CHAPTER FIVE

COMMODITIES OF EXCHANGE BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA THROUGH LADAKH

IMPORTS

Silk

Silk was an important article which was imported from China. For centuries the rearing of silkworms remained a guarded secret in China. Hence, the Chinese exporters of silk derived large profits from the Westerners, and supplied the silk throughout the world. It was only in the 6th century AD that the silkworms (Cocoons) were smuggled out of China by the missionaries and travellers, and were sent to Khotan and other Western countries.\(^1\) With the passage of time the Khotan silk was considered to be the best of all eastern silks.\(^2\)

However, until the 1860s, the manufactured as well as raw-silk was imported into Leh from Yarkand, Changthang and Khotan.\(^3\) In 1862, the import of silk

\(^1\) Jane Gasten Mahler, *op.cit.*, p.74.
from Khotan much decreased, probably due to Mohammadan revolts. But when Yakub Beg, the ruler of Kashgar, consolidated his power in Central Asia in 1866, the import of silk again showed a sign of progress. According to T.D. Forsyth the profit on Khotan silk amounted from 50 o/o to 200 o/o. After deducting the cost of carriage and duty the net profit on silk from Yarkand to India was 132 o/o.

It was all due to Henry Cayley's presence at Leh to protect the British trade, and the Commerce treaties with the Dogras of Kashmir in 1870, and with the ruler of Kashgar in 1874 that the import of raw silk further increased. Unfortunately, this increase was only short lived, because, in 1877 the Kashgarian rule collapsed before the Chinese arms. The latter guarded their trade transactions more shrewdly; the entry of foreigners into Kashgar was banned; and British trade could not flourish as was hoped by the

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(5) Forsyth's report on Leh Trade, Foreign Department Political A, Nov. 1868, Nos. 1-4.

For yearly progress of the import of silk see the draft prepared by J.E.T. Aitchison from Cayley's Reports in Appendix 'D', p. 272.

(6) Foreign Department, Political Proceedings, June 1871, Nos. 560-97; Also see J.E.T. Aitchison, Hand Book pp. 219-377.
Shawl-wool

Shawl-wool or pashm\(^7\) of Changthang and Yarkand\(^8\) was the main commodity which dominated the entire trade of Ladakh during the nineteenth century. Uptil 1866, the Pashm which reached the Panjab and other British territories was from Changthang only and that too through Kashmir.\(^9\) Because, by a treaty right the entire produce of Changthang imported into Leh was a firm monopoly of Kashmir state since 1684.\(^{10}\) And, same was the case with the 'Turfani wool'\(^{11}\) (Pashm from Yarkand). Uptil 1866 the real Turfani wool of

\(^7\) Pashm or shawl-wool is the fine undercoat of the goats who live in the highlands of Central Asia. Once in a year the hair of the goat is cut short by a knife in the direction of its growth, or from the head towards the tail. Then a sort of comb is passed in the reverse direction to bring out the finer wool, almost unmixed with the coarse hair. This fine wool is used for making shawls and the coarse hair is made into ropes, coarse sacks and blankets etc. If not shorn as the summer commences, the animals themselves rub off the wool: cf. Baden H. Powell, *op.cit.* Vol. I, p. 179.

\(^8\) The changthang pashm has two varieties- the 'Khalchak' (superior) and the 'ralchak' (inferior), while the Yarkand wool is called the Turfani wool: *Ibid*, p. 180.

\(^9\) Whole of the Pashm which was imported into Leh was carefully watched, and sent direct to Kashmir, R.H. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 32, J.E.T. Aitchison, *Hand Book*, p. 188.

\(^{10}\) See *supra*, p. 42.

