

BRITISH DIPLOMACY AND ITS VARIOUS MISSION IN NEPAL FROM 1767 TO 1799

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1. Kinloch Expedition (1767) :-

In case of diplomatic relation with Nepal, the first instant in the history of East India Company was Kinloch Expedition sent by the Company's Government on the request of Raja Jaya Prakash Malla of Kantipur in the year 1767 against the noble ambition of the Gurkha Raja Prithivi Narayan Shah's unification of Nepal. Thomas Rumbold, the chief of Patna for the first time gave official informations to the Company Government about Nepal. He advised and took full initiative to help the Malla rulers of the Valley. He convinced the Company Govt. to send an expedition against Nepal. In fact he played a vital role in the drama of Kinloch Expedition. In a letter dated 20th April 1767 he reported to the President of the Council in Calcutta that the Gurkha Raja besieged Nepal and that these military operations started by the Gurkhas had interrupted the trade that had existed between Nepal Valley and Patna. In the same letter he enquired from the Company Govt., if any help, which had been solicited from the Company's officers, should be given to the Newar Government of the Nepal Valley against the seige by Gurkhas or not. In fact the Company Govt. was also waiting for such chances to come and to penetrate in Nepal and to suppress the Gurkha Raja and his noble ambitions. The Company Govt. was already annoyed with the Gurkhas because of this policies of unification of Nepal and expansion of territories. These policies were totally against their imperialistic wishes and ambitions in the Himalayas. More than that the Gurkha incursions

into Bettiah in Bihar had kept the place in the state of perpetual disgust and alarm. "A counter offensive action against the Gurkhas" was deemed the most fitting reply to Prithivi Narayan Shah's threat that he would forcibly take possession of the disputed territories of Bihar boarder, if the British did not acquiesce in his stronger claim to them.¹ Thus they at once decided to send an expedition under Captain Kinloch to invade Nepal. The select Committee gave all the powers and responsibilities to Mr. Rumbold to launch the expedition. Captain Kinloch and his party reached up to Nepal border but could not enter into the Nepalese territories and at last the expedition was proved totally failure. The Company Government could not help the Newar Raja in time and so the valley was easily captured by the Gurkhas. According to the Nepalese records, there was an engagement at Hariharpur on Aug. 25th 1767, with the troops of Kinloch in which the Gurkhas gained a victory. But Mr. Rumbold on the contrary reported that the Gurkhas behaved despicably where troops to oppose them and only in place difficult to access showed any degree of spirit. After the severe failure of the first expedition Mr. Rumbold tried to send a second expedition with more troops and equipments. He considered that Kinloch's detachment, much reduced by sickness and desertion, needed a complete battalion consisting of five or six companies and some artillery before it could undertake the relief of the Malla Rajas of Nepal. But after considering many factors and collecting many informations the select Committee decided that a second enterprise should be postponed for the

1. Chaterjee Nandalal "A Forgotten Expedition against Society, 11th December 1938 [part II] n 924.

Prithivi Narayan Shah." Journal of U. P. Historical

time being and that Capt. Kinloch should be directed to remain in that quarter until further orders.² At the same time the Company's attention was diverted on the other sides and Nepal was totally forgotten for some years and the peculiar idea of Mr. Rumbold to make the forgotten valley under the Company Government was failed.

The only effect of this expedition was that the Nepalese then onwards took the Company Govt. as their enemy, which at last led both of them to the war in 1814-16, which is famous in the history of Nepal as The Anglo Nepalese war.

Prithivi Narayan Shah easily conquered all those small kingdoms and principalities around his country which were remaining as the barriers in his dream of greater Nepal. Then after he consolidated his empire and began to rule in united Nepal peacefully. Later on the Company realised that they were backing the wrong horse in Jaya Prakash because they saw that the Mallas were of no match to Shahs and more than that the Mallas had lost their power. Then the Company began to try to win the friendship of the Shah rulers which however could not be successful so long as Prithivi Narayan Shah was alive. Here also the Britishers were not late in playing their role of diplomacy, they at once followed the policy of conciliation towards the Gurkha kings. Conciliatory letters and complimentary presents were hence sent to Prithivi Narayan Shah. The hill fortress of Bara Parsa and other were returned to Nepal Raja which were seized by Kinloch. But as a shrewd diplomat Prithivi Narayan Shah had always insisted his subjects that his kingdom is a "sandwiched between the two giant powers" and advised his followers not to develop any intimate relations with either of them. (See "Dibya Upadesh")³

