

The Failure Of Captain Knox's Mission In Nepal

(1801 A.D.-1804 A.D.)

—*Shaphalya Amatya*

The arrival of Rana Bahadur Shah in Benaras as a refugee created a congenial atmosphere to the East India Company's Government to enter into a treaty with Nepal as desired since the failure of the commercial treaty of 1792. The Company's interest was conveyed to the Nepal Darbar (court) by Guru Gajraj Misra. The Nepal Darbar, which was afraid of Rana Bahadur's return and recapturing of power at once accepted the Company's proposal. Accordingly for making necessary arrangements and to negotiate the treaty with the Nepal Darbar the Governor General sent Captain Knox to the frontier of Nepal. In return the Nepal Darbar sent Gajraj Misra to the Indo-Nepalese border with full powers to conclude an alliance with the Company's Government. Gajraj was given blank papers bearing the seal of the reigning Raja (Girwanyudha Bikram Shah) for the purpose of drawing up the pro-

posed treaty. ² The draft treaty was mutually exchanged. The greatest opposition from the Nepalese side was to the stipulation that a Resident should stay at Kathmandu. The Chiefs like Badakazi Kritiman Basnet, Kaji Amar Sing Thapa and many others were totally against this clause. Not only the courtiers even the Regent Rani Subarna Prabha had opposed some of the clauses of the treaty. ³ Capt. Knox sent a draft treaty to the Company's authorities; but as they found that the treaty was favourable to the company they accepted it. ⁴ The treaty was duly signed by Gajraj Misra on behalf of the Nepal Darbar on 28 October 1801 in Danapur (India). The treaty of 1801 decided perpetual peace and friendship between the two states, the Jageer of the Rana Bahadur Shah; establishment of a British Residency at Kathmandu (Nepal), and establishment

1. Foreign Secret, April 16th, 1801, No. 136 (National Archives Of India)
2. Foreign Secret, June 30th, 1802, No. 9. (NAI)
3. Foreign Secret, June 30th, 1802, No. 6

- (NAI)
4. (A) Foreign Secret, June 30th, 1802 No. 3. (NAI)
- (B) Foreign Secret, June 30 1802 th, No. 43. (NAI)

of trade relations between the two states.⁵

K. Majumadar is of opinion that this treaty was wholly of a political nature, it did not have any clause relating to commerce.⁶ K. C. Chaudhury is of opinion that the conclusion of the treaty of 1801 was a great stride in the Anglo-Nepalese relation since it marked the beginning of a formal political-cum-commercial relation by establishment of a British Residency at Kathmandu.⁷ Infact the policy of appeasement was a decided factor and the Nepal Darbar carried it by entering into an agreement with the Britishers. This was indeed the greatest diplomatic victory of the Britishers over Nepal.

Captain Knox's Residency:

As an implementation of the treaty of 1801 Capt. Knox was appointed as the first resident in Nepal. He was also instructed to cultivate friendly relations with such influential members of the Nepal Darbar as Damodar Pandey, the minister and Chautaria Bum Shah, a close relative of the king, with the ultimate object of establishing a "controlling influence" in the court through their agencies.⁸ It has been

stated that such influence was deemed essential as much for the promotion of the Company's commercial interests as for the suppression of border crimes to settle boundary disputes and so on.⁹ Actually Knox's primary object was to induce the Nepal Darbar to give "complete effect" to the commercial treaty of 1792. To win the favour of the influential courtiers Knox suggested of paying pensions or jageers to them and to "convert the rulers of Nepal into British dependants".¹⁰ Governor-General Lord Wellesley was well aware of the jealousy and alarm with which the Government of Nepal and the body of her inhabitants had always contemplated an intimate connection with the Company's Government, and of the solicitude with which the reigning power had always discouraged every attempt on the part of the Company's Government to improve the political relations between the two states. He also knew that the reigning powers entered into the treaty only to prevent the abdicated Raja Rana Bahadur's re-ins-tation in power by their help. The Governor-General refused the suggestion of Knox to bribe the Nepalese influential authorities. In fact Knox's estimate of

5. For details of the Treaty see:-

(A) Aitchison C. U.,- Treaties, Engagements and Sanads, Vol. II, Part I Calcutta, 1863, PP 105-108.