\(^{11}\) Turfani wool produced in the mountain districts of Eastern Turkestan was of superior quality. It derived its name from the city of Turfan.
Yarkand was never imported into the Panjab, it having all been forcibly diverted to Kashmir by the Dogras. It was only in 1867 that the Turfani wool for the first time appeared at the fair of Palampur arranged by T. Douglas Forsyth. And:

the appearance of this wool (about 11 maunas), at the fair was hailed as something little short of a miracle by the shawl-wool merchants who exclaimed on seeing it that 'it was the first time it had been seen in the Panjab for some 30 years' (12)

However, the year 1868 was still more beneficial for the merchants of shawl-wool, as the quantity of Turfani as well as Changthang wool increased enormously. According to Forsyth the net profit on the shawl-wool brought from Yarkand amounted to nearly 166 o/o. (13)

Musk

Another important article imported into Ladakh

(12) Foreign Department, Political Proceedings, General A., March, 1868, No. 1-5.
(13) Foreign Department, Political A., Nov. 1868, Nos. 1-4.

To have a clearer picture of yearly increase of this trade see the statistical chart prepared by J.E.T. Aitchison in Appendix D. pp. 271 and 275.
was musk (Kasturi). Musk is a dried natural secretion of musk-deer, native of Tibet. The musk secretion is formed in a little bag or tumour, resembling wen, situated at the navel, and is only found in the male. In the living animal, the musk has the consistence of honey. It is of a brownish red colour, and has a strong odour. When dry the musk is almost solid, granular, and of a dark brown colour. The Last India Gazetteer (London, 1815), p. 811.

(14) For statistical data see: Appendix D, pp. 276-278.


Tea

The Chinese tea was among the most important imports of Ladakh, although until 19th century the tea was not a beverage of general consumption in India.
except among the Kashmiris and other hill people.\footnote{17}

But the Chinese tea was highly esteemed as a valuable beverage by way of medicine only. Hence, the tea remained a predominant item of import from China until the full force of Indian competition in that field was felt in the 1880s.\footnote{18}

Two kinds of tea were imported into India before the plant was discovered and cultivated on Indian soil.\footnote{19}

These varieties were Tukhta Siya (Black tea) and 'subaz' (green tea). The 'subaz' tea had further varieties like 'karakokla' and 'khushbo' etc. The tea was processed in two ways, in bricks called 'dhuman' or 'japag';\footnote{20} and in balls called 'gola-cha'. Processed

\footnote{17} In China too the definite reference of tea in the Chinese history is in the biography of an official of Szechwan, in about 273 A.D. And, upto 8th century the tea was not in general use in China. It was only in 780 A.D. that the author of the Tea Classic recommended that 'tea be drunk from the bowls of ice and jade, because, it imparts a tint of green to the tea': Carrington Goodrich, A Short History of the Chinese People (London, 1948), p. 77.


\footnote{19} For the history of tea discovery and plantation in India see: infra, p.180.

\footnote{20} The Bhotia term for 'japag' is 'chapow', the Kashmiri term was 'dom,' while the Lahassans named the bricks as 'ponkah': Moorcraft, Travels, I, p. 351.

\footnote{21} The size of the ball was of a man's fist. This tea was greatly sought after by the poorer classes in Yarkand and Ladakh: J.E.T. Aitchison, Hand Book, pp. 33.
like this in bricks\(^{(22)}\) and lumps, the tea was easy to transport as it reduced its bulk. Because the tea leaves were firmly compressed as if they had been wetted and forcibly compressed. However, Moorcraft\(^{(23)}\) does not rule out the possibility of mixing gum-catechu or an infusion of poppy heads to render the leaves of the tea adhesive. But moisture and pressure were the definite means resorted to for moulding the tea into the shape. Besides, a four seer brick, by the time it reached Ladakh, was not above 2 seers. It was due to the reason that the package was always opened at the end and a portion cut off at every custom house it passed through on the road.\(^{(24)}\)

Upto 1861, the tea was imported into Ladakh via Yarkand and Changthang.\(^{(25)}\) But by this time due to the Muhammadan rebellion in Central Asia, the import from Yarkand and Changthang almost stopped. According to R.H. Davies' report the year 1861 was the first year in which the tea came to Ladakh via Lhasa.\(^{(26)}\)

\(^{(22)}\) These bricks were in the form of large square blocks. The size was about four inches thick, nine inches broad and about eighteen inches long, weighing nearly four seers or less than eight pounds; Henry Cayley's Report on Tea, Foreign Department, Political Proceedings, General A., July 1869, Nos. 23-25A; Moorcraft, Travels, I, p. 351.

