CHAPTER II

The Great Game: Man, Mission and Place

With the exception of the travel-records of Hiuen Tsiang, Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, this study concentrates on the analysis of samples of mainly 19th and 20th Century travelogues. One of the reasons for this is that the Great Game in Central Asia (which began in the 19th Century), the advent of the Communist era (early 20th century), and the aftermath of the Soviet system's dismantling are the most important happenings in the history of this land in the last two centuries. These themes naturally form the core of a number of 19th and 20th century travel-accounts (both first-hand and retold) of Central Asia. Another important factor to be considered when looking at the travelogue as a reflector of history, is availability: many previous records on Central Asia have long been either lost or destroyed or out of print. Many who travelled to this region were never allowed to publish their writing. Some travel-accounts that are still recognizable as such are mouldering away in the cellar of National Library, Kolkata, with not much hope of preservation.
In view of their condition, the scholar of Central Asia has not much access to a great many primary sources; one has to turn instead to a mass of literature that has evolved from these faded and crumbling relics. In this context, the works of John Keay (well known for his accounts of exploration in Central Asia between 1820-1895 A.D) and Peter Hopkirk, have inestimable value. This chapter will focus on a close look at the above authors' works on Central Asia; while they are not historians in the strict sense of the word, they have presented various time-periods, persons' and situations in Central Asian history in a very accessible if somewhat romanticized manner. A discussion of their works will serve to flesh out the historical outline developed in the previous section and to colour the otherwise rather stark picture of Central Asia so far created.

Since the first tentative moves of the Great Game began to happen in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the works of Keay *When Men and Mountains Meet* (The Explorers of the Western Himalayas *1820-1875 A.D.*, [hereafter WMMM]) and *The Gilgit Game* will have precedence. In the former work, Keay presents to us some of the principal mountain systems of Central Asia, that cut it off from India and other neighbours: the Hindu Kush range in the southwest, the Pamirs to the north, the Kun Lun range in the east, and in the junction formed of
these three systems lies the Karakoram range. Nearer India, there are of course, the Pir Panjal range and the Himalayas themselves. (See Map 3, Keay, WMMM VIII-IX).

With skillful strokes, Keay introduces to us the world of personal dramas, adventure, political intrigue, the confrontation between man and his environment, danger and glamour that made up the Great Game. In this book, we shall single out, as the author has done, individual characters and their personal roles with respect to this region, and scrutinize them. The manner in which each man appeared on the Great Game arena, the methods and ploys he used to play the Game, the results he obtained—these are pointers to the attitude of 19th century Western explorers of this region and their perception of it. The Introduction to Keay's work provides some useful insights into man's attempt at comprehending the daunting geography of this part of Central Asia, assuredly the most mountainous region in the world. In view of the sheer difficulty, even impossibility of the terrain, travellers were more concerned about crossing the mountains than exploring them.
India and Central Asia showing the approximate positions of the Russian
and Indian frontiers and the intervening lands, in 1898.
While Bokhara, Samarkand, Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan and Khokand (Turkestan, as it was then called) were known to exist beyond the mountains, they had long since passed into the realm of fable and legend, exoticised alike by men who reached there, and those who did not. Eighteenth century maps of the region, notably Rennel's map of 1794, did not help much in increasing the topographical knowledge of this region. Keay shrewdly observes that the awards presented by the Royal Geographical Society (founded 1831) in London are a good yardstick to estimate the political and strategic importance accorded to this little-known region in the nineteenth century (Keay, WMMM 4). Indeed, its very obscurity and mysterious inaccessibility rendered it all the more exciting and attractive, not only to British officials sponsored by the Society and the East India Company, but also to missionaries, merchants, naturalists, scholars and statesmen. In Keay's words:

"The explorers of the Western Himalayas, though as ill-assorted a crowd as can be imagined, have a few traits in common. They tend to be more scholarly than their counterparts elsewhere, more wide-ranging in their interests, and perhaps because of the nature of the
mountains, more chastened by their experiences and more reticent about them” (Keay, WMMM 6).

At first, since commercial and political interests in Eastern Turkestan predominated, merchants and statesmen alike tended to play down the monstrous difficulty of the routes from India to Central Asian towns. But by the 1860’s, with several pioneering attempts at conquering this complex knot of mountains having failed, it was realized by those concerned that the problem was much more formidable than was imagined. It was around this time, that the outsiders’ perception of this mountain-locked region began to change; attention began to shift from the lands beyond to the mountains themselves as "a legitimate field for exploration" (Keay, WMMM 6).

Keay makes an important observation at this juncture: that exploration in Central Asia seldom led on to colonization, despite European talk of making Kashmir "a little England in the heart of Asia", of ‘opening up Central Asia’, and of "bagging the Pamirs" (Keay, WMMM 7). These dreams remained as such; the mountains, especially the Himalayan range, posed not just a great natural frontier, but a volatile
political barrier too. The frontier to India was a particularly difficult proposition to European map makers, since they had to grapple with the ethnic diversity of this region, besides its unimaginable vastness. As Keay puts it:

"Interlocking with ... one another, the worlds of Mongol, Aryan and Turanian here coalesce. This ethnic jigsaw has its religious counterpart with Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic adherents... Polygamy is the rule in one place, polyandry in another. Here the wildlife is sacred, there it is hounded unmercifully" (Keay, WM MM 7).

Even today, no less than five countries evince an interest in this region: India, Afghanistan, Russia, China and Pakistan; and in spite of this, knowledge of the region's geography is incomplete.

Keay's book focuses on the personality traits, temperament and motivating factors that prompted each of the explorers to this part of Central Asia in the nineteenth century. It is important to note how the same geographical area came to be perceived differently by each man that
attempted to comprehend and in a sense 'overcome' this region. With a lively, informative, entertaining style of writing not unlike that of Hopkirk's, Keay also has an eye for historical accuracy and a passion for story-telling. As each traveller's circumstances and aspirations differed from those of his predecessor, so did the dynamics of the political scene. The British Government in India often held an ambivalent political stance, not because they were at a loss, but because it suited them. Keay indicates four elements that are common to the travels of not less than five adventurers: the British Government's fence-sitting, the undefined status of the traveller, the hostility and suspicion of the natives of the region, and the pathetic anxiety of some remote prince seeking for British support (Keay, WMMM 92).

Most of the explorers in Keay's works are not as well-known as, for example, the legendary "Bokhara Burnes", Capt. Burnaby, Younghusband and other prominent players of the Great Game. They are largely players behind the scenes, though their discoveries and findings are a crucial contribution to the growing knowledge of the region. However, each of them used the existing political circumstances to suit his own purposes and advance his personal career.
The Great Game is generally recognized as having two phases: the first phase coinciding with the phenomenal career of Alexander Burnes in the 1830's and the second phase dated from the late 1860's onwards (Keay, WMMM 235), when the British gave way to the Russian advance in both commercial competition and political influence in Central Asia. There were, in the late 1860s, barely 500 miles separating the two empires. In the latter phase of the Great Game, it is important to note that the focus of political interest had shifted from Central Asia itself to the more urgent concern over the defence of British India (Keay, WMMM 238). The discoveries and reports of the Great Game players of both phases led to wild fluctuations in the stances adopted by the British in India and back home. One explorer's reports would one moment be dismissed as alarmist, while another's would add fuel to the fire of Russophobia. But to go back to the very beginnings of foreign interest in Central Asia, we shall look at the dozen-odd individual explorers and their roles in the Game as presented in When Men and Mountains Meet. The first of these, William Moorcroft, (a qualified veterinary doctor with a passionate interest in the shawl industry) makes his appearance in the Great Game arena in 1820.
With his infectious energy, eccentricity, enthusiasm and visionary capabilities, he is regarded as the father of modern exploration in the Western Himalayas and in Central Asia. Keay likens his method of writing (he left behind 10,000 sheets of manuscripts) to that of Marco Polo's: we know very little about him and his personal life that is not highly controversial (Keay, WMMM 18). Variously described, in the absence of more authoritative information, as a horse-dealer, a spy, and an adventurer, Moorcroft was nevertheless very much a product of the free-thinking and commercially-driven eighteenth century, as far as his attitudes go. His models are Marco Polo and an earlier traveller to Tibet, George Bogle. The year 1812 marked the first of his two famous journeys into Central Asia: he had crossed the Central Himalayas into Tibet disguised as a Hindu sadhu and gone in search of the goats from which the fine wool for Kashmiri shawls is obtained. On this journey, he cleared a long-standing controversy over the origins of the three main Indian river systems: he showed that the Ganga did not (as Hindu tradition and current maps had it), rise from sacred lakes, but that the Sutlej did. He also identified a river flowing north-west towards Ladakh as the main branch of the Indus. While his goat mission did not prosper, his interest in the
shawl industry epitomizes his passion for establishing trade between Central Asia and British India (Keay, WMMM 22).

In 1819, Moorcroft (he had been employed for some time by the East India Company as manager of their stud farm in Bihar) won official permission to start for Central Asia in search of stallions for breeding stock back home. It is extraordinary that Moorcroft's vision of a possible threat to British India from Russian quarters was initially not given much currency, and even regarded as impossible. In 1813, he had recommended that the mountain roads beyond Kashmir and Ladakh be explored with regard to their feasibility as invasion routes — precisely the same mission that Sir Francis Younghusband set out on seventy five years later (Keay, WMMM 23). Along with Moorcroft were George Trebeck, the son of a solicitor friend and an Anglo-Indian doctor by name Guthrie.

As he descended on the Kulu valley, Moorcroft, never one for poetic rapture, and more inclined to preparing dossiers on the country he saw, exclaimed at the sheer beauty of the place. His rhapsodies are too long to be quoted here, but are amusedly reproduced in Keay's book (WMMM 28-29).
Though Keay is of the opinion that Moorcroft is a wretched travel writer, it cannot go unnoticed that Moorcroft was one of the first British explorers to sound the alarm bells about possible Russian designs on British India (Keay, WMMP 32). Due to various misunderstandings and Moorcroft's own flouting of authority as the East India Company regarded it, his conduct was disowned and severely reprimanded. As intensely as Moorcroft disliked the Kashmiris (whom he describes as "the most profligate race on the face of the earth" {qtd. in Keay, WMMP 35}), he loved the natives of Ladakh where he spent three years. He was genuinely impressed by their animal husbandry, their bee-keeping and farming practices and his appreciation is reflected in his journals (Keay, WMMP 39). Passing through the Pir Panjal pass, he made his way to Peshawar, where the Afghans became suspicious of this foreigner with the dubious claim of horse-trading. The chief of Kunduz Murad Beg held him captive for six months, hoping to fleece his party of all they possessed in goods and money. With his usual resourcefulness, Moorcroft and his party managed to escape, and even reached Bokhara, their ultimate goal. Their experiences there are quite unheard-of in the history of foreign visits to Bokhara-i-Sharief (the noble), the holiest city in Central Asia: they were
actually allowed to ride through the city, with permission from the Amir to trade. They even procured a hundred horses, in accordance with their ostensible mission. But this happy state of affairs had an abrupt ending, since Moorcroft met a bizarre death on his way back to India. So did his party companions, amidst wild speculations about the implacable hatred of Murad Beg (the Kunduz chief who had held them prisoner for six months) and a mysterious ‘Kunduz fever’. Sir Alexander Burnes, who found his grave, brought Moorcroft’s papers back from India in 1832, but they were published only in 1841, long after Burnes’ own Travels to Bokhara.

