

Exploring the Inter-relationships Between British India and Bhutan's Monarchical Political System: An Analysis from 1907 to 1947

SUKHWINDER KOUR

University of Jammu

The article explores the interaction between British India and the embryonic monarchical political system of Bhutan from 1907 to 1947, characterised by strategic diplomacy, mutual respect, and the sharing of cultural values, which ultimately fostered a complex setting of cooperation, resistance, and collaboration. Interfacing the British colonial determinations with Bhutan's exceptional traditions has meaningfully shaped its course of development while distinguishing its efforts to preserve sovereignty and inimitable cultural identity. Further, the study describes how constructive associations can be built amidst contradictory political systems through momentous interactions. It, further highlights and reflects the resilience of Bhutan's monarchical system, the complexities of British colonial influence in the region, and the shifting tides of power. The findings of the paper aim to augment the understanding of diplomatic history, the interplay between external powers and internal governance, and how intercultural relationships influenced Bhutan's development and identity.

Keywords: Monarchical Political System, Governance, Strategic Diplomacy, External Powers, South Asia

Bhutan (*Druk Yul* or The Land of the Thunder Dragon) boasts a rich tapestry of history woven with threads of spirituality, legends, and political intrigue. Its drive as a state has been marked by an enduring struggle and profound transformations across spiritual, artistic, and political settings. The political transition of Bhutan is not just one of conflict and reorganization but also an account filled with mythologies that breathe life into its unique identity (Choudhury and Roy, 1993, p. 61). Recognized and identified as the Dragon Kingdom, Bhutan is a treasure trove of rich customs and traditions. Nestled in an exclusive blend of *Lamaist* beliefs and vibrant folklore, Bhutan presents a breathtaking foretaste of a world that feels like an unreal (often mentioned as *Shangri La*). Historically steeped in medieval Tibetan influence, the populace of Bhutan fondly describes their homeland as *IHo-mon-Khabzi*, the Southern Mon country of four pathways. With its appealing culture and peaceful lands, Bhutan is a realm where the extraordinary meets the timeless (Sinha, 2001, pp. 9-17).

The political land of Bhutan was cloaked in mystery and complexity. Until the 17th century, Bhutan wasn't a unified entity but a region governed by a subtle balance between a Buddhist religious leader and a secular ruler. However, the turning point came with the escalation of *Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal* (1594-1651), a character of enormous historical worth when he effectually held spiritual and temporal powers

with his formidable strength and strategic prowess and overpowered his rivals and appeared as the King of Bhutan (Library of Congress, 1991; Sinha, 2001, p. 52). This system set the stage for the country's expedition towards unity and progress and further marked the commencement of a new epoch in Bhutan's governance with the institution of an exclusive dual administration system known as *Chossi*. To guarantee the effective governance of his kingdom, the King appointed two esteemed Tibetan monks commended with vivacious responsibilities, *Je Khempo* (Dharma Raja) and *Druk Desi* (Deb Raja). The first monk meticulously oversees the adherence to religious vows among the monks, chairs noteworthy spiritual ceremonies, and guides the community with wisdom and integrity. Whereas the second monk, charged with the wide-ranging management of the country, focusing on areas related to international relations, financial affairs, and the requirements of the Lamas, had a broader mandate than the former. Both guaranteed that faith and governance thrived hand in hand by being spiritual leaders and fundamental stewards of the country. In a transformative move to ensure a cohesive governance structure, *Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal* (1594-1651) restructured the country into a series of organizational units (*dzongs*) along with establishing a council of states. Tasked to adhere to the directives of the central authority, each dzong is led by a local governor (*Penlop*). Further, the establishment of a council of states brought together influential figures, the *Je Khempo*, *Deb Raja*, *Penlops*, and other high-ranking spiritual and secular leaders, who facilitated his mission to navigate the complexities of national affairs by offering practical proposals and outlining comprehensive guidelines for governance. However, the King made the final decisions to shape the country's future and solidify the decentralized administration into a well-accepted norm.

The political countryside of Bhutan underwent a tumultuous transformation from the period of *Namgyal's* death (1651) until 1907, earlier marked by fierce struggles and confrontations (Wangchuk, 2004, p. 838). Though Ugyen Wangchuk's father had laid the foundation for the *Tongsa* dynasty's escalation to power, however, a momentous turning point, heralding a new era, commenced in 1907, with the establishment of the monarchical political system under King Ugyen Wangchuk, known by the title *Tongsa Penlop* since 1883. This political transition, along with Ugyen Wangchuk's ascendance into a fundamental role by consolidating his authority, signalled a noteworthy shift in the political account of Bhutan. In the face of frequent civil conflicts and uprisings from 1882 and 1885, he triumphed over his political adversaries. The resistance he faced from figures like *Pema Tenzin*, *Tongsa Penlop*, and *Dungker Gyaltsen*, as well as the rebellion led by *Alu Dorji*, *Thimphu Dzongpon*, and *Phuntsho Dorji*, *Punakha Dzongpon*, were no trivial impediments. Yet, through determination and strategic competence, Ugyen Wangchuk unified the country and the people of Bhutan, though indirectly represented, had agreed to the contract, shaping Bhutan's future amid the pandemonium of those former years (Aris, 1994, p. 96; Rahul, 1970, pp. 61-62; White, 1971, pp. 226-228).

