CHAPTER II

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The British policy towards Tibet, throughout the colonial rule, to a great extent determined their policy towards the Himalayan region. Tibet was always considered as a buffer between the British subcontinental empire and its northern neighbours—China and Russia.\(^1\) To maintain the security of the northern frontier, the British designed a "double-rampart" security system. According to this the "outer rampart included the Tibetan Plateau where external influence was not ruled out (e.g. China): and the inner rampart consisted of the Himalayan states where no external influence was permitted".\(^2\) Britain continued this policy till 1947.

The conquest of the Kathmandu valley by the Gorkha King Prithvinarayan Shah in 1769 and the subsequent unification of Nepal under the Shah dynasty,\(^3\) seriously threatened the above mentioned security arrangement. The Gorkha expansionism in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries directly affected the strategic and commercial interests of the British.\(^4\) This ultimately led to the Anglo-Nepalese War in 1814. The war turned out to be disastrous for Nepal. By the Treaty of Sugauli, ratified

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2 Norbu, n.1, p.62.


on 4 March 1816, the war came to an end. The Treaty of Sugauli fixed the Kali river as the western limit of Nepal and the Mechi river as the eastern limit.5

Though the Gorkha/Nepali expansionism was contained by the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, it introduced the concept of Prabhashi Nepali (immigrant Nepalis)6 and the out-migration of people to areas beyond the boundaries of Nepal. Abject poverty and the exploitative Jhara system (compulsory unpaid labour services for the state) that was enforced in Nepal till 1959 further worsened out-migration.7

The British interests in Sikkim were linked to their trade and political interests in Tibet. Through the treaty signed on 10 February 1817, Sikkim surrendered her rights. to deal directly with any foreign power, to the East India Company.8 This treaty lent the British unhindered access to the Tibetan border.9 In 1835 Darjeeling was ceded to the British as a health and recreation resort by the Chogyal of Sikkim.10 In 1861, when the Treaty of 1817 was revised, Sikkim virtually became a de facto protectorate of the British.11

The East India Company was very keen on developing trade relations with territories in the eastern Himalayas. But the idea of establishing trade relations with the

5 Rahul, n.3, p.65. Also see Ram Rahul, Modern Nepal (New Delhi, 1985), p.22.
7 ibid, pp.20-21.
9 ibid.
10 ibid. Also see Rahul, n.3, p.43.
11 Das, n.8, p.6.
Himalayan region and Tibet was undermined by the Gorkha ascendency in the late eighteenth century. Gorkha militancy resulted in the closure of the old trade route between India and Tibet through Nepal. However, the location of Bhutan in the eastern Himalayas and its proximity to the Chumbi valley with direct access to southern Tibet offered an alternative to Nepal. In their letters of 10 April and 3 May 1771, the Court of Directors instructed the Governor of Bengal to explore the prospects of Bhutan and Assam as future markets to help expand the trade of Bengal.

The Company's political interventions and manipulation of forces in the Himalayan region during this period were intended to realise the plans laid out by the Court of Directors. Political developments involving the state of Cooch Behar and Bhutan gave the Company an opportunity to enter into a region which lay between Bhutan and Tibet.

A dispute arose between two claimants to the throne of Cooch Behar in 1772. One of them approached the Bhutan government for help while the other sought the help of the British. The war which followed ended with the defeat of the Bhutanese. Through the mediation of the Panchan Lama and Prithvinarayan Shah, the King of Nepal, a treaty was signed between the Deb Raja of Bhutan and the East India Company on 25 April 1774. Under its terms all lands belonging to the Deb Raja which were appropriated during the war with Cooch Behar, were returned and the Bhutanese

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13 Singh, n.12, p.293.

14 ibid.

merchants were allowed to send their caravans to Rungpoor without paying duties. In
return the British were given the right to cut timber from the hills duty free while timber-
cutters were assured protection.\textsuperscript{16} The treaty was essentially beneficial for the
Company as its trade and commercial interests were protected.

