CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION

(1)

After becoming a territorial power in Bengal (1765), the John Company's first consideration was to revive the strained economy of that province by extending its trade towards Tibet and Assam. Secondly, the Company wanted to introduce British goods to China through her back-door (Tibet) since the conditions at Canton were not very satisfactory.

Thus the economic reasons i.e. search for new market and new channels of trade were the direct stimuli which dictated the Company's policy towards Nepal, Tibet and Assam during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and inspired the first English man to enter Tibet in 1774.

Besides, there was a hope that through Tibetan mediation the Company might establish satisfactory relations with the Chinese Government. To Hastings, at least, this became the important stimulus to despatch
the missions of Bogle (1774), and Turner (1783) to Tibet. Unfortunately, the Gurkhas of Nepal proved great hinderance and the Tibetan-Nepalese crisis (1789-92) created much misunderstanding between the two Governments i.e. China and the Company, regarding the latter's intentions towards Tibet. An attempt was made through Macartney's mission to China (1793) to clear the Company's position but it proved abortive.

Moreover, for the first time, through Turner's account, the Company came to know about the Russian activities in Tibet. The Company's Government deemed it dangerous for the safety of its possessions, which after the treaty of Sagauli (1816) extended up to the western Himalayas. Obviously, a watch had to be kept on these activities, and commerce was the best guise to do so.

Roorcraeft was twice sent to Tibet (1812), and Ladakh (1819-22), ostensibly on a commercial venture but actually on a spying mission i.e. to keep watch on the activities of Russia. But Roorcraeft's long stay at Ladakh (1819-22) and his highhanded activities there such as manipulating the allegiance of Ladakh to the Company's Government, which were prejudicial to the commercial and political interests of Ranjit Singh,
aroused suspicions in latter's mind about the Company's intentions in that region. Consequently, Ranjit Singh complained to the Company's authorities against Moorcraft's activities in Ladakh and wanted to know the latter's designs. The Company's Government was quick enough to disown Moorcraft and assured the Maharaja of its goodwill towards Ladakh. Moreover, Ranjit Singh was informed that the offer of allegiance of Ladakh to the Company had not been accepted since that province was the sphere of Sikh influence.

Obviously the Company's policy towards the Sikhs and the Dogras during the 'twenties and 'thirties was motivated by twofold considerations. Politically it was considered advisable to have a friendly buffer state on the borders of the British possessions to check Russian activities in that direction, and the creation of Jammu and Kashmir State can largely be attributed to this policy. Commercially too the disturbances created by the Sikhs and Dogras in the vicinity of Kashmir and Ladakh, proved beneficial for smuggling out the shawl wool of Western Tibet into the British possessions of Bashahr and Rampur. Any action in this area, which might be interpreted as British attempt to interfere with the sphere of Sikh's influence, was therefore opposed by the Company. Hence, the rejection
of proffered allegiance of Ladakh and the repudiation of Moorcraft may largely be attributed to this policy.

With the Dogra invasion of Tibet in 1841, however, the Company's benevolent attitude towards the Sikhs changed. Actually the British were apprehensive of the Dogra-Gurkha unity in the Himalayas and its implications so far as the British position in that sphere was concerned. Moreover, the Dogra-Tibetan treaty of 1842 was prejudicial to the Company's commercial interests, because, to the detriment of British trade, it gave the monopoly of shawl-wool trade to the Dogras. Hence the authorities at Calcutta could not stomach this arrangement and there were Anglo-Sikh wars of 1845-46, and the British came out victorious.

Afterwards by the treaty of Amritsar (1846) the political balance of power was established in the north by recognising Gulab Singh as an independent ruler of the States of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Apparently, by this arrangement the British obtained a much needed friendly buffer zone between their Indian possessions and Russia. Commercially too the possession of Spiti by the Company (geographically a part of Ladakh) proved beneficial for the import of shawl-wool of western Tibet into the territories of the Company. But the British attempt to delimit the boundaries between the
territories of the Company, Gulab Singh and those of Tibet proved still-born due largely to the evasive attitude of the Dogras, the Tibetans and the Chinese officials.