(B) D. R. Regmi,- **Modern Nepal**, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1975. pp 48-54.

(C) B. D. Sanwal, **Nepal And East India Company**, New Delhi, 1965, pp. 98-103.

6. K. Majumadar, **Indo-Nepalese Relations, 1837-1877**, Ph. D. Thesis, School Of International Studies (JNU), New Delhi, pp 1-50.

7. K. C. Chaudhuri, **Anglo-Nepalese Re-**

lations; From the Earliest Times of The British Rule In India Till The Gurkha War, Calcutta, 1960.

8. Letter from Mr. Edmoostone, Secy. to the Gov-General, dated october 31, 1801, No. 11 to the Resident Capt. Knex gives detail of the instructions given to Gov-General for his guidance in political and commercial matters. (Foreign Secret) June 30th, 1802, No. 11 (NAI).

9. Ibid.,

10. For details see, K.C. Chaudhuri, No. 8., pp. 119-123.

the character of the Nepalese Chiefs was totally wrong. The idea of receiving pensions from the Company's Government for their good offices in the interests of the company never occurred to them. They owed allegiance to one power only and that was their country, when they found nobody in Nepal to accept the pensions the matter was dropped.¹¹

Apart from all the instructions given to Knox by the Gov-General the most important was to conclude border disputes between Nepal and India. In fact during those days that was one of the major problems of both the Governments.¹² To gather informations about Nepal's inner and outer conditions, civil and military administration, resources and mines, and so on experts like Capt. Charles Crawford, Mr. Blaker and Dr. Francis Hamilton were sent with him in his escort.¹³ A detachment of Indian infantry consisting of two Companies, with their usual proportion of European and Indian Officers were appointed to attend him as an escort. Knox proceeded towards Kathmandu on receiving a letter from Edmonstone, Secretary to the Gov-General on 1st November 1801.

Knox was an able diplomat. By any means he wanted to implement the treaty of 1801. So he was trying hard for that. Again he was also busy in gathering informations secretly to punish Nepal if she did not implement it. Because he knew it that "the treaty was the only off-spring of fear"¹⁴ and it would no doubt, continue in force, as long as the reigning authorities

feel it necessary. With the intention to punish Nepal if she violated the treaty Knox secretly contacted the Raja of Butwal on his way to Kathmandu and began to make plans. In this respect Knox's letter to the Gov-General dated February 1st 1802 makes his design quite clear. It says- "To keep the Nepal Government true to their engagements, they must believe that they could be easily punished for violating them, but this they knew to be impracticable unless we acquire the command over such a number of the hill people as would be requisite for the transportation of provisions and baggage, without which a military force could not penetrate any distance into their country".¹⁵ The Nepalese knew that the Raja of Butwal was competent enough to help the company. "His country opens the easiest access into theirs, the most accurate information would be obtained from him and his people respecting the roads and passes, and his troops, not inferior to their own in quality and in number, are more than sufficient to perform those duties which, however necessary, could not be performed by men unaccustomed to find their way through pathless woods, and over almost alpine mountains presenting every kind of difficulties in its most repelling form". In short by every account, were it suspected in Nepal that the Raja had devoted himself to our interest more would not be required to keep them steady to every engagement they have contracted or may contract with the British Government".¹⁶

All these developments showed that the Company's Government was really trying

11. B. D. Sanwal, No. 5 c, pp 90-91.

12. Foreign Secret, June 30th, 1802, No. 11. (NAI)

13. (A) Ibid, Para 31.

(B) B. D. Sanwal, No. 5 c, pp 90-94.

