

Krishnakanta Basu, Rammohan Ray and Early 19th Century British Contacts with Bhutan and Tibet

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In mid-1815 Krishnakanta Basu¹ and Rammohan Ray—later famous as one of the leading figures of the 19th century Bengali renaissance—set out from Rangpur in northern Bengal on a sensitive diplomatic mission. In late 1814, the East India Company had declared war against the Gorkha state in Nepal: the task of the two emissaries was to brief Bhutan's Deb Raja (*'Brug sDe srid*)² on the background to the war, and to assure him that the Company had no designs on his own country. If possible, they were to convey a similar message to the Tibetan authorities in Lhasa.

In the event, the main military theatres of the 1814-1816 war with Nepal took place far to the west, and the mission to Bhutan proved to be of no more than minor diplomatic significance. It is therefore mentioned in standard accounts of the war,³ but in a peripheral manner. The purpose of this paper is to bring the mission and its two main India protagonists to centre-stage, and to place them in their wider political and cultural context.

Rammohan Ray returned to India after delivering the initial message to the Deb Raja, and had no further contact with Bhutan, but Krishnakanta Basu stayed on for more than a year. Although he had scant success in his diplomatic role, he used his time to good effect by collecting information on the language and culture of Bhutan. His literary legacy includes a detailed “Account of Bhútán”, which was first published in 1825

1 In contemporary texts his name is transliterated as Kishen Kant Bose.

2 The Deb Rajas or *'Brug sDe srids* were the senior lay officials of Bhutan during this period in contrast to the *Zhabs drungs*, or ‘Dharma Rajas’ in British parlance, who were the main source of spiritual authority. The Deb Rajas typically were chosen from among the region's ruling families, and served for a defined period of years. In this paper I have chosen to stick to the term ‘Deb Raja’ as this was the term most used in contemporary British archival sources.

3 E.g. Pemble (1971), Lamb (1986), Singh (1988). The mission likewise appears in historical accounts of Bhutan such as Gupta (1974), Deb (1976) and Aris (1994), but again in a somewhat peripheral manner.

in *Asiatic Researches*, the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal; as well as a manuscript “Grammar and Vocabulary of the Bhotan Language”. Although his main role was to serve as a Company official, he arguably can be regarded as an early forerunner of modern Indian scholarship on Bhutan and Tibet. His struggles and achievements deserve to be more widely recognised.

This paper draws on archival sources at the British Library’s Oriental and India Office Collection in London.⁴ It begins with an introductory review of the Company’s relations with Bhutan in Tibet in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with a particular focus on the Indian intermediaries who facilitated communications on both sides. The second part of the paper analyses the political circumstances of the 1815 mission to Bhutan in some detail. The paper concludes with a discussion of Krishnakanta’s contributions to Western knowledge of the Himalaya.

British diplomacy and Indian intermediaries

The 1815 mission took place some 40 years after the opening of the first substantive British contacts with Bhutan and Tibet, and the challenges that Krishnakanta and Rammohan faced reflect the legacy of this period.

The common themes include first a continuing sense of suspicion on the part of both Bhutan and Tibet concerning British ambitions in the region. The leaders of both countries feared that the Company’s commercial expansion might serve as a prelude to political and military intervention, as had already happened in Bengal. A second theme is the role played by Indian intermediaries. No more than a handful of British emissaries were able to visit Bhutan and Tibet in person. During these visits, and still more in the long intervals when no British official was able to visit either country, Indian intermediaries played an essential interpreting role to both sides. These intermediaries fell into three categories: Gosains, Kashmiris and, in due course, the two Bengali officials that are the main subject of this paper.