Following the involvement of the Company in the above mentioned crisis, a
number of British missions were sent to Lhasa via Bhutan. These missions were led by
George Bogle in 1774, Alexander Hamilton in 1776-77 and Samuel Turner in 1783.\textsuperscript{17}
The aim was to open trade communications with Bhutan and through it, if possible, with
Lhasa and other parts of Tibet.\textsuperscript{18} Among these missions, Bogle's mission achieved
some success. About this Kapileshwar Labh writes:

He [Bogle] was able to extend the Company's trade to Bhutan through
non-European agents. By an agreement with the Government of Bhutan,
he secured the passage of British merchandise through Bhutan. Besides,
he furnished to the Company much important information and made
valuable suggestions which largely influenced the Company's policy
towards Bhutan for a long time. Bogle considered it impracticable to gain
possession of any part of Bhutan or to form a settlement there without the
consent of the Bhutanese, and the Bhutanese, he felt, would never agree
to British rule.\textsuperscript{19}

The British policy towards the Himalayan countries during Warren Hastings' tenue as Governor General was consistent and at the same time cautious and conciliatory. The departure of Hastings in 1785 resulted in a downward slide in Anglo-
Bhutanese relations. The fluctuations in the relations between the British and Tibet also


\textsuperscript{17} Kohli, n.16, pp.19-28. Also see Labh, n.12, pp.18-21 and Rathore, n.15, p.46.

\textsuperscript{18} Singh, n.12, p.294.

\textsuperscript{19} Labh, n.12, p.19.
furthered it. The frequent across-the-border raids by the local Bhutanese officers played an important role in keeping the relations at bay.\textsuperscript{20} This trend continued till 1826.\textsuperscript{21}

The co-option of Assam into the British empire after the first Burmese War (1825-26) resulted in the extension of the Indo-Bhutanese frontier.\textsuperscript{22} This development changed the whole pattern of Anglo-Bhutanese relations. The frequent incursions of the Bhutanese into Indian territories and the issue of "tribute" due from the Bhutanese in return for their possession of \textit{Duars}\textsuperscript{23} caused a lot of tension between the Company and the Bhutan government.\textsuperscript{24}

Anglo-Bhutanese relations from 1826 were to a great extent centred around the question of \textit{Duars}. When Assam was annexed, Bhutan had sovereign control over the Bengal \textit{Duars}. But in the case of Assam \textit{Duars} they were not in full control. After the Company took over Assam this became the bone of contention between Bhutan and the Company. Matters came to a head with repeated incursions into the Company's territory

\textsuperscript{20} ibid, p.21. Also see Kohli, n.16, p.27.
\textsuperscript{21} Ram Rahul, \textit{Modern Bhutan} (Delhi, 1977), p.41.
\textsuperscript{22} Singh, n.12, p.299. Also see Labh, n.12, p.28 and Rathore, n.15, pp.48-49.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Duars} lie at the base of the lower ranges of the Bhutanese hills. They form a narrow strip of land ten to twelve miles wide and extending from the Dhansiri river in Assam on the east to the river Tista, or the frontier of the Darjeeling District, on the west. The \textit{Duars} are eighteen in number. They are named after various passes in the hills which lead to Bhutan. Eleven of these are situated between the Tista and the Manas, and are known as the Bengal \textit{Duars}. The remaining seven are between the Manas and the Dhansiri; and are called Assam \textit{Duars}.

The eleven Bengal \textit{Duars} are:

The seven Assam \textit{Duars} are:

\textsuperscript{24} Labh, n.12, p.28.
from across the border.\textsuperscript{25} A mission under Captain R.B.Pemberton was sent to Bhutan to resolve the dispute over Assam Duars in 1837-38. The mission, however, could not do much. Consequently in 1841, the Assam Duars were annexed and it was decided to pay a sum of Rs. 10,000 to Bhutan annually, by way of compensation, from the revenue of these Duars.\textsuperscript{26}

After the annexation of the Assam Duars, though the Bengal Government assured that it would not intervene in the internal affairs of Bhutan, continuing incursions from the Bhutanese side compelled them to go back on their assurance. Agent after agent of the North Eastern Frontier advised permanent annexation of the Bengal Duars to end the border skirmishes and called for a mission to Bhutan to help resolve the crisis.