14. Foreign Secret, June 30th, 1802, No. 43.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

it's best to implement the treaty whatever the circumstances might be. The unwelcomed treaty which was forced by the Britishers as well as compelled by the selfish desires of some of the Nepalese nobles led Knox and his party up to the frontier of Nepal on his way to Kathmandu. The arrival of British Resident was not liked by the Nepalese Court as well as the people in general. Knox had to wait many weeks at the frontier before he was allowed to enter into Nepalese territory. He was so tired of waiting for the invitation from the Nepal Darbar that he wrote a letter to Edmonstone dated 22nd March 1802 in which he had expressed his wishes to return back to Company's territory from the border.¹⁷ In the Nepal Darbar hot discussions took place about the acceptance of Knox's Residency. At last the Darbar decided to welcome Knox. The Darbar despatched Bum Shah, Damodar Pandey and other officials to meet and to welcome Knox, towards the Nepalese frontier. On 16th April 1802 the deputies met Knox. All these developments in Nepal were not liked by Rana Bahadur Shah. He in the meantime sent the regent Rani Suvarna Prabha at Kathmandu, a ring and a letter applauding her having displaced Damodar Pandey. Rana Bahadur also advised the regent Rani to procure the death of Damodar Pandey and Gajraj Misra and charged her not to allow Knox's party to enter into Nepal on any account.¹⁸ He thought that the Britishers were taking undue advantage of his exile and court trouble of Kathmandu. His faith in the English flagged, he tried to effect his escape to Nepal, only to find his attempts

foiled and more rigorous surveillance being imposed on his person. Knox was always pressing the Nepalese Ministers to fix the date of his journey towards Kathmandu. In fact he was really disgusted by delaying from the Nepal Court.¹⁹ Ultimately Bum Shah decided the date March 14th 1802 for his journey towards Kathmandu. In return the Nepal Darbar also sent there young men, sons of the most influential courtiers namely Lachman Shah, son of Bum Shah, Kur Beer Sing Pandey, son of Damodar Pandey and Kubeer Jung Singh son of Indra Bir to Patna with Maulvi Abdul Kadir on 20th March 1802. In his letter to Edmonstone, Knox wrote that though these young men were not avowedly despatched as hostages, yet such they were in reality and they were to remain at Patna until the commencement of the next cold season.²⁰

Return of Senior Maharani Raj Rajeshwari Devi:

On 15th March 1802 the return of Senior Maharani Raj Rajeshwari Devi to Nepal from Benaras created a lot of confusions and disturbances in the pre-arranged programmes. Hot discussions took place about the Rani's arrival in Bum Shah's Camp.²¹ This new development again delayed Knox's journey towards Kathmandu. With disgust Knox return to his last standing post within British territory from Nepalese territory. In the camp itself the Nepalese Courtiers discussed many problems of the country and the most important point of discussion was how to give effect to the

17. Foreign Secret, June 30th, 1802, No. 50. (NAI)

18. Ibid, No. 46, Para 4.

19. Ibid No. 46 & 50.

20. Ibid, No 51.

21. Foreign Secret, June 20th, 1802, No. 50. (NAI)

stipulation of the treaty signed between the Company and the Nepal Government. Objections were raised by Tribhuwan Singh, one of the influential Nepalese nobles, on the number of personnel of the residency. He totally opposed the escort accompanying Capt. Knox. He pointed out that the strength of the escort which accompanied him was "capable of effecting a revolution in the state".²² Gajraj Misra defended the cause of the escort and said that the Nepal Government was bound to accept according to the clauses of the treaty. He also told the Nepalese chieftans who had raised such objections that if the British so desired could have taken Nepal but it was their forbearance for which Nepal ought to be grateful. But all this could not succeed in allaying the fears and suspicious of those nobles who pointed out that 'whenever the British had been received as friends, there they had in the end established themselves as master'.²³ However, after the delay of another ten days, Knox was taken to Kathmandu on slow marches by Gajraj and Bum Shah.

