Chapter Two

THE RULE OF BHIM SEN THAPA

Nepal after the War Era of Recovery

Defeat in the war could not daunt Nepal, nor its humiliation subdue her spirit. She smarted under the yoke of the Treaty, by which the British seized one-third of her territory, and sought to destroy her martial spirit, closing for ever her career of military expansion. After the war, she entered upon an era of consolidation and progress, and became ere long as strong and formidable as before the war. This splendid recovery of her power was due mainly to Bhim Sen Thapa, one of Nepal’s greatest statesmen, able, vigorous, farsighted and ambitious, who ruled the state in almost regal sway for more than three decades.

(1)

Assuming power in 1804 as Minister, he continued to rule Nepal with iron hand till 1837, when he was deposed, and two years after, under tragic circumstances, obliged to commit suicide. Between 1804 and 1814 he had carried the

(1) Chittaranjan Nepali holds that Bhim Sen became Mukhtiyar (Minister) in 1806, Bhimsen Thapa Ra Tatkalin Nepal (Nepali, Kathmandu, 2013 V.S.) 3-4.
boundaries of Nepal to their greatest-ever extent and had built up an army which gave the British arms their toughest ever trial. His task after the war was difficult; for he had to keep up the morale of the state, especially that of its army, wrecked by the recent war. He had to restrain the restlessness of the army, for the times had changed, and the plundering raids and armed aggressions of the pre-war era, were no longer feasible. He had to reconcile the Nepalese to the new situation arising out of the war, namely, the permanent political relation with the British, their deadliest enemies.

**British Policy after the War: Policy of Reconciliation**

Peace with Nepal was a welcome relief for the British Government when the Marathas and the Pindaris were showing signs of imminent hostility and the attitude of the Sikhs called for keenest vigilance. Never before had the British

---

(2) Most of the conquests to the west were effected by Kaji Amar Singh Thapa, the greatest of the Gurkha generals. Bhim Sen was a warm advocate of this expansive policy. S.V. Gyenvali, *Amar Singh Thapa* (*Nepali, Darjiling, 2000 V.S.*).

(3) For the life of Bhim Sen see C. Nepali, n. 1.

suffered so much physical and moral injury as during this war. They learnt how arduous a campaign in Nepal could be; what an ordeal it was to subdue Nepal by force; and what a patriotic and martial people the Nepalese were.

The immediate aim of the British government was to soothe the soreness of Nepal's defeat by conciliation and scrupulous non-interference in her domestic affairs. A British Resident was maintained at Kathmandu primarily to effectuate the policy of reconciling this overbearing, proud

---

(5) East India Company Finances and Nepalese War; Correspondence of Lord Moira, Eggerton and Edmonstone, Cleveland Public Library, Ohio, U.S.A., W2 091.92 Ba 77 L2, National Archives of India (in Microfilms).

Metcalfe wrote to Jenkins, "After a long and inglorious struggle, we have at length by superiority of numbers, the protection of artillery, and length of purse, gained considerable success." Quoted in Thompson, Life of Lord Metcalfe (London, 1937) 163-4.

In a Memorandum to Lord Hastings, Metcalfe expressed great concern over the moral damage wrought by the Nepal War on the British military prestige. "In this war," Metcalfe wrote, "... we have had numbers on our side and skill and bravery on the side of our enemy." Metcalfe to Hastings, January 1815, quoted in Ibid., 192.

(6) Metcalfe noted, "we never had an enemy to contend with in India so formidable as our present enemy. None other ever displayed so much bravery in action or so much system, skill and conduct, so much prudent caution, and so much well-timed confidence." Quoted in J.W. Kaye, Life and Correspondence of Charles, Lord Metcalfe (London, 1858) 1, 296.

(7) Immediately after the peace, Captain Boileau was sent to Kathmandu as a locum tenens. He was shortly relieved by Hon'ble Edward Gardner, the first British Resident at Kathmandu after the war.
and sulky enemy to the political relations with the British Government. The ultimate object was to gradually transform Nepal to a friendly neighbour or, at the least, a peaceful one. The Resident was asked to avoid "all future causes of misunderstanding," and to maintain a spirit of conciliation and prudence in dealing with the Nepal Durbar, with a view to increasing its confidence in the British government's sincere goodwill and friendliness to the state of Nepal. He had to disabuse the Nepalese of their fear of acquisitive designs of the British in Nepal, and to convince them that the British government had no interest in meddling in the internal affairs of their state so long as they honoured the Treaty of Segowlee and remained peaceful. This policy of conciliation and non-interference, coupled with Resident Gardner's firmness, tact, prudence and moderation, contributed greatly to the gradual establishment of stable and peaceful relations between the two states in the subsequent period.

