

A Cheerless Change: Bhutan Dooars to British Dooars

*Dr. Sonam B. Wangyal**

Following the Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864-65, the Duars,¹ eighteen in number, seven along the Assam and eleven along the Bengal frontiers, were annexed by the British. The British accounts are replete with justifications that led to the war and the eventual appropriation of these tracts. Whether the charges will stand up to any impartial scrutiny, an interesting topic in itself, is another point and this essay will only barely scratch that surface. While ignoring the legal or political correctness of the war and subsequent annexation of the Dooars, this commentary will steal a glance on the moral correctness of the British intervention. The actual hub of the study will muse upon the consequences faced by the natives of these frontiers, more specifically the tribal people of the Western (or Bengal) Dooars.

Considering the accounts of the time, almost entirely written by British authors, and taking Sir Ashley Eden's² estimation as a classic example of the general mood of the British, in his

* Dr. Sonam B. Wangyal is an Indian doctor running a clinic in Jaigaon, a border town abutting Phuentsholing. He was a columnist for *Himal*, *The Himalayan Magazine* (Kathmandu) and *The Statesman, NB Plus* (Siliguri & Calcutta). He currently runs a weekly column in a Sikkim daily, *Now* and a Kalimpong fortnightly *Himalayan Times*.

¹ In Sanskrit *duar* means door or entrance and so in our case it would translate as passes or gateways leading to Bhutan. (Also spelt as dooars and dwars.)

² Ashley Eden led a Mission to Bhutan in the cold season of 1863. Eden had entered Bhutan to notify the rulers with the existing situation along the border and to impress upon the latter the necessity of stopping of all raids and outrages which, the British officials claimed were inspired, instigated or conducted by Bhutan officials.

expressively cultivated but uniformly hardnosed narrative, the Bhutanese appear to be “treacherous robbers”, “a cruel and treacherous race” and “absolutely without shame” who distinguished “themselves by treachery, fraud, and murder” and were “an idle race, indifferent to everything except fighting and killing one another, in which they seem to take real pleasure”. For a Bhutanese “crime” was “the only claim to distinction and honour”³ and their nation “had no ruling class, no literature, no national pride in the past or aspirations for the future” and that there were “no reliable history, and very little tradition.”⁴ Eden's unlimited scorn of Bhutan is difficult to absorb even if one is charitably blessed with a soft and spongy mindset. Of the revenue system he concluded, “Strictly speaking there is no system. The only limit on the Revenue demand is the natural limit of the power of the official to extort more.”⁵ Commenting on the Judiciary he scoffs that, “the Bootanese have no laws, either written or of usage” and where religion was concerned he berates that the Bhutanese only “nominally profess the Buddhist religion...their religious exercises are merely confined to the propitiation of evil spirits and genii, and the mechanical recitals of a few sacred sentences.”⁶

Of course, Eden had a heavy axe to grind having been a victim to an incensed Bhutanese displeasure for transgressing their frontier, traveling into Bhutan with a huge entourage which even included armed soldiers, and having the temerity to enter the capital uninvited⁷ and even

³ Eden, Ashley: *Report on the State of Bootan, and the Progress of the Mission of 1863-64*, in a combined volume titled *Political Mission to Bootan* (Henceforth PMTB), Majusri Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972 (1865), pp.15, 57, 87, 115, 130, 123,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.118 & 124.

⁷ Aris, Michael: *The Raven Crown*, p.60. Aris writes: "Despite a great number of warnings from Bhutan that the mission would not be welcome, Eden and his escort forced their way to Punakha with

demanding that the Bhutanese sign a treaty of non-Bhutanese making. Bhutan was to become Eden's whipping boy and so it is easy to understand his ire and frustration even against his own government when it handed over the ownership of the disputed Falakata and Jalpaish tracts to Bhutan. Eden vented: "I am afraid that on this occasion the friendship of the Bhootanese was purchased at the expense of the Bykantpore Zemindar⁸, and that the unfortunate Bengallee Ryots⁹ living these Mehals, who were thus practically handed over as serfs to the barbarous rulers of the hill tract to the North..."¹⁰ In another instance Eden goes to the extent of transforming the natives into traitors with the claim that when he entered Bhutan's Dalimkote Dooar¹¹ the people there "were vehement in their abuse of their own Government, and loud in their praise of our administration in Darjeeling: their only wish seemed to be that they should come under our rule."¹² On meeting with some Meches of the Dooars he informs us that, "They were kept constantly employed in carrying up rice to the Fort, and received no sort of remuneration for their services. They are absolutely nothing more than slaves to the Bootanese, and their only hope appeared to be that we might be goaded by the misconduct of their rulers to annex their villages to British territory."¹³

In very much the same vein, Captain R.B. Pemberton, who had gone on a Mission to Bhutan in 1838, refers to a certain Major Lloyd, working in the Bhutan frontier, having received a petition to the British government "from the Katmas¹⁴ of the

many obstacles and delays along the way."