\(^{(23)}\) Moorcraft, Travels, I, p. 351.

\(^{(24)}\) Foreign Department, Political Proceedings, General A., July 1869, Nos. 23-25A.

\(^{(25)}\) From Changthang the annual import of tea-bricks (black and green) before 1860s, was of the value of Rs.30,000: Powell, op. cit., p. 280.

Previously, it was only through religious missions that the tea from Lhasa was exchanged.

The import of China tea through Lhasa did not increase much till 1866. After 1866, the import steadily increased due to two main reasons. Firstly, in 1866 Yakub Beg the ruler of Kashgar consolidated his power in Central Asia, and since he was also willing to encourage the trade, he offered facilities to the traders; secondly, the presence of Henry Cayley, British Commercial Agent at Leh, was a great consolation for the traders who were normally harassed by the officials of the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. But the imports from the Chinese territories showed a general decrease after 1872. It may be due to the fact that the good Indian variety of tea was becoming more popular by this time. Hence, the import of tea from Lhasa and Changthang was decreasing day by day and totally stopped by 1877.

Borax

Borax or 'tashale' as it was called in Tibet,

(27) Foreign Department, Political Proceedings, A., June 1871, Nos. 560-97.
(28) See the statistical chart in the Appendix 'D', pp.270-274.
(29) In Kashmir and Punjab it is called 'sohaga' or 'soda' the Tibetan name is 'sal' or 'tshale': J.E.T. Atichison, Hand-Book, p. 246.
was another article of import into Ladakh. However, the Company was aware of the commercial possibility of borax as early as 1644. (30) The annual import of borax from Changthang till eighteen forties amounted to almost 2,500 maunds. (31) However, in eighteen sixties the import of borax from the Chinese territories decreased considerably. (32) It was due to the reason that the borax obtained from Puga and Rupshu districts of Ladakh was more in demand. Besides, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir charged heavy duties on the Chinese borax. (33)

Bhang

Bhang or charras (34) was another article of import into Ladakh from Yarkand and Kashgar where it was produced. (35) About 3,000 maunds was annually imported into Leh, whence it was carried to Panjab and

(30) A letter of the Company in London from its representative in India, dated 27th Jan., 1644, discussed the Company's monopoly on the export of borax and speaks of enclosing particulars concerning its place of origin, which was Tibet. Citation Cammann, op. cit., p. 21, n. 79.

(31) Kacha maund of 16 seers, which means the import was 1,000 maunds. Alexander Cunningham, Ladak, Physical, Statistical and Historical (London, 1854), p. 235.

(32) Foreign Department, Political A., 25 May, 1855, Nos. 94-95.

(33) Ibid.

(34) It is called 'Nasha' in Turki.

(35) For detailed processing of this article see: Powell, op. cit., p. 293.
Kashmir. Before sixties the charras was freely bought and sold. But later the merchants were instructed that upon entering the British territory, all the charras was to be taken to the nearest Magistrate, before whom it was weighed and sealed. A certificate of its weight was given to the owner who could only sell legally to a licensed wholesale purchaser. During six years (1867–72) not less than 9,134 maunds of charras of the value of Rs. 4,32,368 was imported into Leh and was sold in the Panjab at 97 o/o profit. But there was yearly decrease in the importation of this drug, due perhaps to licensing system.

Shawl-wool, wool, tea, silk, charras and musk apart, there were many other minor articles which were imported into Ladakh from the Chinese territories. These were gilar-patar, tobacco, silver and

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However, a small quantity, not more than a few maunds, was brought from Kandhar through the Bolan pass by the Shikarpur traders: *Ibid.*


(38) Foreign Department, *Political A.*, Nov. 1868, Nos. 1-4.

