In this chapter is sketched the rise of three powers, the Sikhs, the Dogras and the British, and their attitudes vis-à-vis Ladakh up to 1834. In order to understand their attitudes in a true historical perspective, a brief description of the process of integration in the Punjab and the hilly areas contiguous to Ladakh is given.

After acquiring control over territories in the Western Himalayas, the Sikhs, the Dogras and the English became interested in the commercial potentialities of Ladakh and Western Tibet. Here, Pashmina (Pashm or shawl wool) was the most lucrative article of trade. Since trade in shawl wool influenced the politics of Western Himalayan states in the late thirties and the early forties of the nineteenth century, it may be worthwhile to deal with it in detail, more specifically of the attempts made by the British, the Sikhs and the Dogras to divert the flow of shawl wool into areas within their respective spheres of influence.

The closing decade of the 18th and the opening years of the 19th century were marked by the emergence of forces which worked for integration in the history of the Punjab and the west Himalayan hill states. In the Punjab, Ranjit Singh had risen to power and was making a new map of the Land of the Five Rivers. After defeating many Misldars (Sikh chieftains) who had become powerful on the ruins of the Durrani empire, he laid, in 1799, the foundations of a Sikh monarchy in the Punjab. In the same year, he captured Lahore - the Imperial City of the
Punjab - and started on a plan of systematic aggression. His fondest wish was to subdue all the Sikh chieftains who were ruling on either side of the Sutlej and establish a strong Sikh state in the Punjab. He was assiduously devoting the next few years to realise his aim but, in the cis-Sutlej territory, to his great disappointment, he was checked by the British, a new rising power on the Indian sub-continent, about whom more presently. In 1809, the Sikh ruler had to sign a treaty with the British, undertaking not to further invade the cis-Sutlej territory and molest the chieftains of this area who were declared to be under British protection.

After his plan to expand to the south and east of the Sutlej had been checked, Ranjit Singh turned his attention in other directions. He had already adopted the plan of conquering the hill states in the north and north-east of the Punjab simultaneously, with the Punjab plains. In the Kangra hills, the Maharaja's serious rival was Raja Sansar Chand Katoch who, like his Sikh adversary, had embarked upon a career of conquests over the chiefs of the eastern hill states of the Punjab, little realising that by doing so he was weaving a web in which he himself will be enmeshed.

By 1805, Raja Sansar Chand had made himself into the supreme lord of the hills; reduced one state after another; had according to tradition, 22 hill chiefs

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1In the Kangra hills between the Sutlej and the Ravi, there were fourteen states - Kangra, Guler, Gaswan, Datarpur, Siba (all offshoots from the same stock), Katlehr, Shalpur, Kulu, Manui, Suket, Bangahal, Nurpur, Kutila and Chamba. This political group of the states was also known as Jullundur group. See H.R. Gupta, History of the Sikhs, (Lahore, 1944), III, p. 21.
attending court, subdued Chamba, Mandi, Kulu, Guler, Kahlur, Nurpur, Kutlehr and Bengahal. Before discussing Ranjit Singh's conquest of the Kangra hills and in order to make the course of events clear, a brief description of the advance of the Gurkhas of Nepal, a new power which had risen in the hills, may be noted.

In the seventeen-sixties, an event of the first magnitude in the history of Nepal occurred: the Gurkha, a warlike tribe under the able leadership of Prithvi Narayan Sah began a rapid process of expansion. They soon conquered all the small states in that part of the Himalayas, which now forms Nepal, including the Newar states of Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan. Soon, their inroads on Tibetan territory to the north became frequent; their large-scale invasion of Tibet was ultimately checked by the Chinese in 1792, when the latter not only defeated the Gurkhas but also dictated terms to them. After having been checked in the north, the Gurkhas turned to the west, and engulfed all the small hill states between Nepal and the Sutlej lying to the south of the main Himalayan axis. Having subdued these hill states they crossed the river, ostensibly on the invitation of some of the local chiefs like the Rajas of Kahlur and Mandi, who feared Sansar Chand, but in reality to implement their expansionist policies. It is said that they were keen to conquer the hill tracts as far west as Kashmir, and even of establishing their power in the Punjab plains. Their

3 Punjab States Gazetteer, 1920, Vol. XII-A, Mandi State, p. 44.
forces under Amar Singh Thapa, Rudrabir and Nain Singh defeated Sansar Chand at Mahal Mori in May, 1806, and pressed on to Kangra where the latter had entrenched himself. The Gurkha invasions became persistent and irresistible. Sansar Chand in despair looked around for an ally and found one in Ranjit Singh.

Sansar Chand's request for assistance was in consonance with Ranjit's own ambitions. In May, 1809, the Sikh ruler advanced into the hills with a large army and compelled the Gurkhas to retire across the Sutlej. But this aid was too expensive: Sansar Chand had to surrender the fort of Kangra to Ranjit Singh and was reduced to the position of a vassal.

Surrender of Kangra — the gateway to the hills precipitated the downfall of other hill principalities lying between the Sutlej and the Ravi. The Maharaja now embarked upon a career of conquest in the hills and made and unmade the map of the hill states as he pleased. The hill princes were captured, subdued, made subservient and exiled. The story of their downfall is consistent: Guler in 1813-14; Jaswan and Nurpur in 1815; Datarpur in 1818 and Kutlehr in 1825.

After the expulsion of the Gurkhas, and the occupation of Kangra, Ranjit Singh took immediate steps to consolidate these conquests. Desa Singh Majithia was appointed Nazim or Governor of the hills, and asked to

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1 O.C. Barnes, Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Kangra District (Lahore, 1889), pp. 10-11.
2 Ibid., pp. 10-13; Kangra District Gazetteer, 1883-84, pp. 40-45.
survey the country. The new Nawab realised tribute from all the Kangra hill states including Kulu, Suket and Mandi and perfected the Sikh machinery of conquest.

Soon after 1799, Ranjit Singh had paid attention to the Jammu hills also. But unlike the Kangra hills, in this hilly region, he had to reckon with the individual chieftains. Between the Jhelum and the Ravi, there were twenty-two states. The rulers of these states recognised the nominal supremacy of the Durrani monarchs of Afghanistan. But when the Kabul monarchy became weak, they asserted their independence and mostly kept quarrelling among themselves. In 1800-1801, the Punjab ruler advanced to Jammu. Raja Jit Singh of Jammu immediately tendered his submission and presented customary tribute. Not long after Ranjit Singh subdued Basohli, which was situated to the south of Jammu and in 1809, the Raja of Chamba also recognised the Sikh ruler as his overlord.