Resultantly, in a momentous assembly of a diverse group of lamas, abbots, state councillors and representatives of the people held in Punakha on December 17, 1907 (Hofmann, 2006, p. 2), a pivotal figure emerged in Central Bhutan's history who was designated by this extraordinary gathering as the Hereditary King, *Druk Gyalpo* of Bhutan. This move not only marked the beginning of a new era for the kingdom but also underscored the deep-rooted reverence and unity of the country in selecting its leader (Hasrat, 1980, pp. 118-121, 123; Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 485-521; Rahul, 1971,

pp. 44-46; Gupta, 1999, pp. 23-27). The ascension of Ugyen Wangchuk marked a significant shift in its governance, along with embracing a transformative shift into a hereditary monarchy. Ugyen Wangchuk was a capable superintendent and a strategic diplomat who initiated numerous advancements, like the introduction of Western education, improved infrastructure, and boosted trade, laying the foundation for a prosperous Bhutan. Amid these advances and transitions in the political system of the country, the King recognized the impending threats from China as well as the British Government. Considering the existing state of affairs in account and to safeguard Bhutan's independence from outside interference, King Ugyen Wangchuk strategically sought to renegotiate the Sinchula Agreement (1865). Resultantly, this foresight led to the signing of the Treaty of Punakha (1910) between King Ugyen Wangchuk and British India. The treaty guaranteed British India would refrain from meddling in Bhutan's internal affairs, except if the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan faced external intervention (Bell, 1924, pp. 99-106; Hasrat, 1980, pp. 123-125; Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 520-531; Rahul, 1971, pp. 47-55; Gupta, 1999, pp. 26-27). This pivotal arrangement allowed Bhutan to navigate its challenges while preserving its sovereignty, which typifies a testament to Ugyen Wangchuk's perceptive leadership.

A substantial turning point came in the political history of Bhutan with the passing of Ugyen Wangchuk (August 21, 1926), which heralded the rise of Jigme Wangchuk, a visionary leader, as the Second King to the throne of Bhutan who worked tirelessly to enhance the well-being of his populace. King Jigme Wangchuk's reign marked a transformative era for the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan, characterized by unification, growth, and robust diplomatic relationships with neighbouring states that lasted till 1952. His progressive policies encompass the establishment of educational institutions and health centres, ushering in a new age of development, thereby, crucial for improving the quality of life. Further, recognizing the importance of infrastructure, King Jigme Wangchuk focused on building an extensive road network that connected remote areas and, in that way, fostered trade and communication. Besides, his commitment to the happiness of his citizens permits communities to thrive, which became evident in his efforts to decrease land taxes and settle previous dues. At its core, the legacy of King Jigme Wangchuk is of commitment, perseverance, and advancement. Additionally, predominantly drawing inspiration from the Kargyue school, he laid the groundwork for a constitution that reverberated with the religious and spiritual values of the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan. His contributions continue to resonate in the hearts of every Bhutanese who, in due course, shaped the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan into a stronger, more integrated country during his reign. Notwithstanding the same, he consistently championed a policy of solitude and seclusion from the outside world, a principle rooted in the ideals of his predecessor. Hitherto, there came a fundamental moment during his tenure when Bhutan stepped into the international arena by partaking in the Asian Relations Conference (1947) in New Delhi. This marked a momentous shift in the foreign policy of Bhutan before India gained independence from British colonial rule (August 1947). The same year, a Bhutanese delegation travelled to India to deliberate on the budding association with the newly sovereign country, Independent India. Ultimately, on August 8, 1949, a landmark agreement was signed in Darjeeling, solidifying the bond between India and Bhutan (Sebastian, 2015, pp. 49-53; Hasrat, 1980, pp. 125-129; Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 535-564; Rahul, 1971, pp. 55-58; Gupta, 1999, p. 27).

Cultivating a Productive Dialogue: Unravelling the Significance of Missions and Treaties under the Pre-Monarchical (Theocratic) Period

The subheading, “Cultivating a Productive Dialogue: Unravelling the Significance of Missions and Treaties under the Pre-Monarchical (Theocratic) Period,” discloses an interplay of power and diplomacy. The importance of several missions and treaties during this era highlights that delving into the narrative of how these strategic agreements shaped and influenced the course of political history, resultantly helps in understanding the intricate affairs that defined a time of immense change and development. This section presents a milieu for understanding the historical interactions of the region by necessitating an in-depth examination of the relationship between diplomatic missions and treaties amidst the overarching structure of Bhutan’s Royal Government governance and the British. By the late eighteenth century, Bhutan had captured the attention of the East India Company for two persuasive reasons, first and foremost, its strategic positioning as a buffer state between China and India, which made it a pivotal player in the region. Nestled near Bengal and poised in the eastern Himalayas, Bhutan was influential and also held sway over Lhasa. The Britishers understood its vital position in their expansive agenda along with its important part in maintaining stability and security in these territories (Regmi, 1975, p. 128).