The political situation in India too suggested the wisdom of such a soft-pedaling policy towards Nepal. The British hands were full with the wars against the Marathas and the Pindaris. Nepal exploited the situation and made

---

(8) S.C., 4 May 1816, 69-70; Major Ross of Bladenburg, The Marquess of Hastings (Oxford, 1900) 77.
earnest bids to rally these powers against the British. The British were aware of Nepalese intrigues with these powers, but they winked at these; so they did the many instances of evasion, covert hostility and extreme suspicion and distrust which marked the attitude of Nepal towards the Residency immediately after the war. The British government regarded these as the natural feelings of a patriotic and brave people who needed time to reconcile themselves to defeat. The Government were anxious to avoid another war with Nepal at such a time. The Resident was clearly told that:

The Government have no motives for reducing the Nepal power and resources below the present state, when many powerful considerations suggest the expediency of avoiding a war with that people, however justly provoked. (10)

In keeping with this conciliatory policy, the British returned to Nepal the Eastern Tarai between the rivers Kosi


(10) S.C., 19 December 1816, 29; 11 May 1816, 32.

"In the present state of things, it would be obviously inexpedient even if the proofs were complete to raise any question with the Government of Nepal which would interrupt the good understanding between two governments, and which it is so essential to maintain while all our forces are employed on a distant service." Government to Gardner, 13 October 1817, N.R., Vol.1.
and Repti, as a "gratuitous concession," and as a friendly gesture.

Bhim Sen's Policy

The war convinced Bhim Sen, the all-powerful minister, of the strength of the British, as also of the vision of retaining peaceful relations with them, "a power that crushed thrones like potsherds." He was keen on plugging the sources of discord with the British, for he feared that the latter would exploit these as means to entangle his government in interminable and dangerous political complications. These complications, he further feared, might serve as excuses for their armed intervention. Both Bhim Sen and the British were anxious to resolve the disputes over the ill-defined boundaries of the two states, and those of Nepal and Sikkim, now a protectorate of the British Government. Matters as the surrender of fugitive criminals and border crimes were settled.

---

(11) The whole of the Gurkha possessions below the hills, extending on the west from the River Gogra to the British district of Gorkhpuur on the east, and bounded on the south by the Nawab Vazir's possessions and the District of Khayragarh, and on the north by the hills, was ceded to the Nawab Vazir to pay off the loan he had given to the Company for the prosecution of the war. C. U. Aitchison, Treaties, Engagements and Sandads (Calcutta, 1909) I, 155-6; Hafral Vamsavali, 172.

(12) Oldfield, H., Sketches from Nepal (London, 1880) I, 299

(15) FELs, Vol. 198, 192-6, 206-17.
likewise. In all these, the moderation and conciliatory
cordiality of the British Government were as much in evidence
as the sagacity and pacific policy of the able Minister of
Nepal.

Policy of exclusion and non-intercourse

The policy of Bhim Sen was peaceful but not friendly,
nor was it free from distrust and suspicion. He maintained a
consistent attitude of jealous exclusion of the British from
the internal affairs of Nepal, and confined their unwelcome
political intercourse to rigidly defined and closely guarded
limits. This seemed to him the only means to safeguard
Nepal's political integrity and independence from that
scheming power, which before his eyes had reduced and weakened
the Indian powers like Mysore, the Marhattas, Hyderabad and
Oudh, as much by arms as by subtle diplomacy. His policy was
narrow, but it seemed to him the only insurance against
British ascendancy in Nepal which, he feared, would inevitably
follow closer intercourse with them. "His own efforts were
henceforth confined to rendering our [British] victory over
Nepal as little productive as possible of results."

(14) P.C., 29 April 1826, 30; 27 January 1826, 41;
28 May 1830, 21; 26, 31; 13 May 1831, 56; Rukka of the King

(15) Oldfield, n. 12, 298-9.

(16) W. Hunter, Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson, British
Resident at the Court of Nepal (London, 1896) 100.
The Position of the British Resident

The Resident was distrusted as the arm of British imperialism and the artery of British influence, a permanent symbol of Nepal's disgrace at the hands of the British. Intercourse with him was, hence, rigidly restricted to occasional official matters alone, conducted through the Minister personally or through his trusted agents. Being closely watched in all his movements by guards placed around the Residency, with no right of moving beyond a fixed distance, and deprived of any kind of social relations with anybody, he was virtually a parish, kept under a galling and perpetual surveillance. No occasion was spared to make him conscious that his existence in Nepal was on sufferance, and that nothing would the Nepalese like more than his expulsion, if they could do it. Bhim Sen's constant concern was to prevent the British Resident from assuming any form of influence, direct or indirect, in the Court of Nepal. He was convinced that a free intercourse between the Resident and various parties in the Court would lead to intrigues against his undisputed sway on the Nepalese government. The Resident was prevented from knowing the happenings in the Court and the