The Bhutanese attitude towards the general uprising in India against British rule in 1857 was viewed critically by the British. In 1863, the British sent Ashley Eden, who was then Secretary to the Government of Bengal, as their emissary to Bhutan to explore the possibilities of a relationship with Bhutan more acceptable to the British.\textsuperscript{27}

The Bhutanese response to this British initiative was pretty much arrogant. At first, the Bhutanese authorities were unwilling to even receive the mission. In the Bhutanese Durbar, Eden was humiliated by the Tongsa Penlop (governor of Tongsa) and under duress he had to sign a treaty that the British were surrendering all the Duars in Assam to Bhutan.\textsuperscript{28} Eden's mission failed and its experience worsened the Indo-Bhutanese relations. On Eden's return to Calcutta, the Government of India unilaterally

\textsuperscript{25} ibid, p.34. Also see Singh, n.12, p.302.
\textsuperscript{26} Rahul, n.21, p.42. Also see Manorama Kohli, \textit{From Dependency to Interdependence: A Study of Indo-Bhutan Relations} (New Delhi, 1993), p.14.
\textsuperscript{27} Rahul, n.21, p.42. Also see Rathore, n.15, p.51.
\textsuperscript{28} Kohli, n.16. pp.80-83.
cancelled the above mentioned agreement and on 28 November 1864 declared war on Bhutan. The second Anglo-Bhutanese War lasted almost a year and came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Sinchula on 11 November 1865. ²⁹

The Sinchula Treaty of 1865 was a landmark in the history of Bhutan's relations with British India and its domestic politics. The treaty once and for all confirmed the British paramountcy over Bhutan and institutionalised the pattern of Indo-Bhutanese relations for the coming years. ³⁰

The Sinchula Treaty of 1865 with Bhutan was somewhat similar to the Indo-Sikkim Treaty which was signed after the Sikkim campaign in 1861. Politically, both of these treaties were aimed at establishing domination over Bhutan and Sikkim and to bring them within the British "sphere of influence". Regarding the impacts of the treaty, Peter Collister writes:

> For the inhabitants of the duars the quality of life was enormously improved as they no longer lived in constant dread of cross-border raids: and British Indian capital became available for investment in tea plantations and other forms of agricultural improvement.... There would also have been an even greater problem over Nepalese immigration. ³¹

The British Indian Government avoided the risk of interfering in the internal affairs of Bhutan. This was because of two reasons - the annexation of Bhutan would have set off alarm bells ringing in Tibet and the economic potentiality of Bhutan minus its Duars was negligible. ³² The British Indian government only wanted a peaceful and

²⁹ Rahul, n.21, pp.42-43. For details see D.F.Rennie, Bhotan and the Story of the Doar War (New Delhi, 1970).


³¹ Collister, n.16, p.130.

³² Labh, n.12, p.97. Also see Kohli, n.26, pp.16-17.
friendly Bhutan and this was ensured by the Sinchula Treaty of 1865. Bhutan became an ideal buffer state for the British. As Amar Kaur Jasbir Singh observes:

The various changes, both external and internal, which the 1865 Treaty had brought about in Bhutan, was well suited to the British concept of a buffer state: a buffer zone with its own autonomous government to which they owed little or no responsibility, but over which they exercised considerable influence in respect to foreign relations and trade.

A careful examination of the articles of the Sinchula Treaty of 1865 reveals that economic consideration played a more significant role in shaping Anglo-Bhutanese relationship than any other factor. A possible capitalist development in Bhutan was arrested by the provision for annexation of all the Assam and Bengal Duars under the Sinchula Treaty of 1865. The Duars became very important for the British as it turned out to be the main tea plantation area. The British had an eye on the Duars much before the Anglo-Bhutanese War of 1864. Colonel Jenkins in his report of 1859 categorically emphasized the need for immediate occupation of the Bengal Duars because of favourable conditions for high quality tea plantation. It is interesting to note that the first tea plantation in Bengal Duars was established in 1874 - only nine years after the Sinchula Treaty.