During the fifties of the nineteenth century the commercial as well as political interests of the Company extended from Ladakh to Kashgaria where Russian efforts to implement her political designs in the guise of commerce were more persistent. Hence a similar check from the south, in the guise of trade was the need of the hour. But the route to Kashgar passed through the territory of Gulab Singh who was averse to the British merchants passing through his territories, and discouraged such overtures by charging heavy transit duties. Moreover, there were frequent complaints by the British merchants against the high-handedness of the Kashmir officials posted at Ladakh and Kashgar. During this period the John Company was too busy in Indian affairs to pay heed to the complaints of the merchants and to persuade the reluctant Maharaja to improve the commercial conditions for the free flow of trade through his territory to Kashgar.

The period from 1861 to 1878 saw the height of commercial activity in this area. In 1864 a tariff agreement was reached with the Maharaja. But
in view of Russian advance in Central Asia, it was felt that some official vigil in Ladakh, may be in the guise of commerce, was essential to keep a watch beyond the Himalayas. Consequently, in 1887 Henry Cayley was appointed as the British Commercial Agent at Leh despite the aversion of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the son and successor of Maharaja Gulab Singh.

Although the presence of Cayley at Ladakh proved effective in checking the irregularities and inspired confidence among the traders, yet the commercial concessions under the tariff agreement were insufficient to satisfy the Russophobe officers of the Panjab. As a result, a new commercial treaty was signed with the Maharaja in 1870. By this bilateral treaty, the Leh-Kashgar route was declared free-highway for the travellers and traders. New routes through the valley of Changchenmo were explored and missions were despatched to Kashgar and vice versa. In a nutshell, the trade was quite brisk for a few years and the British in India were able to compete with Russia in Kashgaria, both politically and commercially.

Unfortunately this state of affairs could not last long. Yakub Beg, the ruler of Kashgar, through whose initiative and encouragement trade was flourishing,
cited in 1878 and the principality fell to the Chinese who were averse to the entry of the foreigners into their territories. Hence the British had to find new pastures. The ultimate result of the annulment of trade in this area was the opening of Lhasa-Kalimpong route to Tibet in 1904.

(ii)

With regard to the Company's policy towards Assam, it was motivated by commercial interests in its outset. But gradually the Company turned its attention to the political interests as well due entirely to the weak administration of Assam rulers and the expansionist attitude of the Burmese. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century some private British merchants were trading with Assam through the Assam 'Chowkies'. But they were unable to protect their commercial interests and needed Company's intervention. Hence the Company entrusted this task to Hugh Baillie but he, the author of the original proposal for promotion of trade with Assam, could not achieve much. Because during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Assam was being ravished by three-pronged disturbances i.e. the rebellion of Maomarias, the rebellion of the Darrang Princes and the hostile activities of the Burkendazes.
These disturbances totally annihilated the Bengal trade with Assam, and the ruler of Assam was a fugitive at Gauhati.

Thus in 1792 at the repeated requests of Gaurinath Singha, the Assam ruler, the Company despatched Captain Welsh's expedition to help him in quelling the internal disturbances of Assam, and to formulate a commercial treaty with him. After restoring peace and order in Assam, Welsh negotiated a commercial agreement with the ruler (on 28th Feb. 1793) for reciprocal and free flow of trade between Assam and Bengal. But the succeeding Governor-General, Sir John Shore was averse to the Company's armed intervention in Assam. He recalled the Welsh expedition in 1794. For thirty years after the withdrawal of the detachment the Assam-Bengal trade suffered a lot due to the state of insecurity in the Assam 'chowkies'.

Later, it was the expansionist policy of the Burmese during the early decades of the nineteenth century and the inability of the Assam rulers to protect their subjects, which dragged the Company into the Assam-Burma politics. A war with Burma was fought and won (1824-26) and the Company got hold of upper Assam after the treaty of Yandaboo (1826). David
Scott, an Agent to the Governor-General, was entrusted with the control of whole territory upto Sadiya.