Taking into account its above significance, the Britishers never made the mistake of disregarding its prominent position and tried to move very cautiously to establish trade relationships with it. Notwithstanding the above, Bhutan also served as a vital passage to the Chumbi Valley through its northwestern border. Thereby, it holds a special significance for the Britishers. This route, previously obstructed due to the Gorkha takeover of Sikkim for British merchants, opened new opportunities for trade and the movement of goods. This route gained utmost significance for one more reason, as the Gorkha government had shown little interest in nurturing relationships with the British, the direct path to Tibet from Bhatgaon was also closed off. Ultimately, faced with these challenges, the British East India Company found itself with just one practicable route into the Chumbi Valley, i.e., through the strategic land of Bhutan. (Regmi, 1975, p. 129; Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 348-354). This made Bhutan not just a region of interest but a key player in the broader tapestry of trade and interaction in the region.

Treaty of 1774: A Peace Treaty Between Bhutan and the British East India Company

After several vain attempts in different endeavours, the British established their first interaction with Bhutan in 1774. As previously mentioned, during a tumultuous struggle and the subsequent war of succession, the defeated Khagendranarayan, who had been ousted from Koch Bihar, sought the British’s support against the Bhutanese forces, all in the name of the deposed Raja. This plea for assistance led him to sign a significant agreement on April 25, 1774, officially recognizing the British East India Company’s influence through a nine-article pact, at Fort William in Calcutta (Majumdar 1984, p. 40; Rahul, 1970, p. 59).

The unfastened opportunities that arose paved the way for the Britishers, who seized the moment to arbitrate in the continuing conflict. Their stratagem was strong to bring Cooch-Bihar underneath the protective wing of a subsidiary alliance along with subduing the Bhutanese forces (Cammann, pp. 26-29, 155 Appendix A). Warren

Hastings, by recognizing the potential in this state of affairs, acted swiftly and stepped in to influence the unfolding actions. As tensions intensified, the Bhutanese comprehended that their guerrilla tactics might catch the British off guard, making them increasingly determined to face off against the British in a challenging confrontation. The turning point came instantaneously when the Bhutanese seized the garrison in Bihar, placing them in direct antagonism to the British forces now positioned across the plains. In response, Warren Hastings dispatched Captain Jones and his troops, tasked to liberate Cooch-Bihar from the Bhutanese plunder and reinstate the allegiance of the region to the Government of Bengal. With his strategic wisdom, Captain Jones laid siege to the fortress of Bihar, effectively by synchronizing efforts with the Raja of Baikunthapur. The Britishers envisioned solidifying their position in Cooch-Bihar and subduing any intimidation from Bhutan, intending to secure the terrain for their commercial interests without resistance or mistrust (Majumdar, 1984, p. 35; Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 348-354). This intrepid move marked a decisive chapter in the recounting saga of colonial determinations and drives in the region.

Captain Jones's movements against Bihar marked a substantial moment in the complex relations between the Britishers and Bhutan. Despite the irresistible challenges of limited roads and railways, a shortage of ammunition, and the daunting terrain that worked against the Bhutanese, they showed remarkable bravery. By late January 1773, the hostility between the British and Bhutan was nearing its end. However, the prospects for an agreement with the Bhutanese were temporarily stalled as the British were entangled in yet another conflict, with the Sannyasi assailants who had become increasingly defiant and fierce (Phuntsho, 2013, p. 348). After successfully dispersing the Sannyasis, leading to their defeat, the British forces soon turned back their attention to the situation in Bhutan. During this period, the Bhutanese sought support and backing from the Tashi Lama, the ruler of Tibet. Petech has revealed from the memoirs of Palden Yeshe (Third Panchen Lama) that the great Lama statesman was advised by the two Nepali representatives (Braahmcari Bhagirathi and Jayas Ram Thapa) to arbitrate amongst the Britishers and the Bhutanese (Petech, 1950, pp. 339-340). In 1774, he reached out with a friendly letter to Governor-General Warren Hastings and due to his diplomatic efforts, negotiations commenced between the British government and Bhutan, culminating in a settlement that was finalized on April 25, 1774 (Cammann, 1951, pp. 161-161; Rathore 1974, 42-45; White, 1971, p. 264).

George Bogle's First Mission (1774)

The accord in the year 1774 marked a histrionic turning point in the political subtleties between Bhutan and Cooch Behar. The Deb Raja of Bhutan agreed to settle any disagreements with the Company's subjects through the company's adjudicator and halt raids into the territories controlled by the Company. To establish impending diplomatic relations with the Tashi Lama, Warren Hastings sent an expedition led by Bogle to secure the Deb Raja's approval for the establishment of a free trade route through Bhutan (Aris, 1979, p. xxvi; Cammann, 1951, pp. 35-36; Deb, 1984, p. 22; Regmi, 1961, p. 134). This Anglo-Bhutanese agreement of 1774, shaping relations between the Britishers and Bhutan, was a significant milestone in the 18th century. Additionally, it fulfilled a long-standing British desire to expand trade with Tibet, leveraging Bhutan as a crucial conduit for this commercial ambition (Deb, 1973, p.