In the period between 1866 and 1898, Bhutan witnessed three major civil wars; the first war in 1868-69, the second in 1877 and the third in 1884-85. Disputes regarding the sharing of the subsidy offered by the British and the struggle for supremacy

33 Singh, n.12, p.330.
34 Basu, n.16, p.18.
35 Cited in ibid, p.19.
36 ibid.
37 Singh, n.12, p.330. Also see Labh, n.12, pp.116-20 and Collister, n.16, pp.133-5.
were the main reasons behind these conflicts. During these civil wars, the Government of India followed a policy of non-intervention in spite of repeated appeals for help by the various factions concerned. 38

The Tongsa Penlop, governor of central and eastern Bhutan and the Paro Penlop, governor of western Bhutan were the rival parties in the above mentioned conflicts. At the end of the civil war in 1884-85 Ugyen Wangchuck, the Tongsa Penlop, had emerged as the unquestioned leader of Bhutan. 39 The emergence of Ugyen Wangchuck once and for all put an end to frequent civil strife in Bhutan. 40

The arrival of Lord Curzon as Viceroy in 1899 marked a shift in the Government of India's policy towards the neighbouring states, especially Tibet. 41 He linked the frontier policy to the wider question of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia. Rumours about the Russian presence in Lhasa made him more sensitive and suspicious about Russian territorial ambitions in Central Asia.

To discourage a probable Russian penetration into Tibet and into the British "sphere of influence" the Government of India sent a military expedition team in 1903-04 under Colonel F.E. Younghusband. 42 The expedition successfully marked the conclusion of the Anglo-Tibetan convention or Lhasa convention of 1904. 43 All through its journey, the expedition team was helped by Tongsa Penlop Ugyen

38 Singh, n.12, p.330.
40 Rahul, n.21, p.46.
41 Singh, n.12, p.334. Also see Labh, n.12, p.130.
42 Rahul, n.21, pp.46-47. Also see Labh, n.12, p.130.
43 Kohli, n.16, p.164.
Wangchuck who became the chief mediator between the British and Tibet. In recognition to the services rendered by Ugyen Wangchuck the Government of India decided to confer on him the title of the Knight Commander of the Indian Empire (KCIE). This friendly gesture was followed by John Claude White's mission to Bhutan in 1905.

John Claude White in his report argued for a policy of active interference in the internal affairs of Bhutan and recommended propping up Ugyen Wangchuck against other aspirants to power. He pointed out that it was in the interest of the Government of India that Ugyen Wangchuck should continue in power. He also argued in favour of British assistance in the development of natural resources, establishment of mines, tea gardens and other industries in Bhutan. He wanted Bhutan to be opened up, linking it with roads and a communication network to facilitate greater trade relations between Bhutan and British India. But his main recommendation was the revision of the Sinchula Treaty of 1865 in the background of the looming Chinese threat. In support of this recommendation he wrote:

A new treaty could be drawn up so as to prevent Bhutan having any relations with other foreign powers such as Tibet and China, and might stipulate for authority to make roads as was the case with Sikkim.

44 Singh, n.12, p.346. Also see Rathore, n.15, p.56.
45 Kohli, n.16, pp.165-6. Also see Labh, n.12, p.155.
46 Labh, n.12, p.155. Also see Kohli, n.26, p.21.
48 ibid, pp.283-4. Also see Labh, n.12, p.157.
49 Cited in Kohli, n.16, p.167.
The Foreign Department took a favourable position on John Claude White’s recommendations. But the suggested revision of the Sinchula Treaty did not find official favour.50

In June 1905, Ugyen Wangchuck sought British help in making his Tongsa Penlopship hereditary. But the Government of India did not react. However, internal political developments in Bhutan made him the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan in 1907.51 Immediately the Government of India recognised him as the hereditary ruler of Bhutan and confirmed that Bhutan was a native state under the suzerainty of the British government.52 In support of this, John Claude White has written as follows:

I need hardly point out the advantages to us that such a change means. Whereas in the past, we had to deal with the Rajas of Bhutan, their irresponsible masters, the Penlops, we will in the future deal with the responsible head of the Government.53

The success of Younghusband’s mission was reflected in the sudden shift in the Chinese strategic thinking. In the new circumstances, China not only wanted control over Tibet but sought to bring Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim under her dominance.54 The British authorities in India recognised the gravity of the situation. They realised that to maintain peace on the frontier, China had to be kept away from getting a foothold in Bhutan. This situation led them to initiate a process for the revision of the Sinchula

50 ibid.
52 Singh, n.12, p.349. Also see Labh, n.12, p.154.
53 Cited in Kohli, n.16, p.173.
54 Labh, n.12, p.167.
Charles A. Bell the Political Officer who was entrusted to carry out negotiations with the Maharaja of Bhutan wrote:

...our policy with regard to Bhutan should be to show her all the friendliness we can and if opportunity offers, to make a brief treaty with her so as to enable us to control her foreign relations while leaving her absolute freedom in her internal affairs. This will enable us to keep Chinese agents, Chinese troops and Chinese influence generally out of the country.

As per the instructions Charles A. Bell initiated negotiations with the Maharaja of Bhutan through Ugyen Kazi, agent of the Bhutanese Government in India. Maharaja Ugyen Wangchuck accepted the terms put forward by the British and the treaty was signed and sealed on 8 January 1910. According to this new treaty the Government of Bhutan agreed to be guided by the advice of the British Indian Government in its external relations. In a not unrelated move, the subsidy to Bhutan was raised to Rupees one lakh per year.

The Indo-Bhutanese Treaty of 1910 was a turning point in the history of Bhutan and Indo-Bhutanese relations. The British insecurity in the wake of a shift in the Chinese strategic thinking and Ugyen Wagchuck’s need for protection both from inside and outside of Bhutan somehow coincided and contributed much to the conclusion of the treaty. About the impact of the treaty Ram Rahul writes:

It put Bhutan, so far as the management and conduct of its foreign relations was concerned, on the same footing as Sikkim. It lost its external sovereignty and became in effect a British protectorate even though the word ‘protectorate’ was not mentioned in the treaty. To be sure, the treaty did not make Bhutan a part of the British Empire. All that

55 ibid, p.173.
56 Cited in Collister, n.16, p.166.
57 Labh, n.12, pp.174-5.
58 Kohli, n.16, pp.180-1. Also see Rathore, n.15, p.57.
it did was to enable the British secure the north-east frontier of India from both external aggression and intrigue.59

The main debate during 1910-1947 between the British Indian Government and the Bhutanese *Durbar* centred around the status of Bhutan. On the British attitude towards the status of Bhutan *vis-a-vis* the British Indian Government, Kapileshwar Labh writes:

Had the Government of British India so desired, it could have incorporated Bhutan among the Indian native states. But, then, it would have entailed immense responsibilities on the Government of British India without corresponding advantages.... Apart from keeping China off, all that they expected of Bhutan was friendly co-operation and general amenability to their control and this they had secured under the treaty of 1910.60

In 1924, however, it was made clear that, Bhutan, though under British suzerainty was outside India and was not a native Indian state.61 When the Council of States of the Federal Legislature came into existence as per the Government of India Act of 1935, Bhutan was kept out of it. This was because of the undefinable status of Bhutan, in its relations with the British Indian Government. The Government of India Act of 1935 made no change in the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Bhutan and the British maintained the policy of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of Bhutan till they left the subcontinent in 1947.

After the decolonisation of the Indian sub-continent, Bhutan and the newly born Indian Union signed the "India-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship, 1949" at Darjeeling on 8 August 1949. As per the treaty in matters concerning its foreign affairs, Bhutan agreed to be guided by India's advice. On its part, India promised not to interfere in the

59 Rahul, n.21, p.52.
60 Labh, n.12, pp.200-1.
61 ibid, p.201.
internal affairs of Bhutan and agreed to pay Bhutan an annual subsidy of Rs.500,000. The familiar paradigm was in place. Moreover, as a gesture of friendship India decided to return to Bhutan, the 32 square miles of territory called Diwangiri which had been annexed by the British in 1865. The Bhutanese government renamed it as Deothang and now it forms the southernmost tip of Bhutan.