But it was only after 1809, when his own expansion beyond the Sutlej had been checked and when he had expelled the Gurkhas from the Kangra hills that the Sikh ruler paid serious attention to Jammu. His plans to conquer Kashmir were then taking concrete shape, for the

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2. These states were, Akhnur, Alasi, Kishtwar, Rajauri, Punch, Kotli, Bhimbar, Khari-Khariali, Jammu, Bahu, Dalpatpur, Samba, Jasrota, Trikot, Lakhpanpur, Mankot (Ram kot), Behandrata, Chaneri, Bhoti, Bhadur, Balor (Basohli) and Bhadarwah. Out of these, the first eight lying between the Jhelum and the Chenab were under Muslim chiefs, whereas the rest were under the control of Hindu rulers, mostly Rajputs. Cf. Gupta, op. cit., pp. 20-21.
3. Ibid., p. 32.
materialisation of which it was necessary to subdue all the hill principalities to the south of the Pir Panjal range. In 1812, the Sikh army, after defeating the confederated Muslim chiefs of Akhnur, Rajouri and Bhimbar turned towards Jammu. Although the Raja of Jammu had tendered his submission to the Maharaja in 1801, it appears that his Rajput subjects did not submit to this alien yoke and in 1809, and 1810 there were uprisings against the Sikhs engineered by the Dogra dare-devils such as Mian Dedo. The Sikhs after suppressing these revolts, deposed the Raja and assigned Jammu, in jagir, to Prince Kharak Singh.

In Kashmir, Ranjit Singh had to reckon with the moribund Durrani empire. In the first two decades of the 19th century, because of frequent changes in Afghanistan, and virtual suspension of the Afghan monarchy, the administration of Kashmir also suffered. The Maharaja, taking advantage of lawlessness and dissensions,

4 There is disagreement about the date of final subversion of Jammu and its annexation to the Sikh kingdom. Editor of Kashmir Gazetteer, 1873, (p. 111), says that Ranjit took possession of Jammu in 1809, when the last of the rightful descendant of Jammu ruling family died. Lepel Griffin says that this event occurred in 1816. Drs. Hutchison and Vogel, however, say that this happened in 1812. (JPHS., Vol. VIII, No. 2, p. 130).
successfully conquered Kashmir in 1819.

Immediately after the conquest of Kashmir, Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent his emissaries to Ladakh demanding tribute and customary presents, which the Ladakhi kings had been paying to the rulers of Kashmir. The Gyalpo of Ladakh paid the tribute, and the emissaries of the Maharaja returned to Kashmir. In October, 1820, the Maharaja's envoy again visited Ladakh, realised the tribute and exhorted the Gyalpo to make the payment regularly. The Prime Minister of Ladakh also wrote to the Sikh Nazim of Kashmir that at that time Ladakh was in danger of being invaded by Raja Ahmad Shah of Baltistan, and if necessity arose, he would apply for assistance. It appears that the Gyalpo continued to pay this tribute regularly to the Sikh Nazim of Kashmir until 1834, when the Dogras invaded Ladakh. The state of affairs in Ladakh before 1834 has been described in the chronicles as follows:

To say 'Salam' to the king of Ladakh, there came annually from Kashmir called Malig, and together with him about 100 assistants ponymen. In return to this, the king of Ladakh sent with a man from Kha-la-tse, called Drag-chos-don-grub, various products of Ladakh, for instance a yak, a sheep, a goat, a dog, and also more valuable things.

1 Ranjit Singh had previously invaded Kashmir in 1814, though unsuccessfully, when the Sikh army because of the treacherous conduct of the Rajas of Rajouri and Shimbar suffered much and had to return with great loss.


4 Foreign Department Political Proceedings, 20 September 1822, No. 63.

5 Malig or Malik was an official appointed by the Governor of Kashmir to Leh to collect the customary tribute.

6 Francke, Antiquities, II, p. 250.
Though Jammu had been annexed to the Sikh kingdom and many other adjoining hill chieftains subdued, uprisings against the Lahore Durbar in Jammu hills did not cease. The man who was to restore order and complete the work of Sikh conquest in this area was Dogra Raja Gulab Singh. Born in 1792 (5th Katik, 1849 Vikrami Samvat) he was descendant of a collateral branch of the ruling family of Jammu. About 1810, after trying his luck at many places, he joined the service of Ranjit Singh. He was a brave soldier and soon impressed the Maharaja by his faithful and obedient conduct. Later on, Gulab Singh called to Lahore his younger brothers Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh also. These Dogra brothers played an active role with the Sikh army in many conquests and being accomplished courtiers, soon won the favour of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In 1819, Dhian Singh was appointed Deodiwala or Minister-in-Waiting. Gulab Singh also got the command of troops and was chiefly employed for suppressing insurrections in the hills around Jammu and west of the Chenab. Later, pleased by the meritorious services rendered by him in the conquest of Attock, Multan, Kashmir and in suppressing the rebellions of the Rajas of Rajour and Bimbar, Ranjit Singh in 1820 granted Jammu in Jagir to the Dogra chieftain.

Not long after, the Maharaja asked Gulab Singh to subdue Tegh Singh, Raja of Kishtwar - a state in the interior of the Himalayas. Tegh Singh had offended Ranjit Singh by providing asylum to Shah Shujah, the ex-king of Kabul who had escaped from the Maharaja's

1Gulab Nama, p. 87.
2Ibid., pp. 130-131.
captivity in 1815. Gulab Singh captured Tegh Singh, sent him to Lahore and annexed his state. In recognition of his services, Ranjit Singh entrusted the administration of the Jammu hills to Gulab Singh in 1822, and granted him, and his successors, the principality of Jammu with the hereditary title of Raja. His brothers Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh were also made Rajas and granted jagirs of Bhimbar, Kussal, Ram Nagar, and Sambha. With Gulab Singh’s elevation, the fate of other hill principalities around Jammu was sealed.

The Dogra brothers, as they came to be known, made a common cause. While Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh generally lived at Lahore, Gulab Singh usually resided in Jammu and looked after the jagirs of his brothers also. Dhian Singh’s holding the post of Deodiwala, made him come to close contact with the Maharaja, and in 1828 he was appointed Prime Minister, which office he held till his death in 1843. This appointment further increased the influence of the Dogra brothers in the Sikh court. Dhian Singh looked after Gulab Singh’s interests at the Lahore Durbar and pushed their common cause. Clearly, political influence of Dhian Singh greatly helped Gulab Singh in entrenching his position in the hills. After becoming Raja, the latter took great pains to consolidate and extend his possessions. The

For details about the subversion of Kishtwar by Gulab Singh, see Vigne, Travels, I, pp. 181-82.