⁸ Landlord.

⁹ Cultivators.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹¹ Kalimpong.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.57.

¹³ Eden, p.61.

¹⁴ An inferior official in the Duars appointed by Bhutan. He could be either a Bhutanese or an Indian, the latter generally.

Dooars entreating to be taken under its protection, and representing their situation as most deplorable.”¹⁵ Pemberton himself alleged that, “It is against the inhabitants of the Dooars that the rapacity of the Booteah¹⁶ Zinkaff¹⁷ is principally exercised; ...The arrival of a party of Zinkaffs in the Dooars, on any pretence, is a calamity against which their oppressed inhabitants earnestly pray...”¹⁸

Within four years of Pemberton's adverse reporting on Bhutan, Dr. Archibald Campbell¹⁹ was deputed to enquire into the frontier disputes in the Western Duars and he found that:

... in the majority of cases the Bhutanese were not the main offenders. In 1842 he and the magistrate in Rangpur decided that although the Bhutanese Durga Deva was a major cause of trouble the Baikenthar Zemindar's son on the Indian side was as much to blame. They also considered that the Bhutanese were not hostile to the British government, only to the British subjects who invaded their land.²⁰

Nevertheless, the powers at Fort William failed to cast even the slightest bit of scepticism regarding the veracity of Pemberton's comments, which paved the way for the British to comfortably deem Eden's Bhutan-loathing as an exercise in objective reporting. The East India Company eventually went on to molest Bhutan basically on Eden's inferences and assumptions while outbursts like the ones quoted above instead of raising severe suspicions ended up as being a case of a White Man's word against the alleged misdemeanor of the

¹⁵ Pemberton, Capt. R. Boileau: *Report on Bootan*, PMTB, (First Ed. Bengal Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, 1839), p.183.

¹⁶ Read 'Bhutanese'.

¹⁷ Low ranked Bhutanese Official superior to the Katmas.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Section III, Sub-Section I, p.205.

¹⁹ He was the first Superintendent (1840-1862) of the newly acquired Darjeeling tract.

²⁰ Collister, Peter: *Bhutan and the British*, Serindia Publications, London, 1987, p.77.

'treacherous' Orientals. Conditioned by years of misunderstanding the Bhutanese perspective and problems²¹, and fuelled by negative reporting by frontier officials, Britain invaded Bhutan and appropriated, forever, the eighteen Duars. Eden went on to become the Governor of Bengal, was knighted, and honoured for posterity with Asia's first and one of the largest maternity hospitals²² being named after him. He had obtained, almost on a platter, the eighteen Dooars²³, which, in a short time, would become revenue-spinning tea plantations.

However, Eden was not a solitary figure in this act of negatively characterizing Bhutan. Captain Pemberton (1838) who was hospitably received by the Bhutanese officials, but failed to obtain the desired treaty from them, was to write, in respect to the Bhutanese and the Dooars, "...almost every article of consumption is drawn from them under the name of tribute, the amount of which is entirely dependent on the generosity of the several Soubahs²⁴, who regard the people of the plains with the same sort of feeling which the task-masters of Egypt entertained for their enslaved Hebrews." Kishen Kant Bose, a Bengali, was also dispatched to Bhutan (1815) to settle some frontier dispute and though his accounts, translated by a British officer, generally reported on the route, geography, religion, government and economy, his detached objectivity is blotched by one paragraph where he asserted, "Whenever any Ryot, or landholder, or servant, has

²¹ Mehra, G.N: *Bhutan - The Land of the Peaceful Dragon*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1974, p.92.

²² Eden Hospital (Bengal Medical College, Calcutta)

²³ The Eighteen Dooars: In Assam: 1. Booree-Goomah, 2. Kalling, 3. Ghurkolla, 4. Banska, 5. Chappakhamar, 6. Chappaguri and 7. Bijnee. In Bengal: 1. Dalimkote, 2. Dalimkote, 3. Zumerkote (Mainaguri), 4. Lukhiduar, 5. Buxaduar (Pasakha), 6. Bhulkha, 7. Bara, 8. Goomar, 9. Reepu, 10. Chirang and 11. Bagh or Bijnee.