(39) Gilar-patar is a dried sea-weed. It used to come from China through Yarkand. It was in great demand in the hilly areas of the Punjab, because, it was used as a medicine for goitre which was quite common in this area. The gilar-patar fetched the high price of Rs. 6.80 per seer: J.E.T. Aitchison, *Hand-Book*, p. 225.

(40) Tobacco was largely imported from Yarkand. The annual import was almost 1000 maunds: *Ibid.*, pp.101-82, 255; Powell *op. cit.*; 282–92; A.H. Davies, *op. cit.*; p.17; A Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 244-45.
gold threads (Zari), gold-dust, carpets of Khotan, coarse silk clothes, porcelain wares, (41) silver ingots, called 'Kuru' or 'Yambu', (42) ponies and horses etc.

**EXPORTS**

The chief articles of exports from India to China through Ladakh were, opium, shawls, brocades (or kimkhab) saffron, cotton clothes, sugar, spices, otter-skins, majeeth (red-dye), indigo, piece-goods, guns, rifles and pistols (43) etc.

**Opium**

Opium (44) was one of the staple articles of export of Kulu (45) and Yarkand. Apart from Kulu, the produce of Bashahr (Rampur) and Kishtwar was mainly exported to Yarkand from where it was smuggled into China.

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(41) Because of the dangers of breakage on the long journey from China, porcelain cups were highly prized and often mounted with silver or gold bases and covers: Cunningham, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 162.

(42) Kuru is a Turki name, while Yambu is a Tibetan name. One Yambu was equal to Rs 166/- of the Company. A. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 242; R.H. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 28.


(44) The poppy head of the plant or seed vessel contains two distinct uses. Firstly, while growing it yields on being incised the milky juice, which when concreted is called opium; secondly the fresh or dry heads, when infused in water yield a liquor which is narcotic and intoxicating: Powell, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 293-94.

(45) The opium from Kulu was considered to be of excellent quality. Good opium is not soluble in water, and if a specimen dissolves, it is not a good quality; good opium is also inflammable. Moreover, the inferior qualities are almost devoid of morphia: *Ibid.*, p. 294.
Of the two varieties of opium, i.e. red and white, the former grows mostly in the hills having Persian type of climate. It was greatly consumed by the Chinese army and gentry who smoked it through pipes. It was rarely eaten or swallowed as it was in India. In China the opium was cultivated in Yunnan, Szechwan and Kweichow etc. but the opium from the Indian hills was of a superior quality and was highly prized by the Chinese. During the end of the eighteenth century, the demand of opium increased enormously due to the invention of the method of opium smoking through a pipe. But this demand coincided with the imperial edict of 1796, prohibiting the importation of all opium. But by then opium had become a necessity of life with the high-up Chinese. Hence, it started flowing through land routes. At Kashgar the opium was purchased by the Chinese dealers, who kept houses where it was smoked.

In 1339, by another imperial edict the opium

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(46) The poppy was probably introduced into India from Persia. The sanskrit names of opium viz., 'chasa' and 'apayam' sound like corruptions of the Persian names for the plant is 'Khash-Khas' and 'Afyum': Ibid.; Also see J.E.T. Aitchison, Hand-Book, pp. 3-5.


(48) Ibid., p. 70.

(49) J.E.T. Aitchison, Hand-Book, p. 3.
was interdicted in China. But the officials on the road were bribed to connive at and a considerable quantity was secretly exported from Kulu in goat-skins to Yarkand, Khotan, Aksu and other Chinese provinces. According to the information given by Cunningham, in late eighteen forties, the annual supply smuggled into the Chinese territories through Ladakh was almost 500 maunds (1 maund = 16 seers). The rate was Rs 15/- per seer and the total value amounted to Rs 1,20,000.

