

WILLIAM MOORCROFT'S COMMERCIAL PILGRIMAGE TO MANASA SAROWARA IN 1812

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Summary

Disguised as a *gosain* (pedlar), William Moorcroft (1767-1825) made an unauthorised pilgrimage to Mânasa Sarôwara in 1812 in order to explore its hydrography, appraise and start tapping the economic and commercial potentials of its region, reconnoitre the socio-economic and political conditions there and assess the military strength of its rulers. It was during this successful pioneering trip to the Undes (Nari) that he developed his style of travel and Proconsul-like approach to the Himalayas, Central Asia and their peoples and also affirmed the anti-Russian bias of his political outlook. The paper attempts to make up for the neglect of this journey in H.H. Wilson's account of the travels of Moorcroft and Trebeck published in 1841. It highlights the especial interest which the East India Company's Superintendent of the Bengal stud and veterinary surgeon took in *pashmina* and Russian commercial penetration.

I shall deal with Moorcroft's (1767-1825) secret trip to Tibet in 1812. I shall describe its setting, define its nature, follow its log-book, assess its results and point out its consequences. The subject is of interest for several reasons.

It was Moorcroft who commissioned Csoma de Kőrös to study Tibetan, when he met in Ladakh the Hungarian scholar who was pulling back from Leh to Srinagar after his failure to cross the Karakoram. Their contract of March 24th, 1823, provided for the extension of the Tibetan project to Tangut, [as Bethlenfalvy (1976) reported it] thus preparing a strike-out to Central Asia, the original destination of the Siculo-Hungarian hiker who stuck to it to the very end of his life. This was how his search for the supposedly Asiatic "cradle" of his people got diverted to the language and canonical texts of the Himalayan Buddhists.

The character and endeavour of the providential and fatal sponsor who induced this distraction are worth publicizing. They are revealed for the first time in the expedition and the ensuing official correspondence which I want to highlight. The enterprise let free Moorcroft's nomadic drive and for the leader and two of his most valuable companions (considered by Le Calloc'h, 1989, 1991) it

became a general rehearsal for the long march to Bokhara of no return; in which the stay in and around Leh from September 24th, 1820, to the last day of the same month, 1822, was just a stage. It typified a remarkable figure of the expanding British colonialism in the Indian subcontinent. His venture reconfirmed his nation's peculiar sensitivity to international affairs which Ralph Fitch had already made manifest in Tudor England. Its commercial stake and hydrographic findings showed the true stature of the entrepreneur who behaved like a Proconsul in the guise of the versatile trading doctor and extremely well paid veterinary surgeon he was. Its pretext was inspired by Indian tradition. Its utilitarian bias contrasts with the remarkably idealistic motivations of Csoma, a pilgrim of another kind.

Moorcroft's position and problems

William Moorcroft had spent three and a half years in India when he set out for Tibet. He was then 45 and felt bored. The East-India Company had appointed him Superintendent of the stud and Veterinary Surgeon at Pusa in all its branches. Against the exceptionally high, tax-free salary of 30,000 Sicca rupees a year¹, he had to supply the local British forces through reproduction and breeding on the spot with cavalry remounts strong enough to carry the 252-lb load of the dragoon and his equipment at speed over great distances in rough country.

Moorcroft was quick to realise that he could not fulfil this task. The Pusa estate on the overpopulated plain of Tirthut comprised 5 000 acres of land, but neither its climate, nor its pasture on the bank of the Burhi Gandak suited the use to which it was put. Most of its stallions lacked the necessary size, form, bone structure and movement. Under the existing arrangement with neighbouring farmers, they were seldom put to standard-height mares. Only too often the colts left with the subcontracting breeders suffered from neglect or inferior ones took their place for admission to the stud. It would have been better to meet the annual demand of 800 horses (in

1 According to Yule & Burnell (1866) in *Hobson Jobson* a Sicca rupee was a coin containing 176.13 grs. of pure silver, replaced in 1835 by the 'company's Rupee', worth only 15/16ths as much. In 1779 about SRs 10 were equivalent in value to one pound sterling, making Moorcroft's salary about £3,000. The high level of this is shown by comparison with Csoma de Kőrös's monthly pay of SRs 100 + lodging as librarian to the ASB, and with his receipt of SRs 300 from Moorcroft for compiling a Tibetan Dictionary, Grammar and Anthology in about one year in Ladakh-Zangskar. The contemporary value of the Kacha [=inferior] rupee is not clear. In modern usage Sicca rupee refers to the coin, and Kacha rupee to paper notes.

peacetime) through purchases in the big traditional markets, but these lay outside the British confines.