²⁴ A Bhutanese frontier official. The local administration of the Duars was left to various officials called *Soubah*, *Lashkar*, *Wazir* or the *Gup*.cf. Bikrama Jit Hasrat, pp.90 & 96.

collected little money, the Officer of the Government under whose authority they happen to be placed finds some plea or other for taking the whole. On this account the Ryots are afraid to put on good clothes, or to eat and drink according to their inclination, lest they should excite the avarice of their rulers." Dr. William Griffiths who accompanied Captain Pemberton observed that the Bhutanese committed "black treachery"²⁵ upon the plainsmen and were in "utter want of faith, honesty and consideration" while their "...trickery, intrigue, and falsehood could only be equalled by the supreme ignorance, presumption, and folly exhibited upon every occasion."²⁶

The reports mentioned above are substantially serious and severe indictments and they paint Bhutan in a very reprehensible and repugnant canvas. They obviously raise more questions than can be answered. Could all of what had been written be absolutely true? Could not Eden's vitriolic vocabulary be an aftermath of the drubbing he received at the hands of the Bhutanese? Was Pemberton trying to whitewash his failure by colouring the Bhutanese in the darkest dyes? In an entirely academic and favourable report, why did Bose insert one stray paragraph that besmirched the Bhutanese character? Was he, a native servant, simply trying to appease his European masters? Was Major Lloyd itching for a fight, a profession he was trained and paid for, and so in a circuitous manner was suggesting an invasion? And could Griffiths possibly be trying to buttress what his leader of the failed Mission had stated. The answer probably lies with the fact that Pemberton, Ashley Eden and Kishenkant Bose were on specific Missions to Bhutan and they failed to achieve the desired results.

In contrast, consider the mission of Bogle. His charge was basically targeted at achieving political and commercial

²⁵ Griffiths, William: *Journal of the Mission to Bootan in 1837-38*, Part I, PMBT, p.310.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.309.

liaison with Tibet and had no political representation in Bhutan save for requesting minor trade concessions.²⁷ Consequently, he was able to interact happily with the Bhutanese and effect a successful mission. Because he had not come with any sense of superiority and because he had no brief to dictate terms the Bhutanese returned the affability with utmost courtesy and Bogle in turn obliged with comments like,

The simplicity of their manners, their slight intercourse with strangers, and a strong sense of religion, preserve the Bhutanese from many vices to which more polished nations are addicted. They are strangers to falsehood and ingratitude. Theft and every other species of dishonesty to which the lust of money gives birth are little known.²⁸

Elsewhere Bogle reiterates,

The more I see of the Bhutanese, the more I am pleased with them. The common people are good-humoured, downright, and, I think, thoroughly trusty. The statesmen have some of the art which belongs to their profession.²⁹

Bogle's visit was considered a success³⁰ in that he was able to penetrate Tibet through Bhutan and establish cordial relationship with both the countries. Despite the achievement, it is telling that Bogle's comments had to wait almost a century to come to print, while most of the journals adverse to Bhutan were published within a decade of their writing. Bogle's visit was followed by another mission led by Captain Samuel Turner (1873). Regarding the creditable

²⁷ White, John Claude: *Sikkim and Bhutan - Twenty-one Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887-1908*, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi, 1971 (1909), p.238. Here White writes, "Bogle's appointment letter is dated May 13, 1774, and in that letter no specific Mission is mentioned."

²⁸ Markham, Clements R: *Narratives of Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*, Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, 1989 (1876), p.37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.51

³⁰ White, John Claude: p.241.

character of the Bhutanese, “Turner came to much the same conclusion as Bogle”³¹ The only thing that did not agree with him was the natives' poor personal hygiene, which he observed “that my new friends were far from having any nice notions of cleanliness. The ablution, I have just noticed, is a practice connected with their religion, and not repeated more frequently than it enjoins.”³² Though Turner did not achieve anything new the Mission was also considered successful for it consolidated what Bogle had achieved.