(17) In 1816 the party jealous of Bhim Sen solicited Resident Gardner's help to depose Bhim Sen from power. Gardener refused to intervene, knowing full well that his intervention was certain to gain him some political influence in the Durbar. S.C., 28 December 1816. 27.
sentiments of the nobles, let alone those of the general people. He was not allowed to go even a few miles beyond the capital itself, for there was a deep-seated suspicion in Nepal that once the country was open to the prying eyes of the British Resident, it would lose its independence. While the Nepalese were liberally given passports by the Resident to move anywhere they pleased in India, strong guards dogged the Resident when he went out, lest he went beyond the rigidly enforced limits. If the Resident urged for waiving this galling restriction on his movement, he was told that China, to whom Nepal was a tributary, might (18) take umbrage. The Indian merchants at Kathmandu were prevented from having any intercourse with the Resident, lest they acted as his spies. In every overture of the British government for closer economic and political relations, Bhim Sen discerned some devious scheme of a dangerous and encroaching neighbour, out to conquer and annex his country. Naturally he kept warm the people's prejudices against the British Resident, leading them to view his virtual imprisonment as absolutely needed for saving Nepal from the fate of the Indian States below. In short, a feeling of jealousy and

(18) This make-believe of Chinese wrath was deliberately kept up ever since to prevent the Europeans from going to the interior of the country. P.C., 12 February 1833, 160.
suspicion influenced "every look and thought" of the Durbar towards the British Government.

The British government gradually reconciled themselves to this distrustful policy of Bhim Sen; and the first two Residents' attitude to this policy was one of grumbling acquiescence. Gardner, with his suavity, tact and prudence, put up with the series of provocations, indignities and personal irritations caused to him by the Durbar. He made no attempts to press or persuade Bhim Sen to change this policy. "He preserved an attitude of benevolent non-interference and abstained from raising any new questions." His successor, Maddock, too followed in his footsteps. Although he was treated by the Durbar with greater reserve, he "felt neither anxious nor made any effort to diminish the distance which

(19) Resident to Government, 20 June 1832, P.C., 27 August 1832, 18; same to same, 18 February 1833, S.C., 5 March 1833, 24; Campbell's Report, 24 July 1837, P.C., 18 September 1837, 69-72; Oldfield, n. 11, 299-302.

While the maintenance of the British Resident at Kathmandu was deemed as a matter of "highest importance" by the British, the Nepalese apprehended this as the first step to the introduction of the British subsidiary forces in Nepal and as paving the way to the gradual ascendancy of the British. The bitterness of Bhim Sen’s feelings and his great dread of the British is noted in an undated letter quoted in Nepali, n. 1, 319-21.

(20) S.C., 4 May 1816, 69-70; 11 May 1816, 32-3.

(21) Hunter, n. 16, 62-3. "His Gardner's business was to do nothing and he and Bhim Sen were-like two estimable augurs without a wink or a betraying smile." Ibid.
the Court seemed desirous to preserve" with him. Nonchalantly he suffered the Durbar's indifference, inattention and rudeness towards him. The British government found no legitimate ground to remonstrate against the policy of exclusion so long as it bore only a spirit of aloofness and not open hostility.

Nepal and the Indian States

While jealous exclusion was the settled policy regarding the British, Bhim Sen kept up lively interest in their activities in India. He maintained close relations with the various Indian powers, with a view to following their proceedings with the British government. This was expressive of an eagerness to exploit the disaffection of the Indian powers towards the British government. It was a policy of waiting upon events; and the Nepalese records bear out that he made many futile attempts to rally the Indian powers against the British in India. In the Courts of the Mughals and the Sikhs agents were maintained and tried emissaries were sent annually to various parts of India to report on the activities of the British government and the state of feeling

(22) Resident to Government, 2 December 1832; P.C., 12 February 1833, 160. Maddock noted: "... though surprised at the want of courtesy and apparent inattention with which I was treated, I let the matter unnoticed in the hope that by studiously avoiding all intercourse with the people ... I should in time remove the suspicions to which my appointment seemed to have given rise." Ibid.
among the various Indian powers.

The British could not object to Nepal's having such intercourse with the Indian powers, for the Treaty of Segowlee provided no injunction against it. They knew that the Indian powers were too disunited and the Nepalese projects of alliance too amorphous for success. These activities were indicative of Nepal's restlessness and needed no further step than keen vigilance on the part of the British Government.