On 16th April 1802, Knox reached Kathmandu.²⁴ At first the Resident's suit was highly welcomed. On 18th April Resident Knox paid his first visit to the Maharaja of Nepal. This warm welcome of the Nepalese gave him the impression of success of his mission but soon he realised that it was not so. In the meantime the court party which had concluded the said treaty lost the confidence of the Regent Rani and their opponents, who were anti-British took

up the administration.²⁵ This party had openly declared against the engagements entered with the company. They determined to break the treaty. The turning of table changed the fate of the Britishers in Nepal. First of all the Nepal Darbar violated the clause of the payment of Jageer to Rana Bahadur Shah at Benaras. Resident Knox could not convince the authorities for the payment of Jageer.²⁶ The letter from Resident Knox to Edmonstone dated 30th September 1802 clearly that how the Nepalese Court suddenly changed their policy towards the Britishers. As a measure against the non-payment of jageer to Rana Bahadur Shah in time the Resident quitted the Bungalow which was handed over to him very recently for camping.²⁷

The policy of the Nepal Darbar against the British Residency became intolerable. According to the order of the Nepalese Officials the guards placed at the Resident's house began to interfere with his communications with his communications with the Nepalese subjects. Doctor Buchanan who accompanied Knox had been collecting various kinds of herbs and plants through the natives was also stopped. Knox sent many complaints to the Nepal Darbar about these humiliations and disrespect shown by the guards but nothing happened. After these fruitless remonstrances to the ministers, Knox retired to the lines of escort and there he got tents pitched for his accomodation. When the Regent Queen Subrna Prabha came to know of all these circumstances she was very much dis-

22. Foreign Secret, June 30th, 1802, No 45. (NAI)

23. Ibid, para 3.

24. Foreign Secret, June, 20th, 1802, No. 53.

25. For more details see; K. C. Chaudhuri,

No. 7, pp. 129-30.

26. Foreign Secret, December 30th, 1802, No. 86.

27. Ibid.

pleased and surprised. She then ordered to bring Knox back to the bungalow and promised him to fulfill all his demands and also twenty thousand rupees was ordered to be sent to Rana Bahadur Shah as the payment of his jageer.²⁸

Again for a short time the party infavour of the Britishers under Damodar Pandey came into power. To cement their friendship with the Resident two ceremonies were arranged and in the first a great darbar was held where the treaty was publicly presented by him in return. In the second, the Resident went through a ceremony of adopting the elder son of the Regent Rani as his brother.²⁹

Next year in 1803 the Senior Maharani Raj Rajeswari who was encamping at the border of Nepal left her residence and proceeded towards the capital. The governing Rani Subarna Prabha was very much shocked by this news. She wanted to check the Senior Rani's movements towards the capital by any means and so she requested the Resident to mediate the affairs. But the Senior Rani could not be convinced and she reached Thankot just seven miles far from Kathmandu. The Regent Rani sent troops to imprison her party but the troops declared their favour towards the Senior Rani and so the Regent Rani failed in her attempts. She then fled to the sanctuary of Pasupatinath, taking with her the minor Maharaja and all the important officials. Unfortunately this step decided her fate. As soon as this incident was known at Thankot the Senior Rani moved on to within a mile of the capital and then for the

first time avowed her intention of assuring the regency. Her authority was instantly acknowledged by all and in a few days the minor Maharaja Griwnayudha was taken by his orders from the charge of the deposed Rani, and conducted back to the palace.³⁰

The Senior Rani Raj Rajeswari declared herself as the Regent of the Minor Maharaja and Damodar Pandey was appointed as the chief Minister of Nepal once again. Regent Rani sent message to Knox assuring him that the engagements contracted by the late government had her full approbation and would be fulfilled. In the meantime the Resident notified the Maharani to pay instalments of the jageers of Rana Bahadur Shah within a week if not he would leave the country on that day. This compelled the Nepal Darbar to pay the Jageer money and thirty thousand rupees was paid to the Resident on the very next day.³¹