After the commercial treaty with Burma in 1826, Scott suggested to the Company to trade with Tibet and China through Assam routes (Lhasa-Udalguri and Sadiya-Rima routes). There were several other proposals for trying these routes to enhance the Company's trade beyond Assam with the markets of China. Several explorations were made in the Assam hills and almost the entire tribal belt was traversed. But ultimately it was felt that the remoteness of the country and the hostility of the intervening tribes would not allow any foreigners to traverse through those hills.

These hill-tribes of Assam-hills had the nefarious habits of loot and plunder and they frequently looted the people of Assam plains. Moreover the expansion of tea-gardens in Assam during the second half of the nineteenth century necessitated some security against such savage tribes. Hence the trade was confined to the fairs at Sadiya and Udalguri, and the intercourse between these tribes and the people of the plains was regulated by the Inner Line Regulation I, of 1873. Although the enactment of this administrative line isolated the hill-tribes from the people of Assam plains but all was done for the convenience of administration.
It was not a political division as is now misunderstood, but an administrative division. Anybody wishing to visit either side was required to have a license for that. Moreover, it was through these intervening tribes that the British commodities started reaching Chinese market and vice versa. But the British could not pierce through this tribal belt and declare the routes as free highway as in the case of Leh-Kashgar route during the same period.

(iii)

The motivation behind the British policy towards Burma from the outset was mere political than economic due mainly to three reasons. Firstly, after their (Burmese) annexation of Arakan in 1785, the Burmese had become the next door neighbours of the British. Secondly, the expansion of the Burmese instigated by the French and inspired by the weak administration of Assam rulers was posing a threat to the eastern boundaries of Bengal. Thirdly, the Company wanted to exploit Burma as a thoroughfare to reach the fabulous markets of China. Hence it was needed to formulate some sort of friendly and commercial treaty with Burma to check the increasing French influence there; to reach China through another back-door; and to safeguard the
eastern boundaries of Bengal.

In 1795, an attempt was made by sending Captain Byrnes to Burma to remove the cause of misunderstanding over the Arakan frontier incidents, and to formulate a commercial treaty with that Government. Captain Byrnes succeeded in obtaining permission for the appointment of a British agent at Rangoon to supervise the trade. But the Court of Ava did not treat Captain Cox, the British Agent at Rangoon on an equal footing, because it was considered below its dignity to have direct contacts with the agent of a mere Governor-General. Hence it was felt that the commercial concessions obtained by Symes were not worth the paper they were written on. Similarly four more attempts (1802-1811) failed to persuade the Burmese ruler to negotiate another commercial treaty and to establish diplomatic relations.

It was only after the first Anglo-Burman War that a political and a commercial treaty was signed with the Burmese. Crawfurd (1827-29) and afterwards Henry Burney (1829-37) were appointed as British Residents at Ava. It was during this period (from 1827 to 1837) that the Company's trade with Burma was given a fair trial. But the Company was more interested in using Burma as a door to China than in 'tentative' and 'fluctuating' trade with
During his stay at Ava (1829-37) Henry Burney therefore acquired all possible knowledge of the topography of the routes from Burma to China, and opened a new chapter in the history of exploration of Burma-China routes. Ultimately Bhamo-Yunnan route was considered as an excellent back-door to China.

Some abortive attempts were therefore made to open up this route for the British merchants. But the Burmese officials were totally averse to this sort of arrangement and put hurdles in the way of such efforts. Moreover, for Tharawaddy (1837-46), the succeeding ruler of Burma, the treaty of Yandaboo was a waste paper and he would not recognise the Agency. As a result, the Agency under Burney had to be withdrawn in 1837. The Anglo-Burman relations were also becoming tense day by day over the trifling question of British etiquette in the Burmese court.

In 1852, the second Anglo-Burma war broke out and the British annexed Pegu, Bassein, Prome and Rangoon. Major Arthur Phayre was appointed first Commissioner of Pegu. Mindon Min (1853-78) who succeeded Pagan Min (1846-53) as king after a palace revolution was not so averse to the British overtures for commerce and friendship. Consequently in 1855 Phayre's visit to Amarpura, capital
of Burma, was successful in cementing the Anglo-Burman goodwill and strengthened the relations between the two.