British attitude to Bhim Sen's Rule

The primary interest of the British was in stable government in Nepal, which would restrain the turbulence of its army, so that the long common Indo-Nepalese frontier would rest in peace. Bhim Sen had set up such an administration. The general spirit of his rule after 1820 was pacific. He avoided open hostility and conflict with the British, for he knew that single-handed Nepal could not match them in arms; and his attempts at rallying the Indian States against them had borne no fruit. In his later days, particularly, he realised that it was futile to snipe at the British, and

(23) S.C., 14 October 1829, 23. In 1820 Bhim Sen appealed to all the Indian States to rise against the British. A stirring poem composed by Beninidhi, the Nepalese Court poet, was circulated in various Indian States. Nepali, n. 1, 152-9, 175-81, 285. During the Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) Nepal made an overture to the Burmese for alliance against the British. Government to Resident, 4 February 1824, 30 April 1824, 24 June 1824, N.R., Vol.II. See also Sanskrit Sandesh (Nepali) Anke 9.
that aloofness was a safer policy than open provocations. In fact, in 1820 Gardner noted that the feeling of distrust and suspicion "appear to have been dismissed from the mind of the administration." In 1829, Hodgson, the Acting Resident, expressed the same views. His firm administration came gradually to be looked upon by the British as not only the best for his country but as the strongest bulwark of stable relations between the two governments. Resident Gardner wrote,

I consider great credit is due to him [Bhim Sen] for the manner in which he has generally administered the state, whereby a system of good order and tranquillity prevails such as is very uncommon in India; and every matter of importance between the two governments being at present at rest." (25)

In short, the British policy at the time when Gardner retired (1829) was maintenance of peaceful relations with Nepal by conciliatory cordiality; non-intervention in her domestic affairs; and reliance on Bhim Sen's rule as the surest insurance of peaceful and stable relations.

---

(24) Resident to Government, 12 August 1820, P.C., 2 September 1820, 11. "He always used all his influence in favour of peace with the British, 'a power', as he said, 'that crushed thrones like potsherds'," Oldfield, n. 12, 299. See also Hodgson to Government, 24 September 1829, S.C., 14 October 1829, 23.

Residentship of Hodgson: Incipient
Change in British Policy

This policy underwent a change, if gradually, during (26) the Residentship of B.H. Hodgson who was destined to influence the course of British relations with Nepal as no Resident then or since had done. An alert, keen and critical mind, together with a long residence in the land, had given him a thorough knowledge of the Nepalese institutions and policy, their language and literature, their mind and manners. He had observed closely the policy of Bhim Sen, more particularly, as it concerned the British government. For a time he had (27) shared his predecessors' appreciative views of the great Minister, an able ruler whose contribution to the existing stable relations between Nepal and British India he fully acknowledged. In 1829, as the Acting Resident, he wrote,

Since the peace [of 1816] the [Bhim Sen] has been our cordial ally and to his energy and sagacity are we mainly indebted for the duration of a peace concluded under unpromising circumstances. It is in this view that the permanence of Bhim Sen's power, seems to me to be of great importance. His attachment to our alliance is steady because it is founded on an

(26) For the life of Hodgson see Hunter, n. 16.

(27) Hodgson was Assistant Resident at Kathmandu in 1820-22; in 1824, he was in charge of the Post Office there; in 1823-33 he was Assistant Resident; in 1829 Gardner retired and Hodgson served as Acting Resident till 1832 when T.H. Maddock took charge as Resident. In 1833 Hodgson became full Resident. He remained so till the end of 1843. Author of numerous learned papers on a variety of subjects relating to Nepal and its environs, he was the greatest authority on this region during his life time. See Hunter, n. 16, for details.
adequate conception of our power (which no other Nepalese is capable of forming) ... and in him the soldiery are accustomed to acknowledge the hand of a master. Therefore, so long as he is there, all is safe." (28)

The other side of Bhim Sen's policy

Yet the underlying spirit of Bhim Sen's administration, viewed in the wider context of its bearing on the people of Nepal and their government in future, appeared to him harsh, despotic and menacing. A searching probe into the history of Bhim Sen's regime convinced Hodgson that it was built up not only with his own ability, but also with the acquiescence and indifference of the British Government.

The corner-stone of Bhim Sen's policy was his own absolute control of all affairs of the state. The Kings who were minors, had hardly any political influence or authority, being completely under the overweening tutelage of the Minister and his men. The Regent, Queen Tripura Sundari Devi, was the

---

(28) [Source: p. 14 October 1829, 23. In 1830, Hodgson repeated this, "I have always thought Bhim Sen's vigorous and energetic administration at least as valuable to us as his declared and proved enmity." Hodgson to Swinton, Political Secretary, 18 October 1830, F.M., Vol.149.]