Moorcroft started to approach them as early as 1811 when he went to Hajipur (near Patna), visiting Butwal on Gurkha territory, and pushing forward to Hardwar close to the mountains of Kumaon. In the first quarter of 1812, he returned to the annual fair of Hardwar better prepared with fresh commercial information. As his inquiries confirmed the decline of trade in big Turki and Turkoman remounts in Rajasthan, Jungle Lakhi and Punjab, he placed his hopes north of the Himalayas and also in supplies from Bokhara. He hired a young Muslim educated in Persian from Delhi, Saiyid (Mir) Izzat-Allah (1790-1826) to cross-check his optimistic assumptions in these directions, reconnoitre the going prices and commercial practices, explore the ways of access and prepare an expedition (if feasible and worth undertaking). This civil servant was a tested interpreter and spy. He set out on April 21st, 1812, and in approximately one and a half years covered Kashmir, Ladakh, the Karakoram, Chinese Turkestan, the Pamir highlands, Transoxiana and returned to report. (The publication of the information which he had gathered in those remote regions, hardly known in Europe, caused a sensation.)

The Tibetan escapade

Having several months at his disposal before the obligation to resume his duties at Pusa, the Superintendent decided to avoid the summer heat by an excursion to the North. The prompting came from his acquaintances in the region who explained to him all the interest of such a venture. The government agent in the area, Sir Edward Colebrook, approved the plan. Moorcroft did not wait for other permission. He requested authorisation from his superiors in a formal letter without caring for the reply (which could be only negative). He also dispensed with official Gurkba consent by crossing *incognito* their territory, choosing the shortest, least obvious and most loosely guarded path. In order to stave off Tibetan suspicion, he opted for the trading pilgrim's disguise and for taking the traditional itinerary of the Indian worshippers to Mount Kailas and to the lake which is associated with it. In case of need, the natives could be bribed to vouch for the good behaviour and *bona fides* of the devout travellers. Presents and lucrative business proposals might help obtain the goodwill of the security officials involved. The expenses were defrayed out of Moorcroft's personal income.

The company took shape near Chilikia and Ramnagar at a mart clearing the products of the plains for those of the hills. It comprised 45 participants (including the porters). Most of them were armed.

They drove a herd of goats along with them. The only white member, Moorcroft (alias Mayapoori), concealed his true identity by marking his eyes with lamp black, darkening his face and neck with the juice of walnuts and smearing them with the ashes of burnt cowdung. His Afghan retainer, Ghulam Hyder Khan and his two guides (the illegitimate half-caste son of a British infantry officer, Captain Hyder Harsey [as Hargiri] and an old Kumaoni brahmin, Pandit Harbalam or Harbullubh) could pass unnoticed more easily. Yet the two officers were well known by the Gurkhas on the south-western border.

They loaded spices (nutmeg, cloves, cardamom, black pepper), European broadcloth, coloured glass beads, trinkets from Hardwar, cutlery and scissors and three telescopes. They also secured large provisions of brandy, peppermint essence and sugar. Their bargaining power was enhanced with 2,000 rupees in gold coins.

The caravan set off on the 9th of May, advanced North through Kumaon, passed by Karnprayag at the junction of the Pindar with the Alaknanda River, reached Josimath, then climbed to Tapoban. Edging its way further in the Dauli gorge between summits like Kamet and the two-peaked Nanda Devi, it attained Niti on the 4th of June. During its three-week halt there, it succeeded in negotiating its progress to the top of the pass and beyond and ensured its entry into Tibet at Daba. Moorcroft's healing performances and guns helped achieve this result. Gartok, the administrative centre of western Tibet, was caught sight of on the 17th of July, with its population swollen by the big summer fair. Thanks to the cooperation of the governor (*garpon*), Moorcroft could buy the animals and wool he wanted and left the bulk of them at Tirtapuri. He got to Lake Manasarowar (Mapama; Tso-ma-vang; Tso-rinpoche; etc.) by what came to be called the Ladakh-Lhassa Trade Route, but fever and bad weather prevented him from exploring the full circumference of its shoreline. From the 5th to the 8th of August he and Harsey (after him) examined the western side and Pandit Harbalam's nephew, Harkh Dev walked round to the southern edge. Instead of extending their discoveries to Rakas Tal (Rawan Rudd; Lankan; Langak-tso; etc.), the twin expanse of water without the sacred connotation of its sister, they turned back to Tirtapuri as quickly as they could to collect the belongings they had left there. They made haste along the Sutlej to Daba, where they were welcomed by the natives like old friends but claimed publicly as impostors by the Tibetan officials in charge. They sold part of their freight, replenished their supply of food and purchased additional quantities of gold dust, turmeric and flocks of goats. They bid farewell to their hosts on the 26th, sticking to the road by which they had come in compliance to Tibetan order. In the vicinity

of British territory, however, a Gurkha patrol stopped, disarmed and arrested them. After a custody of 16 days, the party was led to the border without any extortions whatever. Moorcroft could be satisfied: the aims of his expedition were accomplished.