Hastings, Bogle and Purangir

The first diplomatic opening came in 1774 when the Company intervened on behalf of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar in a conflict with Bhutan. The Third Panchen Lama, Blo bzang gal ldan ye shes (1738-1780),

4 More detailed records may be available at the National Archives of India in New Delhi, but I have not to date been able to consult them. It is conceivable that still further records survive in Bhutan and in Rangpur, which is now in Bangladesh.

sought to mediate on Bhutan's behalf. Governor-general Warren Hastings (1732-1818), took advantage of the opening to send George Bogle (1747-1781), a young Scottish official, via Bhutan to Tashi Lhunpo where he was to make direct contact with the Panchen Lama.

Hastings had two broad strategic objectives. The first was to develop a trade route from India via Bhutan to Tibet: this was to serve as a replacement for the hitherto more important route via Kathmandu which had been blocked as a result of the expansion of the Gorkha state under Prithvi Narayan (1723-1775). His second, more distant aspiration was to explore the possibilities of establishing communications via Tibet with China.

Bogle's main guide and mentor in Tibet was Purangir, a member of the north Indian Gosain community, which had an extensive network of contacts on both sides of the Himalaya.⁵ The Gosains were religious devotees, who combined regular pilgrimages with trade, and were of service to the Tibetans—as well as the British—as a source of knowledge and advice on developments on either side of the Himalaya. As Bogle reported following his return from Tibet:

The Gosseines, the Trading Pilgrims of India, resort hither [i.e. to Tashi Lhunpo] in great numbers. Their humble deportment, and holy character heightened by the merit of distant Pilgrimages, their accounts of unknown countries, and remote Regions, and above all their possession of high veneration for the Lamas, procure them not only a ready admittance but great favours. Tho' clad in the garb of poverty there are many of them possessed of considerable Wealth. Their trade is confined to articles of great value and small bulk. It is carried on without noise or ostentation, and often by Paths unfrequented by other merchants.⁶

The Kashmiri community, many of whom had intermarried with Tibetans, constituted a second group of Indian origin that was well-represented in Tashi Lhunpo. Kashmiri traders operated an extensive personal and commercial network from Ladakh, Nepal, and Bengal right across Tibet as far as Xining and beyond.⁷ According to Bogle, the Tibetan merchants of Tashi Lhunpo believed that the Kashmiris and Gosains had an advantage over them in that they were better suited to the Indian climate:

5 On the Gosains see in particular Cohn (1963).

6 Bogle's report of 1775-1776. Cited in Sarcar (1931).

7 On the Kashmiri network in Tibet see in particular Gaborieau (1973) and Bray (2010).

They [the Tibetans] said that being born in this country they were afraid of going into a hot one; that their people would die in Bengal; that they had heard from tradition that about eight hundred years ago the people of this country used to travel into Bengal, but that eight out of ten died before their return; that the Kashmiris and Gosains travelled into different countries, but that they could not.⁸

Bogle himself had to contend with suspicions that he had come to “spy out the nakedness of the land,”⁹ but he was nonetheless able to establish a warm personal relationship with the Panchen Lama. Both he and Hastings hoped that these beginnings would prepare the way for an eventual expansion of British trade with Tibet, and in due course for a new communications route with China.

On Bogle’s return journey from Tashi Lhunpo, he opened negotiations with the Deb Raja of Bhutan on a possible trade agreement with the Company. Bogle reported that:

Foreign merchants have always been excluded [from Bhutan] except the Kashmiri houses who in consideration of a large sum of money are permitted to transfer otter skins, chank [conch shells] and a few other articles through the country.¹⁰

He added that, having been cut off by the mountains from the rest of the world, the Bhutanese were “averse from innovations and ignorant of all the advantages which flow from a free and extensive commerce.”¹¹

As in Tibet, a major factor impeding the negotiations was the Deb Raja’s fear that the presence of British merchants in his country might turn out to be a precursor of military conquest. The eventual compromise was that the Deb Raja agreed to allow Hindu and Muslim traders to pass and repass through his country between Bengal and Tibet. At the same time Bhutanese traders were to be allowed special privileges at an annual fair in Rangpur, and the Deb Raja sent the first of a series of *vakils* (envoys) to represent his interests in Calcutta. However, he did not reciprocate to the extent of allowing the Company to station its own *vakil* in Bhutan, and the country remained closed to European merchants.