The failure of Kinloch's expedition proved to be a great disaster to the British traders and Christian Missionaries in Nepal. The Shah King Prithivi Narayan Shah became the harsh enemy of the Britishers. He even wrote a letter

to Dalai Lama of Tibet to decline all relations with the British and refuse them admission to their country.⁴

British search of market compelled the Company to try to re-establish the relationship with Nepal. According to the wishes of the court of directors the Company tried to open trade relation with Nepal. Thus James Logan went to Nepal in 1770 to achieve this aim.

3. James Logan Mission:— James Logan Mission of 1770 was the best and brilliant example of the policy of conciliation played by the Britishers. It seems that the main aim of this mission was to establish a good commercial relation with Nepal, because only after that the Britishers could gain success in their hope to develop trans-Himalayan trades. But Mr. Logan and all the authorities of the Company were quite sure that the present rulers of Nepal did not like their mission. In his memorandum he had suggested the Company Govt. to help Jaya Prakash to regain his power. Any way now it has been proved that the main aim of this mission was neither a political nor a military one but purely Commercial. The Gov. General in his second letter to the Raja of Nepal had expressed that their move to assist the Newar Raja of Nepal Jaya Prakash was due to sheer ignorance. Again he had stated that as opening up of the trade between Nepal and Bengal would be mutually beneficial, and so Mr. Logan had been deputed to arrange the matter. But we do not have any further details of this mission. Historians are of opinion that this mission was a failure. Thus it is quite clear to us that the first attempt of Britishers to make friendship with Nepalese became unsuccessful.

4. Mr. Foxcroft Mission:— The period of Governor-Generalship of Warren Hasting was very important in the history of Anglo-Nepalese relations. During this period the unifier of Nepal Prithivi Narayan Shah was conquering as well as consolidating his empire. The petty

2. Select Committee to Mr. Rumbold Select Committee Proceedings Feb 10th, 1768 (xi) page 73; Chatterjee n938

3. "Dibya Upadesh" No 15; Available in N. A. Nepal Persian letter 13th Nov 1769, Available in N.A.I., Chatterjee n9, 38.

4. Ramakant "Indo-Nepalese Relations" page 6; P. Landon. Nepal vol I, London 1928, page 67.

hill chieftains under the leadership of Raja Karna Sing of Morang wrote letters to the Company Government requesting the military aid to check Prithvi Narayan Shah's noble attempts. But nothing was so far decided by the Company against the Raja of Nepal and thus the matter was dropped. Soon after the Sannyasi incursions and the plundering raids of Budh Karan brought once again the Company and the Gurkha Raja to mutual correspondence. In May 1773, Prithvi Narayan Shah wrote a letter to the Gov. General expressing his anxiety to cultivate friendly relations with the Company. The Raja also demanded the districts of Ameerpur and Bijepur from the hands of Budh Karan the treacherous Dewan of Morang, who had killed his own master and became the ruler. In the same manner the Governor also wrote letters to the Raja against the sannyasis, who were giving troubles to the Company Govt. in the border areas.

According to the Governor General's wish the Nepal Raja sent Dina Nath Upadhyaya as his trusted *vakeel* to settle the dispute of Ameerpur and Bijepur with the Company. When the talks were going on, the revolt of Chet Sing of Banaras endangered the Company's sovereignty and the life of the Gov. General too, because he was surrounded by the troops of Chet Sing at Banaras. The situation became very serious and so the wife of the Gov. General Mrs. Warren Hastings appealed to Dina Nath in the name of friendship to help the Company with military aid to subdue the rising of Chet Sing. The lady herself addressed a letter to the Nepal Raja requesting him to send assistance speedily. The Nepal Raja also despatched his troops but very soon the rising was suppressed and the Nepalese troops were requested to go back. At Patna Dina Nath met the Gov. General and there he was given satisfactory reply by the Gov. General that he had nothing to do with the affairs of Ameerpur and Bijepur. Warren Hastings was very much interested to revive the trade relations between Bengal and Nepal so he managed to

sent a mission to Nepal to fulfil this purpose. He, in his letter dated 1st Jan. 1784 had recalled the time when there existed a trade relation between Bengal and Nepal and how it was stopped. He informed the Raja that he was sending one Mr. Foxcroft to proceed towards Nepal with his letter containing true sentiments of the Gov. General regarding the establishment of friendly relations between the two countries. But this mission was never reached Kathmandu and what had happened to this mission is still unknown to us.