Sven Hedin's view of the expedition

With Hearsey, Moorcroft made an impressive number of scientific and technical observations. He carried back with him a lot of dried plants and flowers, several of which bear his name. He also collected seeds and samples of a wide range of plants. [A 172²]. In his view, the Europeans had much to learn in and borrow from Asia, especially if they wanted to give new impetus to the activity of their economies in the wake of the devastating Napoleonic wars.

As we can see today, his expedition to Tibet had two objectives: one geographic, the other economic.

In the sphere of hydrography, it verified and completed the discoveries made by two of its members four years earlier. Encouraged by the Governor of Bengal, Hyder Hearsey and two other officers (Webb and Raper) followed the Ganges to its source at Gangoktri and thereby established that, in contradiction to prevailing belief, the river could not flow from Lake Manasarwar. Their guide, Pandit Harbalam had noticed in 1796 a river which discharged to the West from this body of water and which was considered as the holy spring of the Ganges, the Indus, the Sutlej and the Brahmaputra at the same time. In the third volume of his book *Trans-Himalaya*, Sven Hedin discussed this belief and explained how it was progressively refuted. Moorcroft is given pride of place in this historical overview which presents his account on the mystical lake in the *Asiatic Researches* of 1816 as one of the best pieces of information on the subject. [H 223¹] The English doctor found the lake completely closed to the West under the effect of drought. In a rainier period, under more propitious circumstances, he would have witnessed a situation more in accordance with traditional Tibetan and Chinese representations. Thus, he would have perceived it with the Racas Tal as two pearls pierced and connected into a set of ornaments by the Sutlej welling forth from the Ganglung Glacier under the name of Tage-tsangpo and following its course as the recognized main tributary of the Indus. However, this relationship was proved only in 1907. [H 233 & 221-22¹] Suffice it to say that Moorcroft got a good glimpse of the Indus at Gartok and trailed the Sutlej (Langchen-kamba) from

2 My paper relies heavily on three authors, viz., Garry Alder, Sven Hedin and John Irwin — see references. They are acknowledged in the text respectively by A, H and I followed by the number of the page concerned.

Tirtapuri to Kyunglung.

In the same book, Hedin also glorified the place of Moorcroft's feat. He compared it to a fine ring, a turquoise set between two diamonds. Manasarowar or Mānasa Sarōwara, "the most beautiful of lakes created by the soul" (of Brahma / Buddha), 4,570 m above sea level, guarded by the north-westerly, 6,714 m high Kailash (Kang-rinpoche, Gangri) and to the South-South-west by Gurla Mandatta (Naimo, Memo-nami) rising to 7,728 m. Its fresh water is praised by the Skanda Purana for purifying those who drink from it, bathe in it or sprinkle their body with it. The mountains towering over its edge were hailed by Kalidasa in the poem *Maghaduta (The Cloud-Messenger)*. To many, Kailash is identical with the fabulous Mount Meru, the axis of the world. The Hinduists hold that Shiva elected it for his dwelling. The Buddhists regard it as the ideal support for meditation where hosts of Tibetans have achieved *nirvana*, like Yogi Milarepa [as summed up by Dak-Pa (1987)]. A few fancy that the abode of Samvara (*Bde-mchog*), the Tantric divinity is there. By their ritual circumambulation (*parikrama*) of these holy sites (*tirta*), the Hindu and Tibetan pilgrims believe that they have acquired extraordinary merits.

Moorcroft could not walk around the place like them. He did not believe in the role of *gosain (gossyne)* which he acted with Captain Hearsey out of sheer expediency (trying even to seduce - without success - the pretty women on their way).