8 Bogle’s journal, 29 March 1775. In Lamb (2002), p. 260. On Bogle see also Teltscher (2007)

9 Lamb (2002), p.238.

10 Bogle to Hastings, 9 June 1775, Cooch Behar. In Lamb (2002), p. 315. On the treaty see also Deb (1971).

11 Ibid.

The late 18th and early 19th centuries

Despite these promising beginnings, the Company's relationship with Bhutan and Tibet did not develop as had been hoped. One factor was the demise of two of the most important personalities: in 1780 the Panchen Lama died of smallpox while on a visit to Peking (with Purangir in his entourage). Bogle, who meanwhile had been appointed Collector of Rangpur, died in a drowning accident the following year. Hastings sent Samuel Turner to Bhutan and Tibet in 1783, and he was able to meet the infant Fourth Panchen Lama in Tashi Lhunpo. Turner was greatly taken with the child's dignity and composure but was unable to enter substantive diplomatic negotiations either with the new Panchen Lama or his regent.

A second, even more serious factor was a shift in overall policy under Lord Cornwallis, who succeeded Hastings as Governor-General in 1786. Cornwallis was more preoccupied with developments in southern India than with the Himalaya, and may have missed diplomatic opportunities as a result. In 1788, the Regent in Tashi Lhunpo sent two Kashmiris, Mohammed Rajeb and Mohammed Wali, to carry letters to Cornwallis in Calcutta seeking British assistance to repulse a Gorkha assault on Tibet.¹² Cornwallis refused to intervene, and his offer of mediation following a second Gorkha war with Tibet in 1792 came too late to be of practical assistance.

The outcome of the 1788 and 1792 Gorkha wars with Tibet was a strengthening of Manchu authority over Lhasa, and the tightening of border controls of the Himalayan passes, making it all but impossible for Europeans to visit the country.¹³ Cornwallis's slow and heavily-qualified response to Tibetan appeals for assistance had raised suspicions in Lhasa that the Company had actually supported the Gorkhas, and it seems that the Gosains were caught in the backlash against the British. In 1800 Turner wrote of Tibet that:

A most violent prejudice prevails even against the Hindoo Goseins, who are charged with treachery against their generous patrons, by becoming guides and spies to the enemy [i.e. the British], and have in consequence, it is said, been proscribed their accustomed abode at Teshoo Loomboo, where they had been ever patronised in great numbers by the Lama, and enjoyed particular favour and indulgence.¹⁴

12 Sarcar (1931), p. 126; Lamb (2002), p. 470. On the diplomatic repercussions of the 1788 and 1792 conflicts between Nepal and Tibet, see also Engelhardt 2002.

13 The one exception was Thomas Manning who managed to visit Lhasa in 1811.

14 Turner 1800, p. 422.

Meanwhile, the Company's relations with Bhutan fared little better. Again, the main underlying reason is likely to have been fear of possible British military expansion. The annual fair in Rangpur continued to take place but was poorly attended, and overall trade with India was limited in scale. For example, in 1796, the Baptist missionary Dr John Thomas reported:

I went to a great Fair... toward Bootan where the natives come down yearly & having found only two real Bootanese, I enquired the reason & find, they have suffered losses by thieves which have discouraged them from coming to the Fair. These 2 Persons were a Merchant and his servant, with woollen Blankets, Elephants' Teeth etc for sale...¹⁵

A further reason for poor relations was a series of disputes along the boundary between Bhutanese territory in the *Duars* and the princely state of Cooch Behar which had been under British protection since 1774.¹⁶ Hastings had tended to favour Bhutan in these disputes, perhaps taking the view that minor territorial concessions were worthwhile if they served the Company's wider diplomatic and commercial interests. However, Hastings' successors and their local representatives tended to take a more legalistic view, and frequently ruled against Bhutan.