Nepal-Tibet War 1792:- Another event which dragged the Nepalese and Britishers together was the war between Tibet and Nepal in 1792. Nepal was enjoying trade privilege in Tibet since ages. But when Tibet tried to increase taxes on Nepalese merchandise and dust was mixed in salt exported to Nepal and when the Tibetans did not care to settle the currency problem. Nepal made all these as her prestige issues and declared war on Tibet.⁵ During this war Tibetans and Gurkhas both appealed to Lord Cornwallis, the then Gov. General to countenance their cause and to lend military aid. But actually the English did not want to embroil themselves with the Tibet Nepal war. So the Gov. General refused to give any military aid to both the parties. He refused to Nepal on the grounds that for years Britain and China had traded on the coasts and so that she would not like to impair the friendship that existed between the two countries. He refused to Tibet and Chinese Vazeir at Lhasa by saying that his Govt. was friendly to Nepal having only recently signed a commercial treaty with her. In fact Tibeto-Nepalese clash provided a good opportunity to the Britishers to get a commercial treaty from Nepal. Nepal agreed to the commercial treaty of 1792 only because they thought that they could get some help from the Britishers against the Chinese if they were pleased. But the Nepalese got nothing in return and so they were annoyed with the Britishers. Lord Cornwallis's policy of non-intervention decided to

5. Quoted by F. Toker. Gorkha-The story of the

Gorkhas of Nepal, London 1957, page 58; Ramakant

mediate the disputes between the Nepalese and Tibetans. In the early autumn of 1792, he wrote letters to both the parties that he would send a representative to Kathmandu to act as a mediator. But the main purpose of this mediator was something else than to act as mediator in Nepalese Tibetan clash. It was a fact finding mission and nothing else which was sent to Nepal under Capt. Kirkpatrick in Feb. 1793. Actually the Britishers wanted to study the political, social, cultural, religious and other conditions of the kingdom and more than that they wanted to make it clear about certain clauses in the commercial treaty in which the Nepalese Govt. was hostile and also they wanted to execute it as soon as possible and with full spirit.

Kirkpatrick Mission:— In February 1793 under the leadership of Capt. Kirkpatrick a British mission left for Kathmandu and with him went Lieut. Samuel Scott, Lieut. W. D. Knox, J. Gerrard and Mr. Adam Feer as surgeon and Maulavi Abdul Kadir. They went with two hopes— to establish the residency in Nepal and to carry out the signed commercial treaty of 1792. But the Nepal court showed no willing to it. In his own words Capt. Kirkpatrick said, “I had now ascertained with sufficient certainty that my residence at this court was not to be hoped for”. In fact this was the first mission of the British diplomats which was sent to Nepal to establish a diplomatic relationship with the Nepalese court. He arrived at Kathmandu on March 3rd 1793. But he was scantily received (at Kathmandu) by the Nepalese court because his mission was not liked by any one in Nepal and the court thought that they did not need Capt. Kirkpatrick because they were already in peace with Tibet and more than that they did not like any foreign interference in their politics. From a letter sent by him to Lord Cornwallis we can say that he was very much disgusted in Nepal. He could not remain in Nepal for a long time and on March 24th he went back with his mission to India. In this way the

fourth attempt of the Britishers was also failed.

The failure of Capt. Kirkpatrick Mission was indirectly the failure of British diplomacy and the treaty of 1792 also. In reality, the Nepalese were not in favour of any treaty with the Britishers, only the circumstances compelled them to enter into that treaty and so when they got opportunity, they withdrew from it. According to Dr. K. Mujamdar the treaty itself was a “counsel of despair,” a political expediency to weather a crisis, and as soon as that crisis had passed off with the conclusion of peace with China and without the British aid, the treaty ceased to have any value for the Nepalese. Consequently, the letter showed no disposition to give effect either to the said treaty or to appreciate Kirkpatrick’s attempts to improve the merchantile relations between the two countries. No wonder, the withstanding cordial reception at the court and it’s well meaning professions, Kirkpatrick was soon convinced that his mission could achieve nothing. So convinced, he returned back to India. Mr. Richard Huges is of opinion that the Kirkpatrick mission of 1793 was sent in response to the Gurkha appeal for protection against a feared attack by the Chinese through Tibet. But this mission was not sent to Nepal as a military aid to Nepal against China, it was purely a diplomatic mission and so the Nepalese court did not like this mission at all thus this mission was discouraged in Nepal and compelled to leave after some time.