Even upto 1862, informs R.H. Davies, the drug was largely smuggled into the Chinese territories in spite of the imperial prohibition of 1839. The caravan merchants used to meet the Chinese dealers outside the towns and the latter would purchase the whole stock, which they smuggled gradually into the town, whilst the caravan merchants would enter the city with rest of their wares. However, after 1865, the export


The quantity, annually exported to Yarkand, was about 210 maunds. From Kulu almost 100 maunds; from Rampur about 50 maunds; and from Kishtwar about 60 maunds. It all amounted to Rs 1,38,600 annually. *Ibid*, p. 28; Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 294.
of opium diminished enormously. It was due to the reason that in 1865 the Chinese, the main smokers, were driven out of Central Asia by Yakub Beg. Hence the opium trade almost entirely ceased and the opium became a non-saleable article in the Yarkand market.\(^{(53)}\)

With the Commerce Treaty of 1870, however, the export of opium into Yarkand and Changthang was revived on a small scale. But the export of the drug never reached the previous weight and amount.

**Shawls**

The next important article of Ladakh export to Yarkand and Changthang was shawls prepared from the shawl-wool of Central Asia. These shawls were manufactured largely at Kashmir and Amritsar and Nurpur in the Punjab. But the genuine Kashmir shawls far surpassed those made in the Panjab.\(^{(54)}\)

According to the information given by Cunningham during eighteen forties, not less than 500 pairs of

\(^{(53)}\) Henry Cayley informed that during three years i.e. 1867 to 1869, only 24 seers of opium was sold at Yarkand, and that too at the rate of Rs. 6/- per seer. *Foreign Department, Political Proceedings, General A.* July 1869, Nos. 24-A.

\(^{(54)}\) R.H. Davies, *op. cit.*, (1864), p. 31.
shawls were exported to the Chinese territories, and the rate was almost Rs. 100/- per pair. Hence the total value of shawl export to the Chinese territories amounted to Rs 50,300/- annually. But after that the export was a bit less due to the disturbances in Central Asia.

Brocade

The third important article of export from Ladakh to Yarkand and Changthang was brocade (kimkhab). It was a sort of stiff silk with gold and silver patterns, and was of Benaras manufacture. It had two varieties viz. 'jutha' (false) and 'sucha' (genuine), and was very largely imported into Leh and thence exported to Changthang and Yarkand. According to Cunningham, in eighteen forties the annual export of Ladakh in brocade was almost 400 'thans' (pieces of 18 gaz or 648 inches), which amounted to Rs. 20,000 at the rate of Rs. 50/- per 'than'. From 1862 to 1866, however, the trade was not very flourishing,

(55) A. Cunningham, Ladak, p. 251.

(56) For Statistical chart of shawl export see Appendix D. pp. 270-274.


(58) A. Cunningham, Ladak, pp. 247, 251.
but it again showed a steady increase from 1867 onward.\(^59\)

**Saffron**

Saffron\(^60\) was another article of trade. It was mostly exported to Lhasa, and was a Government monopoly in Kashmir. At Lhasa saffron was used as a dye and as incense.

Apart from Kashmir saffron Spanish saffron was also exported to Lhasa. According to some merchant families of Hoshiarpur,\(^61\) the British used to import large quantity of saffron from Spain by sea-route. From Bombay it was brought to Leh and thence was exported to Kashgar.

**Indigo**

Indigo was another commodity of export to Kashgar and other Central Asian cities. It was of two qualities

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\(^59\) For Statistical data see Appendix D., pp. 270-274.

\(^60\) It is also called 'Kesar' in India, whereas the Kashmiri name is 'Kong'; Turki name is 'zafar'; and Bhotias call it 'kurkum': J.E.T. Aitchison, Hand-Book, p. 125.

\(^61\) Some information about a few commodities of export was given by some Hoshiarpur merchants, viz. D.N. Qhri, now settled in Chandigarh and Lala Nathu Ram Gohial (99 yrs. old) from Bassi Purani, Distt. Hoshiarpur.
i.e. the Indigo from Khurja (in U.P.) was considered to be of superior quality, while the indigo of Multan was of inferior quality. Other commodities were spices, goat skins, Kajeeth (red-dye) and piece goods etc.

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