Gulab Nama, p. 138; JPHIS., Vol. VIII, No. 2, p. 131, Sir Richard Temple (Journals kept in Hyderabad, Kashmir, Sikkim and Nepal (London, 1887), I, p. 306) wrongly says that the possession of Kishtwar was taken in 1833.

Gazetteer of Kashmir, 1873, p. 111.
smaller states of Riasi, Sambha Dalpat Pur and Akhnur had already been subdued. Kishtwar and Mankot were conquered about 1820, Behandrata and Chaneni in 1822 and the fort of Samarth in 1825. In addition to Jammu hills, Gulab Singh held large tracts of territory in the Punjab plains and also obtained monopoly of the salt mines of Pinddad Khan. In short by 1834, Gulab Singh came to be considered after Ranjit Singh the greatest chief in the Punjab. Nominally these conquests and annexations were made in the name of the Sikhs and as extensions of the kingdom of Lahore, but in reality Gulab Singh was practically independent.

For running the administration and to keep under control such large areas as Raja Gulab Singh possessed, the Maharaja had authorised him to raise and keep his own army. The Dogra Raja, ambitious as he was, had trained and equipped with great care a large army, mainly consisting of the inhabitants of the hills. Further, he was fortunate in having in his service a most able, intrepid and faithful officer, Zorawar Singh Kahluria, about whom more will be said in the next chapter. By the acquisition of Kishtwar, the boundaries of Gulab Singh's possessions had become conterminous with those of Ladakh. With these rich resources—a large territory and a well-equipped army headed by an able general—Gulab Singh, as and when the occasion arose, was ready to conquer new lands.

The third power, which in the first two decades

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1 JPRS., Vol. VIII, No. 2, pp. 132-133.
2 Panikkar, Founding of Kashmir State, p. 37.
of the nineteenth century acquired possessions in the Western Himalayas was the Hon'ble English East India Company. Founded in 1600, for about a century and a half, it was primarily concerned with trade. But in the meantime, it became interested in acquiring territory and carved out an empire for itself. The Governor-General Lord Melville (1788-1815), by pursuing a spirited and forward policy, pushed the frontiers of the Company up to the banks of the Jamuna in the north. In the next five years, thanks to the Napoleonic danger in Europe, the Company extended its frontier westward for about two hundred miles, and now the Sutlej became her boundary with the Lahore Durbar.

The newly-acquired British territory lying between the rivers Jamuna and Sutlej was bounded in the east by the Gurkha possessions. We have already noted how the Gurkhas of Nepal had engulfed the hill states lying between Nepal and the Sutlej and how in their westward expansion, they were checked by Ranjit Singh in 1809. After suffering a defeat at the hands of the Sikh ruler at Kangra, Gurkha encroachments on the

1Napoleon Bonaparte of France and Czar Alexander I of Russia concluded the Treaty of Tilsit in July, 1807, one of the details of which was a combined invasion of India by the land route. This spurred the English to launch diplomatic offensive; missions were despatched to Tehran, Kabul and Lahore. Charles (later Sir Charles) Metcalfe was sent to negotiate an alliance with Ranjit Singh who at that time was invading cis-Sutlej territory. But in the meantime Britain concluded treaties with Turkey and Persia, and this resulted in easing the situation in the Near East as also in the Middle East. The bogey of Franco-Russian invasion of India thinned. With the change in European situation there was change in British attitude towards Ranjit Singh also; the Sikh ruler was asked to stop his invasions on the cis-Sutlej area which now was declared to be under British protection.
Gangetic plains and the Company's newly acquired territory increased enormously. It was clear that either the Company should withdraw or alternately surrender it to the Gurkhas. But the British could ill afford to do either. A logical result, therefore, was the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-16 in which the Gurkhas were defeated and forced to make some territorial concessions. Under the Treaty of Sagauli (March 1816), they ceded to the Company, all territory lying between the rivers Kali and Sutlej. This included Kumaon, Garhwal and many other hill states (later christened the Simla Hill States). An important one was Bashahr, with an area of 3,820 square miles, which brought British possessions contiguous to Ladakh and Western Tibet.

This hilly region was of great advantage to the Company. It was thought to be of potential value as a source of revenue, and as a site for the development of hill stations, where British valetudinarians could take refuge from the heat of the plains. Commercially also this tract was of great advantage. In this context the Earl of Moira, later the Marquess of Hastings, recorded:

"By the possession of Kumaon, your Hon'ble Committee is aware, that we possess a direct and not difficult road into the Oondes, or country producing the animal which bears the shawl-wool, and into the vast region of Tartary: a circumstance which opens views of great...

2Later on Simla and Naini Tal hill-stations developed in this area.
4He was the Governor-General of India from 1813-23.
From a political and military point of view, the area was no less important. Underlining these gains, the Governor-General wrote to the Secret Committee again,

We are now not only freed from that evil [Gurkha menace] but are secure from the consequences which would ensure, were Runjeet Singh, or any ambitious and powerful chief, to establish himself in the hills beyond the Sutleje. In such an event, we could not, without a commanding influence in the hills on this side of the river, and the possessions of a frontier enabling us to penetrate and occupy them at any time, ever be secure against the danger of a chief of that character, establishing his own power there, and thus taking in flank one of the most valuable and important positions of our north-western frontier line. From such a danger, which will perhaps not be deemed chimerical, we are now effectually secured.2

Surprisingly, as the Governor-General had perceived, such a danger from the other side of the Himalayas became a real threat to the English within a quarter of a century. In 1841, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Dogras under Wazir Zorawar Singh over-ran the whole of Western Tibet contiguous to the British hill possessions. Then, the British were in a commanding position to watch and check any Dogra invasion of British territory from that side.

Thus we see that by the first quarter of the 19th century three powers had risen in the Western Himalayas. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, after his conquest of Kashmir in

1Papers Relating to the Nepaul War, Printed in conformity to the resolution of the court of proprietors of East India Stock of 3rd March, 1824. p. 761: Secret Letter from Lord Moira, 2 August, 1815.

2Thid., p. 762: Secret Letter from Lord Moira, 2 August, 1815.
1819, realised tribute from Ladakh and enjoyed trade privileges, which the erstwhile rulers of Kashmir—the Afghans and the Mughals—had been enjoying. Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu, though a feudatory of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, controlled Jammu hills which were adjacent to Ladakh. The English, on the other hand controlled all the hilly tract lying between the rivers Kali and Sutlej, the boundaries of which as has been remarked, were also coterminous with those of Ladakh and West Tibet.

These powers, after acquiring territories in the Western Himalayas, became interested in the commercial potentialities of Ladakh and West Tibet. As known in Kashmir, Pashmina or shawl-wool, the fine under-coat of Tibetan sheep and goats, was the most important article of trade in this region. It was used for the manufacture of the famous Kashmiri shawls, an article of clothing highly prized both in Europe and Asia. Shawl wool, coming mainly from Western Tibet was deeply interlinked with the economies of Ladakh and Kashmir.

