

ARTICLES OF TIBET TRADE 1784

— NCS

Captain Samuel Turner, the second Englishman to visit Tibet, submitted his report to The Hon. Warren Hastings, Esq., Governor General of Bengal dated Partna 2nd March, 1784. "A List of the Usual Articles of Commerce between Tibet and Surrounding Countries" is reproduced herewith as a bi-centenary memento of the document.

Tibet exports to China,

Gold dust,
Diamonds,
Pearls,
Coral,
A small quantity of Musk,
Wollen cloths, the manufacture
of Tibet,
Lamb skins,
Ood, or Otter skins, which are
brought from Bengal

China to Tibet.

Gold and Silver brocades,
Plain silks,
Satins,
Black teas, of four or five different
sorts,
Tobacco,
Silver bullion,
Quicksilver,
Cinnabar,
Some China ware,
Trumpets, Cymbals, and other
musical instruments.
Furs, viz.
Sable,
Ermine,
Black fox,
Dried fruits of various sorts.

Tibet to Nipal.

Rock salt,
Tincal,
Gold dust.

Nipal to Tibet.

Specie,
Coarse cotton cloths,
Guzzie,
Rice,
Copper.

Tibet to Bengal.

Gold dust,
Musk
Tincal.

Bengal to Tibet.

NIPAL is the principal channel,
through which English commodities,
and the produce of Bengal are con-
veyed, of which the following is
a list.

Broad cloth, and especially the inferior sorts, of which the colours in most request are yellow and scarlet
Some few trinkets, such as, Snuff boxes, Smelling hottles, Knives, Scissars, Optic glasses;
Of spices, Cloves are most saleable. No sort of spice is used for culinary purposes. Cloves are a principal ingredient in the composition of the perfumed rods, which men of rank keep constantly burning in their presence.

Nutmegs,
Sandal wood,
Pearls,
Emeralds,
Sapphires,
Pheirosa, or Lapis lazuli,
Coral,
Jet,
Amber,
Chaunk shells,
Kimkaubs; those of Guzerat are most valued;
Malda cloths,
Guzzie,
Rungpore leather,
Tobacco,
Indigo,
Ood, or Otter skins.

Tibet to Bootan.

Gold dust,
Tea,
Woolen cloths, the manufacture of Tibet,
Salt.

Bootan to Tibet.

English broad cloth, Rungpore leather,
Tobacco
Coarse cotton cloths, Guzzie, &c.
Paper,
Rice,
Sandal wood,
Indigo.
Munjeet.

Tibet to Luddauk

The fine Hair of the Goats,
of which shawls are
manufactured.

Luddauk to Tibet.

Gamboge,
Shawls,
Dried Fruits.
Apricots,
Kishmishes, Raisins,
Currants,
Dates,
Almonds,
Saffron.

Khumbauk to Tibet.

Horses,
Dromedaries,
Bulgar hides.

II

The first Englishman, George Bogle, visited Tibet in 1774. While Samuel Turner's Report was published in 1800, Bogle's Report was not published until 1876. It is appropriate to notice here the opening paragraphs of Bogle's chapter on 'Trade of Tibet'.

"The foreign trade of Tibet is very considerable. Being mountainous, naturally barren, and but thinly peopled, it requires large supplies from other countries, and its valuable productions furnish it with the means of procuring them. It yields gold, musk, cow-tails, wool, and salt. Coarse wollen cloth and narrow serge are almost its only manufactures. It produces no iron, nor fruit, nor spices. The nature of the soil and of the climate prevents the culture of silk, rice, and tobacco, of all which articles there is a great consumption. But the wants of the country will best appear from an account of its trade.

"The genius of this Government, like that of most of the ancient kingdoms in Hindustan, is favourable to commerce. No duties are levied on goods, and trade is protected and free from exactions. Many foreign merchants, encouraged by these indulgences, or allured by the prospect of gain, have settled in Tibet. The natives of Kashmir, who, like the Jews in Europe, or the Armenians in the Turkish empire, scatter themselves over the eastern kingdoms of Asia, and carry on an extensive traffic between the distant parts of it, have formed establishments at Lhasa and all the principal towns in this country. Their agents, stationed on the coast of Coromandel, in Bengal, Benares, Nepal, and Kashmir, furnish them with the commodities of these different

countries, which they dispose of in Tibet, or forward to their associates at Seling, a town on the borders of China. The Gosains, the trading pilgrims of India, resort hither in great numbers. Their humble deportment and holy character, heightened by the merit of distant pilgrimages, their accounts of unknown countries and remote regions, and, above all, their professions of high veneration for the Lama, procure them not only a ready admittance, but great favour. Though clad in the garb of poverty, there are many of them possessed of considerable wealth. Their trade is confined chiefly to articles of great value and small bulk. It is carried on without noise or ostentation, and often by paths unfrequented by other merchants. The Kalmuks, who, with their wives and families, annually repair in numerous tribes to pay their devotions at the Lama's shrines, bring their camels loaded with furs and other Siberian goods. The Bhutanese and the other inhabitants of the mountains, which form the southern frontier of Tibet, are enabled by their situation to supply it as well with the commodities of Bengal as with productions of their own states. The people of Assam furnish it with the coarse manufactures of their kingdom. The Chinese, to whose empire the country is subject, have established themselves in great numbers at the capital; and by introducing the curious manufactures and merchandise of China, are engaged in an extended and lucrative commerce. And thus Lhasa, being at the same time the seat of government and the place of the Dalai Lama's residence is the resort of strangers, and the centre of communication between distant parts of the world."

III

A conclusion is firm. Despite Tibet being a landlocked country and despite its reputation of being not friendly to those who would not venerate the Lamas and their gods, two centuries ago merchants belonging to different nationalities and professing different religions freely moved in and out of Tibet. Trade was mostly through barter, exchange of commodities; and there was no mercantilist or protectionist concern about any commodity.

A note may be added regarding two particular imports, rice and conchshell. These two imports were all from south, that is, the Indian subcontinent. Both could be available from east; China produced rice as much as tea while conchshell could be found in the Pacific Ocean.

The present writer had learned while journeying in Central Tibet in 1955-56 that no rice or conchshell would be accepted in the monasteries as well as orthodox households unless it was from Phagyul

(Aryabhumi-Land of Buddha). It was also learned that if available Varanasi silk was preferred to the best from China for making garments for icons and spreads for altars even in 1955-56. The same was true about copper and brass utensils and ritual instruments from Nepal visavis such items from even Kham.

Tibetan sentiments about certain commodities from south survived down to the middle of the current century, notwithstanding the vigorous prosecution of trade by the Ambans of the Manchu Empire and their successors, the agents of the Chinese Republic.

[The two source books, Turner's **An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama in Tibet** and Markham's **The Journeys of Bogle and Manning to Tibet**, were photo-mechanically reproduced from New Delhi in 1971.]