83; Debnath, 2010, p. XIX; Labh 1974, 18-20; Petech, 1950, p. 338-339; Rathore 1974, 45-47; White, 1971, pp. 264-65; Younghusband, 1910, pp. 9-15).

Warren Hastings, recognized for a keen understanding of the vast complexities of Anglo-Bhutanese relations, worked tirelessly to foster a positive alliance. As Hastings understood that preserving and upholding this benevolent relationship was vital for stability and advancement in the area therefore, his efforts were driven by a commitment to protect British interests in the region and to cultivate goodwill with the Bhutanese Raja while navigating the intricate dynamics surrounding Tibet and China (Markham, 1876, pp. 1xix, 57-58; Regmi, 1975, p. 135; Deb, 1984, pp. 17-20).

Alexander Hamilton's Mission (1775 and 1777), George Bogle's Second Mission (1779), Captain Samuel Turner's Mission (1783), and Indian official, Kishen Kant Bose's Mission (1815)

Further, taking into consideration the significant role Bhutan played in the early Tibetan expedition led by Bogle as well as in subsequent missions, shortly after Bogle's expedition, two small-scale missions were undertaken by Hamilton. The first, in 1775, aimed to investigate the claims of Deb Raja concerning Falakata and Julpaish (Rennie, 1866, p. 36; State Archives, Government of West Bengal, 1865, p. 2; Imperial Record Department, 1930, p. 31). Two years later, in 1777, another mission was sent to Bhutan to extend greetings to a newly enthroned Deb Raja (Aris, 1979, p. xxvi). Bogle returned, for yet another mission heading towards Tibet, to the Bhutanese frontier in 1779 (Younghusband, 1910, p. 26). Additionally, in 1780, another British expedition made its way to Bhutan tasked to resolve territorial disputes there. These missions, one after another, highlight the complex interplay between these regions. To probe into the concerns raised by Bhutanese traders, Warren Hastings took a noteworthy step, in 1783, by engaging Captain Samuel Turner Mission for the above issue (Davies, 1937, pp. 346-347; Eden et. al, 1865, p. 3; Majumdar, 1984, p. 57; Rahul, 1970, pp. 60-61; Regmi, 1961, pp. 141-142; Younghusband, 1910, pp. 26-32). Resultantly, this initiative paved the way for stronger ties between the Britishers and the Himalayan regions and led to the establishment of a fruitful trade agreement with the Bhutanese Raja (Turner, 1800, pp. 363 and 376). Further, to explore cooperation and keenness to foster positive relations with Tibet and Bhutan, Hastings sent even further missions. However, a substantial obstacle to these diplomatic efforts was ultimately posed by the Nepal-Tibet War from 1788 to 1792, disrupting the British determination and drive to build exceptional relationships with Tibet (Shakabpa, 1983, p. 169). During this turbulent time, principally due to continuing border disputes and skirmishes, the cordial interactions between the British and the Bhutanese began to wane. Consequently, this set the stage for a mounting divide that would later culminate in the significant conflicts of 1864 and the Anglo-Tibetan tension of 1904 (Regmi 1975, p. 136; Rahul 1971, pp. 40-41; Rajput, 2014, p. 150).

The origins of the Anglo-Bhutanese divergence can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, a time when differing perspectives began to emerge regarding the borders of Bhutan. It wasn't until after the Anglo-Burmese War of 1825-26 that the relationship between the British and Bhutan entered a period of tension. The interaction between East India Company and Bhutan was more or less disengaged amid 1783 and 1826 apart from an official visit by an Indian official, Kishen Kant Bose (1815), who was directed to Bhutan by the Judge of Rangpur to attempt to settle

down the continuing boundary disagreements (Deb, 1984, p. 23; Eden et. al, 1865, p. 5; Kohli, 1982, p. 34). Following the British takeover of Assam, the Britishers and the Bhutanese came into confrontation with each other, with the reason being that their border between British territory and Bhutan became a point of conflict. Amid this shifting environment, the Bhutanese displayed a defiant attitude towards British expansion. However, the seven duars—fertile plains located along the Assam border—and the eleven found along Bengal were not just mere geographical areas; they were valuable and thriving regions that captured the British interest. The combination of having the economic potential and strategic importance ultimately led the Britishers to establish their presence in the duars (Rathore, 1974, pp. 47-48; Labh, 1974, pp. 23-30; Hasrat, 1980, pp. 86-87, 90-91). This set the stage for a complicated and dynamic relationship between the two entities.

In the lush settings of the Bengal duars, the Bhutanese hold has a storied past, long wielded a unique and autonomous influence over the region, particularly during the turbulent times leading up to the British annexation of Assam following the first Burmese War (Gait, 1906, pp. 271-273). In a remarkable twist of fate, the Bhutanese managed to secure four of the Assam duars from the British Government under pressure, while the remaining three continued to be shared between the Bhutanese and Assamese in an obliging and cooperative tenure. These state of affairs thereby showcase the intricate dynamics of power and collaboration in the region (Aitchison, 1909, pp. 286-287). Among the many tumultuous events of the past, the invasion by Wanton in 1836 was particularly notable. Moving swiftly from the Banska duar, this incursion would lead to a fierce confrontation with the Bhutanese forces (Eden et al., 1865, p. 13-15; Rennie, 1866, pp. 182-183).