(29) King Girvan Juddha Vikram Shah died at the age of nineteen in 1816, ruling as a minor since 1799. His son, Rajendra Vikram Shah, aged four, became King in 1816.

(30) Wife of King Ran Bahadur Shah and grandmother of King Rajendra Vikram. She died in 1832, after a regency of 26 years (1806-1832).
nominal head of the administration; and she bestowed
unreserved favours upon the able Minister, so enabling him
to become the de facto ruler of the state. Bhim Sen was
the chief executive of the state, the Commander-in-Chief of
the Nepalese army, the sole manager of the foreign affairs,
the fount of all patronage, honour and authority. All
important offices of the state, both civil and military,
were filled mostly, if not exclusively, by members of his
family, the Thapas. The various other parties and his
potential rivals, the Chautarias, Gurus, Pandes, Bashnaitas,
Bishtas and Bohras, were held in effective control and
rendered innocuous for mischief.

If absolutism was the linchpin of his internal
administration, jealous exclusion and non-intercourse with
the British in India, was that of his external policy. None
of the two Residents before Hodgson had attempted at inter-
fering in the internal politics of Nepal. They were

---

(31) S.C., 5 March 1833, 24; Campbell's Report, 1837.
The "Chautarias" were a dynastic party of royal collaterals.
The "Gurus" were the spiritual advisers of the King and his
family. The "Pandes" were a powerful party before the
dominance of the Thapas under Bhim Sen. Damodar Pande, the
Minister, before Bhim Sen, along with many other members of
his family, were executed, banished and tortured in the
beginning of Thapa ascendancy. They were hereditary rivals
of the Thapas, and their bitterest enemies. The "Pande"
family had two branches, Gora Pande and Kala Pande. The
"Bashnaitas, "Bhoras" and "Bishtas", all influential parties
before the Thapa rule, had lost authority during Bhim Sen's
absolute rule. Genealogical List of the Kings, Chautarias,
Kale Pande, Gora Pande, Bashnaita and others, M.H., India
Office Library, Vol.18, K481.

(32) Gardner wrote, "I have on no occasion interfered
(contd. on next page)
convinced that howsoever prejudiced and reserved Bhim Sen might have been in dealing with them, peace with the British government was his settled policy.

Hodgson held different views. He found it highly invidious that the British Resident should be compelled to lead the life of a prisoner, a pariah, an object of universal suspicion and hatred.

Hodgson sought to convince the Government that Bhim Sen exploited his policy of exclusion and non-intercourse as a justification of his own absolute regime. On the one hand, he fostered the dread of the Nepalese that the Resident had no intention other than making Nepal subject to the British, and that none but Bhim Sen, with his own exclusive and intimate knowledge of them, was able to foil his vile designs, and so preserve the country's independence. On the other hand, he exploited the conciliatory, forbearing and

in the slightest degree in any public or domestic matter of this Durbar in which we are not immediately concerned.... I shall pursue the same policy of non-interference in internal matters." Resident to Government, 20 November 1824, S.C., 17 December 1824, 8. Maddock held, "... at the present day any appearance of increased inquisitiveness would but defeat its own end." Resident to Government, 20 June 1832, P.C., 27 August 1832, 18.

(33) None but Bhim Sen and his trusted agents had any intercourse with the Resident. Strict watch was maintained over the Residency to prevent anyone from communicating with the Resident or his staff. Campbell's Report, 1837.
appreciative attitude of the British government to impress his countrymen with the idea that the British looked upon him as the best administrator of the state, and his rule the best regime. He sought to convince them that none but he could have maintained peace so long with such a bellicose power as the British. Thus he created a myth of his own indispensability both among the Nepalese and the British. People were thus led to view him as the strongest custodian of national independence. In short, Hodgson held, that the Nepalese people, as much as the British government itself, had so long been deluded by the myth of Bhim Sen's indispensability as a ruler of Nepal.

(34) Hodgson alleged, "That Gardner in his negative and invisible manner gave real support to the Minister is unquestionable, and that he was enabled to do so, and thus most effectively to promote their views of lasting peace with which he was accredited." Resident to Government, 24 September 1829, P.C., 14 October 1829, 23.

King Rajendra Vikram later expressly acknowledged Bhim Sen's services as the preserver of national independence. Lalmohar, 1892 v.S., Kartik Vadi 5, Baj 2, Nepali, n. 1, 245-9.

(35) "... and I fear that he has found it too easy to persuade us that through him and him alone could we manage to deal in peace and amity with the alleged hostile disposition of the Nepalese chiefs to the British government." Campbell's Report, 1837.