In many ways, the story of the exploration of the Western Himalayas is to a considerable extent the story of Moorcroft’s dreams and fears becoming reality (Keay, WMMM 47). Had his recommendations all been promptly taken up there might have never been the Great Game!

The next European to be seen in this part of the world was Victor Vinceslas Jacquemont, a young French botanist, affecting a Byronic world-weariness after a turbulent love-affair with an opera-singer and seeking solace in the romance of travel in the exotic East. Right from the beginning of his short but colourful career in the Himalayas (he died at
Jacquemont seems to have had a thoroughly easy-going, happy-go-lucky experience of this region, getting through difficult, even life-threatening situations by sheer bluff and force of will.

Ostensibly in North India to make a collection of flora and fauna for the Jardin des Plantes of Paris, he procured from the then Governor General of India Lord William Bentinck a personal letter of introduction to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, (the emperor of the Sikh kingdom northwest of India) as "the Socrates and Plato of the age" (Keay, WMMM 52).

Apart from some utterly ludicrous adventures (he was afflicted at one time not only by having lost his precious stomach-pump, but also for having over-indulged in his love of the Kashmiri 'nach' girls), he is one of the few Europeans to have understood and made friends with the irascible Ranjit Singh, who was generally deeply suspicious of all foreigners who showed interest in his dominions. From Simla, he attempted to cross into Tibet in 1830, but appears to have been dissuaded by the British (Keay, WMMM 56). At Mirpur, he became the prisoner of a bandit called Nihal Singh, but Jacquemont got out of this trap easily enough, with his capacity for bluff. Spending four months in Kashmir, he collected a considerable
number of plants, geological specimens, stuffed birds and preserved fishes. All in all, he claims to have been the first European to visit Kashmir undisguised. It is sad that Jacquemont did not live to bask in the admiration of his Parisian friends, for the exotic experiences he had had. Here is one European who was content with what he got from his life abroad.

The next European to visit Bokhara and the Himalayan regions below it after Moorcroft was the eccentric converted Jew Joseph Wolff. He found support from The Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, and from a benefactor, Henry Drummond. He claims to have been the first Jew since Christ to preach Christianity in Jerusalem and also to have visited every city betwixt Teheran, Cairo and Constantinople. When a friend suggested that Jews could still be found in Bokhara and Afghanistan, Wolff, with a mad gleam of missionary zeal in his eye, set out at once, unmindful of all the dangers on the way that Europeans generally were the victims of.

At the initial stages of his journey, he was confronted by the Mullahs of Doab, who were inclined to put him to death, but Wolff
pretended to be a dervish and purchased his freedom by parting with all of his few possessions, including the clothes off his back. For the next six hundred miles, across the mountains of Afghanistan, Wolff claims to have travelled naked. He finally approached Kabul, where Lieutenant Burnes (later, of the Bokhara fame) rescued him. Wolff talked at length about the vision he had had in Bokhara, in which Christ had told him that the valley of Kashmir would be the new Jerusalem; that Kashmir was the site of the Garden of Eden and that the population belonged to one of the lost tribes. The only way he could have crossed through Jalalabad, Peshawar, Attock, the Khyber Pass and Lahore, was because of the Asiatic attitude to madmen. Madness was considered next to godliness in Central Asia; there were plenty of shamans, fakirs and dervishes to support such a belief. Being convinced that Christ would come again in 1847, he tried his best to convince Maharaja Ranjit Singh of this, but failed to get permission to visit Kashmir at first. He also attempted to reach, like Moorcroft before him, the oasis cities of Yarkand, Khotan and Kashgar, in order to convert any Jews he might find there. But it was too late in the year for such a journey, since the mountain passes had already received their annual snowfalls and when Wolff arrived in Srinagar, “what should have been an epic journey of Himalayan travel fizzled out in a brief and
pointless excursion" (Keay, WMMM 75). His disappointment colours his perception of this land, which he had conceived of as Eden, and the new Jerusalem:

"Instead of the splendid palaces described so enchantingly by the poets one sees only ruined and miserable cottages; instead of the far famed beauties of Kashmir one meets with the most ugly, half starved, blind and dirty-looking females" (qtd. in Keay, WMMM 75).

Wolff made another epic journey to Bokhara in 1844; but one can't help observing that both his and Jacquemont's movements in Central Asia did not contribute much to a better geographical understanding of the region. As Keay puts it, they were travellers and not explorers, and they wrote as much about themselves as the lands they visited (Keay, WMMM 76). Their published works, however, did much to exoticize and popularize Central Asian lands in the European mind of the early 19th century; and inspired would-be travellers.
The next three European travellers who appear on the scene in 1836 were vastly different from one another, both in character, temperament and in ambition. However, they are spoken of together, since we know from a marble inscription in the Vale of Kashmir (Isle of Chenars) that they knew and had met one another in 1835. The first of these to arrive in Srinagar was an Austrian baron, von Hugel, reputed to be a great naturalist. It was here that he met John Henderson, the *bête noire* servant of the East India Company who headed for Ladakh without official permission, disguised as a fakir. His facade was at once penetrated by the Ladakhis; he was arrested and jailed, while in British India, there was a warrant placed for his arrest. He escaped, however, and begged his way down the Indus to Baltistan. Having received hospitality from his fellow Europeans, Vigne (an English barrister; of him later) and von Hugel in Srinagar, he headed for Balkh, only to reappear eight weeks later in Srinagar a dying man. Unfortunately no record of his indiscretions remains (Keay, WMMM 81). "Godfrey Thomas Vigne from Iskardo" is an important figure since his travels in the Western Himalayas take another long stride towards Central Asia. As far as can be made out, there was no reason but wanderlust for his travels. Hunting was his
passion, and he did a good deal of it in Kashmir. His descriptions of Kashmir valley are unrivalled, calling it “the noblest valley in the world” (qtd. in Keay, WMMM 85).

In all, Vigne crossed the Pir Panjal to the south five times; lists twenty passes into the Kashmir valley. He has been criticized for the confused way of presenting his travels; but he covered so much ground and so often retraced his steps that a map of his travels would be meaningless. He wrote, however, a guide book, which, even thirty years later, was the best of its kind (Keay, WMMM 87). He was also the first European to plot the courses of the Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum rivers through the Pir Panjal, and the first to visit Kishtwar, Chamba, Bhadarwah and Muzafarabad (Keay, WMMM 87). Vigne’s description of Kashmir, with its attractive European climate, intensified British interest in the region. In fact, his perception of it is typical of the British imperialist:

"Kashmir ... could and should be, ... the brightest jewel in the imperial crown... (upon) acquisition... the valley would become the most popular retreat in the East"... (qtd. in Keay, WMMM 87).
In short, Vigne sought to make in Kashmir "a miniature England in the heart of Asia" by conjecturing on what the introduction of British capital and know-how, combined with the skills of the native craftsman and farmer, would make of this Himalayan land. In Keay's words, he dreamt of a little oasis of English life in the heart of Asia, a place where the rulers of India, having left the heat in the plains and having dumped the White Man's Burden on the Pir Panjal, could change into their old tweed suits and settle down before a good log fire on their own few acres (Keay, WMMM 88). From his work, we come to know that, in his wandering north of the Himalayas, he made in all four attempts to reach Central Asia, but was foiled in each by circumstances of climate, both political and geographical. But still, he is remembered today as the first European to visit Baltistan and Astor, and the first to sort out the complex topography of Gilgit, Yasin and Chitral to the west, and the Chilas and the Indus valley states to the south-west (Keay, WMMM 97). His was the first recognizable account of the stupendous Nanga Parbat, and the whole Karakoram range was practically his discovery. He also proved beyond doubt that the land towards Turkestan was not a vast plateau, as was popularly believed at the time, but one of the most complex impenetrable mountainous regions in the world. This latter discovery put paid to all
future travellers who aspired to reach Central Asia by striking due north for Skardu (Baltistan). One of the least conspicuous players of the Great Game had generated concern that the Western Himalayas might screen some vulnerable back door entrance into India (Keay, WMMM 99). His contemporary, von Hugel, had spent just three weeks in Kashmir valley, and his comprehensive account of it (entitled Cachemire und das Reich der Siek) betrays a vastly inferior understanding of the region, in comparison with Vigne's. Yet he received the Gold Medal from the Royal Geographical Society, while Vigne, regarded as unreliable, was overlooked (Keay, WMMM 100). It was only in 1861 that Vigne's work on Kashmir won precedence, as a classic account of the Western Himalayas.

In von Hugel's meeting with Ranjit Singh in Lahore, a glimpse of the glittering Orient is caught through his eyes, because the decayed old monarch sought to impress him with all the sumptuousness of his court, and tried to make him accept employment as one of his generals. But thoughts of his aging mother back in Austria drew him back to Europe, after a brief hesitation. In 1839, with the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lahore fell to British arms after two hard-fought wars, while the
mountains from Jammu to Skardu and from Tibet to Muzafarabad were united under the rule of Gulab Singh, the first British-created Maharaja of Kashmir.

One of the few foreigners to remain in the Sikh service after Ranjit's death was Alexander Gardiner, an artillery officer, described by Keay as the antithesis of the nineteenth century explorer, and "a man from travel's other side" (Keay, WMMM 132). Born in the U.S.A. in 1785, he spent his youth studying mineralogy, but was refused employment by Russian authorities in Astrakhan, where his brother had settled. Disgusted, he set sail across the Caspian and lived in the saddle for the next thirteen years. His wanderings took him from Ashkhabad to Herat, then amongst the Hazara tribes and the Turkomans to Khiva, north to the Aral Sea and back to Astrakhan again.

In 1823, he set off across the steppes to the Aral and then up the Syr river, (the Jaxartes) to Ura Tyube near Samarkand. Single-handed, without any official support and geographical training, he had, by 1831, already explored the Western Himalayas; ten years before Vigne gave up trying to reach Gilgit, Gardiner had been there; twenty years before
Thomson tackled the Karakoram pass, Gardiner had crossed it. Forty years before Shaw and Hayward reached Yarkand, he had passed through the city. And fifty years before an Englishman reached Kafiristan, Gardiner had returned there for the second time. He had crossed all the six huge mountain systems before any map even acknowledged their individual existence, and he had seen more of Turkestan than any other non-Asiatic contemporary. But because his account is frustratingly lacking in distances, dates and identifiable place-names, his travels did not receive the acclaim they deserved (Keay, WMMM 108). It is a topic of heated debate as to what part his travels played in the discovery of various lands in this region and if he had any political motives.