Captain Robert Boileau Pemberton's Mission (1837-1838)

In response to the escalating tensions, the British Government dispatched Captain Robert Boileau Pemberton (1837) on a critical mission toward Deb and the Dharma Raja (Eden et. al, 1865, p. 15). Despite being provided with invaluable insights into the complex terrain of Bhutan, the delegation under Pemberton has failed to secure a lasting resolution. Further, aiming at fostering better relations between the two countries and also hinting at a path towards diplomatic engagement amidst the tensions of the time, on April 25, 1838, Pemberton presented a detailed proposal to Deb. This agreement sought to facilitate the return of exiles and promote free and open communication between the citizens of both countries, along with addressing the repayment of lingering debts, with a commitment to settle amounts in hard cash (Pemberton, 1838, p. 78, 98; Rahul, 1970, p. 60).

Tensions escalated in the year 1841 as Lord Auckland moved to assert control over the seven Assam duars, ultimately seizing them amidst a landscape of increasing instability in the region. This bold action came with a financial commitment—an annual payment of Rs. 10,000 to the local chiefs as a form of reimbursement for their cooperation (Mackenzie, 1884, pp. 13-20; Rahul, 1970, p. 60). However, the agreement opened the door for ambiguity, lacking any written confirmation. A few years later, in 1844, a more formal arrangement was struck with the Bhutia community, centered around the Towang Raja. Under this new written agreement, Rs. 5,000 was earmarked each year to extend the Kuriapara duar (Eden et al., 1865, p. 23; Lahiri, 1954, p. 222). These strategic manoeuvres stabilize and shape the fabric of the political dynamics within the foothills of Bhutan, effectively. Additionally and

ultimately, these efforts also remained successful, in a time of uncertainty, in identifying the complexities of governance and collaboration in the area.

Emergence of Tongsa Penlop (1854)

Throughout the Bengal Duars, tensions simmered. Against this backdrop, the Tongsa Penlop, a powerful chief of Bhutan, in 1854, sent an unsettling message to the Britishers. The demand was with regard to the significant increase in the amount of the compensation, deeming the reimbursement insufficient, for losses incurred during their conflicts over Assam Duars. This demand was followed by a series of Bhutanese incursions into the territory of Assam. In response, Lord Dalhousie stood firm against the Tongsa Penlop and asserted that any future raids by the Bhutanese would result in deductions from the annual compensation related to the Assam Duars.

The stakes were high, and the growing unrest promised to challenge the fragile balance in the region. The tension in the air and the simmering anger among the locals have hinted at a looming conflict over the Bengal Duars. However, the situation did not yield any lasting resolution. Considering in account the seriousness of the threats and the continuous unabated incidents of abduction and plundering, the Britishers established a fortified encampment near Jalpaiguri to counter the Bhutiyas. However, the Bhutanese relentless incursions deeply troubled and created an atmosphere of unease for the Britishers. Meanwhile, due to the continuous onslaughts from Bhutan, Lord Canning began considering a military operation against them. Yet, his plans were shelved when the rebellion of 1857 erupted which shifted the focus of the British Empire in an unexpected direction as Bhutanese supported Indians (Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 447-448; Chaudhuri 1957, p. 203; Hasrat, 1980, pp. 96-98; Rathore, 1974, pp. 50-51; Labh, 2016, p. 24; Majumdar, 1984, p. 116; Majumdar, 1957, p. 63; Rahul, 1970, p. 60). The stage was set for a dramatic confrontation, but the tensions remained unresolved for now.

Sir Ashley Eden's Mission (1863-1864)

Following the restoration of reconciliation and authority, the British took note of the escalating tensions from Bhutan. As the Bhutanese grievances persisted, that further lead to incursions into Cooch Behar and Sikkim. In response, the British Government decided to send Sir Ashley Eden, a representative to Bhutan (Eden et al., 1865, p. 49; Trotter, 1886, p. 176). Eden's mission was critical as he was tasked with resolving contentious issues, fostering better relations, and aimed to negotiating the release of captured individuals, restoring looted property, and establishing safeguards for future border discussions. After his arrival, on March 13, 1864, in Punakha, he observed the political environment, and it became clear that both the Debs and Dharma Rajas were merely puppets under the influence of the Tongsa Penlop, complicating the negotiations ahead. The stage was set for a pivotal moment in Bhutanese-British India relationships. Tongsa Penlop disregarded every stipulation set forth by Ashley Eden, a British representative, leading to an unfortunate display of indignation and rudeness. In stark contrast, Eden and his party made a hasty retreat under the cover of night (Aris, 1994, p. 60). In April 1864, they returned to Darjeeling marking a turn of events that would shape their interactions moving forward (Hasrat, 1980, pp. 100-101; Rathore, 1974, pp. 51-52; Rahul, 1971, pp. 42-43; Labh, 1974, pp. 67-69; Rennie, 1866, p. 7).