II

The ethnic scenario in the Himalayas underwent a tremendous change with the arrival of the British. The liquidation of the Newari power in Kathmandu valley by the Gorkhas in the middle of the eighteenth century and subsequent Gorkha incursions into Sikkim resulted in the appearance of Nepalis in Sikkim. Large scale migration of Nepalis to Sikkim began in the mid-1860s after the establishment of Sikkim as a British protectorate. The British encouraged the migration of Nepalis "in the belief that it would help restrain the pro-Tibetan Bhotiyas". Later, these Nepalis were used in the developmental activities of Sikkim. Because of this conscious policy, by 1891, the Nepalis constituted 51 per cent of Sikkim's population, reducing the Lepchas to 19 per cent and the Bhutias to 16 per cent.

British mission reports since the eighteenth century are considered to be the only authentic sources on the population patterns in southern Bhutan. According to these


64 Rahul, n.3, pp.45-46.

65 ibid, p.46. Also see Das, n.8, p.6.

66 Das, n.8, p.6.
reports, southern Bhutan was generally inhospitable because of hot weather, dense malarial forests and wild animals. Till the end of the Duar War in 1864, the Bhutanese highlanders used to conduct raids in the Duar area to capture slaves and collect taxes. Uptil the Duar War in 1864, the British noted only sparse settlements in the South consisting entirely of Indian ethnic groups, leaving no record of the Nepalis in southern Bhutan.

Babu Kishan Kant Bose in his account of Bhutan in the year 1815 described the Duar area in the following manner:

The intermediate country is covered with long grass, with a few huts here and there, which are not observable until the traveller is close upon them. The jungle is very high... [and] of such height that an elephant or rhinoceros cannot be seen in it when standing up, and it is so full of leeches that a person cannot move a hundred yards without having his body, wherever it has been scratched by the grass, covered with these animals, so that a single person cannot get rid of them without assistance. In this jungle, when the sun shines, the heat is intolerable, and when the sun ceases to shine a person cannot remain in it without a fire on account of innumerable mosquitoes and other insects with which it is filled. 67

Pemberton, in his account on Bhutan in 1838 pointed out that the Duars are principally populated by the Kacharee tribe. 68

With the conclusion of the Treaty of Sinchula in 1865, the Duars were ceded to the British. Before that, Darjeeling was ceded to the East India Company by the Chogyal of Sikkim in 1835. 69 And Kalimpong was finally annexed by the British on 11 November 1865, following the Indo-Bhutanese War of 1864 and included in Darjeeling.

68 ibid, p.161.
69 Tanka B.Subba, Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling (New Delhi, 1992), p.34.
The British were fully aware of the potential of this newly acquired land. The quality of the soil and the climate was suitable for the cultivation of tea. Hence the clearing of vast forest lands in large scale and commercial logging operations. For commercial logging operations and preparation of the tea gardens the British needed labour in big numbers. This labour was provided by the Nepalis and thus began the Nepali migration to Darjeeling, Kalimpong and the Duars.

A host of "push" factors including repression, economic exploitation and perhaps overpopulation, as well as "pull" factors in British India (need for labour) led to large scale migration from Nepal to the East along the hills and Duars. These migrants were instrumental in the opening up of territories of the Indian North-East for settlements, timber and tea gardens. The eastward migration of Nepalis reached them up right across the North-East and as far as today's Myanmar. About the reasons for the migration of Nepalis to the east, D.N.S. Dhakal and Christopher Strawn write:

... Nepali emigration throughout the nineteenth century (and the beginning of the twentieth) was encouraged by three factors: problems in Nepal, specifically a repressive government with an exploitable labour system and coupled with a lack of land, occasional famines, and epidemics; the labour force needs in Darjeeling and Assam, for which the British especially recruited Nepalis; and former Gorkha soldiers who settled (or were resettled) in the areas of their units.