The next step taken by the Resident to examine the courts loyalty was regarding the passport of the two Britishers Proctor and Lloyd to come to Kathmandu. He did not realise that the people of the forbidden valley were against the opening of their country for foreigners. Serious discussions took place in the Nepal Darbar over the grant of passports. Eminent officials like Ranjit Pandey and Tribhuwan Singh openly opposed it. The Resident realised that the Nepal Darbar was not ready to grant passport so he threatened the Darbar and sent formal notice of his

28. For more details see:

(A) K. C. Chaudhuri, No. 7. pp 130-31.

(B) B. D. Sanwal, No. 5c, p. 108.

29. Foreign Secret, 30th Decembes, 1802,

No. 88 (NAI).

30. Foreign Secret, July 7th, 1803. No. 28. (NAI).

31. Ibid.

intention to leave Kathmandu on 12th March 1803.³² Up to the 17th March the Darbar could not decide the matter and so the Resident determined to leave Kathmandu on the 19th March. At the eleventh hour on the 17th March a deputation of the leading men in Nepal was sent to convince the Resident that they would grant passports. They also requested the Resident to give up the idea of his return to the British territory. To this request the Resident turned a deaf ear, and directed the Darbar to approach the Governor-General and ask for the Resident's return upon the setting in of the next travelling season.³³ Knox wrote letters to Proctor and Lloyd not to enter Nepal before settling the question and they were detained.³⁴ On the 19th March 1803 Knox left Kathmandu.

The main cause of the failure of Knox's mission was that soon after his arrival he became *persona non grata*—it is because the Nepalese by nature were anti-foreigners. But this did not totally close the British Residency at Kathmandu. On the request of the Regent Maharani, Knox had left Mirza Madhi, one of his munsis to stay on as a representative. Nepal Darbar also did not take Knox's departure so seriously. The only move the Darbar took to get back the Residency was that Rani Raj Rajeshwari and the principal officers wrote letters to Gajraj Misra, who was living at Benaras and un-officially represented the interests of Nepal in India, asking him to invite the Resident to return to Nepal and assure

the company's Government that the Nepal Darbar would maintain a stricter adherence to the treaty in future.³⁵

When Knox reached Phurting on his way to India some chief Nepalese officials visited him under instructions from the Regent Rani to express in the name of the reigning Raja and herself, sent her extreme regret at Knox's departure and to wish his speedy return to Kathmandu.³⁶ At the same time the Nepal Darbar sent similar letter to the Governor-General. The Governor-General then took this matter seriously and at last he came into conclusion that none of the objectives which the British Government had contemplated in concluding an alliance with the state of Nepal had been attained and that their accomplishment had been frustrated by causes inherent in the very constitution of her Government and in the character of the persons who had successively exercised the administration of affairs in that country. The Governor-General held that the failure of the state of Nepal in fulfilling the stipulations of the treaty virtually constituted the dissolution of that alliance and that, therefore, the British Government was at liberty to withdraw from the alliance contracted. The Governor-General declared the treaty of 1801 as null and void. Rana Bahadur Shah was set free and given full liberty and the British Munshi who was in Nepal was ordered to leave the country at once.³⁷ Rana Bahadur Shah left Benaras for Kathmandu. But the company authorities were afraid of Rana Bahadur's cruelties and so he was checked to buy arms and ammunations as well as he was compelled to promise that he would not do any act of violence against

32. Ibid, No. 29

33. For more details see: B. D. Sanwal, No. 5c, pp 111-12.

34. Foreign Political, March 31st 1803, No. 69. (NAI).

35. Foreign Secret, April 26th. 1804, No.

295 & 296. (NAI).