Chang Thang or the northern arid wastes of Tibet, with the districts of Rudok and Gartok is the most important shawl wool producing area. Because of its elevation and aridity, the area is coated with a short and succulent grass which provides excellent pasturage for sheep and goats. Under the peace treaty, concluded after the Tibeto-Ladakhi-Mughal war (ca. 1681-84 A.D.),

1Foreign Department Political Proceedings, 10 October 1823, No. 21.

Tibetan authorities undertook to supply the entire wool of this region to Ladakh. ¹ At the same time, Ladakh under a separate treaty with the Mughals, further undertook to supply all this wool, along with its indigenous produce, to Kashmir. ² This practice appears to have been followed throughout the 18th century.

From time immemorial, Kashmir was the only manufacturing where shawls were produced and its looms were fed with the wool procured as above from West Tibet and Ladakh. The economy and prosperity of Kashmir was dependent on the shawl industry, and that is why, the rulers of Kashmir, be it the Mughals or the Afghans steadfastly clung to the clauses of the treaty of 1684 relating to shawl wool and continued to get this commodity from and through Ladakh. On the other hand, shawl wool was an important article in the imports and exports of Ladakh ³ and was a lucrative source of income to its ruler and other high state officials. Hence the Ladakhis maintained a well-guarded monopoly on the shawl wool produced in West Tibet, and any attempt to export this article to areas other than Ladakh was severely punished by Tibetan authorities. Thus, it was under strict treaty rights, and not as a result of custom and usage, as a recent writer has said, ⁴ that Ladakh got the monopoly of West Tibet's shawl wool. Any dislocation in the flow of this commodity from the

¹ For details, see supra pp. 96-97.
² Ibid.
³ See supra pp. 32-34.
aforementioned old and well-frequented route was bound to affect adversely the economies of both Ladakh and Kashmir.

After becoming a territorial power, John Company had become interested in the trans-Himalayan trade, and because of its obvious value, shawl wool had attracted the notice of the British. In 1774, while commissioning George Bogle\(^1\) to Tashilhunpo, Warren Hastings, the Governor-General, had requested him "to send one or more pair of the animals called Tus, which produce the shawl wool."\(^2\) In 1799, the Board of Agriculture also asked the Court of Directors, if they could secure samples of shawl-bearing sheep of Tibet with a view to breeding it in England. The Court instructed the Bengal Government to procure specimens, with precise directions as to the care of the animals during their long voyage to England.\(^3\) In the opening years of the nineteenth century, the manufacturing coalition on the continent was dead-set against Britain,\(^4\) and the acquisition of shawl wool was very much desirable to the Company.\(^5\)

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\(^2\) Markham, *Narratives*, p. 8.

\(^3\) Bengal Despatches, Vol. 34, Bengal Commercial Despatch of 31st October, 1799, quoted in Lamb., *op. cit.*, p. 58.


\(^5\) Foreign Department Political Consultations, 20 September 1822, No. 67.
Though Bogle\(^1\) and later Samuel Turner\(^2\) had given some information about shawl wool,\(^3\) much was not known till 1812, when William Moorcroft, a resourceful and intelligent young employee of the Company penetrated into West Tibet and visited Gartok, the then principal centre of shawl wool trade. Moorcroft, a veterinary surgeon and a native of Lancashire, had joined the Company's service in 1808, and was soon appointed Superintendent of the Company's stud-farm at Pusa near Patna.\(^4\) In 1811, he sought and obtained permission from the Governor-General's Agent at Fatehgarh to "penetrate into Tartary" and to collect specimens of mountain ponies and shawl wool goats.\(^5\) British officials in Calcutta were "horrified" and considered Moorcroft's venture "replete with danger to himself and his companions and so little likely to be productive of advantage to the public service.\(^6\)

Moorcroft's enterprise was certainly quite hazardous. He was not only to deal with the ever-vigilant Tibetans, who would not allow a foreigner to enter their

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\(^1\) Bogle reported that shawl wool came from goats in the regions of Western Tibet and was an important item of export to Kashmir. (Markham, *Narratives*, p. 126).


\(^3\) Turner attempted to bring out some shawl goats and later tried to send them to England, but he was not much successful. (Cammann, *op. cit.*, p. 84 fn. 11).

\(^4\) For details about his early career, see Moorcroft, *Travels*, I, pp. xix-xxii (introduction).


\(^6\) Idem.
country, but also to elude the hostile Gurkhas, then masters of the Himalayas. Accompanied by Captain (later General Sir John) Hearsey, and disguising themselves as Gossains, they crossed the Niti pass and entered 'Undes'. While at Gartok (the capital of West Tibet), Moorcroft was told that Shawl wool of West Tibet was sold to the Ladakhis only. In 1810, a British merchant, Mr. Gillman of Bareilly, through some middlemen purchased a small quantity of shawl wool but when the Ladakhis came to know about it they protested to the Garpon or the Tibetan Governor of Gartok, who issued an edict forbidding the sale of shawl wool to any but the Ladakhis, on pain of death. Later on probably by giving many presents such as those of broadcloth and coral beads - things very much liked by the Governor — and also by offering

1 Gossains were the trading pilgrims of India, whose humble deportment, holy character and professions of high veneration for the Panchen Lama, procured them not only a ready admittance to Tibet but also great favours at Tashilhunpo. (Markham, Narratives, pp. 124-25).


3 In Moorcroft's own words, 'Undes' or 'Oondes' was 'country of wool', situated to the north of Garhwal. Foreign Misc., Vol. 125, p. 30 (N.A.I.).


5 Idem.

6 Mr. Webb, who for sometime carried survey work in the Western Himalayas, tells us that when the authorities in Lhasa came to know about the visit of Moorcroft and Hearsey to Gartok, they dismissed the Governor from service and summoned him to Lhasa, where, probably he was given more punishment. Cf. Historical Records of the Survey of India, collected and compiled by R.H. Phillimore (Dehra Dun, 1954), Vol. III, p. 45.
little more money than the Ladakhis would have given for the same quantity, Moorcroft purchased a small quantity of shawl wool, and in his account of this journey, published in the *Asiatic Researches* in 1816 observed:

> I consider this day as the epoch at which may be fixed the origin of a traffic, which is likely to be extremely beneficial to the Hon'ble Company.