Moorcroft's true design and merit

According to the *Glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases, and of kindred terms, etymological, hystorical, geographical and discursive HOBSON-JOBSON* by Yule & Burnell (1866), the word was derived from the Sanskrit *Goswami* meaning *Lord of Passion* (literally Lord of Cows). It characterises "one who is supposed to have subdued his passions and renounced to the world". It is "applied in various parts of India to different kinds of persons not necessarily celibates, but professing a life of religious mendicity, and including some who dwell together in convents under a superior, and others who engage in trade and hardly pretend to lead a religious life". George Bogle's account of the trade of Tibet depicts them under the latter aspect emphasising that many of them are quite rich. As Markham (1875) pointed it out, they deal in articles of "great value and small bulk" which they sell "without noise or ostentation and often by paths unfrequented by other merchants". (Bogle had had plenty of opportunity to observe this practice during his mission to the Tashi Lama from 1774 to 1775 when he had availed of the services of *gosain*

Purungir who also accompanied the Panchen Lama to Peking in 1779-80 and reported his death there in 1780. He took part in the Embassy of Captain Samuel Turner to the new Rinpoché of Sigatse in 1783 and acted as the representative of the Bengal Presidency in Tibet until about 1785.)

Moorcroft's trip to Mânasa Sarôwara ended in implicit blasphemy, as it denied the existence of a complex of lion, elephant, peacock and horse-shaped rocks gushing into the human world the Indus, the Sutlej, the Karmali and the Brahmaputra. Its economic stake outclassed the usual calculations of a normal *gosain*. It boiled down to breaking to British benefit the monopoly of the so-called cashmere wool shared among Tibet, Ladakh and Kashmir. The annual turnover of this restricted trade was estimated at more than 2 million Sicca rupees¹. The merchandise consisted of the fine hair of the breed named today the Central Asian Down. The fibres of the highest value were combed from the undercoat of ventral areas. This fine wool known as *pashmina* (average diameter not exceeding 15 microns) were processed into shawls by Kashmiri handicraft. They found lucrative outlets all over Asia. Their expensive, ostentatious vogue spread mainly among men and hit Europe around 1767. Society women were quick to favour the soft, light, sensuous touch of the new warm fabrics which enabled them to replace their former clumsy overcoats by elegant yarns revealing their shapes to best effect. The fad reached its climax in the wake of Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt which gave rise to a wave of enthusiastic orientalism. The fashion lasted until 1870 when it fell victim of its own popularity and collapsed under the weight of cheap imitations.

The British would have liked to divert the flow of the valuable primary product to their Indian possessions. To channel it directly, for instance, through Garwhal and Kumaon, even at the price of liberating these economically promising provinces from Gurkha occupation - as they did over 1814-16, partly under the influence of Moorcroft. They would have preferred, however, to move the large scale breeding of the peculiar *Capra hircus* to Scotland with the help of males imported from Tibet and/or its adjacent regions. Moorcroft worked simultaneously on both solutions with no more luck than predecessors like George Bogle in 1774 and Captain Samuel Turner in 1783 (both trying to implement the instructions of Warren Hastings, Governor General of Bengal). In this attempt, he renewed previous efforts by Sir John Sinclair [I 21-22], the physician John Gilman and Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Colebrook [A 129-30] and eventually shipped to England 25 pairs of shawlwool-goats. However, half of this cargo perished on sea and the remainder died soon after landing. [I 22-23].

Those who strove later to succeed where he failed (like the French Amédée Joubert, professor of Turkish at the Royal Library) did not fare better. According to Mr. James Crowden (1992), an Anglo-Australian group is now tempted by the experience discontinued for one and a half centuries.³

Despite all his drive, Moorcroft was unable to add impetus to the agro-industry of his country by organizing the production of genuine *pashmina* on British soil, although he went as far as proposing to bring over from India and settle in Great Britain spinners, weavers and designers of kashmiri patterns. [I 37-39] Instead of relaxing his development effort, he channelled it into a global strategy. He referred to it as the 'Himalayan concern' which implied the expansion of Indian trade based on liberal principles to the remote corners of Central Asia. (Other expatriates also overestimated the potential of these little known areas.) For him it was a vital issue in checking the growing Russian encroachment attested by his partners and noticed by his party at Daba and Gartok. (In particular *ooroo* [Russian] dogs, red leather, blue linen, sword blades ... of Russian origin.) He attached crucial importance to it because he presumed that it was boosted by French cooperation and benefited from Chinese connivance. His suspicion was vindicated much later. In his time his compatriots were well advised to remain friendly with the Russians in Europe and prospects looked too poor for doing good business in Central Asia to fall in with his crusade.

Körösi's destiny

Csoma de Körös had to bear the consequences of this conflict. He was hired by Moorcroft to provide linguistic means for penetrating the states of Tibetan culture and comprehending the population around the Koko Nor. The Hungarian scholar narrowed the scope of this assignment to the elements and structure of a language preserved fossilized in canonical texts of no practical use for colonial purposes. His sponsor lost his credit because of his dare-devil lack of discipline, militant russophobia and commercial imperialism in countries put down for buffers (i.e., left practically to themselves). He disappeared in 1825 before Csoma could meet the requirements of his contract. (There is sufficient testimony witnessing that he died of fever on the 27th of August 1825 at Andkhoi, 160 kms off Balkh, in northern Afghanistan. [A 357, etc.])