36. Foreign Secret, May 2nd, 1805, No. 350. (NAI).

37. Foreign Secret, April 26th, 1804, No. 297. (NAI).

those persons who were responsible for the treaty of 1801.³⁸ The greatest effect of the failure of the treaty was the downfall of Damodar Pandey. Soon he lost the confidence of Regent Maharani and the selfish nobles joined together against him.³⁹ As soon as Rana Bahadur reached Kathmandu Damodar Pandey was arrested and soon put into death. This brought the rise of the Thapa family in Nepal under the dynamic leadership of General Bhim Sen Thapa.

Failure of Knox's Mission:

In this way the treaty of 1801 was ended and Knox's residency was failed within a very short span of time. The Company Government thought and discussed to punish Nepal for the violation of the treaty but the prevailing circumstances in India had stopped them to do so. A contemporary author R. M. Martin has narrated in this way about the circumstances which has stopped the Britishers to take any action against the Nepalese.⁴⁰ He says "the pre-occupation with the French, the Marhattas, and the other Indian powers, together with the dread of Chinese intervention on behalf of Nepal and the impairment of the Company's canton trade all restrained Lord Wellesley from strongly intervening in Nepal affairs for the sake of upholding the hard-earned engagements with the Nepalese."⁴¹

Another vital cause of the failure

of Knox's residency was that Nepal at that time was trying to cultivate good friendship with China. The motto behind this was obviously to counter the Company Government of India. Letter dated 10th November 1803 from Knox to Edmonstone clearly shows that there were many possibilities of sending a deputation to China from Nepal.⁴² Knox thought that if the Britishers take action against the Nepalese the Chinese would not interfere. But he was not sure that the control of the British arms would not excite the jealousy of the Chinese Government, since the Nepalese possessions which ran into parts of Bhutan would necessarily bring the British troops very near to Chinese territories.⁴³

Conclusion:

K. C. Chaudhuri concludes that "the Company's attempt to establish a permanent residency at Kathmandu for extending their influence on the Nepal administration and for acquiring Commercial advantage proved abortive."⁴⁴ K. Majumdar opines that "infact the whole circumstance in which the treaty of 1801 was made Capt. Knox appointed and the political stress in which the Nepal Darbar suffered his admission into Nepal all these rendered the mission of Capt. Knox foredoomed to failure."⁴⁵

Any way we have to agree that

38. Ibid, No. 302.

39. Foreign Secret, May 2nd, 1805, Nos. 350-52. (NAI).

40. R. M. Martin, "The Despatches of The Marques of Wellesley", Chapter IV, London 1837, p. 16.

41. (a) R. M. Martin. No. 40.,

(b) K. C. Chaudhuri, No. 7., pp. 139-40

(c) Foreign Secret, May 2nd, 1805, No. 350.

42. Foreign Secret, November 19th, 1803, No. 84. (NAI).

43. Ibid.

44. For details see: K. C. Chaudhuri, No. 8. pp. 139-40.

45. K. Mu;umdar, No. 6,

this was for the first time a British resident came to Nepal and recognised her sovereignty diplomatically. We must consider it as a great honour to Nepal. Any way after the return of Rana Bahadur Shah to Kathmandu with the formal revocation of the treaty of 1801, the relations between

Nepal and the Company relapsed to the same negative state as they were before the first treaty with Nepal in 1792.⁴⁶ Hostile attitudes remained for more than a decade between the Nepalese and the Britishers,⁴⁷ which ultimately paved the way of Anglo-Nepal War in 1814-15.

46. (A) K. C. Chaudhuri, No. 7. pp. 118-41.

(B) B. H. Hodgson, and A. Campbell, "British Relations with Nepal from Their Commencement Down to A. D. 1834", Compiled from the Records of the Residency Office

and Other Authentic Sources. London, India office Library, Vol. I, Hodgson Collection. No. 24.

47. Sirdar Iqbal All Shah, "Nepal-The Home Of The Gods", London, 1938, pp. 51.