has now so long existed", by obtaining in Tibet an outlet for Britsih manufacturers in return for Tibetan wool and gold. And just as Macaulay had recommended it, asked for immediate negotiations in Peking on the

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King who awarded the disputed land to Russia. This led the British to cultivate the friendship of the Amir of Afghanistan with a view to turning his country into a buffer against further Russian advance towards India. This position was formalized by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. See for example, C. Collin Davies, *Problem of the North – West Frontier 1890 – 1908*, Cambridge 1932.

[46] Quoted in Lamb, *op cit*, P. 159

[47] *Ibid*

[48] *Ibid.*

subject.[49] This was followed by similar petitions from the Manchester and Birmingham Chambers of Commerce.

While all this was going on Colman Macaulay arrived in England on furlough. On 15 July 1885 he submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Randolph Churchill, drawing his attention to the advantages of a mission to Tibet through Sikkim.[50] His vision had now broadened enough to embrace the eastern Central Asia: "Darjeeling (is) the natural outlet for the trade of Tibet and South Mongolia", and a mission to Tibet would provide an opportunity for scientific research of much value and there would be enormous political advantages from friendship with "the two great pontiffs* of the Buddhist Church, who exercise boundless influence over the tribes of Central Asia – an influence so great that the present dynasty of China has had to conciliate it in order to secure its own existence. The time had passed, Macaulay's memorandum went on to say, for waiting "till the wall of Chinese obstruction should fall as fell the walls of Jericho."[51] His idea was that a special envoy should proceed to Peking to obtain passports for a British mission to Lhasa. To clinch his arguments Macaulay referred to a reported desire of China for an alliance with the British as an additional reason for attempting to open Tibet.

> Our political influence in Central Asia would receive an enormous accession if, all misunderstanding and jealousy being removed and British envoy and the Chinese Imperial Commissioner were to meet at the Court of the Dalai Lama on cordial terms as representatives of the two great Empires of Asia in alliance.[52]

Such a grandiose project at once appealed to the imagination of Randolph Churchill. He agreed to send Macaulay to Peking for the necessary passports and thence on the mission to Lhasa through Sikkim.

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[49] *Ibid.*

[50] FSEP October 1885. Nos 1 – 23; Memorandum by Macaulay for Lord Randolph Churchill, 15 July

* The conversion of the Mongols was the work of the Yellow Hat or Gelukpon headed by the Dalai Lama. The Mongol Church is therefore modeled on the Gelukpon and is headed by the Jetsundamba Khutukhta.

[51] See Ram Rahul, *Politics of Central Asia*, Delhi 1973, pp 99 - 103

[52] *Ibid*

Macaulay, accompanied by Sarat Chandra Das, arrived in Peking on 9 October 1885. Contrary to what he had persuaded himself to believe, he found the Chinese not just unenthusiastic but positively opposed to the proposed mission. Even before Macaulay left the English shores the Chinese got to know, again from the English press, what was on foot, and were worried. It was only after a good deal of persuasion and wrangling that they issued the passports and agreed to send instructions to their Amban at Lhasa. Having obtained the necessary papers Macaulay was back in India and in no time set himself on organising his mission. Although he was advised by the British Legation in Peking to limit the size of the mission if Tibetan fears were not to be aroused, Macaulay in early 1886 assembled a huge force* at Darjeeling. Here it was destined to remain for long and ultimately terminate.

In Calcutta the Viceroy Lord Dufferin was in no hurry to propel it forward. In the winter of Macaulay's return the annexation of Upper Burma was well under way, and in January 1886 its completion was officially announced. With mounting criticism of his Burma policy Dufferin was hardly likely to risk a war in the difficult terrain of the Himalaya such as would have been the inevitable result of Tibetan opposition. For it was now clear, as Das learnt in Peking and as subsequently confirmed by the British Legation, that the mission would be stopped at the Tibetan frontier. When therefore the Amban was recalled to Peking the Viceroy took advantage of it to suggest that Macaulay wait till a new Amban had taken his post at Lhasa.[54] While the mission idled at Darjeeling the Chinese became extremely uneasy. Burma had been annexed and a large British force was in Darjeeling poised for an advance into Tibet. The Viceroy of Szechuan province, who was responsible to Peking for Tibet affairs, was only just prevented from sending an army to Lhasa for its defence when the new Amban reported to Peking that if the mission entered Tibet "trouble will certainly ensue." The Chinese