Treaty of Sinchula (November 1865)

Amid ongoing frustration with Bhutan's refusal to acknowledge the demands of the Britishers, a pivotal declaration (November 12, 1864) was issued by the British India Government. This declaration detailed the growing outrage among the Bhutanese who had shown considerable disrespect towards the British representative, Sir Ashley Eden, on a mission (Trotter, 1886, p. 179; Rahul, 1970, p. 60). Amidst escalating tensions, the Britishers found it essential to control the vital passes, decided to assert their claim over the strategic Bengal duars of Bhutan and the surrounding hilly terrain. This move did not escalate into a major conflict right away but only fueled the anger of the Bhutanese, leading to the eruption of a series of attacks across various positions, characterized by a surprising ease, except for at Dewangiri, where the British faced stiffer resistance. At this moment, Colonel Campbell, the British commander, ultimately made the difficult decision to withdraw, thereby pulling his forces, under the cover of night, back from Dewangiri. However, within just two months, the arrival of reinforcements from India enabled the Britishers to swiftly retake Dewangiri from the Bhutanese. This turn of events effectively brought the confrontation to a close, but tensions between the two sides had only just begun to simmer (Hasrat, 1980, pp. 110-117; Rathore, 1974, pp. 52-53; Rahul, 1971, pp. 42-43; Labh, 1974, pp. 94-96; Rahul, 1970, pp. 71-72; Rennie, 1866, pp. 288-294). At a standstill, the Bhutanese faced a crossroads as the British command loomed over the Bengal duars, tempting them with the allure of extravagance. In response, the British Government resolved to send a mission to Bhutan. Before this venture, the rulers of Bhutan explored the possibility of peace through negotiations. This dialogue led to a significant turning point with the formalization of an agreement between themselves (Bhutan and British India on November 11, 1865) (Rahul, 1970, p. 60; Rennie, 1866, pp. 160, 166). This treaty became a landmark moment in Indo-Bhutanese relations, paving the way for a harmonious partnership that has endured since the ink dried on that historic document (Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 467-468).

Sir Francis Younghusband's Mission (1904): Substantial Significance in the Establishment of Constructive Relationships

Following the 1865 agreement, British pressure began to grow increasingly intense on the region. The mission led by Sir Francis Younghusband (1904) to Tibet, aimed to explore and secure permission for the construction of a vital road through Bhutan towards the Chumbi Valley marked a significant turning point in the political history of Bhutan and British India (Bell, 1924, p. 66; Deb, 1984, pp. 22-25). After Younghusband's mission concluded its tumultuous journey back from Lhasa, the Manchu Empire regained its confidence and intensified its claims of suzerainty over Tibet, casting its gaze towards Bhutan as well. In response, the Bhutanese seemed largely indifferent while the British steadily expanded their influence over the territory (Mehra, 1968, pp. vii, 67, 315, 316; Pillay, 1955, pp. 201-28; Raghavan, 1961, pp. 137-162; East India (Tibet) Papers Relating to Tibet, 1910, pp. 2-13; Bell, 1946, p. 85). The delicate balance of power in this region was shifting, setting the stage for further intrigue and conflict (Rathore 1974, pp. 55-56). Amid tumultuous times, when the tensions between the Government of India and Tibet flared into conflict in 1888, the sovereign of Bhutan made a surprising choice—he opted not to align with the Tibetans. However, during the Tibetan expedition (1904), Bhutan stepped up to provide invaluable support even collaborating with General Macdonald

on a mission to Lhasa. This period marked a notable shift in the political panorama by establishing a more immediate connection with India itself as the ties between India and Bhutan transitioned from Bengal directly to Colonel Younghusband in 1904. Following the conclusion of the operation in 1904, these political relationships evolved yet again, as they were reassigned to the Political Administrator of Sikkim. This realignment strengthened the bonds between Sikkim and Bhutan and also brought them closer under the administration of India (Rathore, 1974, p. 56; Phuntsho, 2013, pp. 493-502; Labh, 1974, pp. 137-142; Rahul, 1970, pp. 45, 74-75; Bell, 1924, pp. 45-46; Mehra, 1968, p. 316). The intricate diplomacy during these years significantly influenced the region's history.

Evolution of the Relationship Between Monarchical Governance and British India: An Analysis of the 1910 and 1949 Agreements

A significant agreement was forged between India and Bhutan in 1910, marking a pivotal moment in the history of their political relationship, that allowed the Bhutanese Government to operate under the guidance of British India while British India being committed to stay out of its internal affairs (Bell, 1924, pp. 99-106). However, the same year also saw the Chinese government making strenuous efforts to expand its influence in the region, along with asserting its claim over Bhutan, declaring it a vassal state. The British, standing firm, completely rejected these claims. Following the Anglo-Russian Convention (1907), the Britishers issued a strong warning (April 1910), underlining their position in the region, to the Chinese government (Rajput, 2014, pp. 149-150; Stobdan, 2014, p. 4, 24; Rahul, 1970, p. 45; Bell, 1924, pp. 90, Appendix IX). This dynamics of influence and assertion continued till New Delhi's Independence from the shackles of British colonialism on August 15, 1947. These circumstances or the state of affairs, thereby, shaped the relationship between New Delhi and Thimphu throughout an era of change and challenge. This agreement of 1910 marked a significant milestone in the political prospect, demonstrating how the dynamics between local governance and colonial authority evolved. By analyzing these historical interactions and the primary documents, valuable discernment and understanding have been gained into the shifts in power and governance that shaped the trajectory of British India and laid the groundwork for future political frameworks.