In the early years of the nineteenth century because of the oppression of the Afghan Governors in Kashmir, many skilled workers were compelled to leave that valley. Many shawl-manufacturers took refuge in Amritsar, Nurpur, Ludhiana and adjoining hills, carrying along with them their families and the wherewithal of their professional skills. The influx of these Kashmiri artisans was bound to promote and facilitate the work of manufacturing shawls in the Indian plains. In 1818, Shoogn Chund, a rich banker and treasurer of the Delhi Residency, started a venturous project of manufacturing shawls under his personal inspection getting the workmen and material from Kashmir.

In 1815, when Bashahr came under British protection the Company retained possession of Kotgarh, a small village on the Sutlej, from where to tap the lucrative shawl wool of West Tibet into the Company’s territory was easy. Soon after, with a view to purchase wool from

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2. *Foreign Department Political Proceedings,* 10 October 1823, No. 27; *Foreign Department Secret Consultations,* 22 November 1841, No. 25. See also, Moorcroft, *Travels,* I, pp. 110-111.
Tibetan traders and also to divert the wool trade from Kashmir into territories under British control, a factory was established here. ¹ Rampur, the capital of Bashahr, also began to develop into a shawl wool trading centre. For the convenient transit of wool, it was thought necessary to have good roads in Kinnaur, the northeastern part of Bashahr, which is coterminous with Ladakh and Tibet. Tracks, which in 1818 could scarce be used by travellers were repaired and within two years, the people of Kinnaur started bringing sheep laden with wool to Rampur. ² The wandering shepherds of Tibet, when unwatched could easily be induced to part with their wool for more money and merchandise of the plains; due to encouraging attitude of British officials, the residents of Kinnaur though not allowed to purchase shawl wool openly, began to smuggle "it in small quantities of two and three pounds each to a person."³ This situation may be summed up in the words of Alexander Gerard:

... Since the British have thought it worth their while to buy it [shawl wool] the Chinese (clis) have not been so scrupulous, and they now sell it to the highest bidder. Last year one person from Namges Ladze, a country on the bank of the Brahmapostra, eighteen days journey S.E. of Mansurowar, brought about twelve hundred weights of it, and the trade is on the increase.⁴

In Kumaon also, the traders were active in

¹ G. Lloyd (Ed.), Narrative of a Journey from Caunpoor to the Boorando Pass in the Himalaya Mountains etc. by Major Sir W. Lloyd and Captain Alexander Gerard's account of an Attempt to penetrate by Bekhur to Garoo and the Lake Mansarovara etc. (London, 1840), I, p. 174.
² Gerard, Account of Koonawur, pp. 115-16.
³ Ibid., p. 116.
⁴ Idem.
bringing shawl wool from West Tibet and soon this commodity formed an important item in the imports of Kumaon.1

Thus, the arrival of the English in the Western Himalayas upset the long-established commercial framework of this area, and shawl wool of Western Tibet started flowing into channels other than the old and customary ones. This was bound to cause anxiety to the rulers of Kashmir and Ladakh.

On the other hand, Maharaja Ranjit Singh also appears to have grasped the importance of shawl wool trade. Full encouragement was given to the traders who had emigrated from Kashmir to Nārupur and Amritsar. At Amritsar many thousand shawl manufactories were opened,2 which were fed partly by the wool imported from Tibet and partly from Bokhara.3 An attempt was also made to manufacture shawls at Lahore.4 Desa Singh Majithia, the Sikh Nazim of Kangra hills, was said to be busy in building a city called Tilokh Pur, not far from Kot Kangra, where he had already established one hundred shops of shawl workers.5 Soon after the conquest of Kashmir in 1819, Ranjit Singh appointed one Jawahir Mal, a native of Shikar Pur, who collected duties on shawls and other articles of merchandise, of different description imported, exported, or manufactured in Kashmir. He undertook to

2F.D. Pol. Progs., 10 October 1823, No. 27.
3Moorcroft, Travels, I, p. 111.
5F.D. Pol. Progs., 10 October 1823, No. 27.
pay the Maharaja a fixed amount every year. Under his judicious management there was rapid increase in the number of shawl manufacturers, and shawl goods brought to the state exchequer an income of about twelve lakh rupees which was expected to increase to rupees thirteen and a half lakhs in 1821.

In 1821, the supply of shawl wool from West Tibet into Ladakh decreased. It was said that about 150 horse-loads of this commodity had been smuggled into areas other than Ladakh. This caused great anxiety to the Gyalpo of Ladakh, his ministers and Kashmiri traders. This diminished supply of wool was bound to have its effect on the looms of Kashmir. Hence, the Sikh Nazim of Kashmir despatched a special envoy to Ladakh to investigate the causes of the decrease in shawl wool imports. It was suspected that the decrease was due to the activities of William Moorcroft, who at that time was sojourning in Ladakh. The Maharaja also wrote to Mir Izzet Ullah, Assistant to Moorcroft:

Since the duties of the district of Cashmeer are chiefly derived from the import of shawl wool and thread and it has been lately stated to me that from some cause or other, the transport of shawl wool from Tibhut into Cashmeer has fallen off very much ... apprise me ... what may be the cause of deficiency on

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1. The number of shops in 1819, before Ranjit's occupation of Kashmir was 6,000; it rose to 16,000 in 1821. (F.D. Pol. Progs., 10 October 1823, No. 28).
2. F.D. Pol. Progs., 10 October 1823, No. 27.
3. Ibid., No. 28.
5. For more information about Izzet Ullah, see infra pp. 135-36.
the import of shawl wool and thread from Tibet.1

Moorcroft, on behalf of Izzet Ullah replied that decrease in shawl wool was due to the breaking out of an epidemic among the cattle, in which lakhs of shawl goats of Ladakh and Chang Thang had died.2 The English traveller further assured the Maharaja that his object in coming to Ladakh was not to purchase shawl wool for the Company.3

The third power in the Western Himalayas - Raja Gulab Singh - also was not slow to grasp the potentialities of shawl wool trade of Ladakh. By the establishment of shawl manufactories at Amritsar and Nurpur, wool was in great demand in the plains. The shawl-manufacturers of these places would not like to get their supply of wool through a circuitous and expensive route via Kashmir and Ladakh. So, as the chronicler of the Lahore Durbar tells us, Raja Gulab Singh had started to draw the wool direct through Kishtwar from Ladakh into territories under his control. In November 1834, Mihan Singh, the Sikh Governor of Kashmir complained to Maharaja Ranjit Singh that the shawl wool was going from Ladakh to Jammu and that "on account of the inattention of the Maharaja, Kashmir had become absolutely deserted and its affairs had gone from bad to worse."4 The Governor of

1English Translation of Persian Letters Received from January 1822 to June 1822, Register No. 70, Pt. I, letter No. 131 (6) B. (N.A.I.,)

2English Translation of Persian Letters Received from September 1821, to December 1821, Register No. 69F, letter No. 263. (N.A.I.,)

3Ibid.