The bureaucrats in the colonial administration felt little

3 Successful breeding trials are currently in progress in Scotland. Ed.

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inclination to step into his place and made no hurry to do so. Without letting Körösi down altogether, they left him in a precarious situation which hardly improved to the very end. Its amelioration, with the tenure of librarian at the Asiatic Society of Bengal, did not last more than three years (from May 1838 to May 1841). Hiding his sense of exposure to ridicule for the poses of a Siculo-Hungarian obsessed by the rather absurd search for his ethnic forefathers, the Transylvanian apparently did nothing to make things easier for himself. It is singular that the Hungarians honour him as a prominent cultural hero.

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APPENDIX

Moorcroft's Self-justification, Politico-economic Assessment and Military Outlook

As attested by the records kept in the National Archives of India in New Delhi for 1812-13, the Foreign Department, Political Branch, filed three documents pertaining to the escapade discussed. They were entered under the name of William Moorcroft in the class of "Persons not in the Service". The first (N. 29) was a 40-page memorandum addressed by the veterinary from "Neetee in Boothunt" to J. Adam, Secretary to Government in Political Department, on September 7th, 1812. The second (N. 53) and third (N. 63) consisted of an exchange of correspondence between John Monckton, Persian Secretary to Government, and William Moorcroft, bearing on charges by "The Rajah of Nipaul" of having maltreated local government officers while returning to British India through the raja's "dominions".

Monckton's letter signed on March 5th, 1813, was remarkably accomodating. It referred repeatedly to the direction of the Governor General in Council when asking for "an explanation of any transactions to which you may suppose the Rajah's letter to refer", "for the purpose of framing a reply", and stressed that his Lordship gave no credit to the accusation and had "little hesitation in ascribing it to the misrepresentations of the Rajah's officers who were anxious to justify their own proceedings".

The addressee did not fail to describe at length these "proceedings" to his advantage from "Hajeepoor" on March 15, 1813, only ten days after he had been summoned to do so from Fort William (Calcutta). To start with, he denied energetically the representation of the raja of Nepal "That on my return from the Oondes, and when in persuance of the orders of the Gorkeah Government certain Choikedars required me to produce my Passport, I beat them in an unwarrantable manner, and prepared to give them Battle, in consequence of which they seized upon my person and confined me". Then he went on giving full details on two attempts to provoke him to an attack: two insults to which he reacted by displaying his readiness to defend himself and his party. He fired and recharged his gun as a matter of routine every morning. Nearly two hundred soldiers could not "be put into bodily fear by two persons very indifferently armed, attended by a few servants, of whom the greater part were not armed at all", and even less "feel alarmed at one person loading a Gun and this individual not of the Military profession". The servants were

"expressly enjoined ... not to leave the line of road; not to take the most trifling article of any kind without paying it; not to give the slightest cause of offence; and for the better insuring this point they were forbidden to enter into conversation with any persons they might meet". The "Gorkeah" Government did not exercise effective control over the Oondes: in the hills under its nominal authority, especially towards the most Northern range, it stationed no regular guards and had "not the power of defending the weak farmers against the attacks of the strong ones". "Many people both of the borders and far in the Southern portion of the Mountains ... going into Bhote" carried no passports. It took two months to intercept Moorcroft and his men by "Sepahis drawn [from various sites] for the express purpose of interrupting our return to the Company's Provinces" after the intrusion had been reported by an authorised spy.

This protest against a "Slanderous Aspersion" demonstrates what in French may be called "la cocasserie de l'incident" (drollery of the affair). It was natural enough that the Gurkha overlords prove their sovereignty over Kumaon and Garhwal by subduing an arrogant, politically critical armed band traversing these provinces twice without their permission. The more so the more their authority was flouted there, as by Moorcroft.

In contrast to this rather extravagant, "hair-splitting" pleading not guilty, the report from Niti is a major piece of commercial, political and military intelligence. From the observations made during a trek, information through conversations and knowledge of the contemporary balance of power in Europe, it draws far-reaching conclusions and warns of the threat of war for which it spells out the causes and defines the logistic constraints. It is quite straightforward in its anti-Russian stand, as it opens by the statement: "a trade is at this moment carrying on by Russians in the neighbourhood of the Honble Company's possessions immediately and highly prejudicial to the Company's commercial interests, and which, if not timely counteracted, will probably lead to events that may disturb the tranquillity and endanger the safety of the Company's Provinces contiguous to the northwestern and northern frontier of British India, provided the war fare now existing in Europe be prolonged under the present alliances".