To a considerable extent, strategic considerations also played an important role in the British support to large-scale Nepali migration to the East. The encouragement given by the British to the Nepali immigration into Sikkim was only in the expectation

70 ibid, p.36.
71 Kanak Mani Dixit, "Looking for Greater Nepal", Himal (Lalitpur), vol.6, no.2, March/April 1993, pp.15-16.
that "the influx of these hereditary enemies of Tibet would be their surest guarantee against a revival of Tibetan influence".  

According to most of the documents a major portion of the Nepali migration to Bhutan took place between the end of the Duar War in 1864 and up until the early days of the monarchy. In the British records, we can trace Nepali migration at the earliest in the Haa district back to before 1890.

Even up to the twentieth century, the number of Nepali settlements in the southern foot-hills of Bhutan were very few when compared to Darjeeling and Kalimpong. In 1904, the British officer Charles A. Bell wrote, "By comparison with Kalimpong and Sikkim, this part of the country could support 150 persons per square mile. At present it can be only 20 to 30."  

The emergence of the Dorji family of Kalimpong as an active player in the political landscape of Bhutan in the second half of the nineteenth century had tremendous impact on the Nepali immigration to Bhutan. With the signing of the Sinchula Treaty in 1865, the Duar War between India and Bhutan came to an end. The entire Duar tract from Sikkim to the Arunachal border and the Dalimkot region separating Sikkim from Bhutan were annexed by the British. This led to the establishment of peace on the Indo-Bhutanese frontiers. The collateral consequence was the large scale immigration of Nepalis, first to Darjeeling, then to Sikkim and Duars.

During this time, Ugyen Kazi of the Dorji family emerged as a significant person in the Bhutanese power structure, in Indo-Bhutanese relationship and in the authority system of western and south-western Bhutan. After the Duar War, Ugyen Kazi settled

74 White, n.47, p.113.
75 Cited in Collister, n.16, p.170.
down at the burgeoning trading mart of Kalimpong. In 1898, he was appointed as Haa Thrungpa, the chief of Haa, with rights over the whole of southern Bhutan and empowered with the right to settle immigrant Nepalis in his territories. He was also made the Bhutanese Agent in Kalimpong in 1910. The King Ugyen Wangchuck made Kazi Ugyen Dorji governor of western Bhutan and entrusted the entire administration of western Bhutan and the conduct of Indo-Bhutanese relations with him. The Dorji family retained this influential position in Bhutanese politics till 1964.76

In the year 1900, Kazi Ugyen Dorji was authorised by the Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck to recruit Nepalis as Tangyas (contractual workers) for timber logging and clearing of forests in southern Bhutan.77 In 1904, Charles A. Bell found Nandalal Chhetri, Garjman Gurung and Lalsingh Gurung as Thikadars (contractual landlords), in Sipchu and Tsanga-be, controlling 2,730 houses and about 15,000 persons of which 14,000 were reported to be Nepalis.78 Gradually, Nepalis began organising themselves as cultivators against the herdsman Bhotias. It led to several clashes between them. John Claude White, who visited Bhutan in 1905 reported about this situation as follows:

... that for the last fifteen years their [Haa-Pa, the pastoralist Bhotias] winter grazing grounds near Sipchu and the lower hills have been seriously curtailed by the increasing irruption of Nepalese settlers, and thus the chief source of their wealth - cattle-rearing and dairy produce - has begun to fail, while constant quarrels arising between them and the Paharis [Nepalis] entail much worry and expense.79


79 White, n.47, p.113.
During the early decades of this century, Nepalis were concentrated in two separate regions namely south-western (Samchi District) and south-eastern (Chirang District) Bhutan. In 1932, Captain C.J. Morris of the Gurkha Rifles found 1,493 houses in the eastern and 4,000 houses in the western districts with an estimated 60,000 Nepalis in Bhutan.\(^{80}\) During this period, Nepali immigration to Bhutan increased because of the decline in the number of Nepalis working in the tea gardens in the Jalpaiguri area. According to the 1930 Royal Commission on Labour in India, between 1911 and 1921 there was a 30 percent decline in the number of Nepali workers in the tea gardens in that area. They went to Bhutan as graziers and farmers in considerable numbers.\(^{81}\)