Kashmir had previously made repeated representations to the Maharaja in this connection but, Bhai Ram Singh, Minister-in-Waiting, out of regard for Raja Kalan (Dhian Singh) never made a report to the Maharaja, Ranjit Singh rebuked Raja Dhian Singh for all this, and there the matter appears to have rested. But Raja Gulab Singh was not to remain content with importing a part of the Ladakhi shawl wool only, he was eager to subdue completely Ladakh and the neighbouring areas, ostensibly for the Maharaja, but actually for himself. His plans in this regard will be discussed in the next chapter.

Moorcroft's visit to Ladakh alluded to earlier furnishes a good deal of information, that helps in understanding the Company's attitude vis-a-vis Ladakh. It would thus demand some detailed treatment. On his way to visit some Central Asian countries, in September 1820, Moorcroft reached Leh. The ostensible object of his mission was to procure horses to improve the breed within British provinces and to explore the possibilities of opening trans-Himalayan regions for British commerce. But it is probable that another motive of his journey was to get intelligence about the policy and commercial penetration of Russia in this region. He was accompanied by George Trebeck and Mr. Guthrie. The former, son of a Calcutta lawyer had volunteered himself, acted as a supervisor and carried survey work, while the latter was in the service of the Company and worked as an assistant-surgeon. Moorcroft was also accompanied by Mir Izzet Ullah Khan, a member of a Kashmiri merchant-house with its headquarters at Patna and with widespread

1 Hasdat-ut-Tawarikh, Daftar III, p. 213; see also, Mohammad Ul-Din Fouq, Mukammal Farikh-i-Kashmir (in Urdu), (Lahore, 1912), III, p. 39.
branches in Kashmir, Nepal, Western China, Tibet and Bengal. In 1809, Izzet Ullah had accompanied Elphinstone on his political mission to Kabul, and was taken into the Intelligence Department of the Company and was mainly employed by the Delhi Residency. In 1812, he was employed by Moorcroft to reconnoitre routes to Bokhara via Leh, Kashgar, Samarkand and Kabul. Izzet Ullah had successfully completed this mission and kept a detailed journal in Persian about various stages and the objects that attracted his attention. In the present mission he was assisting Moorcroft as an interpreter and linguist.

Although Moorcroft was not clothed with diplomatic powers by the Company's Government, yet he had their permission and sanction and was allowed two years leave with full pay. He was styled as 'Meer Akhoor' or 'Superintendent of the Hon'ble Company's Stud', and was furnished with certificates of introduction in English, Russian, Persian and Chinese languages, signed on sealing wax, with the Company's large seal.

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2C.T. Metcalfe (Resident at Delhi) to John Adam (Secretary to Government), 11 January 1814: Foreign Department Political Consultations, 25 January 1814, No. 44.

3This Journal was translated into English by Prof. H.H. Wilson and published in the Calcutta Quarterly Oriental Magazine and Register, III & IV (1835), and the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, VII (1843). Later on, an official translation of it was published by the Foreign Department Press, Calcutta, 1872.


Moorcroft was also furnished with presents to different chiefs of the countries which he was to visit, but most of the property which he carried in his cavalcade belonged to two English firms of Calcutta, Messrs John Palmer and Co., and Mackillop and Co. The Ladakhis like the Tibetans, were very much allergic to the name of a Westerner and put all kinds of obstacles in Moorcroft's entry into Ladakh. But once in Leh, by persistent efforts of Mir Izzet Ullah and by his own persuasive eloquence and prodigal distribution of presents, the Company's official soon won the confidence of the Gyalpo and the Leh officialdom. Suspicion and distrust was succeeded by a full measure of confidence. He stayed in Ladakh for two years, and despatched very detailed reports dealing almost with every aspect of Ladakh and its inhabitants. Here, we are only concerned with Russian intrigues in this area as these were noticed by Moorcroft, his signing of a commercial agreement with the Ladakhi authorities and finally, his recommendations to Fort William for accepting the allegiance of Ladakh.

2 Moorcroft's Mission had taken the form of a caravan: his luggage through the British territories was conveyed by sixty mules and other beasts-of-burden belonging to the British Government. (Idem.)
3 Francke's observation that "the reason why Moorcroft spent such a long time at Leh was his attempt to arrange for the king of Ladakh's tendering his allegiance to the East India Company" (Antiquities, I, p. 60), does not seem to be correct. On the contrary, we find that in pursuance of his plan, Moorcroft made strenuous efforts to get permission to enter Yarkand, but the Chinese authorities did not issue the passport and he had to wait and stay in Ladakh for all this time.
While in Ladakh, Moorcroft was surprised to find that Russia had already made some overtures to win the favour of the Ladakhi ruler. The Prime Minister showed him a letter from the Emperor of Russia addressed to the Raja of Ladakh which had been brought to the latter by a person named Agha Mehdi about six years earlier. The purport of the letter was to open commercial intercourse with Ladakh. Agha Mehdi, who was sagacious and discerning and had proved successful in the first mission was again assigned a diplomatic mission. He was given two letters addressed by the Emperor of Russia to the ruler of Ladakh and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Agha was also given a quantity of rubies, emeralds and other articles of Russian make mainly to serve as presents to be given to the aforementioned chiefs. For the successful completion of his mission, a considerable amount of gold-ducat called 'Booth Kees' was also placed at his disposal. From Shamei on the Irtysh, the Agha was escorted to Turfan Yangi, on the borders of Chinese Turkestan, by a troop of Russian cavalry. While at Kashgar, he was said to have assured the Mohammadens of that place of support from Russia in their attempt to shake off the Chinese yoke, and even had invited the heir of that principality to St. Petersburg, with a

1 For details about his career, see Moorcroft, Travels, I, pp. 384-86; AJ., XXI (Sept.-Dec. 1836), pp. 137-38.
2 Moorcroft, Travels, I, p. 383.
3 F.D.F.C., Progs., 26 July 1822, No. 56.
4 Moorcroft (Superintendent of Hon'ble Company's Stud on deputation to Chinese and Oozbuk territories) to Metcalfe (Secretary to Government), 6 May 1821: F.D.F.C., 10 October 1823, Nos. 23, 25.
promise that he would be helped by a Russian army to recover the dominions of his ancestors. This would result in the supremacy of Russian influence and trade in Eastern Turkestan.