"The Minister is a great man and able, whose talents and energy constitute perhaps our best stay.... But there is too little justice in his monopoly of all power and all observance on the one hand; and on the other, too much fraud in the use he makes of the utter ignorance of us to which he has reduced the opposite party, including the Prince and the mass of the gentry, to suffer us either in equity or in policy to allow him just now to raise fresh obstacles in the way of the very trivial intercourse we have ever maintained directly with the Court." Resident to Government, 18 February 1833, S.C., 5 March 1833, 24.
In commercial matters too, Bhim Sen's distrustful policy was patent. He feared that close commercial intercourse would engender political complication which might be exploited by the British as an excuse to assert their rights. He did not discourage the flow of trade between India and Nepal on economic grounds, but he did not encourage it either, by entering into any commercial agreement with the British or by adhering to the stipulations of the Commercial treaty of 1792. The said Treaty had remained almost a dead letter since long, though not formally dissolved. While the British, on their part, honoured all the while its stipulations, presumably as a conciliatory gesture, the Nepal Durbar had always been acting against its very letter. Thus, although Nepalese goods exported to India paid a uniform customs duty of 2½ p.c. advalorem, as stipulated by the Treaty of 1792, the Indian goods exported to Nepal were subjected to 6 to 10 p.c. advalorem duty at their invoice price. Hodgson showed that by unilateral adherence to the treaty, the British government had given Nepal an advantage against the Indian

(36) Since 1816, Nepal's trade with India had been tripled in volume. P.G., 2 December 1831, 4.

(37) The Treaty of Segowlee (1816) kept it status quo ante; it was neither mentioned as still operative nor expressly invalidated.

(38) C.U. Aitchison, Treaties, Engagements and Sanads (Calcutta, 1929) XIV, 56.
merchants, who paid in India a customary duty of 10 p.c. ad-valorem on goods like copper, iron and timber (which, incidentally, formed the staple exports of Nepal) on which the Nepalese paid only 2½ p.c.

"Thus we have given for upwards of 40 years a clear advantage of 7½ p.c. to Nepal produce over the same description (39) of commodities as the produce of our own lands." It was a huge sacrifice, for in one year (1833) only, the duty on Nepalese timber alone amounted to more than Rs.30,000/-.

There were other vexatious obstacles to trade, which Bhim Sen had shown no inclination to remove. The Nepalese currency was hopelessly adulterated and, hence, was not accepted in the plains. Export of Company's coins to the plains was strictly prohibited, for they were recoined by the Nepalese Government into their own currency. Besides, there was no means to balance the commercial accounts and to make remittances by bills of exchange, for Nepal lay outside the circle of commercial exchanges of the plains. The British government had so long been indifferent to these long-standing

(39) Campbell's Report, 1837.

(40) Ibid. "The whole interval [1792-1834] had been filled with teeming proofs of our justice, our forbearance, our disinterestedness, our almost romantic generosity upon this very head." Hodgson to Macnaughton, Foreign Secretary, 31 December 1834, P.C.; 22 January 1835, 61; 12 June 1834, 146; 10 July 1834, 144; 19 July 1834, 19041; 13 November 1834, 24.
obstacles to trade till Hodgson proved the injurious effects of such indifference.

Martial spirit of Bhim Sen's Policy: an imminent threat to the British

But the most menacing feature of Bhim Sen's policy was its exclusively military spirit. Ever since the assumption of power, his primary aim had been to organise an army, imposing in number and a model in efficiency. Himself taking the military title of "General", he introduced in the Nepalese army, with amazing perfection, the discipline of the British troops, their dress and uniform, drill and code of conduct. Recruits were regularly enlisted, their martial spirit was fostered, their rights and privileges jealously upheld. Frenchmen and deserters from the British Indian army were employed to train the Nepalese in making modern weapons; and arsenals and magazines were kept well stocked. A network of forts and stockades were built at strategic points, particularly, on the southern frontier. In short, under the fostering care of Bhim Sen, the Nepal army was a "tower of strength," and as formidable as it was in 1814-16.

---

(41) P.C., 10 July 1834, 144.
The success of Bhim Sen was mainly due to his perfect understanding of the temper of the martial tribes of Nepal. They had to be regularly employed in military service; for this was the only occupation they knew and liked. The problem of Bhim Sen was to keep these restless martial tribes, so long addicted to plundering raids and conquests, in check, when such vents to their energies could no longer be provided to them. Such a people, of such restless disposition, had to be regularly drilled, or else they would degenerate into ill-disciplined rabble, a menace to the peace and order of the state itself. Nepal being a military state, Bhim Sen had to keep the army always in good humour. He well knew that the army, if well-disposed, could be used as the mainstay of his regime; if estranged, it would act as his certain destroyer. Hence, he shrank from any attempt at changing the military system of Nepal, for it would have certainly made him unpopular

---


(44) "... but the condition of their military population at large is precarious in the extreme and they are, in consequence, anxious for war as the only means of securing employment and the only chance open to the majority of raising themselves to wealth and distinction." Resident to Government, 2 December 1832, P.C., 12 February 1833, 160.
with the army and hastened his fall. Besides, strongly distrustful of the British, he naturally felt that in a strong army alone lay Nepal's security and defence against the acquisitive propensities of the British in India.