Thus, encouraged by the reports of British officials and the attitude of the ruler of Burma, the British wanted to improve trade relations with Upper Burma with the object of developing the trade with China through that channel, as they wanted to exploit the inner regions of China as a market for their own products. Hence Phayre made two more visits to Mandalay, the new capital of Burma.

In 1862, Phayre was able to formulate a commercial treaty with the ruler of Burma. It was to abolish or reduce the duties so that trade might be opened with Upper Burma and regions beyond. By this treaty Clement Williams was appointed as first British Agent at Mandalay. During his stay there Williams became an enthusiast for plans of overland trade with China through Burma. Besides, the ruler of Burma through whose territories the trade passed; the Panthays or the Chinese Muhammadans who conducted the trade between Yunnan and Burma; and the Kachin tribe who were the masters of the passes into China were all fully alive to the importance and value of such a transit trade.
Surprisingly, despite the willingness of the parties concerned and the enthusiasm of Williams, the treaty of 1862 failed to have desired effect, and the British trade with China through that channel could not make much progress during William's (1862-65) and afterwards Captain Sladen's stay (1865-67) at Mandalay. The terms of the treaty of 1862 could not be fully implemented due to two reasons. Firstly, on certain articles like timber and grain the King had the monopoly and these could be purchased only through royal brokers. Secondly Mindon, the ruler of Burma, was indeed well disposed towards British traders but his officers had different attitude. They looked upon the activities of the British agents (exploration of Upper Burma) with fear and suspicion and put all kinds of obstacles in their way. They suspected British motives which were designed to gain political control. Inter alia, the Panthay and Chinese skirmishes in Yunnan were the great obstacles for the free flow of commerce and, for the implementation of the treaty of 1862.

In 1866, the Phayre again visited Mandalay to persuade the ruler to revise the treaty but without any success. In the meantime Phayre retired and was succeeded by Albert Fytche, the new Chief Commissioner
of British Burma. As such Fytche visited Mandalay in 1867 to persuade the reluctant Burmese ruler to revise the treaty, and to discover the cause of cessation of overland trade between Burma and China. Now the political situation in Burma was completely changed as compared to 1866 when Phayre visited Mandalay. The country was in political chaos due to the rebellion of Mindon's sons. Mindon was badly in need of British arms and help to quell the rebellion.

Under these circumstances Mindon immediately agreed to revise the commercial treaty of 1862 and allowed a British exploring party under Sladen to traverse the route from Bhamo to Yunnan. The exploring party under Sladen, the British Resident at Mandalay and Political Officer at Bhamo, proceeded from Bhamo to Ta-li, the Panthay capital in Yunnan. But due to the political disturbances in Yunnan the party could not reach Ta-li and returned from T'eng-Yueh, half way from Bhamo to Ta-li. However, the venture was not without success. Captain Sladen brought the message from the Sultan of Ta-li for the improvement of British trade through his territory. Sladen concluded that the expansion of British trade in that direction depended largely on the goodwill and cooperation of the Sultan of Ta-li. But unfortunately, as in the case of Kashgar in 1878, Ta-li principality disintegrated before the Chinese forces in 1871, and with that all the fair
hopes of the British to open up the back-door to China.

However an attempt was again made in 1874-75 to explore that route with the permission of the Chinese Government. Raymond Margary was instructed to guide the Browne mission through Bhamo-Yunnan route. But Margary was murdered (22 Feb. 1875) at Nanwey halfway to T'eng-Yueh, and the mission had to retrace its steps. In Nov. 1875 an enquiry mission was sent to find out the causes of Margary's assassination but no tangible result came out. Secondly, King Thibaw of Burma who succeeded Mindon in 1878 was dead set against British activities in Burma. Consequently the Resident had to be withdrawn in 1879.

(iv)

In short the net result of all these British efforts was to find out some shorter way to Lhasa and thence to China and indeed, they did succeed in their mission. But the success was too short to reap any conspicuous reward till the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1904 the shortest and easiest route to Tibet was forcibly opened. However, it was the 'incidental by-product' of Younghusband's expedition to Lhasa that Lhasa-Kalimpong route was opened and a trade mart was established at Gartok. Thus the work started in 1772 was completed only in 1904 and this route remained in use till the India-China conflict of 1962.