The year 1947 marked a pivotal moment for both India and Bhutan, as it also opened a new chapter in the political history of Bhutan. As India embraced its independence after the end of British colonialism, Bhutan took significant steps to reshape its relationship with its Independent neighbor, India. A Bhutanese delegation arrived in New Delhi in 1946, determined to define their country's future. The discussions made it clear that Bhutan would not be seen as an Indian state. This crucial conversation paved the way for King Jigme Wangchuck to engage in ongoing consultations with Independent India between 1948 and 1949. These dialogues ultimately led to the signing of the Indo-Bhutanese Accord (1949) setting the stage for a fresh era of cooperation and mutual respect between the two countries (Alexandrowicz, 1952, pp. 295-98; Rathore 1974, 58; Hasrat 1980, 129; Rahul, 1970, pp. 64-65). Following the independence of India, the foundation of Indo-Bhutanese relationships was laid down with the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1949). After the agreement of Punakha (1910) during the British India times, the updated Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1949) at Darjeeling served as a critical reference point that

illustrates the transformation of political authority and governance structures during India's post-Independence period (Rajput, 2014, p. 154; Varma, 1965, p. 24). These treaties delineate the understanding of the changing dynamics between colonial power and local governance and contribute towards the broader discourse on the political history of British India and its implications for future governance models. However, with the political transition in Bhutan from a monarchical to a constitutional monarchical political system, its leaders, while recognizing the importance of redefining its relationship with India, approached the Indian leaders. This shift prompted the signing of a new treaty in 2007, paving the way for a fresh chapter in the diplomatic ties of India and Bhutan. This agreement, signaling a new era for both the countries, was established just before Bhutan's first historic democratic elections in 2008 (Rajput, 2014, p. 155).

Examining the political history of Bhutan reveals an irresistible account of transformation and complexity. Internal discord and power struggle amongst various rulers, in the early years of Bhutan, prevented lasting stability within the country, resultantly, creating a tumultuous backdrop for the evolution of the country. It was against this chaotic political setting that Shabdrung Namgyal emerged and made the first remarkable attempt to unify the country, setting the stage for Bhutan's future. Bhutan's foreign policy has evolved, slowly and gradually, from isolation to openness, being significantly influenced by historical developments and its complex relationship with British India. A significant turning point in the political history of Bhutan occurred with the rise of Ugyen Wangchuck. This political transition from a theocratic system to a monarchical system was largely influenced by the pivotal role of British India, which facilitated this transformation, and with their support, gained recognition, acknowledgement, and legitimacy. Its emergence as the supreme ruler of Bhutan laid the foundation of a monarchical political system in the country. This political shift ushered in a new era of peace, stability, and unity. The monarchs, afterwards, worked to consolidate Bhutan as a cohesive country. In order to meet their objective of consolidation and cohesiveness within the country, the King tried to gain the trust and legitimacy of their populace. Ultimately, that marked the end of an era of instability and conflict. Further, Bhutan saw its rulers adapting to the changing tides of regional and international politics, which, further, reflects the resilience and adaptability of the monarchical leadership of Bhutan. This political transition (Bhutan's transitional movement from a monarchical to a constitutional monarchical political system) in a changing domestic and external strategies, along with transforming regional and global milieu, for the second time, paved the way for another significant evolution in the political governance of Bhutan.

Conclusion

The early history of Bhutan evokes a sense of intrigue waiting to be unravelled. However, a pivotal moment arrived in the political history of Bhutan in the eighth century A.D., in this chronicle with the arrival of the mythical Indian figure, Padmasambhava. He, after arriving in Bhutan, imparted profound spiritual teachings which marked Buddhism as the guiding light within the country. His principles and teachings ignited a spirit of unity in the whole of Bhutan that created a bond among diverse ethnic groups that transcended their differences. As the centuries passed, along with several challenges, particularly by the seventeenth century, Bhutan underwent significant integration and transformation. The country portrays a land

grappled with political turmoil, domestic conflicts, and tormented by civil strife. Nevertheless, the political history of Bhutan continues to reveal resilience to advance and progress, despite all these trials. In the early seventeenth century, Shabdrung Namgyal, a Tibetan lama of the Drukpa cult, rose to prominence as the country's Dharmaraja, decisively overcoming all rivals to secure his political supremacy. Resultantly, by establishing himself as the King of Bhutan and emerging as a powerful figure, Shabdrung Namgyal, by inextricably intertwining religious authority with worldly governance, laid the groundwork, in Bhutan, for the unique blend of spirituality and secular rule. However, the passing of Shabdrung Namgyal ushered in a turbulent era in Bhutan by precipitating a series of conflicts marked by provincial rivalries, ethnic strife, and religious disputes. From the death of Shabdrung Namgyal until 1904, Bhutan spiralled into civil unrest. Further, the political history was characterized by contention and struggle between competing powers, divulging the challenges of maintaining unity in a country grappling with its identity and governance.