The trade in question covered "Chinese Tatory", "Latakh", "Cashmeer" and spread over to "Punjab" and "Hindoostan". It involved horses and a wide range of merchandise like textile materials and leather, swords and telescopes, beads, large mirrors and glasses paid in rupees or exchanged against fine muslins, woollen shawls, sugar, grain and other items. They included French cloth labelled

"Drap très fin", probably from Abbeville (of which Moorcroft dispatched a sample). They were brought to the "Himachul" massif of mountains by "Ooroos [Russians] under the garb and character of Moosulmans" and followed by persons who looked more like political emissaries and their Armenian associates than real merchants. Despite the disadvantage of long overland transportation across high mountains, the subsidized goods imported from the North were selling very well compared to superior, initially low-cost, moderately marked-up products of British make which were probably priced out of the local markets by greedy middlemen. The supply of shawls from Kashmir seemed to contain low-quality specialities intended expressly for the Russians - an indication of high volumes flowing through well-established channels - should we comment today.

The French woollens "Drap très fin" provided a clue. "In whatever manner the extension of the Russian trade in the Countries just mentioned may have been produced its continuance, whether stationary, or progressive, will interfere with the course of British Commerce, and by giving to the Russians and French an acquaintance with the state of the tract behind the Himachul afford them facilities for attempting the invasion of India which they have not enjoyed heretofore." In fact, it could be feared that Buonaparte lured Tsar Alexander (however reluctant) into an alliance, by promising him the "plunder of India and the addition of its immense territory to the Russian Empire". "Experience ... must have abundantly proved to the Statesmen of Russia that the strength of their Empire is not yet sufficiently consolidated to give it the preponderating influence in the politics of Europe they were formerly willing to impute to it, the reflection may lead to the idea of its aggrandizement as an Asiatic Power." Buonaparte, who sought "to improve the Commerce of France and to depress that of Britain" but was "baffled in his views of wresting the sovereignty of the Ocean from Great Britain or of distressing her Commerce upon that element by direct means", may have ordered the opening of a new, Indian "line of Commercial Speculation for enterprising adventurers in the continental part of Europe." Should he "once be acquainted with the fact of the Russian Merchants travelling amongst the Nations at the back of the Indian Caucasus, the resources of these countries appropriable to his use and the defenceless condition of these hills, he would instantly abandon all idea of crossing the Indus except by fording its stream in some part either of Independent or of Chinese Tatory, an operation of great facility, nor would the passage of the Sutleej be more difficult in the same Country."

British India prepared for attacks from the South or West, not

from the North. She presumed "the Tatars" fit to act as a buffer and "the Gorkalees have been thought competent to repel any attempt at invasion they might make." However, the military force of the former appeared "truly despicable". "And all resistance on the part of the Gorkalees to an European Army proceeding from this quarter would be as transient as unavailing." A company of one thousand French and Russian soldiers could subdue these peoples and encroach on the territories belonging to the East-India Co. They could easily outflank the British if thrusting forth through Yarkand if they secured the cooperation of "the Chief of Punjab" for traversing his country, marched East and attacked on that side. The sparse nomadic population scattering from Yarkand to Kashmir had "no communication except by mere chance with any of the inhabitants of Hindoostan". The Raja in Lahore debarred Englishmen from visiting his country and had lately enlisted one Russian and two Armenians for disciplining his infantry. So the British Resident on the Sutlej could not know what was happening in these inhospitable areas. "It is to be presumed that arrangements would be made previously to the actual invasion with the principal Chiefs of the Tatar Hordes but, if these should not have been effected, the imposing presence of an European Army and the promise of a Share in the spoil of Hindoostan would ensure their co-operation." Ranjit Singh might be tempted to take advantage of French and Russian forces dividing the attention of the British Army and attack on several fronts: beside entering Hindustan from Kashmir, send many columns to "defile by the foot of the Mountains towards the eastern part of the British possessions"... Given his vested interest in the trade in shawl-wool and in French and Russian commodities, the "Rajah of Latak" was likely to be friendly to the cause of the invasion. The natives of Oondes, "the country of wool", were "not only a timid, unmilitary race, but from living in insulated spots by single families ... [were] ... incapable of acting in concert, and of making any combined and effectual opposition." "In fact from the general thinness of population in the vast tract of country between Latak and Lassa no Enemy is to be apprehended sufficiently powerful to interrupt any operation the invader might think proper to carry on within." "The Grand Lama in the event of his territories being invaded ... [had] ... no military force capable of making face against a Column of five hundred Europeans". He depended on succour from Chinese and Tatar campments too far away to provide adequate protection. "The contact of the power of leathern Cannons, of Bows and Arrows, and of ill-served Matchlocks with European instruments of war would lead to the certain defeat of the Chinese, and afford an experience that might ultimately tend to the subversion of that weak and unwieldy