Having realized that he ‘could not rest in civilized surroundings’ (qtd. in Keay, WMMM 110) and that he would be happy only amongst wild races and unknown lands, he assumed the name of Arb Shahz in an Uzbek costume, and with the scanty notes of his travels stuffed into a Koran, he acquired a band of faithful followers. This was possible since in Central Asia there was no law. The distinction between the predatory robbers, slave-dealers, nomads, the preyed-upon merchants, pilgrims and herdsmen was a very fine one (Keay, WMMM 110). He became a
fugitive and an outlaw after having been chased out of Turkestan and was promptly captured near the north of Kabul by Habib Ullah Khan, the dispossessed heir to the throne of Kabul, who was even then waging war against his uncle Dost Mohammed. Gardiner accepted his offer of a command over 180 horsemen in his struggle against Dost Mohammed, and for the next two years made continual forays from the mountain fringes between Jalalabad and Bamian, waylaying caravans crossing the Hindu Kush. Gardiner, at this point, also took a native wife, a maiden of royal blood from a passing caravan of distinguished pilgrims. But by 1826, Habib Ulla’s cause was lost, and Gardiner’s brief domestic happiness was shattered when he returned to find his home raided and his wife and son savagely slaughtered. Anguished by this terrible loss, Gardiner and his band of desperate men struck off into the Hindu Kush for dear life. In his attempt to flee Dost Mohammed’s anger, he and his band climbed north into the mountains, crossing by the Khawak pass hoping to escape over the Oxus river at Hazrat Imam. But to do this, they had to get past a hundred miles of open ground belonging to another tyrant Uzbek chief Murad Beg, who, getting wind of his prey, promptly charged him. They managed to escape into the valley of the Kokcha tributary and crossed the Oxus, entering the valley of Shignan "on the threshold of the Pamirs"
(Keay, WMMM 115) in 1826. His claims to have wandered about in the Pamirs are difficult to credit, since his descriptions of it are quite at odds with reality. The Pamirs are a polar wilderness, combining the bleakness of Tibet with the rugged harshness of the Karakorams. Conditions are too harsh to admit human settlement; Lord Dunmore, who crossed the Roof of the World in 1892, reckoned it the coldest place on earth (Keay, WMMM 116). Gardiner's account, however, with details of fights with wolves and hobnobbing with the Kyrgyz nomads of the area, is a complete contrast. Yarkand is the first recognizable place-name, though we do not know when he reached it, and from it he made his way back to Srinagar, with no explanations for his wanderings. Rumours of a vengeful Habib Ullah sent him into Kafiristan, passing through Chilas, Gilgit and Chitral, all hotspots in a later stage of the Great Game. This visit, accordingly to Keay, was the crowning achievement of his travels, since even today, not much is known about this mountain fastness between Chitral and Afghanistan (Keay, WMMM 119). Gardiner's two visits to this land pointed to the surprising affinities of the Kafirs to European features and ways, despite possessing the "usual" Asiatic characteristics of dirtiness, immorality and primitivism, attributed by Europeans to them.
And now to speak of the man on whom practically the whole of the initial phase of the Great Game hinged: Alexander Burnes. At this juncture, it should be noted that differences in the perception of this land were directly linked to the varying circumstances of travel, the location, background and purpose of the traveller. To the unhappy and maverick Gardiner, the wilds of Central Asia were home; whereas to the well-placed politically ambitious Burnes, Central Asia was a springboard to fame and recognition in Europe. Mention has already been made of his claim to fame ("Bokhara Burnes") and his account of his travels — *Travels into Bokhara* .... in other contexts. Initially a keen young officer in the Bombay army, he soon attracted the notice of his superiors and became a cherished employee of the East India Company. In 1832, he managed to reach Bokhara, accompanied by a friend Dr. Gerard, and published his famous three-volume *Travels into Bokhara*. In Keay's words, *Travels into Bokhara* "was much more than just a travelogue; nothing less in fact than a scholarly and comprehensive account of the whole of Central Asia, the Western Himalayas included" (Keay, WMMM 134). His map was also the first attempt to link India to Central Asia by a connected series of observations (Keay, WMMM 135).
account, entitled *A Voyage on the Indus*, will be discussed in the fifth chapter, in its chronological place with other primary texts.

Apart from the valuable topographical, political, economic and social information about the Indus, Sindh and the Punjab he gleaned for the Company, Burnes had two more important contributions to make to the Western repertoire of knowledge of Central Asian matters. One was the attention he drew to the atmosphere in the city of Yarkand, highly popular since times immemorial with the merchants of Central Asia. As Keay humorously puts it: "Bukhara might be the noblest city, Merv the oldest and Samarkand the finest, but Yarkand was the naughtiest; it was their Paris" (Keay, WMMM 136). Western Turkestan was gloomily Islamic, with rigid segregation of the sexes, and travellers from the outside strictly barred from the pleasures of local life. By contrast Yarkand had a much more permissive atmosphere, though it also had a native Muslim population. However it was ruled by the Chinese, and was the only place, (apart from Kashgar) in the Chinese empire to which the Central Asian merchant was admitted (Keay, WMMM 137).
This comparative laxity was important for the British, who were striving to get a toehold in Central Asia in the 1830's and 40's by establishing trade links there. Burnes' other important contribution was the confirmation he made of the existence of the Sir-i-Kol lake, referred to by Marco Polo in his *Travels*. He also reported that it was rumoured to be the source of the Oxus (also known as the Jaxartes, Syrdarya) river, and of a branch of the Indus.

Burnes has gained the stature he has in the history of Central Asia, mainly because it was his entry into Central Asian affairs and his findings that led to the intensifying of the Great Game. He wholeheartedly supported British fears of a possible Russian attack on India, for "Without India, the British colonies consisted of an inglorious ragbag of semi-savage littorals" (Keay, WMMM 138). Also, Britain's military strength rested on all the sea-routes to her prized possession; for the Russians, it was simply a matter of following their Mohammedan Central Asian predecessors, who had "traditionally looked on Hindustan as a pampered maiden to be periodically ravished". (Keay, WMMM 139).
In the silent tug-of-war between Russia and Britain to gain the upper hand in Central Asia, there were two crucial but indeterminate factors: the instability of the Central Asian domains themselves which still laboured the tyrants of a decadent and bygone era and were “in the last throes of decrepitude” (Keay, WMMM 139). The other factor was the general confusion over the real object of the entire Great Game – whether it was to prevent the Russians from winning the hegemony of Central Asia, or whether it was to defend British possession of India (Keay, WMMM 140). This matter did not clear up until the second phase of the Great Game set in, with the Communists taking the place of the Tsarists; it was only with the British bowing out of India in 1947 that the rivalry ceased.

One of Burnes' right hand men, Lt. John Wood and a marine surveyor, quietly and unobtrusively made a name for himself in the Great Game alongside his mercurial leader. He is associated with the river Oxus, the source of which he was sent out to discover. With a firm faith in the truth of Marco Polo's discoveries, he concluded that the Sir-i-Kol lake was the source, in keeping with local tradition.
George Nathaniel Curzon, (later Viceroy of India) visited the Pamirs in 1894 to settle the issue once and for all. He found a glacial source, the Wakh-jir glacier, and after much research declared it to be the real source of the Oxus in his work, *The Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus*.

In the history of the exploration of Central Asia’s fringes, there was a host of other adventurers who were propelled to the mountains either by personal or political factors or due to inexplicable force of circumstance. They form a rather motley group and have been exhaustively discussed in Keay’s work. Some of the names that stand out from this group (who have not attracted Keay’s notice, but Hopkirk’s) are Arthur Conolly (1807-1842 A.D.), Henry Pottinger (1789-1856 A.D.) who explored the approach routes to India (in disguise as a horse-dealer and a holy man), and Lt. Col. Charles Stoddart. The two British officers who became well-known names in Central Asian history, had albeit short careers in the Great Game, with an abrupt and untimely end. Seen from a temporal distance, they simply appear as mere pawns in the ever-changing dynamics of the Great Game in the early nineteenth century when it was at one of its most volatile stages. Conolly, originally in British Indian Service at Herat in the
early 1830's was keen to try to reach Khiva and try to discover the Russians' maneuvers there, if any. He adopted the guise of a merchant with goods for sale in the Khivan markets, but was apprehended on his way by armed horsemen and robbed. Barely escaping alive, Conolly nevertheless gathered much useful information about the Kara-Kum – Caspian region, and about the Khyber and Bolan passes being possible invasion routes to India. Conolly is markedly the very embodiment of British Imperialism: with a firm faith in the civilizing mission of Christianity, he was officially sent to try to unite the three quarrelling Khanates of Khiva, Bokhara and Khokand. Although a persuasive talker, he failed to convince any of three cantankerous and temperamental Amirs, who were forever suspicious of one another's designs. Conolly, in a last ditch effort, tried to secure the release of his fellow-officer, Lt. Col. Charles Stoddart, who was then a prisoner of the Amir Nasrullah of Bokhara.

The latter's entry into the Great Game arena had coincided with a stand-off between Persia and British forces in India in the 1830's. He had been officially sent to Bokhara to try to persuade the Amir to release his Russian slaves, so that Russia would have no excuse for
attacking Bokhara and thus advancing further south. Furious at receiving no reply to his personal letter to Queen Victoria, he used his prisoner Stoddart to lure Conolly into a common death trap. After having kept them in a verminous pit (filled with specially-bred scorpions and reptiles) for two months, the two British officers were taken out and made to dig their own graves in front of the Ark, or the Amir’s Citadel, and then brutally beheaded. News of their bloody end did not reach the British until several months later and when it did, shock waves rocked British policy towards India’s neighbors. Hopkirk has presented a very moving account of this episode of the Great Game in his book with the eponymous title.

The next important name in the history of the Western Himalayas exploration is Dr. Thomson. He was a distinguished naturalist and a surgeon, and part of an official British mission that had set out in 1847 to define the boundary between Ladakh and Tibet to ward off frontier disputes. While the mission failed dismally for reasons political and climatic, Ladakh itself was thoroughly explored (its language, rituals, literature, archaeology and geography were clearly set out in an official report made by a member of the mission, Cunningham, and it won him a coveted Gold medal from the Royal Geographical Society). Thomson
himself took on the assignment of exploring the northern confines of Ladakh towards Yarkand and Gilgit. Despite his own delicate constitution and the formidable climate to which he was subjecting himself, Thomson was undeterred by four failed attempts and applied for permission for a fifth. The route he took, through the Pir Panjal Pass, was a botanist’s delight; his narrative is full of minute details of the flora and fauna of this region (Keay, WMMM 180). As he moved towards the Nubra Valley, climbing the Sasser pass, he was struck by the barrenness and desolation of the land. He was the first European to discover and stand on the Karakoram watershed between India and China. His journey was politically significant at the time since it proved that the Karakoram pass was not the end of India's northern mountain barrier, and there were still more formidable ranges ahead. The pass had earlier been scaled by two German brothers, Herman and Robert Schlagintweit, in 1856 (Keay, WMMM 186), but for various reasons, their work did not receive the attention it merited; instead, appreciation came from a most unexpected quarter—the Tsar conferred the title of Sakunlunski (Lord of the Kun Lun) on Robert Schlagintweit in 1859. Mount Everest having been recognized as the world’s highest peak, known variously as K2, Mount Godwin-Austen and locally as Masherbrum, was sighted at close quarters by an
intrepid mountaineer Godwin-Austen. He established its relation to the Karakorams, and thus furthered the scope of Himalayan exploration. Johnson, a British national educated in India, one of the few members of the Kashmir Survey (1855 onwards), was the first to reach Eastern Turkestan excluding the Schlagintweits. En route, he was the first to have crossed all five of the great mountain passes (the Karakoram, Sasser, Khardung, the Sanjir and the Suget) and reached Khotan, which had not seen a European since Marco Polo and Benedict de Goes. Surprisingly, he pays scant attention to the appalling hardships of his expedition, mainly carried on during winter, with the icicles in his beard refusing to melt even in the sun (Keay, WMMM 205). He was unlike Dr. Henry Lansdell, who also crossed the Sanjir and Suget passes in October 1889. His report of Khotan, while drawing official censure for breach of Government rules, confirmed to the British, hearsay about turbulent political conditions in Eastern Turkestan. He submitted a detailed outline of Khotan's commercial life, vouching for the supposed safety and existence of a trade route for British goods from Rudok to Khotan. He also sounded alarm bells about Russian caravans bringing their goods to trade in Khotan. His trans-frontier movements were simultaneously praised and disowned by the British Government. After much degrading wrangling over sponsorship
funds. Johnson emerged in 1872 as the Wazir of Ladakh, the natives of which openly loved him.