During this chapter in Bhutan's history, the country found itself in a precarious position due to Deb Raja's vigorous engagement with the neighbouring state of Cooch Behar. The tensions and conflict between Cooch Behar and Bhutan triggered the intervention of the British East India Company in 1772. The Britishers stepped in and forged an agreement to protect Cooch Behar from further Bhutanese incursions. However, due to the continual Bhutanese aggression and hostilities, in response, the British confronted Bhutan directly, compelling Deb Raja to surrender in 1773. Seeking to navigate this turbulent situation, Bhutan turned, for assistance, to the Panchem Lama of Tibet. Ultimately, this culminated in the signing of a Treaty of Peace by Bhutan on April 25, 1774, with the Britishers, marking the first formal encounter between them. This pivotal treaty served British interests by establishing a foothold for political and commercial relations with both Bhutan and Tibet, and not just a mere diplomatic formality. It gave the Britishers considerable leverage in the region by effectively prohibiting these countries from engaging with any other countries. The ramifications of the treaty would ripple through Bhutan and its relationship with the Britishers, as the Britishers, under this treaty, aimed at fostering political associations with Bhutan through different missions. This set the stage for future interactions and developments with Tibet and also with the neighbouring regions of the north of Bengal, to establish free and lasting trade connections. However, the British faced significant challenges in realizing these ambitions. Their conciliatory approach towards Bhutan hindered their efforts, together with border disputes with Cooch Behar and Assam limited their success in the region.

The interactions between Assam and Bhutan were marked by frequent incursions from the Bhutanese into Assamese territory. This turbulent relationship escalated and led to the Britishers taking control of Assam, following the Anglo-Burmese War. Despite this, the Bhutanese continued their aggressive posturing towards Assam. Resultantly, prompting the British East India Company to intervene by embarking upon two significant missions, the Pemberton Mission (1837) and the Ashley Eden Mission (1864). Unfortunately, these endeavours have remained unsuccessful, at different intervals, in curbing the hostilities from Bhutan. For this reason, the British recognized the need for a more forceful approach as the tensions escalated between British India and Bhutan. This ambition culminated in a military campaign against Bhutan, which resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Peace at Sinchula (1865), also

acknowledged as the Ten Articles Treaty of Rawa Pani, to establish peace and stability in the region. This treaty set the ground for profound changes in its international relations and governance. Resultantly, by influencing its future trajectory, this treaty transformed the political terrain of Bhutan, thereby marking a significant turning point in its historical narrative.

Over time, Ugyen Wangchuk emerged as a pivotal figure in shaping its relationship with India and the political terrain, economic and societal relations of Bhutan. After becoming the King of Bhutan, he skillfully negotiated a groundbreaking agreement with the Britishers, i.e., the Treaty of Punakha (1910). This landmark treaty solidified the sovereignty of Bhutan and also ushered in a new era of friendship and mutual support, marking a significant chapter in the region's history between British India and Bhutan. Jigme Wangchuck (son of Ugyen Wangchuck) ascended to the throne as the King of Bhutan (1926) and established himself as a powerful and visionary leader. His reign marked a significant turning point for the country, paving the way for a new era of bilateral cooperation. One of the key milestones during his time was the historic agreement signed in Darjeeling (August 8, 1949), between the newly independent India and Bhutan. Following in his footsteps, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck was crowned King of Bhutan (October 1952), an architect of modern Bhutan, skillfully guiding the country towards greater prominence on the global stage. His vision and leadership laid the foundation for a progressive Bhutan, which is open to international dialogue while cherishing its rich heritage.

The establishment of monarchical rule in Bhutan marked a transformative era. The period was characterized by distinct phases of leadership under the Wangchuck dynasty. In the early years, the monarchs worked to assert their dominance and consolidate power, focusing on the unification that has been scattered amongst the various factions. Their efforts mainly focused on laying the groundwork for a more cohesive governance within the country. This consolidation was crucial for implementing systematic reforms throughout the realm, aimed at ensuring peace and security. It was not until the reign of the second king, Jigme Wangchuck, that true authority took shape with the monarchical system being rooted firmly and largely uncontested. Slowly and gradually, as time progressed, the approach of the Bhutanese monarchs evolved from vigorous assertion to a more collaborative and conciliatory approach to preserve Bhutan's sovereignty and security. Examining the political ups and downs, since the seventeenth century, reveals a tapestry of actions and decisions marking a significant shift in the political topography of Bhutan. This historical narrative sheds light on the domestic evolution of Bhutan and also provides a backdrop for understanding its international engagements, particularly with its neighbours, Tibet, China, and the British East India Company. Through this lens, the present paper provides valuable perspicuity into the foreign policy of Bhutan, its core principles, and the intricate relationships it has forged with the surrounding countries.

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