It might be appropriate to note that Turner, like Bogle, had no political brief to dictate or negotiate with Bhutan and consequently was received cordially. It appears that those who entered Bhutan with political or territorial motives not really advantageous to her were received with indifference and even hostility and that in turn churned repulsive reporting against the highlanders. Somewhere down the line, the search for the truth went astray, adverse reports were given undue credit, war was invoked and the Dooars were annexed and a happy Agent to the Governor-General, on the North East Frontier, Mr. P. Jenkins, proclaimed, “The Bengal Duars between Manas and the Tista wore a wretched look. The people living there welcomed British rule.”³³

It is difficult to accept that the simple highlanders of the Himalayas could possibly be so treacherous and inhuman as was projected by Eden and his ilk. Even if we accede that some parts of their reports could possibly be true it becomes necessary to examine how much better off the natives were after the civilized and more 'humane' British government addressed the issues after they gained possession of the Dooars.

³¹ Ronaldshay, Lord: *Lands of the Thunderbolt, Sikkim, Chumbi and Bhutan*, Akay Book Corporation, Delhi 1986 (1923), p.213

³² Markham, Clements, R: p.85.

³³ Majumdar, A.B: *Britain and the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan*, Bharati Bhawan, Patna, 1984, p.113.

Documents and research papers on the tribal people inhabiting the Bengal Dooars, immediately before, during and after the Anglo-Bhutan War, are scanty and when available they do not deal in any way with the difficulties faced by the natives in those turbulent years. However, relatively recent research has come out with more detailed studies and they throw a completely different light on what transpired.

Dr. Bimalandu Majumdar in his dissertation exposes that the inhabitants were no better off and the British were as bad as or even worse than what they claimed the Bhutanese to be. In a stinging comment he wrote, "Prior to Independence³⁴ the total villages of this part of Bengal were badly neglected. The administration used to maintain relation with them only to realise the annual revenue without implementing any development programmes or providing amenities to them."³⁵

Majumdar claims that there were several Toto villages during the time of the attachment of the Bengal Dooars: Totpara in the Falakata area, Tatpara under Alipur Police Station, Totapara under Madarihat Police Station, and Totgaon under Mal Bazaar Police Station. Totpara was leased to Sarugaon Tea Company in 1901,³⁶ thus driving out the native inhabitants. Where Tatpara was concerned, even as far back as 1895, D.H.E. Sunder's report³⁷ lets it be known that the Totos had left the place during the Anglo-Bhutan War and, of all the places, they had gone to Bhutan. A large tract of Totopara was converted into Totopara Tea Estate (1892) and once again some of the displaced Totos migrated to "the hills and settled in Dianapuri in Bhutan."³⁸ In the fourth village,

³⁴ This refers to the British period i.e., prior to 1947.

³⁵ Majumdar, Bimalendu: *The Totos*, Academic Enterprise, Calcutta, 1998, p.27 -28

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.29

³⁷ Sunder, D.H.E: *Survey and Settlement of Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1895.

³⁸ Dinapuri is marked as Dinagaon in the Survey of India map of

Totgaon, Majumdar found no Totos at all, three-fourths of the village having been washed away by the river. Records of rescue, relocation and rehabilitation are conspicuously absent. Today Totopara is the only Toto village in existence.

Majumdar enumerates eight reasons for the disappearance of the Totos from their villages and they are worth reflecting upon: (1) destabilization of the geo-political environment, (2) transfer of power from Bhutan to the British, (3) expansion of tea plantations in places populated by the Totos, (4) the abolition of the Capitation Tax (*Dao-khazna*) and imposition of land tax etc. in terms of cash, (5) banning of exploitation of forest resources through Indian Forest Preservation Act of 1886, (6) conversion of the Toto community lands to *jote* lands on the basis of individual ownership, (7) migration into secluded places with a view to retain their separate identity and (8) unusual and unequal competition with the newly settled communities.³⁹ These reasons hardly expound British goodwill, and neither do they sully the Bhutanese character, but they certainly make the British estimation of Bhutan a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Immediately after the annexation of the Dooars, in 1866, T.H. O'Donnel was engaged to demarcate the boundary between Bhutan and British India and having done so he at once imposed a fixed tax for the village areas with Totopara's share coming to Rupees Sixty.⁴⁰ In 1889-94 the first regular Survey and Settlement Operation was conducted by D.H.E. Sunder and he almost doubled the tax by imposing a levy of Rs.105/= for the Totopara orange groves. The second Survey was conducted in 1906-16 by the District Settlement Officer, J. Milligan, and this resulted in a Capitation Tax of Rs.2/= per adult head in 1911.⁴¹ Historical records show that orange was

Bhutan.

³⁹ Majumdar: pp.26-27.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.31.