The intensity with which the Western Himalayas were explored and the tempo of exploration increased greatly during the late 1860s and early 1870's. British knowledge of Eastern Turkestan was confined to Khotan, while Yarkand and Kashgar, two of the largest and richest cities in Turkestan, and attractive trade-centres, were yet to be visited "by someone who would live to tell the tale" (Keay, WMMM 213).

Two men set out with this very venture in mind; Robert Shaw¹, a tea planter from Kangra with a caravan of merchandise and “high hopes of opening up Central Asia”” (qtd. in Keay, WMMM 213) and a professional explorer from England, George Hayward. By pure coincidence, these two men competed with each other for the fame and glory that the mission would bring them, if successful. In their only meeting, they reached a certain compromise. Hayward was to forego his unconvincing Pathan disguise and give Shaw a start of ten days, who, in his turn, was

1. Uncle of the legendary Francis Younghusband, who opened up Tibet to the world.
to persuade the Yarkandis to admit Hayward into their city as well. Kangra, a tea-growing area, was the nearest such to the vast tea-drinking populations of Central Asia; to Shaw, the commercial potential of Yarkand appeared so promising that it was the 'Eldorado of Asia' to him (Keay, WMMM 216). Having survived the Changchenmo route between Kulu and Yarkand, Shaw was given friendly enough welcome by the Yarkandis at Shahidulla, their southernmost outpost. The Yarkandis were curious about this foreigner, and kept a close watch on him and Hayward, who arrived soon after. Both soon gave the slip to their guards and rode off in the direction of Yarkand. It must be noted that Hayward's interest in Central Asian regions were not so much commercial, as exploratory. To him, the question of the source of the Oxus still remained unanswered, and he viewed Yarkand and Kashgar as "possible spring boards from which 'to bag the Bam-i-Dunya' " (qtd. in Keay, WMMM 222) i.e. explore the Pamirs, the Roof of the World.

2. A place completely devoid of fuel, water, grazing or shelter. It was recognized for the death-trap it was by Forsyth in 1870. Forsyth was a Commissioner in the Punjab, who had made Central Asian affairs his area of interest.
Hayward went on to Yarkand, having discovered a new pass over the Kun Lun, and a new route from the Changchenmo, and the source of the Yarkand river. His rival, Shaw, had already arrived, and was duly amazed by the legendary hospitality of Turkestan: dasturkhans (feasts), robes of honour, horses and gun-salutes—all seemed in order. The exotic differences between India and Eastern Turkestan made Shaw view it as an Asiatic Holland. (It was this that had also attracted Leo Tolstoy to the idea of visiting Eastern Turkestan. The local name was Altyn Shahr {the Land of the Six Cities}. Keay, WMMM 227). Both men duly made their way (albeit separately) to Kashgar, where they were more in the position of pampered prisoners than guests of honour. Following their reports of the economy and politics of Eastern Turkestan, the British Government dispatched a trade mission headed by Forsyth. Shaw joined this party, while Hayward struck out on his own to the Pamirs which were his original destination. At the foot of the Darkot glacier in Yasin, however, he was mysteriously murdered. Shaw, as part of the Forsyth mission, fared somewhat better. Though the expedition was ruined by the cold, shortage of fuel and the death of hundreds of pack animals, they managed to reach Yarkand. But trade-wise, nothing was achieved, since the ruler of Eastern Turkestan Yakub Beg, was highly suspicious of all foreign interest in the
region. Nothing daunted, Forsyth mounted another expedition, this time on a far grander scale, in 1873. The object was to minutely examine every aspect of Turkestan life, and of course derive all kinds of strategic information in commercial, political and geographic areas. The upshot of the mission was that a treaty was concluded with Yakub Beg, to the effect that Indian goods, marketed by British subjects had unrestricted entry into Turkestan. (This was far more than the Russians had achieved in this region.) This treaty did not ever get ratified, despite Shaw’s efforts, and when Yakub Beg was murdered in 1877, the Chinese reoccupied Eastern Turkestan, and this put paid to all British interests. Andrew Dalgleish, a Scotsman who had actively engaged in the Leh-Yarkand trade for more than a decade, had reached Yarkand in 1874 with the first consignment of goods from the Central Asian Trading Company. In 1888, however, he too was hacked to death by his Afghan companions right on the crest of the Karakoram Pass. Thus the notions of trade with Central Asia that Moorcroft had first envisioned, and later furthered by Shaw, were finally destroyed.

The latter decades of the nineteenth century saw more determined thrusts into the Western Himalayas than ever before. Keay’s *The Gilgit
Game (hereafter TGG) echoes the dynamics of the Great Game not just in its title, but in its theme as well. After a temporary lull in the mid-nineteenth century, the Great Game intensified once more. Nowhere did the Russian empire and that of British India come closer to collision than in Gilgit, a small township in the heart of the Western Himalayas, where the frontiers of India, China, Russia, Afghanistan and Pakistan today meet. As Keay puts it, it was "the hub, the crow's-nest, the fulcrum of Asia" and "surely the wildest arena in which the Game was played" (Keay, TGG 1,2). The story of the exploration of Gilgit begins with the adventures of an eccentric German, Dr. Leitner, who had a way with languages, and whose interest in this region had brought him to Chilas³. He soon obtained official sanction from the Bengal Asiatic Society to study the language and customs of Chilas and to establish whether it had any connection with the mythological Mount Kailas. Encountering much hostility to his documenting in Chilas, he crossed the Indus, despite specific orders to the contrary. After several escapades and close brushes

³. Chilas – a place on the Indus, below Bunji and Gor, with a republican Government (Keay, TGG 16).
with death, occasioned alike by hostile natives and the treacherous route, he reached Gilgit. Here, after some initial trouble in locating the native Dard population, he hit upon the plan of holding a feast to attract them, and it worked. Though he stayed among them for only thirty-six hours, he claims to have discovered them, to have invented the name Dardistan, and to have been the first to study their languages. In spite of these rather tall claims that served only to infuriate his detractors, his 1866 journey led to the publication of *The Languages and Races of Dardistan* in 1877. In 1886, he was given the task of looking into the languages of Hunza and Nagar by the British Government, which he took up enthusiastically. But his *Hunza-Nagar Handbook* had a lukewarm reception due to its cumbersome size and tedious style. Since the British Government had annexed Kashmir, Dardistan was now a cause for deep anxiety. While Leitner was a failure as an explorer, his pleas for a sensitive handling of the Dards fell on deaf ears. Imperialism was the order of the day. By 1880, John Biddulph (he had been part of the 1873 Forsyth Mission), had seen more of the Western Himalayas than anyone interested in the area. His *The Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh* became the standard work on the subject (Keay, TGG 82). Never one for sensational travel-writing, even
Biddulph cannot help exclaiming over the ghastly treacheries of the Hunza road. All subsequent travellers to the Gilgit-Hunza region have "strain(ed) every literary muscle" (Keay, TGG 83) to do justice to this stretch of land. Apparently Biddulph's passion for sport had brought him to this hostile land; in actual fact, he was a captain in a crack regiment of the Bengal Cavalry, bound on a highly secret commission, to explore the tracks over the Hindu Kush between the Dard Valleys and the Oxus; in doing this, he investigated the extent of Afghan territorial claims in the region, re-examined the supposed source of the Oxus and checked on the significance of the Pamirs as a strategic barrier (Keay, TGG 87). His explorations coincided with a major advance in Russia's territorial claims: they had taken over most strategic locations in Central Asia, including the Khanates, which since times immemorial, resisted all foreign intrusions. Ostensibly commissioned to further probe the case of Hayward's murder, Biddulph was the first official secret agent to set foot in Dardistan; his real task was to further British expansionist policy in the region and to report on Russia's movements there. Upon a somewhat suspicious 'invitation' to visit Hunza, from its Mir, Biddulph entered the Hunza gorge, after having insisted on sending the Wazir's son as hostage to Gilgit, to guarantee his own safety. As Keay puts it, Hunza is " like
some forbidden fairy-tale garden" (Keay, TGG 92), being situated at over 8000 feet above sea level, on a narrow ledge between the Hunza river chasm and the sheer blackness of glacier-scarred rock, with neat little houses, surrounded by mulberries, vines, and carpets of yellow apricots drying in the sun. All the houses seemed to be orientated towards the towering Rakaposhi mountain; the people appeared to be cheerful and hardworking, despite traditional amusements of waylaying passing caravans and dealings in slave trade. This late nineteenth-century picture of Hunza is not very different from a mid-twentieth century account by two American travellers to this region, published by the National Geographic Society. Following Biddulph’s official report, it was decided that a direct British interest in Dardistan should be bargained for with the Maharaja of Kashmir, who would be bribed with the offer of power in Yasin. Needless to say Biddulph became the official British agent in Gilgit, embodying the national 'forward' policy that had been latent in the working of the British Government in India. Certainly Biddulph’s post in Gilgit was a most unenviable one. While he did his reporting conscientiously, he was one of the loneliest men in the service of the British Government. His perception of the natives around him bespeaks blatant imperial prejudice:
"The smiling fickle Chitrali wore a slightly different cap from that of the quick-witted cut-throats from Hunza; the choga, the long buttonless dressing gown of the fanatical Chilasis, was darker and commonly dirtier than that of the ... traders from ... the Indus. But each and all had the same unkempt, piratical aspect. The open chogas revealed bone-barred chests. Hideous scars and missing limbs might be the work of a crop-spoiling bear or an agitated neighbour; knives, swords and matchlocks... were never removed. Big nosed men, as bony of feature as of limb, some with heads shaven, others boasting long ringlets and rat's -tails, they looked like veteran homicides from a penitentiary chain-gang" (Keay, TGG 102-103).

This description, although retold by Keay, clearly reflects the imperial attitude of the Victorian Briton to those around him: the piecemeal description of body parts, the usual attributes to natives of dirt, slovenliness, craftiness, bestiality, deception and a wildness which could be mitigated only by the civilizing influence of the white man who took it upon himself to come to these lawless regions. Anglo-Russian rivalry intensified alarmingly during Biddulph's stint in Gilgit; the local
hostilities amongst the various ethnic peoples, together with wildly fluctuating power in the hands of a few unscrupulous brigands and Biddulph's own inexpert handling of the situation, finally led the Government to close their Agency down in Gilgit, while Biddulph himself was recalled to Simla, as doing more harm to British interests than good.