At Yarkand, Agha Mehdi, in conjunction with a phalanx of Kashmiri traders, who seeing their trade monopoly in danger were inimical to Moorcroft, successfully foiled the latter's attempts to visit that place. Later on, when the Agha moved down to Leh, Kissak Shah, the principal judge at Yarkand gave him a letter containing instructions about Moorcroft's entry into Chinese territories. But the Agha could not reach Leh, for, while crossing the Karakoram mountains, he was suddenly taken ill and died soon after. His papers including the one about Moorcroft were destroyed by his followers. Mohammad Zahur, the Agha's assistant or deputy, arrived at Leh with a small caravan in April, 1821. But not being so clever as Agha Mehdi and being a votary of the pleasures of the flesh, Mohammad Zahur squandered away the large sum at his disposal and gave up the intention of returning to Russia.

Puzzled Moorcroft, who had hoped to meet the Agha in rencontre at Leh felt a bit relieved and wrote to a friend that "all circumstances considered, it is probable that we have gained rather than lost by not having received the instructions or rather by the death

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1 F.D.P.C., 10 October 1823, Nos. 23, 25.
4 Moorcroft to Metcalfe, 6 May 1822 : F.D.P.C., 10 October 1823, No. 25.
of the Agha. Moorcroft further observed that if the Agha had lived a few years longer, he might have produced scenes in Asia that would have astonished some of the Cabinets in Europe.

From Agha Mehdi's followers, Moorcroft procured two letters which had escaped destruction. These were written by Count Nesselrode, Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Privy Councillor of Czar Alexander I, and addressed to Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Gyalpo of Ladakh. The letter to Ranjit Singh was written in Russian language, and at Yarkand it was opened by Agha Mehdi so as to get it translated into Persian. In the letter, Agha Mehdi was styled as "one of the aulic counsellor of the state of Russia." Inter alia, it requested the Maharaja to receive the Agha with every attention and consideration, assuring him at the same time of all assistance to any native traveller or merchant of the Sikh ruler. The letter to the Raja of Ladakh was similar in tenor and differed in address only.

Moorcroft surmised that the purpose of Agha Mehdi's mission was political. One probable object of Czar Alexander was the invasion of British India.

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1. 1 Ad., XXI (Sept.-Dec., 1836), p. 137.
2. Ibid., p. 138.
3. On Moorcroft's request this original letter in Russian characters was also translated into Latin by Alexander Csoma de Koros, the Hungarian scholar, who at that time happened to be in Leh, Cf. T. Duka, Life And Works of Alexander Csoma de Koros (London, 1885), pp. 28-29.
4. No. 25A, 10 October 1823, No. 25A.
5. For details, see infra pp. 280-81, Appendix A.
6. No. 24, 10 October 1823, No. 24.
through a direct Kokand-Ladakh route across the highlands of Pamir. By following this route, there were less chances of opposition from the enemy: Chinese posts at Yarkand and Kashgar were not on the way and over the rest of the steppe there were not many forts, troops or guards. Resistance, if offered by the nomadic Kirghiz hordes of these areas, could be easily overcome. 1

Alternately, Moorcroft thought that the Russian Emperor also contemplated invasion of China. For both these objects goodwill and friendship of the Ladakhi Gyalpo and Maharaja Ranjit Singh were desirable and Agha Mehdi had been despatched to achieve these objects. In any such invasion, both Ladakh and Kashmir, because of their geographical situation, would serve as convenient military advance-posts where an invading Russian army, exhausted after a long march through the mountains, would take respite and replenish its supplies. 2

Agha Mehdi's mission spurred Moorcroft to take some active steps for securing commercial concessions for the British. He was convinced that Russians were pursuing their objective with vigour and if the British wished to counteract their designs, they will have to act quickly. On 4th May, 1821, the Company's official, on behalf of English merchants signed a commercial engagement with the Raja, the Prime Minister and other authorities of Ladakh. Under this agreement British

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1 F.D.Pol. Progs., 20 September 1822, No. 63, pp. 178-80. These proceedings are quite detailed: Moorcroft's single letter containing his recommendations regarding Ladakh's allegiance and other details about this Himalayan principality consists of about eighty foolscap manuscript pages. So, for the sake of easy reference, pages of the proceedings are given.

2 Ibid., pp. 181-85.
merchants were permitted to trade with Ladakh and through it with the Chinese and Western Turkestan. The Ladakhi authorities also allowed a reduction of nearly one-fourth of the amount of the duties which was levied on merchandise of traders from the Punjab. Moorcroft's real object in concluding this commercial agreement was not only to seek access to Ladakh and its environs for British trade, but also to compete with the Russians who, after grasping the potentialities of Central Asian trade were busily engaged in introducing their goods in these markets. As far back as 1812, after his visit to Gartok, he had written to the then Governor-General, Lord Minto that the vigorous trade carried on by the Russians in the neighbourhood of the Hon'ble Company's possessions is highly prejudicial to the Company's commercial interests, which if not timely counteracted, will probably lead to events, which may disturb the tranquillity and endanger the safety and security of the Company's provinces.

This commercial agreement was followed by an offer of allegiance of Ladakh to the Company. What motivated the Ladakhi authorities to tender this allegiance and what role did Moorcroft play to bring it about? These are difficult questions to answer. Yet Moorcroft's remarks that he simply acted as a medium for forwarding the memorial to the Company, which was proffered, are not convincing. On the contrary, in the chronicles of Ladakh we notice that Moorcroft and Trebeck, sensing the danger of Ladakh being conquered by others, offered

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1For more details, see infra pp. 284–85, Appendix C.
2Foreign Misc. No. 125, para I (N.A.I.)
3Moorcroft, Travels, I, p. 420.
4Ibid., pp. 419 et passim.
to build a 'tower' (fort) in Ladakh, but this offer was rejected by the Ladakhi authorities. It appears, that Mir Izzet Uliah and his friends in Ladakh took pains to convince the Ladakhi authorities that the best solution to save Ladakh from any invasion by the Sikhs or Russia or any other power was to accept the protection of the Company and place Ladakh under British guardianship. Whatever the reasons, a tender of allegiance was made to the Company. Important clauses in the memorial were that the Company's Government was not to interfere in the internal administration of Ladakh, but if the latter suffered aggression from any other power, then, on application from the Ladakhi King, the Company was to send its forces to protect this Himalayan principality. Expenditure incurred on such an expedition was to be defrayed by the Company.