Empire". "Having reached the northern front of the Himachul an invading Army would find a Climate not unfriendly to the constitution of Europeans, and ... the Oondes would give a supply of animal food and of grain without delay, and of the former in quantity sufficient to suffice for a large consumption during a long time." However, it could not provide other fuel for cooking "than a species of low Tamarisk and two varieties of Furze". Abundant sheep could be used to carry loads "of twenty pounds and upwards walk as fast as a man in a hilly country, and perform daily journeys of six or eight miles without being distressed, requiring no other food than the grass he meets with at the end of his days work." Roughly the same held true of goats also in profusion. Nevertheless, the extremely rugged surface made progress difficult and precluded the transportation of artillery, with the exception of very light pieces. This difficulty might be partly overcome by cutting sloping roads in zig zags and building temporary causeways. The twelve major passes of the region had to be considered also.

The final point of the memorandum: "the paltry force of twelve thousand Gorkeeahs, ill-paid, ill-fed, ill-equipped and ill-disciplined, even if concentrated, would be capable of making little substantial resistance against the well appointed Soldiers of France and Russia, but divided as it now is between the extremities of the long line of subjugated Country running from Nepal to the Jumna, the moment of invasion would be the signal of destruction to the thinly scattered bands in the intermediate Provinces from the resentment of the wretched oppressed mountaineers, who would rise in mass against the instruments of oppression employed by their detested Masters. And the deposed Rajahs, who have now long struggled with poverty, would fly with alacrity to join the Standards of those, who would promise to re-instate them in their former possession the condition of their assisting the invaders in their designs upon Hindoostan".

The document made no allusion whatever to the feasibility of an invasion by British troops, nor did it advise any pre-emptive sweep through the Nepalese Empire to "Tatary". Yet Hearsey (and no doubt also Moorcroft) lent a lot of thought to such prospects and one can safely infer that their analyses helped two years later in triggering the war against Nepal, whose military capability they had grossly underestimated. Moorcroft's assumption of a collusion between Napoleon Bonaparte and Tsar Alexander I was proven wrong in the same year by the former aggressing the latter. Russia's glorious comeback to the political scene in Western Europe in the wake of the defeat and annihilation of three fourths of the "Grande Armée" in local snow and mud further discounted Moorcroft's proposition about a sense of

political inferiority and consequent subservience to France in the tsardom. These radical changes in circumstances did not prevent, however, the veterinary's stated apprehensions crystallizing into an *idée fixe*. His criticizers and contradictors in whose opinion he was chasing shadows and causing only constant embarrassment to Government, were vindicated until later in the century when the imperatives of the "great game" became manifest.

NOTES

(i) Besides echoing one of the commemorations of Csoma de Körös and of his initial sponsor in Ladakh, the purpose of the lecture is twofold. First, to provoke a debate on what a pilgrim is; second, to question trading potentials across the Himalayas.

(ii) Next year, in 1994, alpinists in the country where I live will remember the Swiss expedition to Garhwal 55 years earlier whose itinerary overlapped in part with that of Moorcroft's. It had attained its first two objectives: conquering the Dunagiri and exploring the amphitheatre of Kosa with ascension of the Ghorī Parbat, but it was carried away by an avalanche before reaching the top of Badrinath (Chaukhamba). Two sherpas hired from Darjeeling lost their lives in that disaster. (ROCH, A. 1947 *Garhwal Himalaya*. Ed. Victor Attinger, Neuchâtel-Paris).

(iii) Much more significant then will be the 100th anniversary of the death of B. H. Hodgson, "the most brilliant young scholar whom the Indian Civil Service has produced..., the masterly diplomatist who held quiet the kingdom of Nepal and the warlike Himalayan races throughout the disasters of the Afghan war..., the munificent Englishman who enriched the museums of Europe with his collections, enlarged the old boundaries of more than one science, and opened up a new field of original research..., the founder of our Buddhist studies". His career started in 1818 in the position of Assistant to George William Traill, the Commissioner of Kumaun. It is striking how closely their reports on local conditions echoed those of Moorcroft. (HUNTER, W. W. *Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson British Resident at the Court of Nepal*. Asian Educational Services Reprint 1991, New Delhi - Madras).