It is important to note that the closing down of the Gilgit British Agency did not necessarily mean a dwindling in their interest in this region. On the contrary, never were the secret workings and intrigues of the Great Game more rife in this part of the world. These undercover tactics have fascinated many a literary artist, notably Kipling, whose works about British life in the Indian colony were mainly inspired by the dynamics of the Great Game of this time (1881-1889).

4. Going by the personal experience of Biddulph, the native attitude to the white man was very different in Gilgit, when compared to India. In the latter, any British could reasonably expect that the doctrines of Imperialism would protect him; whereas in Gilgit he was an object of curiosity and contempt (Keay, TGG 102).
One of the most unlikely entrants into the Great Game was William Watts MacNair, a British surveyor (born and educated in India), who had been mapping in Afghanistan during the second British occupation of it in 1883. This was because he was easily one of the least politically motivated players; apart from this, he had a total lack of any personal career ambition. Disguised as Mir Mohammed, a hakim with carefully concealed mapping equipment, together with a genuine affection for and understanding of Asiatics, he set off for Ganderi just beyond the British frontier. He was accompanied by two secret agents of the 1860's Indian Survey - they were two genuine Kaka Khel Pathans who traded regularly between Peshawar and Chitral. One was a Kafir recently converted to Islam, and the other was a Syed. They now attempted to make a route survey from the Punjab to Chitral and Kafiristan, passing through dominions that were strictly out of British bounds. They crossed the Malakand pass into Swat and headed for the Lowarai pass into

5. A native Muslim travelling-doctor.
6. Kafir — infidel or unbeliever according to Islam. Their land, Kafiristan, lies between Chitral and Afghanistan.
7. Syed — wandering Islamic holy man.
Chitral—this was the most direct route between British India and Dardistan, and MacNair was the first European to see it. Their ultimate aim was to get to Kafiristan, map its passes and view the route possibilities around it, since it was totally unexplored on British maps of the region. Apart from the topography of the land, the people themselves were a great curiosity to European eyes. Keay describes them as Asia's greatest ethnological mystery (Keay, TGG 119). Called Dards by Dr. Leitner more for convenience than anything else, the Kafirs appeared to have been ignored by every religious and cultural influence since the stone age. European in physique, they worshipped spirits, wore goatskins, and hunted with axes, bows and arrows; they were also reputed to indulge in orgies of unspeakable obscenity (Keay, TGG 119). MacNair managed to breast the Shawal Pass which led to independent Kafiristan, and rapturously sketched in the features of this hitherto unknown land. He also settled down in the first village to observe their way of life and even participated in it. His stay was, however, brief; he was called back to Chitral and eventually received a severe official reprimand for having acted out of bounds. Here was one player of the Game that reaped precious few rewards for his involvement in it.
MacNair's movements in Dardistan may well have been inspired by Sir Charles Metcalfe MacGregor, who was then Quarter Master General of the Indian Army, and famous in Great Game literature for being the founder of the Indian Army's Intelligence Department. This institution analysed reports submitted by various intrepid Great Game adventurers; MacGregor clearly occupies a leading position in the phenomenon of Russophobia that followed in the wake of his reports. Of all the adventure-hungry and footloose applicants for official missions into Central Asia, MacGregor was one of the most clamourous. It is unfortunate that his career coincided with a relatively relaxed attitude on the part of the British towards Russian movements in Central Asia; as a consequence of this, his pleas and doomsday warnings were dismissed as alarmist, and he never got sent anywhere. It is ironical that, with his death in 1887, the very sentiments that he had been trying to foster in vain suddenly came into frenetic life: British chiefs began to speak of a forward policy once more, as Russia coolly routed an Afghan detachment from the Panjdeh oasis (Keay, TGG 127). MacGregor's closest friend Colonel William Lockhart led the first ever major British mission into Dardistan soon after this. It was an open attempt to thwart Russian plans, and
somehow secure the goodwill of the chief of Chitral, Aman-ul-mulk. In an effort to achieve the latter aim, Lockhart, with an erroneous judgement, arranged for two rival sons of the Chief (he had sixty-odd) to be feted in India by the British. In return, he obtained a half-hearted consent to visit the Dora pass and Kafiristan. He reported in due course that the Dora Pass was a possible opening to any aggressors wishing to invade British territory. He therefore set out to secure the goodwill of the Kafirs of the region and ensure that they would retard any mischief-makers, Russian or others.

He headed back to Chitral, having sealed a pact with the Kafirs to the effect that they would guard their own passes from invaders, armed with British weapons and ammunition. The Lockhart mission, however, was completely eclipsed by the incredible achievement of Ney Elias, the next Briton on the scene. He was not much of an official agent, though; he was propelled by a purely exploratory and scientific zeal. His movements

8. The Chief was known as the Mehtar. Chitral was being keenly eyed by the British as a point from which to effect a face-off with Russia, following MacGregor’s reports.
across Central Asia reflect the West's attitude to this part of the world at the time: travel and discovery in this region brought them recognition, fame, wealth and adulation back home. Ney Elias, despite his retiring nature, could certainly have basked in his achievements: in 1868, he had surveyed the mouth of the Yellow River in northern China; in 1872, he had crossed the Gobi desert, the Mongolian steppes and most of Asiatic Russia en route from Peking to Moscow; early in 1875 he had gone as part of a mission to Western China; in 1876, as British Representative at Leh, he had journeyed twice across the breadth of the Western Himalayas into Sinkiang (Keay, TGG 147). Though he was regarded as the greatest Asian traveller of his day, Ney Elias proved an exception to the general herd of Western explorers who sought desperately to aggrandize themselves by travelling in this region. In Keay's words, he was morbidly sensitive about self-advertisement; none did so much and talked so little about it (Keay, TGG 147). Beneath the shrinking introvert image, however, lay a little-understood trait — he was a perfectionist, to whom no goal or standard was high enough. This, together with a complete indifference to physical hardship akin to that of Hayward's, did not win him any friends. The marathon expeditions across Central Asia were all at his own expense and enterprise. His explorations attracted official patronage and he remained in government service all his life,
though not enthusiastically. With the Lockhart mission still dragging on with many a backward glance at Ney Elias’ movements in the Pamirs, there was still the Chinese province Sinkiang to be reckoned with. Elias was commissioned to try and improve politico-trading relations with the Chinese authorities in Sinkiang. Unfortunately his superiors considered it too dangerous to designate any official position to Elias, in the wake of Hayward’s brutal murder: the Chinese were on red alert for all foreign intrusion, and besides there was already Petrovski, a deeply influential Russian consul, established in Kashgar. He was to explore the Pamirs and Upper Oxus with special reference to the territorial status of the region; and to monitor Russian movements in and around it.

The Russians, of course, had already explored the Pamir region, complete with botanists, surveyors and military spies. Their reports were quickly translated and published in the British Royal Geographical Society journal.

Elias travelled from Yangi-Hissar in Sinkiang to Zebak in Badakhshan in over two months, crossing (or recrossing) more than a dozen passes of over 13,000 feet and discovering a peak of over 24,000
feet which he named Mount Dufferin°, after a prominent official of the

time.

As he was leaving the Upper Oxus region, he got official news that

the Lockhart mission was now in Gilgit. He corresponded with Lockhart

out of sheer desperation, since ill-health had quite demoralized the man.

The proud trail-blazer who had chafed against all official restrictions now

lapsed into the querulous irritability of a hypochondriac. His jaundiced

gaze wanders over Badakhshan:

"How sick and tired... one gets of everlasting hills, brown, rocky,

barren and snow-topped, and of deep, narrow valleys" (qtd. in

Keay, TGG 156).

When he reached the plains of Kateghan, he speaks of the place as "a

dreary, gloomy land and one that depresses the spirit more than any place

I know of"; of the native Uzbeks, he said that they were "like savage

9. It is commonly called Mustagh Ata, later coming into limelight

when Sir Francis Younghusband scaled its pass in 1887.
curs muzzled by their Afghan rulers ... surly and sullen ... an ill-favoured, coarse, Chinese race with bad features and bad characteristics stamped upon their faces" (qtd. in Keay, TGG 156).

Though his lone mission had run aground so disappointingly, Elias took stock of what he had discovered and reported that the Afghan frontier could be continued right across the Pamirs till it touched Chinese territory (the north-east bank of the Murghab-Aksu tributary). This, he felt, would create a belt of neutral buffer territory right across the Pamirs and protect the whole of the Hindu Kush and Dardistan from Russian advance. One of the main reasons for the failure of his discoveries to be immediately transposed to active policy in the region was the intense personal rivalry that had cropped up amongst Elias, Lockhart and a new entrant, Ridgeway. As Keay puts it, "Throughout 1886 not a single British boot left its mark on the virgin Pamir snows" (Keay, TGG 161).

In April 1886, the Lockhart mission, having wintered in Gilgit, made straight for Hunza, thereby walking into the same trap that Biddulph had struggled out of a decade back. The Mir of Hunza Ghazan Khan quoted the restitution of the forts of Chalt and Chaprot (still held jointly by
the Dogras and the Mir of Nagar, his deadly rival) as the price to be paid for the onward progress of the mission. After much dithering, Lockhart, not without shame, effected the official disposssession of the Mir of Nagar, and pushed ahead on to the Killik pass, where the Afghan governor denied him further progress without the requisite documents. Though he had reached Badakhshan, as had Elias, Lockhart was officially recalled at this point of his journey since Anglo-Afghan relations were then under strain. At great cost (he had alienated Nagar, which had been one of the most loyal Dard states; antagonised the Afghans and disappointed the Kafirs) he had managed to complete the exploration of Dardistan, and came to the conclusion that both sides of all the main Hindu Kush passes would not admit any intruders larger in number than a small exploratory party (Keay, TGG 167). Ridgeway had, with bitterness, merely followed in his footsteps and gotten a knighthood, and Ney Elias, “too old and too broken”, had tiredly made his way back to Simla (Keay, TGG 167). Elias, for his part, gained notoriety rather than fame, because he took the unheard-of step of returning the Gold medal awarded to him by the Royal Geographical Society. His motive for this can be found in the rather cavalier treatment he had received from British official quarters in India.
In 1883, Russians had advanced up to the Wakhan corridor (which had been Elias' legacy). In May 1888, the dreaded 'advance' on the wrong side of the frontier came; but it was not an army of invading Cossacks. Gabriel Bonvalot, a French geographer who had already gone over a good part of Central Asia, was along with his two companions credited with the honour of first bridging the Pamirs gap between the Russian and British empires. Surprisingly, he was neither a British nor a Russian agent; he had been benighted on the Alai, snowed in on the Pamirs and robbed in the Hindu Kush, and barely escaped alive, before being arrested by Nizam-ul-Mulk, the Yasin Chief, and sent on to Simla through British orders. Bonvalot's coming over the frontier is politically significant mainly because the condition in which he arrived signalled the firm closure of the frontier for at least another six months.