While forwarding this memorial to Fort William, Moorcroft took great pains to bring to the notice of the British Government the manifold advantages which would accrue to the latter by accepting the allegiance of Ladakh. This Himalayan kingdom, he observed, would greatly facilitate the project of tapping the lucrative shawl wool trade and also act as a key for opening the vast markets of Chinese Turkestan and other Central Asian countries for British goods. Militarily, Ladakh was invulnerable. Its sky-high mountains, deep ravines and unfrequented narrow footpaths were its strong

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1 Francke, Antiquities, II, p. 125.
2 Ibid.
3 F.H. POI., Progs., 20 September 1822, No. 64.
4 For details, see Infra pp. 282-83, Appendix B.
defences, and the Company's monthly expenditure for maintaining peace in this area would not exceed rupees one thousand. ¹ Further it would be an excellent base for operations against China if the necessity ever arose, and British presence in Ladakh, in addition to keeping in awe Maharaja Ranjit Singh, would forestall any Russian attempt to invade India from the north. ² Moorcroft was anxious to save Ladakh from being conquered by Ranjit Singh or any other power. In this context he observed:

should Raja Ranjit Singh unhappily succeed in obtaining Ladakh through the British Government rejecting its tendered allegiance, all the fair hopes now entertained of commercial enterprise being carried to an indefinite extent in this direction must be considered as completely blasted and destroyed. ³

In the end, Moorcroft requested that if the allegiance of Ladakh be not acceptable to the Government, then they should keep the matter as a secret ⁴ until he returned or until his papers on the commercial capabilities of the countries to the north-west of India were published. ⁵

³ Ibid., pp. 203-204.
⁴ Prof. H.K. Wilson, Editor of Moorcroft's Travels (I, p. 420), wrongly says that while forwarding the tender of allegiance to Bengal, Moorcroft immediately apprised Maharaja Ranjit Singh about this matter. On the contrary, we find Moorcroft anxious not to let the Maharaja know anything about it until the Company decided about this matter. Moorcroft's apprehension was that if Ranjit Singh got information about the tender, by sending his troops to Ladakh, he would certainly forestall the Company's probable action there.
⁵ Cf. F.D. Pol., Prog., 20 September 1822, No. 63, p. 204.
Moorcroft's long stay in Ladakh and his activities there, had raised suspicions in the Sikh ruler's mind. The Maharaja despatched a pair of Harkaras to Ladakh, and wrote to Moorcroft and Izzet Ullah making searching enquiries about their objects and activities in Ladakh and desired to know everything in "full detail." Moorcroft replied that after signing a commercial treaty with the authorities of Ladakh, he was busy in settling the duties to be levied on English merchants in Yarkand. He further wrote that rumours were afloat in Ladakh that the Maharaja was contemplating to send a Thanadar with some force to Ladakh. The English traveller impressed upon Ranjit Singh, that any such action was fraught with many dangerous consequences. Instead of increasing, it will stifle the supply of shawl wool from Ladakh to Kashmir, thus annihilating the economy of the latter. In Moorcroft's own words, as he later wrote to a friend, his purpose in writing this letter was to alarm Ranjit's ruling passion and avert any probable Sikh invasion of Ladakh until the Company determined upon the tender. Moorcroft's letter raised apprehensions in the Maharaja's mind and he perceived in it a hidden threat. Ranjit Singh's Agent at Delhi, handed over this letter in original to Sir David Ochterlonny, British Resident, and desired to know British intentions. The Governor-General wrote to the Maharaja expressing regret and surprise.

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1. \textit{English Translation of Persian Letters Received from January 1822 to June 1822}, Register No. 70, Pt. I, letter No. 131\((6)\) A B. (N.I.I.)


that Moorcroft's letter excited apprehensions in the Lahore ruler's mind. Ranjit Singh was told that Moorcroft had acted without any sanction, and that an offer of allegiance from Ladakh was received and rejected. The Maharaja was further assured of British friendship. The Panjab ruler acknowledging this letter observed:

Should therefore any weak-minded person venture to put forth anything inconsistent with the relations subsisting between us and without the privity or consent of either Government, it shall not be regarded and should be dis­

countenanced by our Governments so as to prevents its exciting any suspicions on either side. 3

Moorcroft's recommendations about the acceptance of the allegiance of Ladakh fell on deaf ears and most of his correspondence made little impression on the Company authorities. The British Indian Government not only rejected Ladakh's offer of allegiance but also disapproved of Moorcroft's conduct and disowned him. 4

After Moorcroft's visit, Ladakh was no longer a terra incognita. This leads to certain questions. If his observations about Ladakh's commercial, strategic and political importance were correct, then why did the Company refuse the allegiance with Ladakh which was offered to the British on a silver platter? And if Russian overtures befriending the chiefs of this area for the purpose of creating difficulties for the

1 Governor-General to Ranjit Singh, 20 October 1821; English Translation of Persian Letters Issued, 1821, Register No. 71, letter No. 140. (N.A.I.)
2 Moorcroft, Travels, I, p. 421.
3 Ranjit Singh to Governor-General, 5 February 1822; F.D.P.C., 9 February 1822, No. 25.
British in India were correct, then how would the Company's interests and possessions in India remain safe? Answers to these queries are not far to seek. Firstly, the Company had recently fought expensive wars with the Gurkhas, the Pindaris and the Marathas, and had just about begun to digest the big slices of territories acquired during the Governor-Generalship of Lord Hastings. Under these circumstances the Company's Government was not prepared to commit itself to a remote territory. Secondly, the Company was apprehensive lest any interference in Ladakh should provoke Chinese resentment, thus endangering British commerce with China by sea. Thirdly, the Company at that time did not want to give umbrage to Ranjit Singh. The British knew that after his conquest of Kashmir in 1819, Ranjit Singh had received tribute from Ladakh and it was under his sphere of influence. Moreover in the year 1821, the British Government had not yet become apprehensive of the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of Ranjit Singh, otherwise they may have tried to limit his expansion in that direction, as they later on did in the case of Sindh. Finally, and this was important, a Russian threat of the invasion of India from the north was not as dangerous or probable, as it was from the north-west. The British in Calcutta must have known that India had always been invaded from the north-west and not from the north. Moreover, from this side it was yet a long way for the Czar's troops to reach the Indian borders: Eastern or Chinese Turkestan, Kokand and many other independent Central Asian Khanates intervened, which then were certainly not friendly towards Muscovy.
While there is no doubt about the authenticity of the letters written by St. Petersburg to Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Gyalpo of Ladakh, after the death of Agha Mehti and the defection of his followers his mission failed completely. In retrospect, it is evident that the Russians never pursued their feelers in Ladakh and Kashmir. So, the Agha's mission may be said to be a stray incident, which greatly perturbed and alarmed Moorcroft, who was overzealous to extend and protect British interests. In fact, in many respects Moorcroft anticipated future developments: his warning of the Russian intrigues along the whole northern frontier of India, and his advocacy of extending British influence to Ladakh, were problems which later attracted the attention of the British Indian authorities. Further, by saying that the outcome of the rivalry between Britain and Russia was to be the decisive factor in Central Asian politics, Moorcroft was running far ahead of his times. The Great Game, in common parlance, became a preoccupation of the latter part of the nineteenth century.