The increasing migration of Nepalis to Bhutan was viewed with suspicion by the British. Anticipating a possible rise in the Nepali population John Claude White wrote:

> In a very few years, the whole of the outer hills will be settled with Nepalese and it will require a good deal of tact and firmness on the part of the Bhutan authorities to keep them under proper control.\(^{82}\)

The settlement of Nepalis in Duars, Assam and the entire North-East of India later paved the way for ethnic skirmishes throughout the region. The conflict between the Ngalong-dominated Bhutanese state and the Lhotshampas (southern people, mainly Bhutanese of Nepali origin) is the latest in this regard.

III

An overview of the British policy towards the Himalayan region reveals its inherent intricacies and complexities. Tibet occupied a very important position in this

\(^{80}\) Cited in Sinha, n.76, p.39.

\(^{81}\) Cited in Christopher Strawn, *Falling Off the Mountain: A Political History and Analysis of Bhutan, the Bhutanese Refugees and the Movement in Exile* (unpublished dissertation submitted to the University of Wisconsin in 1993), p.42.

\(^{82}\) Cited in Collister, n.16, p.155.
colonial project and was considered a potential market and a springboard from which they could expand their trade and commercial interests to China and Central Asia. Moreover, Tibet controlled the whole of the Lamaist world. Hence the colonial regime always refrained from hurting the sensitivities of Tibet. Generally they followed a policy of overall politico-economic domination without interfering in the domestic affairs of the states in the region.

Ever since the Treaty of 1774 between the Deb Raja of Bhutan and the East India Company was concluded, the internal politics and the external relations of Bhutan were largely determined by the British policy towards the Himalayas. The British policy ultimately resulted in the unification of Bhutan under a hereditary monarch. In this process, Bhutan lost its sovereignty and the age-old theocratic Lamaist political structure. The institutionalisation of hereditary monarchy in 1907 marked a rupture in the history of Bhutan. The change that the political structure underwent in 1907 can be considered as the beginning of the process of modernisation in Bhutan.

The taming of the territorial ambitions of Nepal and Bhutan by 1865 and the virtual surrender of Sikkim to British domination led to the establishment of peace throughout central and eastern Himalayas. The demographic and economic consequences were quite far reaching.

The establishment of peace throughout central and eastern Himalayas brought about a sea change in agricultural practices; shifting cultivation gave way to settled cultivation and new crops like tea, cinchona, potatoes, cardamom and oranges were introduced. The opening up of Darjeeling and the rapid development of the tea estates on the periphery of Bhutan and Sikkim attracted large numbers of people from

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83 Subba, n.69, p.44.
Nepal as agricultural labours. From Darjeeling later they migrated to Sikkim and Bhutan.

The unhindered movement of Nepalis in search of livelihood towards the East radically altered the demographic pattern of Sikkim and southern Bhutan. By the early decades of the twentieth century Nepalis outnumbered the natives of Sikkim and southern Bhutan.

Thus, the establishment of peace throughout central and eastern Himalayas and the setting up of tea gardens in the *Duars* by the British set off the great eastern migration. Though they came as timber cutters and workers to the tea gardens, in course of time they settled in southern Bhutan. They transformed the inhospitable and malarial tracts of southern Bhutan into fertile farmlands. The transformation of southern Bhutan into fertile farm lands resulted in further migrations and forged it into a Nepali dominated area. The newly acquired importance of southern Bhutan in the political economy of Bhutan has made it indispensable for the well being of that country.

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84 Rahul, n.3, p.44. Also see Das, n.8, p.6.

85 Das, n.8, p.6. Also see A.C.Sinha, "The Indian North-East Frontier and the Nepalese Immigrants", in N.K.Rustomji and Charles Ramble (eds.), *Himalayan Environment and Culture* (New Delhi, 1990), p.223.