The real advance, however, came in 1889 in the shape of Captain Grombtchevski (a Pole by birth), a Russian political officer with a Cossack escort who entered Hunza. He struck a deal with Safdar Ali\textsuperscript{10},

\textsuperscript{10} Son of Ghazan Khan, who murdered his own father in time-honoured Hunza fashion (Keay, TGG 174).
the new Mir of Hunza, with offers of money and arms, and set up a Russian post in Hunza; the Mir also agreed to seek Russian help in repelling any further aggression from the British in Gilgit. The Mir also reinitiated the traditional Hunza pastime of raiding caravans on the Ladakh-Sinkiang route. His 1888 attack brought to light two things that were of vital interest to the British: China had been unable to prevent the raid from taking place on her own territory Sinkiang; secondly, the fact that the Hunza raiders managed to give everyone the slip from one end of the Western Himalayas to the other, pointed to the existence of more unexplored territory along the length of the Karakorams and around the perimeter of Hunza.

The British responded to this in two ways. At the diplomatic level, an officer named Captain Algernon Durand was dispatched as agent to the Gilgit outpost, which was to be reopened; he was to go to Hunza and persuaded the Mir to refrain from any further raids, and/or dealing with Russia and China, in return for a greatly increased subsidy. As for behind-the-scene operations, (which made up most of the Great Game), a young captain in the King's Dragoon Guards by name Francis
Edward Younghusband was chosen for this difficult task. Only twenty six at the time, young Frank was all for the current 'forward' policy followed by his glorious government; he even managed in 1886 to persuade his superiors that he must be allowed to go to Manchuria (which lies between Mongolia and Korea) to make sure no threat to India could emanate from that quarter. After having reassured himself on this point, while returning he made an overland journey across China and Western Himalayas, being deeply inspired by the intrepid Elias' achievements. The travels of Francis Younghusband are unique, not just for the lands he covered, or the laurels the traveller gained, but for their own peculiar characteristics. To him, travel, especially in the mountains, was a journey of inner exploration. His *Wonders of the Himalaya* exudes a cloying Pantheism surprising in an age of materialism, economic and political imperialism. There are incongruities in the man himself. In tandem with his deep respect for other cultures, there is an open and triumphant acceptance of Imperialism and its values.

His first attempt to scale the Mustagh pass proved impossible since he knew next to nothing of mountain climbing. In his 1889 mission, he reached Shahidulla (Kirghiz nomads’ camping grounds) and secured the
nomads' promise to show him the secret route of the Hunza raiders by well-timed offers of money and support from the Kashmir Government. As he fearlessly ascended the Shimshal pass, he was confronted by Hunza raiders, but with stupendous courage, diplomacy and sheer force of personality, he managed to evade death and prevent bloody clashes amongst the different natives in his group. As Keay puts it: "And the solitary Englishman could not but again marvel at the extraordinary influence of the European in Asia" (Keay, TGG 188). A more detailed account of this famous encounter is to be found in *Wonders of the Himalaya*, which will be discussed later.

Since his official instructions were to find out Russian intentions in the region, Younghusband kept his eyes peeled. His vigilance was duly rewarded: he met a Russian expedition, which had a scientific and military project headed by a pupil of the legendary Prejevalsky, the greatest Russian traveller of his day. This group worked along the Sino-Tibetan border, and had no designs whatsoever on India. He also met a harmless Frenchman M. Dauvergne, who was in the area on account of a carpet manufacture contract with the Kashmir Government. All along, he had kept receiving news of Grombtchevski's movements within his own radius.
The former has been identified by Lord Curzon in India as the "stormy petrel of Russian frontier advance" (Keay, TGG 189). And indeed, his career did seem to merit such a title: he had served with distinction under General Skobelev in the taking-over of Turkestan; he was designated Special Frontier Commissioner for Ferghana¹¹ province; he had systematically explored Sinkiang in 1885, and in 1886 had worked up the Naryn river into the Tian Shan mountain range. His exploits had won him the patronage of the Tsar, and he was considered the natural successor to Prejevalsky.

After leaving Shimshal, Francis Younghusband met the 'stormy petrel' at Khaian Aksai. Despite their opposing political aims, it was an amicable meeting. A detailed description of this famous meeting on 'neutral' ground is to be found in Younghusband's Wonders of the Himalaya.

With good wishes for the future, Grombtchevski went on to explore east towards the Tibetan frontier. It was a bad move weather-wise, but

¹¹. Previously the Khanate of Khokand.
Younghusband deliberately refrained from dissuading him and the journey completely broke his health and party. The genial Pole never suspected his British friend of having put him up to it, and when they met again later in Yarkand in 1890, they were the best of friends. After duly sending back various reports to his superiors in India, Younghusband went on to prowl about the Pamirs and pester the Chinese authorities in Sinkiang. In June 1890, he was officially sent back to the Pamirs to continue Elias' unfinished work: he was to determine where the Afghan and Chinese boundaries were to meet. In contrast to Elias' recommendations, Francis Younghusband felt, like many others, that the Chinese occupation right up to the new frontier would be better respected than the Afghans. After six months of patient negotiations, when the Chinese authorities came to Somatash (where the frontiers met) to establish an outpost, they were confronted by a prior Russian claim. When Francis Younghusband went there to find out for himself, there were quite a few Russian troops ready "to annex the whole of the Pamirs" (Keay, TGG 210). Not being equipped even with a Gurkha escort, let alone troops, he could not protest when the grim-faced Russians politely asked him to leave their territory or face arrest. This insult to British
prestige and trespass across the Hindu Kush made Francis Younghusband's earlier-proposed Hunza-Nagar expedition more urgent than ever. Both empires being hesitant in engaging in a full-scale battle as far as the boundaries were concerned, negotiations took place.

The British prerogative of a strip of Afghan territory\(^\text{12}\) between the Hindu Kush frontier and the Russian one, was accepted in principle; the Russians got most of the Pamirs. As for the Gilgit agent Durand, he could not rest till he had made his way up the Hunza gorge with arms and men. After a long and bloody siege, the Mir Safdar Ali escaped to Sinkiang, while his beloved Hunza was ransacked by the British. A half-brother of Safdar Ali was later established as Mir, after Durand's actions were recognized as a mistake and British political posts were removed from Hunza. It was later found, after all the passes (Killik, Mintaka, Shimshal and others) that led down into Hunza had been mapped and assessed, that British fears of a Russian advance on India through this region were quite unjustified. The Hunza campaign has

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\(^{12}\) This anomalous strip is called the Wakhan corridor. It separates Pakistan from Tadjikistan.
been extensively described in Knight's *Where Three Empires meet*. Knight travelled to Kashmir in 1891, and also to the Hindu Kush and Karakoram regions. He accompanied Captain Bower (of 17th Bengal Cavalry) who was himself well-known as a Central Asian traveller and explorer. On this expedition, they were intent on mapping uncharted areas in the mountain regions immediately beyond Northern India's frontier. In describing the lands, their sights and sounds, he refers to Srinagar as "the Asiatic Venice" (Knight, *Where Three Empires Meet* 13). Their expedition, like many others before and after them, ran into the usual difficulties of crossing mountain passes in winter – perilous pathways, avalanches of crumbling rock, loss of caravan animals, scarcity of water and fuel, menace from caravan-raiding robbers, and so on. He takes particular note of Ladakhi culture, and their religion: describes the Dalai Lama, and the Devil Dance at Leh. After receiving the news of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, they plunge headlong into their own invasion of Hunza in retaliation. At the end of the narrative is an account, full of schoolboy-glee, of a treasure hunt in a Hunza castle, where, however, they found nothing. The entire travelogue reflects a stirring picture of the pillage, looting and ravages committed by the British on the natives of this region.
The Hunza-Nagar expeditions, the subsequent siege on Chilas and Chitral all foreshadow the blasting-open of Tibet by Francis Younghusband. Ironically he had not advocated aggression in any of his reports of the former regions. European interest in the opening-up of Tibet developed as an off-shoot of Central Asian exploration.

Peter Hopkirk describes the dynamics of political intrigue with reference to Tibet as the last round of the Great Game (Hopkirk, *The Great Game* 501). He deals with the opening up of Tibet by Europeans in his work *Trespassers on the Roof of the World* (hereafter TORW). Tibet was still largely a blank on British maps in the early nineteenth century. The Survey of India hit upon the idea of training secret native spies (called the 'pundits') to carry out clandestine surveys of Tibet, if they could get past its perilous frontiers. Two names especially stand out from the crowd of pundits thus trained: Nain Singh and Mani Singh, known simply as No.1 and No.2, who set out for Tibet in January 1865 (Hopkirk, *TORW* 26). They were stopped at the frontier and thoroughly
searched for their suspicious appearance, but their survey instruments escaped detection.

The resourceful Nain Singh Red disguise as a Ladakhi and joined a caravan bound for Lhasa. He collected much scientific data regarding the latitude, longitude, altitude and social-political-religious-economic information about the land and its people as well. He managed to join another Ladakh caravan on his way back and mapped the Jong-lam which is the most elevated trade-route in the world, stretching across Tibet from east to west, up to Lake Manasasarovar. His work was hailed as a feat of extraordinary courage and determination by British officials in India.

The British were attracted to Tibet for two reasons: one was sheer curiosity about this forbidden land; the other was the lure of gold.

13. Native disguise called for concealment of their survey equipment as well. Compasses were hidden in prayer wheels, prayer-beads were used for counting footsteps, thermometers were placed in walking-staffs, false bottoms were added to their travel-chests, in which they carried sextants, etc. (Hopkirk, TORW 26).
which was reported to be found in plenty in Tibet, especially after the Panchen Lama\textsuperscript{14} had innocently sent Warren Hastings two gold ingots and some gold dust as a gift in 1775.

Avid for information on the legendary gold fields of Tibet, Captain Montgomerie (British official in India) again sent Nain Singh, Mani Singh and a third 'Pundit'. The native Tibetan attitude to gold was in stark contrast to the white man's rapacity: they believed that gold nuggets contained life and were the parents of gold dust. If the former were disturbed, the supply of the latter would be cut off and the entire country would be impoverished. If by mistake a nugget was dug up, it was at once reburied. Similar beliefs hovered around the existence of silver (Hopkirk, TORW 37-38). Nain Singh, in due course, made his way back to his superiors in India and reported that native gold-diggers were paid very low, and that the gold mainly went to China, in exchange for their tea. This put paid to any hopes that the British had of ousting Chinese trade in Central Asian markets with Indian tea, which was not liked.

\textsuperscript{14} Religious head of State.
It is surprising that the various exploits of the pundits should have been openly published in the journal of the Royal Geographical Society considering that the Russians depended on the journal for all news on Tibet and surrounding areas. The tribe of 'pundits' greatly increased after Nain Singh's resounding success as a spy and surveyor. One of these who also gained recognition for his contribution to the map of Tibet was Kintup: he was sent by Captain Harman of the Survey of India to establish whether or not the Tsangpo river flowed into the Brahmaputra. He released five hundred tagged logs (at the rate of fifty per day) into the flowing waters to chart the course of the river without exciting any suspicion, despite the appalling personal risks. He even managed to escape out of temporary slavery.