⁴¹ Sanyal, C.C: *The Meches and the Totos, Two Sub-Himalayan Tribes of North Bengal*, Part II, The TOTOS, a Sub-Himalayan Tribe, The

an important cash crop for the Totos but by 1830 all the orange trees had died⁴² and despite being liberated from the 'ruthlessness' of the Bhutanese, the Totos had no recourse but to go back to the old masters as haulers of oranges from Bhutan. One would have looked with some sympathy over the detriment faced by the loss of the groves but immediately a year later, with the completion of the third Survey of the district, the Totos received another big jolt when the Capitation Tax was raised by a quarter rupees.⁴³ One is tempted to conclude this was done to offset the loss from the orange taxes but of greater significance is that every time a survey was conducted the taxes invariably increased. In the Western Duars the East India Company's only real concern was enlarging tax revenue: a deed fiercely criticized when the Bhutanese did the same despite the Bhutanese taxes being of lesser value.

That the earnestness and sincerity to help the people of the newly acquired frontiers were either nonexistent or that they had been thrown to the winds is evident from the unprejudiced account of W.W.W. Hunter who, observing that nothing had been done even after half a decade of the annexation, wrote, "In the Western Duars, hardly any of the cultivators have acquired occupancy rights" on the flimsy statute that "up to 1870 very few of them had held their land for the prescribed period of twelve years."⁴⁴

A lot has been written about how poorly the Meches and Totos were treated by the Bhutanese and as an *aide memoire* it would be appropriate to quote Sir Ashley Eden again. The Meches he claimed "complained bitterly of the oppression of

University of North Bengal, Darjeeling, 1973, p.14.

⁴² Sunder's statement in the Survey and Settlement was. "There are no orange trees at Totapara."

⁴³ Sanyal: p.14.

⁴⁴ Hunter, W.W.W: *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X, Districts of Darjiling, Jalpaiguri & Huch Behar*, Concept Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1984 (1876), p.276-177.

the Booteahs, for whom they evidently entertained feelings of deep hatred. ...They were kept constantly employed in carrying up rice to the Fort, and received no sort of remuneration for their services."⁴⁵ The comment was basically directed to the Meches but the undertone is a general one implying similar conditions elsewhere also.

This study will deal with what the Meches thought of the British a little later on, but in the meanwhile, we will concentrate on the Toto tribe that once worked under the Bhutanese. Besides Eden, several British commentaries assert that the Bhutanese forced the frontier natives to work without wages but when the allegation is put through the scanner the truth emerges differently. In the Toto language, the labour provided to the Bhutanese was called *hui-hwa* and though this has been conveniently rendered to mean 'free-labour' or 'forced labour',⁴⁶ its accurate translation is 'portage service in lieu of remuneration in cash or kind'.⁴⁷ Even the British Survey Officer Sunder is on record that:

The Bhuteas have a village at Doyapara in Bhutan, where they grow oranges. The Totos bring oranges from there into British territory. In lieu of payment in money for carrying the oranges from Doyapara to Totopara they get one third of the oranges as hire.⁴⁸

By any standard this was generous compensation. Nevertheless, there is no denying that slavery was practiced in Bhutan, the Bhutanese freely admit to it, but to take a blanket approach on the issue and term all acts of labour as being extracted gratis or amounting to slavery is, to say the least, unkind and unjustified. It is rather interesting to note that the British themselves resorted to 'free labour' with the

⁴⁵ Eden: p.61.

⁴⁶ Majumdar, Bimalendu: p.159

⁴⁷ Majumdar: p.53

⁴⁸ For more details on agriculture, taxes, population etc. see D.H.E. Sunder's *Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1985.

Totos who were, without wages, “obliged to provide to the Forest Department for five to six days annually for clearing the jungles along the international boundary line.”⁴⁹

If the Totos' lot was dismal, what befell the Meches was no better. But before we venture into their (mis)fortune under the British it is essential that we refer to the causes that led to the war. In the memorandum of 7th May 1864, sent to Ashley Eden, two major objectives were highlighted: (a) procuring satisfaction of the repeated insults and threats from the Bhutanese, and (b) “*also in duty to its subjects resident on the frontier.*”⁵⁰ [Emphasis added.] This 'duty' was to redress what Ashley Eden had charged in his report that the Meches

...complained bitterly of the oppressions of the Booteahs, for whom they evidently entertained feelings of deep hatred.
...They do not cultivate more than is necessary to supply their own wants and to enable them to comply with the demands of their rulers, for any surplus which they produced would merely form an additional temptation to plunder on the part of the Booteah taskmasters. They know they can never be rich nor ever improve their position, and they do not therefore attempt it.⁵¹

Historical evidence shows that instead of uplifting the frontier tribes, they were pushed deeper into poverty and eventually suffered a fate worse what they had under their old masters. It is a sad reflection that the people who were supposed to be liberated from the 'oppressive' rule of the Bhutanese were eventually enslaved by poverty and an acute lack of any human benevolence.