Dr. K. Majumdar says that the policy of British diplomats in the Tibet-Nepalese was failed on every scores. The role played by Lord Cornwallis in this crisis has lost him the respect of both victors and the vanquished. Neither side appreciated his having avoided openly taking sides and then having offered to mediate when the war was already over. In fact both sides got annoyed and on the other hand this war and the resultant Himalayan crisis led to the strengthening of China’s hold over Tibet and the virtual cessation of India’s trade with the Himalaya and trans-Himalaya regions.

Maulvi Abdul Kadir Mission 1795.

Lord Cornwallis was succeeded by Sir John Shore. He also wanted to enrich the Company with the help of trades, so he thought to resume the Anglo-Nepalese commercial treaty again. All this is clearly stated in his minute which runs as follows; "This communication applies to the subject into two points of view. The measure to be adopted for ascertaining the value of trade with Nepal, assisted by an actual experiment on a very moderate scale and the mode of giving a permanent establishment to it by the Residency of an agent on the part of the Government of Nepal if the commerce should be found on enquiry of sufficient importance to render it's expedient.⁶

To fulfil his desire the Governor General sent Mr. Maulvi Abdul Kadir to Nepal in 1795. This is the fifth attempt of the Britishers to establish commercial as well as diplomatic relations with Nepal. The chief aim of this mission according to the instruction of Sir John Shore was to win friendship of Nepal and to improve their commercial intercourse. And more than that to make sure success of this mission the Gov. General requested Guru Gajaraj Misra to visit Nepal and to convince the Raja about the intentions of this mission. Gajaraj became successful in his duty and so he procured an invitation from the Raja of Nepal to Maulvi to proceed towards Nepal without delay.⁷ In Nepal the courtiers were not in favour of this mission. Even then Gajaraj influenced the Raja to invite Maulvi. In Nepal Maulvi and the Raja discussed many political as well as commercial issues. Unfortunately, however this mission had no better luck than Kirkpatrick's. The reasons were quite obvious- chiefly because of the unsettled politics in the

court and the stubborn opposition of a section of Nepalese nobles to closer relations with the Britishers. But Dr. K. C. Chaudhari is of opinion that if Capt. Kirkpatrick's mission was important for making Nepal known to the English, that of Maulvi Abdul Kadir was of greater importance since it gave the first practical experiment in trade with Nepal for assessing the actual value and potentialities of the Indo-Nepalese trade. The accounts of Maulvi is still a source of great information about the trade and economy of Nepal. In conclusion we can say that even this mission did not succeed in improving the relations between the Company and the Nepal Govt. It did not worsen it either. The friendship between the Nepalese and the Britishers remained stand still. At that very moment the revolt of Wazir Ali, the illegitimate son of Nawab Wazir of Oudh once again brought Nepal and East India Company together. The Raja of Nepal helped and tried a lot to punish the rebel and issued orders to his officers to capture him. The Gov. General was very much pleased at the friendliness showed by the Raja. By knowing the intentions of Nepal court Wazir Ali fled westwards towards the Company's territories from Nepal. There at last he was captured in 1799 and confined at Calcutta up to 1817. In this way up to 1799 the Raja of Nepal and the Gov. General were playing diplomatic hide and seek games to fulfil their selfish aims and ambitions. But certainly the Nepalese diplomats played their part most brilliantly and actively than their British counter-parts and they never gave opportunities to the Britishers to overrule them diplomatically. Nepal, on the other hand was successfully carrying her policy of expansion and the annexation of Kumaun and Garhwal in 1794 extended their empire from Sikkim to Jamuna.

6. Political Constitution Nov 10th 1794, No 29 (Available in N. A. I.)

7. Political Consultation May 1st, 1795, No7 (Available in N. A. I.).