15. Hopkirk, in *Trespassers on the Roof of the World* has cogitated at length on the ambiguous status of these intrepid 'pundits' in Indian history — were they heroes or traitors? Whichever, they have certainly since been forgotten.
Up to the mid-nineteenth century, the Tibetans themselves had had no cause to regard Europeans with suspicion; to them, the white man was merely an object of wonder, curiosity and even amusement. But as the Russian empire began its inexorable expansion southwards, and the seemingly invincible Khanates of Central Asia fell to their all-consuming army, and as the British began their power-politics northwards, Tibet began to feel threatened. The Chinese, they knew, could not help them because they had their own problems at the time. After a supposedly British-instigated Nepali attack, Lhasa the holy capital, closed its frontiers to all Europeans and non-Asiatics. The Tibetans feared the most for their precious Buddhistic beliefs and their gold.

Of all the adventurous souls (both men and women) who made it their business to try to reach Lhasa, not one ever had any doubts about whether he had any right to gatecrash thus into a land whose people’s only wish had ever been to be left alone. One of the first of these was

16. They were trying to hold on to a disintegrating Manchu empire.
Colonel Nikolai Prejevalsky of the Imperial Russian army, who in 1872 had made an exploratory foray into the ill-guarded northern regions as far as the headwaters of the Yangtze. He was forced to retrace his steps by the harshness of Tibetan winter (Hopkirk, TORW 58), but he was more determined than ever to reach Lhasa. Six years were to pass before he made another attempt to reach the capital. He had become a legend in Russia by then, with the support of the Tsar himself for his expedition. Armed with a Chinese passport for Tibet (using the Tsar's influence) and seven well-trained Cossack guards, he was determined to shoot his way to Lhasa if need be. The journey through Tibet's great northern mountain ranges and on to the high Chang Tang was peaceful. Wild rumours sped before him to Lhasa, to the effect that a Russian invading army was coming to kidnap the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetans. So when he was only 150 miles short of Lhasa he received official orders from the Potala\textsuperscript{17} that he was to proceed no further and must leave Tibet at once. After much argument and flourishing of the Chinese passport

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Potala – like a huge palace, it is the main monastery of holy Lhasa, where the Dalai Lama resided.
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(which cut no ice with the Tibetan officials) Prejevalsky had no choice but to comply. Thus his great dream was shattered and "Tibetans had successfully tweaked the nose of the Russian bear" (Hopkirk, TORW 62). His other exploratory missions into Central Asia were not as frustrating, however.

In his work *From Kulja Across the Tian Shan to Lohnor* (1879 A.D.) we see his discoveries, both topographical and cultural. He accounts for the brevity of the narrative by pointing out the great physical prostration under which he was suffering, caused by prolonged exposure to one of the harshest climates in the world. As he picks his way through deserts and swamps alike, his descriptions of places, people, manners, customs, food, dress, habits and climate are richly evocative of Marco Polo's style. Amidst details of his journey and its hardships, he describes the Valley of the Ili, the Ovis Poli sheep, the fauna of the Tarim basin, the suspicions of the natives of the region, Lake Kara-Buran\(^\text{18}\), Lake Chomkul, and the subsequent 'disappearance' of the sandswept Tarim. He takes note of the indigenous birds and their migratory routes and habits,

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native camel-hunting methods and techniques of survival in the winter. He explored Lake Ala-kul. He dispatched one of his party, Nifantieff, to survey Lake Balkash, which work was completed after one year. At the end of the expedition and in the middle of the narrative, so to speak, we find Baron von Richthofen's remarks on the entire expedition: technical information on the origins of the Lop-Nor lake, its discovery, and various positions assigned to it on maps from Marco Polo onwards, speculations on Prejevalsky's hydrography and his findings and comparison with Chinese work in the area.

The narrative also contains a reply from Prejevalsky, mainly answering all technical questions, and giving descriptions of the Starovertsi, a particular sect of aborigine fishermen who visited Lop-Nor. His narrative ends with a comparison between the Starovertsi and the Mormons of the Rocky mountains. Yet another work of this "Central Asian Livingstone" (Hopkirk, TORW 62) is entitled Mongolia, the

19. Well-known for his travels in China in the 19th century.

20. His name is also spelt Przhewalski.
The next foreign visitor to Tibet was William Woodville Rockhill, a young American attaché at the Legation in Peking. In 1888 A.D., he marched along the ancient Silk Road, hoping to effect a clandestine crossing into Tibet from the remote north-east frontier, which was ill guarded. Dressed like a Chinese native, he managed to reach Kumbum, a great Tibetan monastery, and stayed there a month and a half, gathering useful material on the Tibetan religion and way of life for the book he would later publish: *The land of the Lamas* (Hopkirk, TORW 69). All this time he had posed as a pilgrim, deeply involved in Tibetan culture, without exciting suspicion. Greatly encouraged, he pressed slowly on the harsh, north-eastern route to Lhasa. Less than four hundred miles from his goal, he realized that he would have to turn back, for he had no money left. Undaunted, he made another attempt to reach Lhasa less than two years later, this time getting within one hundred and ten miles of the capital, before being turned back by the watchful Tibetans. But the wealth
of information and material he brought back with him led to some of the most respected scholarship on Tibet and its people.

At about the same time as Rockhill's adventure in Tibet, an English clergyman by name Henry Lansdell (with visits to Samarkand and Bokhara to his credit) was fired with an idea. This was to try and gatecrash Lhasa, armed with a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Dalai Lama, himself posing as “an English Lama bearing a communication from the Grand Lama of the West to the Grand Lama of the East…” (Hopkirk, TORW 75). Duly equipped, he reached Leh in 1888 A.D., from where he could proceed no further, without the letter reaching its goal. Unluckily for him, his journey coincided with the Anglo-Tibetan clash in Sikkim, and the British themselves discouraged him from trying to move ahead to Lhasa. Notwithstanding this disappointment, he wrote a book on his travels—*Chinese Central Asia* (Hopkirk, TORW 75).

The next attempt to reach the forbidden capital was made by another seasoned Central Asian traveller, a Frenchman named Gabriel Bonvalot. He had visited, like his predecessor, both Samarkand and
Bokhara and had also crossed the Pamirs into India. But unlike Lansdell, he was not easily rebuffed. He tried to reach Lhasa secretly, only to be turned back by the waiting Tibetans just ninety five miles from the holy city. However, he at least had the satisfaction of knowing that he was the first Westerner to have gone that close to Lhasa. His travel-account is entitled *Across Tibet* (Hopkirk, TORW 78).

Yet another in the long list of clandestine travellers to Tibet was Captain Hamilton Bower21, a young Indian Army officer. He was accompanied by Surgeon-Captain W.G. Thorold; in summer 1891 they attempted to cross secretly and illegally into Tibet from Ladakh. His ostensible errand was a shooting expedition, like his previous Central Asian forays; his real purpose of course being to make a clandestine map of large unexplored areas of Tibet and if possible, reach Lhasa and report on the forbidden city.

The expedition met with much the same reception as others before. The Tibetans refused to let him go anywhere near their holy capital, and only very reluctantly agreed to let him continue eastwards and leave

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21. Of the Bower Manuscript fame — more of this later in Chapter 3.
Tibet across its eastern border with China. Though Bower never reached Lhasa, his epic journey (punctuated by several mishaps, such as wolves eating up their sheep, pack ponies freezing to death, etc.) was hailed as a feat of scientific exploration by the Royal Geographical Society. His *Diary of a Journey across Tibet* had a wide readership (Hopkirk, TORW 89). What makes Bower's adventures unique is that he managed despite appalling difficulties, to obtain military and political intelligence on Tibet, which was set forth in an official report entitled *Some Notes on Tibetan Affairs* (Hopkirk, TORW 89). The contents of this report, or any hint of it, did not appear anywhere in the travel-account, which was strictly for public consumption back home in England. In his *Notes*, Bower pointed out that Lhasa could easily be seized by a force entering from the south or south-west: that the Chinese presence in Tibet was negligible, and that an invading army from India had definitely more advantages than any Russian advance (Hopkirk, TORW 90-91).

Apart from the political and geographical motivational forces that drove men to attempt to reach Lhasa, there was also the religious element
to be considered. After the manner of the early Christian missionaries who had first discovered Tibet, there had been a spate of such missions to Tibet since. Needless to say the Tibetans dreaded them the most of all gatecrashers to their Buddhist land. In 1887 they had attacked a French mission station on the Chinese-Tibetan frontier, destroying it and all the inmates totally (Hopkirk, TORW 92). Despite this incident, a young Presbyterian woman named Annie Royle Taylor made her way into Tibet with the dream of preaching Christian gospel to the Dalai Lama himself. The Tibetans believed that their spiritual leader was a reincarnation of God, the "Living Buddha". According to her, "... inside the heathen capital... lived a uniquely religious people awaiting -- surely -- rescue from their barbaric beliefs and practices, and ready for conversion" (Hopkirk, TORW 92). Undeterred by hostility and suspicion which increased at every step of the hard way, she pressed on for Lhasa, driven by missionary zeal. But on January 3, 1893 A.D, only three days' march from the capital she was arrested and ordered to go back the way she had come. Though she did not realize her dream, her courage, strength and determination won deep admiration from those who learnt of her journey.
For their part, the Tibetans had by now acquired through experience an almost pathological fear of all foreigners (Hopkirk, TORW 92). The next name to feature in the list of failed attempts to reach Lhasa was Jules Dutreuil de Rhins; a French explorer, he had spent much of 1891 exploring the Kun Lun and Karakoram ranges and in 1893 made his way to Tibet accompanied by an Orientalist called Fernand Grenard.

When they were six days' march from Lhasa they were halted and forced to go back; after fifty days of negotiation, by a different route from the one they had come on. Ill health, appalling weather, death of both pack-animals and native helpers and open hostility dogged their way out of Tibet. At one village, the Frenchman's highhandedness with the natives led to an altercation, which soon escalated into an exchange of fire. His companion managed to escape, but de Rhins was bound hand and foot and cast into a river, still alive. Back in Paris, Grenard was told that he had only got what he had deserved and that the entire disaster was his fault.

The allure of the forbidden land was never stronger than when the Europeans came to know of one failed attempt after another. The next to
try their luck in the race for Lhasa was a couple named Littledale, together with their nephew William Fletcher and a terrier named Tanny. The Littledales were veteran Asian travellers who enjoyed a high reputation among those who knew about Central Asian exploration. In 1895, they set off for Tibet travelling through Russian Turkestan and along the old Silk Road to Cherchen, the same route taken by de Rhins. The Littledales’ strategy was a combination of reinforced food supplies, plenty of money for bribery, sheer bluff and force of will. But for all that, they met with stronger circumstances than they could withstand; the usual death or desertion of party-men, loss of animals, inimical weather conditions and illness. Just forty-nine miles from Lhasa, they were forced to admit defeat and went back towards Ladakh, where they could find a Moravian mission hospital.

One of the most sensational adventures into Tibet was undertaken by Henry Savage Landor, grandson of the irascible Victorian poet Walter Savage Landor. A scheme that had long been dismissed as impossible was only a challenge to the arrogant Henry. In 1897, he crossed into Tibet, inevitably being stopped by the long-suffering Tibetans, whose much-tried patience however, had finally given out. Henry was the ninth
European to trespass onto their land, which was in their eyes desecrated each time a foreigner set foot in it. He was seized and subjected to unimaginable tortures, described in detail by Hopkirk and in Landor's own travel-account *In the Forbidden Land* (Hopkirk, TORW 116).