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* It included, apart from Macaualay as Chief Envoy by A. W, Paul as Secretary, Colonel Tanner as Surveyor, Dr. Oldham as Geologist, Dr. Leaky as Medical Officer, Warry of the China Consular Service as Chinese interpreter, Sarat Das as Tibetan Interpreter and two Captains in command of an escort of three hundred sepoys. In May the number of sepoys was reduced to fifty eight because of Commissariat difficulties.

[54] For details of the circumstances of the abandonment of the Mission, see *Ibid,* Chapter VI, pp 143 – 173.

Foreign Office sought its postponement. The Chinese, realizing the predicament of the British, next pressed for the cancellation of the Separate Article of the Chefoo Convention. Dufferin, anxious to obtain Chinese recognition of his annexation of Burma decided as a *quid pro quo* the abandonment of the mission. With an army tied down expensively in Burma, and the situation in Afghanistan still critical, there was every need to avoid military commitments in the Himalaya. He therefore gave up the mission for a settlement in Burma. At any rate he was never enthusiastic about the mission, considering that, it "had been imposed upon" him.[55]

The agreement on 24 July 1886 with the Chinese Foreign Office over Article IV of the Chefoo Convention between Bhutan and China "relative to Burma and Thibet", which was the outcome of the changed situation, reads:

> In as much as enquiry into the circumstances by the Chinese Government has shown the existence of many obstacles to the Mission to Thibet provided for in the Separate Article of the Chefoo Agreement, England consents to countermand the Mission forthwith.
>
> With regard to the desire of the British Government to consider arrangements for further trade between India and Thibet, it will be the duty of the Chinese Government, after careful enquiry into circumstances, to adopt measures to exhort and encourage the people with a view to the promotion and development of trade. Should it be practicable, the Chinese Government shall then proceed carefully to consider Trade Regulations; but if insuperable obstacles should be found to exist, the British Government will not press the matter unduly.[56]

"This amounted to", observes Lamb, "a total abandonment of British hopes for the opening of Tibet."[57] The India Office, which at this time exerted enormous pressure on Dufferin to proceed with the mission, now agreed with the Viceroy that the best had

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[55] See A C Lyall, T*he Life of the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava*, London 1905, Vol II, pp 132 – 6; C. E. D Black, *The Marquess of Dufferin and Ava*, London 1903, P. 261.

[56] Quoted in Lamb, *op cit*, P. 169; also Dorothy Woodman, *Burma op cit*, pp 266 - 274

[57] *Ibid*; Lamb goes on to say: "The Separate Article had obliged the Chinese to assist the British in getting a mission through to Lhasa; but it had in no way bound the British to deal with Tibet exclusively through China; indeed it had recognized the British right to establish direct diplomatic relations with the Tibetans. The Convention of 1886, however, removed all ambiguity on this question. In future all British negotiations about Tibet were to be carried on through China. Among the consequences of this was the end to any hope of political results from British contacts with Tashi Lhumpo."

been achieved by the Agreement. By sacrificing the mission and what would have been doubtful gains in Tibet, they had now obtained "the formal recognition of the Chinese Government to the establishment of British rule in Upper Burmah"; complete freedom of action in dealing with any territorial claims on the Burmese border which China may advance in the future"; and "a guarantee for the settlement of the frontier trade between Burma and China, and the opening of S. W. China to our Commerce."[58] Not unnaturally England's commercial community was dismayed over the failure of the Macaulay mission. The Foreign and India Office continued to receive petitions on the subject, from the Chambers of Commerce of Halifax, Hudderfield, London and Manchester.[59]

The failure of the Macaulay mission has been variously interpreted: from Macaulay's rather poor diplomatic skills and failure to understand the real issues involved, to the shift of British interests to Yunnan and Dufferin's bargain with the Chinese. What was overlooked was Sikkim's internal situation, the country through which the trade route lay.

[58] *Ibid*, pp. 169 - 70
[59] *Ibid*