Hodgson looked at this issue with the greatest concern. He observed that years of peace had not enervated Nepal, nor her martial spirit was a whit tempered. On the contrary, in spite of the forced inactivity of nearly two decades, the love for war and conquest was as keen as it was before the war, and the offensive power of Nepal, as great. Instead of moderating the exclusively warlike instincts of the Nepalese by turning their attention to peaceful pursuits like trade and commerce, Bhim Sen had, Hodgson alleged, during his long rule deliberately kept warm their martial ardour. He saw that the Nepalese army in its existing strength and temper posed an immediate threat to the British dominion in India, for its sole object was to plunder the richest and the most undefended region of British India, the Gangetic plains.

(45) Gardner noted in 1816 that Bhim Sen, though disposed to decrease the armed strength of Nepal, could not do so for fear of opposition of army officers. Campbell's Report, 1837.

(46) In 1816 the regular army of Nepal numbered 10,000 men; in 1817, 8,333; in 1819, 12,000; in 1824, 12,690; in 1825, 11,710; in 1832, 14,550; in 1838, 16,195.

The system of annual rotation in the army recruitment enabled the state to treble the number of active soldiers in a few months' time. Oot. Political, 24 October 1854, 13; Memorandum relative to the Gurkha army by Hodgson, 14 February 1825, F.M., Vol.125.
... upon the whole, then, Nepal is fully as formidable at this moment (1833) as she was before the war. She hangs like a thunder cloud on the very heart of our territory, and with the command of 30,000 soldiers as well armed and disciplined as our own, and vastly superior to ours in every moral respect, she has at this moment, no aim but war. observed Hodgson. (47)

Bhim Sen’s effective restraint of the army was not, Hodgson held, indicative of his pacific disposition, but just a part of his policy of waiting upon events and that of conservation of strength for an opportune time when the British would be seriously engaged in a long-drawn war anywhere in India. He had maintained peaceful relations with the British not in a spirit of friendliness but in that of "sullen acquiescence". Even if Bhim Sen did not find during his life time a suitable opportunity to strike at the British, dangers for the latter would by no means be over, for there was none else after him to keep his huge warlike army in effective restraint. The legacy of Bhim Sen’s military policy was thus as menacing to the British as an apprehended invasion of the Nepalese army during his rule. Hodgson further asserted that by retroceding the


(48) "... it may be safely asserted that if his [Bhim Sen’s] present unnatural system be left in status quo till his death or retirement, a crisis will occur, which whether it issue in civil war or in aggression on us, cannot fail most injuriously to affect our interests ... it is more than probable that the army constituted as now, and animated with the spirit already designed, would with great difficulty be kept in due obedience to the deliberate will of the state." Campbell’s Report, 1837; Resident to Government, 23 July 1837, S.C., 18 September 1837, 69.  

( contd. on next page)
Tarai, the British government had unknowingly helped Nepal maintain its army; for Bihim Sen had utilised the revenues derived from the Tarai as the main source to pay his soldiers. So long as the military bias of Nepal's policy remained unchanged or unsubdued, there would be no security for the British in India. It was like a thorn on the side of the growing British empire, and it must either be uprooted or its edge had to be rounded. The change in Nepal's policy was, hence the *sine qua non*.

**Hodgson urges reorientation of British Policy**

In view of the above facts, Hodgson vigorously urged the government for a reorientation of their policy in Nepal. The policy of conciliatory forbearance was passive, dishonourable and suicidal; it had failed on every score. The policy

---

Resident Maddock wrote earlier, "Their idea of war has exclusive reference to rupture with us and at any period since the pacification of 1816 nothing would have been more popular and nothing would now give greater satisfaction to the military classes. That being the case, the British government must feel directly interested in the character of the administration that governs Nepal." Resident to Government, 2 December 1832, P.C., 12 February 1833, 160.