How any human mortal could have withstood the fantastically cruel abominations he was put through is highly debatable. Suffice it to say that Landor presented an apparent indifference to all their cruelties and got away with his life owing to the sole fact of having rather unusually webbed fingers: in Tibetan culture, a sure sign of indestructibility. When he came back to England with his lurid tales, he met with energetic criticism of his doings, and though his original aim (to write a sensational best-seller on a strange and exotic land that the whole world was curious about) was achieved, his experiences in Tibet were dismissed by the British Government.

In Hopkirk's words, perhaps the most foolhardy yet the most heroic of all Western attempts to reach Lhasa was that of the Rijnhart couple, in 1898 (Hopkirk, TORW 137). In Susie Rijnhart's remarkable travelogue *With the Tibetans in Tent and Temple* (Hopkirk, TORW 138)
we hear of the medical and evangelical work they meant to do, once in Lhasa. Hopkirk’s recounting of the Rijnharts’ misfortunes in Tibet focuses on the illness and death of their little baby son Charlie. The grief of the bereaved parents, the difficulties of burial in a strange land, and the necessity of moving on towards Lhasa mark their story. As usual, they were refused entry into Lhasa, and turned back, on a shorter easterly route out of Tibet. In an attack from brigands in that lawless region, Susie Rijnhart had the added sorrow of losing her husband, who fell into their merciless hands. The only thing she didn’t lose on this ill-fated expedition was her faith. She remarried and returned to the Tibetan borderlands and continued her missionary work.

Considering the fate of all Westerners who attempted to glimpse Lhasa, it is not surprising that the first foreigner who succeeded was an Asiatic (Japanese) and a Buddhist. Ekai Kawaguchi, an abbot who had studied sacred texts of Buddhism in various Tibetan monasteries, entered Lhasa in 1901, and lived there undetected for more than a year. In his book *Three Years in Tibet*, he gives us details of daily life in Lhasa, their religious conventions, their shockingly barbaric methods of punishment, polyandry, corruption and avarice among the monks
themselves, and the general filth in which the people of the city lived. In fact, one chapter in his book is entitled "A Metropolis of Filth" (Hopkirk, TORW 151).

During his stay there, he gathered strategic information not for his own country but for a British spy based in Darjeeling called Sarat Chandra Das, who had himself been to Lhasa. Amidst rumours of what appeared to be a growing friendship between Tsar Nicholas II and the Dalai Lama, Kawaguchi, who had been posing as a Chinese Buddhist doctor, suddenly found his cover blown. Fortunately he was helped by friends, who assisted him in escaping from Lhasa before it was too late.

While Kawaguchi was still in Lhasa, the eleventh European with Lhasa in his sights appeared in Northern Tibet, disguised as a Buryat pilgrim. This was Sven Hedin, the legendary Swedish explorer, to whom nothing was impossible. But he too was detected and sent back, just five days short of his goal. Aside from being an intrepid explorer, Hedin was also a prolific writer. His *My Life as an Explorer* gives us a glimpse into each one of his expeditions, and will be discussed in more detail in a succeeding chapter.
With Lord Curzon taking over as Viceroy of British India, Britain’s ‘forward’ policy again gained currency. Colonel Francis Younghusband was the man chosen to clearly establish Anglo-Tibetan relations, using force if necessary. His ostensible commission was to find out if there really existed a friendship treaty between Tsar Nicholas II and the Dalai Lama, as had been put about by a Mongol political schemer, Dorjieff. The real attraction of the expedition, for Younghusband at any rate, lay in the prospect of finally glimpsing the mysterious Lhasa. A man well-known for his remarkably persuasive way with Asiatics, Younghusband was determined that his entry into Lhasa with armed troops, was to be effected without bloodshed, if possible. But he was equally determined that no Tibetan or Chinese official was going to oppose his advance into Lhasa. Despite his resolution, he could not make his way even up to Gyantse without strife and bloodshed. At the end of July 1904, his mission and escort were firmly established only forty five miles away from the holy city. Ruthlessly disregarding the distraught pleas of Lhasa emissaries not to enter their holy city and defile it forever in their eyes, Younghusband, together with a small armed escort and full diplomatic regalia, rode into Lhasa. As Hopkirk poignantly puts it, the Tibetans offered no resistance,
their morale broken: the race to Lhasa was at last over (Hopkirk, TORW 183). While news correspondents, specially brought on this mission, had a field day, describing the golden domes of the Potala palace in vivid terms, Younghusband’s men lost no time in exploring every nook and cranny of the city. In doing this, they found nothing to appeal to their European eyes; only the filth, squalor, foul smells, and the abominable appearance of “these nasty folk” (Hopkirk, TORW 185) came to the forefront. Younghusband was having his own problems, however. The Dalai Lama was not to be found in the Potala; those who said he had fled to Ulan Bator in Mongolia would not disclose his escape route. Left with no one to negotiate with, Younghusband managed to persuade the poor bewildered Tibetans to sign an agreement which is now known as the Anglo-Tibetan Convention. This treaty prohibited the Tibetans from any foreign dealings (except with China) without British approval; they were also to officially accept the Sikkim-Tibet border; open two new trade centres in Gyantse and Gartok (in Western Tibet) each with a resident British trade agent. Younghusband also established that the Tibetans should pay an indemnity of seventy five lakhs of rupees as part of the cost of his expedition and that until it was paid in full, the British would occupy the Chumbi Valley (Hopkirk, TORW 191).
While Younghusband’s achievement in Tibet and Central Asia proper have been hailed time and again as heroic, there have been a great many critics who solidly condemn his blasting-open of Lhasa, and the conditions of his treaty with them. It is not that the Colonel himself was impervious to the human suffering and death he had caused. In his reports, he says: “It was a terrible and ghastly business”, while one of his lieutenants observed in a letter back home: “I hope I shall never have to shoot down men walking away again...” (Hopkirk, TORW 175-176). Candler, his right hand man, explains why the Tibetans walked, and not ran away from the battlefield: “They were bewildered... The impossible had happened. Prayers and charms and mantras, and the holiest of their holy men had failed them... They walked with bowed heads, as if they had been disillusioned in their gods” (Hopkirk, TORW 175).

The forcible opening up of Tibet and its holy capital is deplorable in more ways than at first evident: apart from the mass destruction of the Tibetans themselves and their defenceless homes, the desecration of their culture in their own eyes is sacrilegious and unforgivable. The Liberals in England were most vociferous in this regard, and Younghusband had to
face a hero's welcome together with official censure at once. on his return. It was ten years later that he was officially absolved from all blame, and his reputation was somewhat restored in the eyes of the public. For a man who had staked his public image on this one expedition, Younghusband now found time for his real life-interest, which was religion. A curious streak of mysticism is to be seen in the man's personality, which finds expression in his Wonders of the Himalaya.

The wave of indignation that followed the exploits of the Younghusband expedition in Lhasa, an unexpected Chinese takeover of Lhasa in 1910, together with political upheavals in British foreign policy caused the British to offer sanctum to the homeless Dalai Lama in India. Hopkirk gives us an ironic picture of his flight:

"Riding day and night, and taking routes sometimes chosen by divination, the fugitives struck south towards British India. After numerous narrow escapes, they crossed exhausted into Sikkim. Late at night, and still fearing pursuit, they hammered on the door of the small frontier signal station at Gnatong, run by two British ex-sergeants named Luff and Humphreys. Alerted by telegraph that the Dalai Lama was
heading their way and must be given all the help and protection they were able to provide, the two men leaped from their beds. Opening the door to the royal party, they are said to have asked: 'Which of you blighters is the Dalai Lama?'* (qtd. in Hopkirk, TORW 201-202). This episode clearly reflects the entire age of empire, encapsulated in that tell-tale word 'blighters'. The rest of the world, conqueror and conquered alike, can see for themselves who had been the real blighters.

The Lhasa expedition led to a spate of written accounts, which the waiting public eagerly consumed. Landor's *Lhasa*, Candler's *The Unveiling of Lhasa*, Lt. Col. L.A. Waddell's *Lhasa and its Mysteries*, *To Lhassa at Last* by an unidentified Powell Millington, Major Ottley's *With Mounted Infantry in Tibet*, Younghusband's *India and Tibet*—these are some of the published works on the ill-advised expedition (Hopkirk, TORW 196).

After such merciless exposure, Lhasa lost all its mystery in the eyes of the world. It is not to be supposed for a moment that it was only reckless men, adventurers with a penchant for seeking trouble, who were attracted to the forbidden capital. Women, too, played their part. We
have already witnessed the missionary zeal of Annie Taylor and the
courage and determination of Mrs. Littledale and Susie Rijnhart. In
October 1923, Alexandra David-Neel, a Frenchwoman whom Hopkirk
describes as a particularly determined trespasser (Hopkirk, TORW 220),
made a bold dash for Lhasa.

This was not her first entry into Tibet, however, being the first
Western woman to have been received by the Dalai Lama during his exile
in Darjeeling. She had crossed illegally into Tibet in 1914 to discover
more about Tibetan Buddhism. Her movements back and forth across the
Sikkim-Tibetan frontier attracted the notice of British authorities, who
immediately ordered her deportation. In her writings, she angrily asks:
“What right had they to erect barriers around a country which was not
even lawfully theirs?” (qtd. in Hopkirk, TORW 221).

Deciding to effect her entry into Tibet from China, and thus avoid
British officiousness, she travelled through Burma, Japan and Korea,
living in Buddhist monasteries, accompanied by a young Sikkimese monk
named Yongden (whom she later adopted as her son). With her Tibetan
perfect, she made her way slowly, with much hardship, from Peking
across a war-torn China towards Lhasa, in the guise of a beggar woman and her son making a holy pilgrimage. Her remarkable and unheard-of experiences during her travels are described in her works, *My Journey to Lhasa* and *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet* (Hopkirk, TORW 229). The former of these two travel narratives will discussed in detail in due course. Her arrival in the holy city coincided with the Tibetan New Year festival, and she went unnoticed among the out-of-town revellers who thronged the place. As she puts it, she was free to wander in the “lamaist Rome” (qtd. in Hopkirk, TORW 225). She lived in Lhasa for two months, and then left for Gyantse, to avoid being caught up in a sudden domestic imbroglio perpetuated by her hosts. The British authorities at Gyantse were astounded at her boldness, but were compelled to believe that she was indeed the first white woman to have entered the forbidden city. In France, of course, she was lionised and showered with honours. With a case of sour grapes, the Royal Geographical Society in London, including Colonel Francis Younghusband, was quick to point out that her works contained no maps and contributed nothing to the scientific exploration of Tibet. Hopkirk speaks of other women who tried their luck with Lhasa after Alexandra David-Neel’s adventures; but they are too hazy and insignificant to have a place in this study.
This chapter is a survey of the fortunes of men who explored Central Asia; of these, many were bound up with political forces, while others were motivated by personal ambition. The series of explorers who succeeded them had a different focal interest. Unlike their predecessors who had explored the topography of the Central Asian landmass for its own sake, these newcomers were interested in what lay beneath the surface of the land.

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**Wonders of the Himalaya.**