(iv) "A Journey to Lake Manasarowara in Undes, a province of Little Tibet" published in the *Asiatic Researches* in 1816 (12; 375-534) by Henry Colebrook (President of the Asiatic Society of Bengal) is a "curtailed" account of Moorcroft's notes in which the "narrator's own words [were] scrupulously retained". Most probably its actual editor was H.H. Wilson who, in his own words, had "occasionally digested some of Mr. Moorcroft's rambling epistles for the public press of Calcutta, and the use of the Asiatic Society" - hopefully to a lesser extent than he did in *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Panjab from 1819 to 1825 by William Moorcroft and George Trebeck*. John Murray, London, 1841 (lxx, vol. I of its 1979 Reprint. Oxford University Press, Karachi.) It reveals its author the promoter of economic growth through agricultural and industrial innovation and unfettered trade expansion. It deals with geology and topography, botany and zoology, economy and trade, without neglecting humans and their contact. This lively geographic approach occasionally encompasses shrewd ethnography. However, the chronological sequence of the reported data allows few syntheses. Perhaps the most valuable informant was Ahmed Khan Kazalbash, the Kashmirian Wakil (principal agent) of the Raja of

Ladakh. (443-44, etc.)

What is particularly striking is the desolation of Kumaon and Garwhal, as reflected by the Journal even in its 1816 published form. "The upper part of Butan is now suffering much from scarcity of grain, in consequence of the Juaris and Dharmis plundering the Gungaris, or people living on the banks of the Ganges within the hills, who were in the habits of bringing up grain they raised, and that which they procured from below." (496) Said a Malari man: "the tenants had been plundered of their goats by the Juaris; ... unable without these animals to carry on their usual traffic of grain and salt with the Unias, they were deprived of the means of paying their rent to the Gorkiahs, who took the remainder of their cattle, their cooking utensils, the rings out of the noses of their wives and daughters, and seized their children as slaves. Many persons were actually starved to death, and others fled." (499) "... if a man by his industry raises a small flock of goats, a Juari or a Darmi plunderer attacks him and carries them off, and we can get no redress from our present masters, nor are we strong enough to resist or make reprisals." Comes the scathing generalisation: "Independently of the direct plunder they obtain, without any other caution than putting a number of men under arms, the Juaris are interested in destroying the trade of the Niti Ghati, in order that they may have a larger proportion of the profitable traffic with the Undes." (500) There are other details of pillage and devastation resulting in quasi- genocide. "The inhabitants of the whole tract between Lata and Niti complain much of the extortions of the Gorkiahs. The poorest man is compelled to pay a poll tax of four kacha rupees¹. This has caused many villages to be deserted; and the population is now much diminished." (499) Instead of keeping peace and maintaining security, the Gurkhas are depicted then as quickening the pace of regression to savagery and poverty. Later in Kashmir Moorcroft's judgment was not less lenient. This contrasts with his sympathy for the Ladakhi.

(v) Treating patients is mentioned only once in connection with a boy "relieved by tapping for dropsy". (530) Hearsey's manuscript notebook processed by G. Alder, however, provides ample evidence of Moorcroft putting his skill of a physician to good use all along his expedition, even among his Gurkha captors. (A 162, 164-66, 168). He never gave up his medical practice on humans. At Pusa he usually saw patients waiting in long queues on Fridays and did surgery on Saturdays. H.H. Wilson's quoted transcript gives more examples during the "Great Journey", especially with regard to removals of cataracts.

(vi) Ladakh is still involved in the production, processing and trade of Moorcroft's favourite commodity: *pashmina*. In the estimates of Miss Monisha Ahmed (Oxford University), approximately 80 families of nomads in Rupshu derive their livelihood from this sector, each selling annually 10-50 kg of the precious hair for Rs 500-700 per kg. There is additional production in Zaskar. Both sources meet fierce competition from Tibet under Chinese rule. According to Dr. Mohd Din (or Deen, veterinary project officer with the Desert Development Agency in Kargil), about 140 thousand changra goats in the Ladakh region provide 30 metric tons of raw pashmina a year to be processed domestically. (Contribution to 1992 Luxury Fibres. Special Report No.2633 by Philippa Watkins and Alexandra Buxton. The Economic Intelligence Unit, London) [see also Deen in this volume].

(vii) Many participants in the Workshop had hoped for the imminent reopening of the Kailash-Manasarowa route for pilgrims from the South, stressing the archeological, cultural and spiritual interest of the traditional tracks. Their optimism gained support from the advanced negotiations over Himalayan territorial disputes between India and China. A prominent member of the Colloquium Committee, Mr. Sonam Dawa looked forward to exploring in September with Chinese counterparts the advantages of the agreement.