The testimonial of a Meche, Jnan Mandal, 80 years, extracted

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.55.

⁵⁰ Rennie Dr. David Field: *Bhotan and the Story of the Dooar War*, Manjusri Publishing House, 1970 (1866), p.358.

⁵¹ Eden, Ashley: pp.61 & 62.

by Charu Chandra Sanyal in the late 1960s⁵² states that,

...at the time of Bhutan Government the Meches were not tortured unlike others. They were in good terms with the Bhutanese Government. Harnath⁵³ was made a Mandal⁵⁴...Bhutan Government took rupees seven per family per year and allowed to cultivate as much as the family could do so.⁵⁵

Another Meche, Phade Saiba, more than eighty years old, living in Mechua-Dhura-Balabathan village commented, "We used to eat rice, vegetables, fish or meat three times a day. But now we can hardly afford two rice meals a day."⁵⁶

Kalsing Saiba, a sixty year old Meche's testimony is equally anguished: "My father had vast plot(s) of land and was well-to-do. Now I have no land. I work as a share cropper or sometimes as an agricultural labourer on cash wage of rupees one a day and three meals."⁵⁷

The fate of Gashat Machari, 98 years, is no better. He rues, "At that time the land was plenty and men were few, so we had much land to grow crop. ...Now I have only five acres of land under cultivation."⁵⁸

Dhansing Meche, a centenarian, living in Sisu-Jhorma⁵⁹ was bitter about the British administration:

⁵² This would mean that Mandal was born around 1880s and that would have made it possible to hear first hand accounts from his father, grandfather and their contemporaries about the state of affairs during the early British years of British rule.

⁵³ Grandfather of Jnan Mandal

⁵⁴ Village headman.

⁵⁵ Sanyal, C. C: Part I, p.85.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.79.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.87.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.86.

⁵⁹ Dalgram Sarugan during the Bhutanese period.

My father's name is Late Khayer Singh. My father was in Bhutan holding a large plot of agricultural land. The whole of the Duars was under Bhutan Government. My father was at Chamurchi near the present Reabari Tea Estate (in the Duars). My father had a large plot of land more than one hundred acres where the present Ambari Tea Estate is situated.⁶⁰ Then we shifted to the present site of Bandhapani Tea Estate, then we came to Maraghat and from there to this place. ...we were cultivators. We grew plenty of rice and we ate rice and vegetables three times a day... As far as I can remember and so far I heard from my father that the Bhotias⁶¹ were good. The collectors came once a year, collected rupees eight per family and left us to enjoy as much land as we could cultivate. The British came. They spoke sweet words. They gave us protection no doubt but they increased the rents, introduced many laws and we gradually lost our lands and we shifted to this place. Now I have only four acres of land that can hardly maintain my family.⁶²

There is no necessity to elaborate on these testimonials for they are clear in their condemnation, and unambiguous in contradicting the claims made by people like Sir Ashley Eden.

I would like to wrap up with the comment made by Dr. David Field Rennie a man who was actively involved in the Anglo-Bhutan war and was a witness to all that had happened. Immediately after the war, he interviewed a frontier gentleman of good standing and wrote the following:

After all that has been officially written on the subject of Bhotan and the oppressive character of its rule in the Dooars, I was hardly prepared to hear from a resident of Julpigorie, peculiarly well placed for obtaining reliable information, that the inhabitants of the Dooars, bordering on our frontier, state that they have no complaints to make of the Bhotanese, and that they have suffered much more from aggression from within our frontier (including that of Cooch Behar) than from

⁶⁰ Another case of a native losing land to Tea Plantations as in the case of the Totos.

⁶¹ Read 'Bhutanese'.

⁶² Sanyal, C.C.: Part I, p.76.

oppression exercised over them on the part of Bhotan; raiding within the Dooars by natives living under British protection, having apparently been as common as it has been within our own frontier by the Bhotanese.⁶³

⁶³ Ibid., pp.357-358.