(49) He had thus "converted the fruits of peace into prospective means of hostility." P.C., 10 July 1834, 144. The revenue of the Tarai ceded to Nepal in 1817 was estimated at Rs.2½ lakhs. In 1837 it yielded a revenue of nearly 12 lakhs. *Campbell's Report*, 1837; M.H., Vol.14, K480, 94 et seq.

of non-interference was abstinent in nature, being little short of "indiscriminating indifference" to the interests of the British government itself. This policy had been naturally mistaken by Bhim Sen for unqualified appreciation of his regime. The policy had failed to moderate the distrustful attitude of the Minister, let alone befriending him. Far from reciprocating the sincere goodwill of the British, he had studiously prevented the growth of amity and friendship between the Nepalese people and the British government - a feeling which would have otherwise followed as a natural sequel to the friendly policy of the British government in India towards the state of Nepal. It had failed to bring Nepal to closer political and economic relations with British India, as it had failed to temper, let alone crush, the military power and sullen hostility of the nations. Worse than that, this policy, Hodgson emphatically alleged, had contributed to the strengthening of Bhim Sen's rule. In other words, the British had so

(51) Campbell's Report, 1837, n. 19.

(52) "As often as the Resident expressed to Government his firm conviction of the favourable disposition of Bhim Sen towards us, so often did our Governor-General feel assured of that friendship, and so often did they hope that he [Bhim Sen] might continue in undiminished power." Ibid.


(54) "The abstinent conduct on our part, together with the long minority of the Raja, the want of energy in his friends and in the chiefs of Nepal in general, has contributed greatly to the underpower of Bhim Sen." Campbell's Report, 1837.
long whetted the very weapon with which Nepal was certain (55) to destroy them in future.

It was his firm conviction that Bhim Sen alone was responsible for the perilous political system of Nepal; that he alone was opposed to closer relations with the British, which must have followed as a natural sequel to a peaceful and conciliatory policy of the British in the post-war era; that he alone mattered in the administration; and that he alone was needed to be brought to his knees to change the spirit of his system - a change imperative in British interests.

Hodgson was, however, in favour of "gradual and persuasive reforms" in the policy of Nepal; for an immediate and drastic change of system by direct political pressure was neither politic nor possible.


(56) "Now it is perfectly apparent that Bhim Sen is resolutely bent, as he always has been, on maintaining the ancient anti-social and hostile policy of Nepal, despite of her circumvallation by our territories; that he is the prime-mover of this rash and ruinous procedure ... that so long as it is maintained, peace and commerce must be inoperative to produce such change, either in the habits of the martial tribes or in the institutions of the government as can alone afford us a prospect of permanent security or advantage." Resident to Government, 20 September 1834, P.C., 9 October 1834, 17; Hodgson to Macnaughton, 15 June 1833, S.C., 28 June 1833, 11.
A new phase in Indo-Nepalese relations

Hodgson was thus up against the very man, whom the British had so long looked upon as the preserver of peace between Nepal and British India, and as the strongest buttress of stable relations between the two governments. They had long put up with his distrustful, though peaceful policy, with the fond expectation that time and friendly policy would wear out this attitude, and a more amicable intercourse would follow as a matter of course. They not only appreciated his able administration but even disfavoured his fall as being harmful to British interests. A change in the existing British policy was inevitable when Hodgson vividly portrayed the evils of its continuance. Changing the character of Nepal's polity, at first by non-political, and then by political means, became Hodgson's unwavering aim and all-absorbing interest; in the spirit of Bhim Sen's regime, he saw

(57) *Campbell's Report*. In 1820 Gardner noted that the feeling of distrust and suspicion "appear to have been dismissed from the mind of the administration." Resident to Government, 12 August 1820, P.C., 2 September 1820, 11.

(58) Hodgson's predecessor Maddock wrote,

"The subversion of Bhim Sen's power would be an event greatly to be deplored.... We can hardly expect to see the present ministry succeed by one equally efficient; and it is the strength and vigour of his administration to which we are mainly indebted both for the tranquillity which has prevailed in Nepal and for the maintenance of friendly relations with the British government for the last sixteen years." Resident to Government, 2 December 1832, P.C., 12 February 1833, 160.
a menace affecting not only the Nepalese themselves but also the very vitals of the British dominion in India. He fought Bhim Sen peacefully, but with an inflexible resolution, casting away the policy of conciliatory acquiescence of his predecessors, and adopting instead that of dignified firmness and friendly, though spirited, remonstrance.

What to Hodgson was the most essential need for the security of the British government, was to Bhim Sen the subversion of a regime, his own, built after years of toil and zeal. More than that, it was to him, the most unwanted interference in Nepal's domestic affairs by the most hated power, the British, to the most dreaded end, the subjugation of Nepal.

Indo-Nepalese relations were entering upon a new phase, characterised by the struggle between two persons, Hodgson and Bhim Sen; the one, young, energetic, keen and determined, with the backing of a mighty power; the other, equally energetic and vigorous, but aged, arrayed against increasingly hostile elements, with powers gradually ebbing. A long rule of enlightened despotism was coming to a dramatic close, hastened by factors, internal as well as external.