British and Indian officials in Rangpur

On the British side, the frontline management of these boundary disputes fell to the Commissioners in Cooch Behar and the Collectors in Rangpur. The key protagonists in the early decades of the 19th century include: James Morgan, who was Collector of Rangpur from 1807 to 1809; John Digby, who succeeded him from 1809 until 1814; and David Scott who was successively Collector in Rangpur from 1814 to 1816, and then Commissioner in Cooch Behar.¹⁷

15 Thomas to the Society. 25 April 1796. Baptist Missionary Society Papers. IN/16. Regent's Park College Archives, Oxford. On the Baptists in early 19th century Bengal, see in particular Potts (1967).

16 The *Duars* were lowland tracts analogous to the Nepali *terai* that were then under Bhutanese control. They were annexed by the British after the 1865 war with Bhutan. On the boundary disputes, see in particular Gupta (1974), pp. 57-69.

17 On David Scott (1786- 1830) see in particular White (1832) and Barooah (1970). Scott came from Dunninald, near Montrose in the north-east of Scotland. His connection with India came via his uncle, another David Scott (1746-1805) who had served in the East India Company and eventually became its Chairman. The younger David came to India in 1802 and served first in Gorakhpur and Purnea. By the time he reached Rangpur he was still only 28.

All three men were of course supported by an extensive Indian staff. Among these were Krishnakanta Basu who joined government service as a junior official in the Rangpur *Faujdari 'Adalat* (criminal court) in 1807,¹⁸ and Rammohan Ray who first came with Digby to Rangpur in 1809. Rammohan had been born into a wealthy Bengali family in 1774, and had entered Digby's service in 1805, initially as a private *munshi* (secretary) and then as temporary *sar-ristadar* (head clerk) of the Ramgarh *Faujdari 'Adalat* in northern Bihar.¹⁹ He moved with Digby successively to Jessore (Bengal), Bhagalpur (Bihar) and finally to Rangpur.

Digby evidently held Rammohan in high regard. In November 1809 he wrote to the Board of Revenue describing Rammohan as a "man of very respectable family and excellent education" and seeking the Board's approval of his appointment as his *diwan*.²⁰ However, the Board rejected the appointment, arguing that Rammohan was insufficiently qualified. When Digby sought to protest, citing Rammohan's excellent qualifications and references, the Board confirmed its original decision and reproved him for the style in which he had addressed them.²¹ Despite this setback, Rammohan remained in Rangpur. Two Bengali-language letters from 1812 and 1814 refer to him as *diwan*,²² and it therefore appears either that he was reappointed to the post, or that he continued to hold the title unofficially.

The Maraghat boundary dispute

The most important of the Bhutan/Cooch Behar boundary disputes in the period under review concerned the Maraghat district, some 25 miles from Jalpaiguri. Maraghat was awarded to Bhutan in the 1774 treaty with the Company, and this was confirmed by a Council at Dinajpur in 1777. However the Raja of Cooch Behar claimed the southern part of the district, which was known as Gird Maraghat.²³ In 1807 Morgan conducted an on-the-spot enquiry and decided in favour of Cooch Behar. In 1809 Digby confirmed Morgan's ruling awarding Gird Maraghat to Cooch Behar, and the Maharaja took possession of the territory two years later.

18 The Petition of Kishun Kunt Bose inhabitant of Baluakoudee purgannah Kassinnuggur in Zillah Idalopore. OIOC. F/4/810/21274, p. 17.

19 Robertson 1995, p. 20

20 Digby to Board of Revenue, 5 November 1809. In Chanda & Majumdar 1938, p. 41.

21 Board of Revenue to Digby, 8 February 1810. In Chanda & Majumdar 1938, p. 44

22 Letter from the Deb Raja, received 18 August 1812, in Sen (1942), p. 50; letter from the Raja of Cooch Behar to the Commissioner, received 9 May 1814, in Sen (1942) pp. 55-56.

23 Gupta (1974), p. 63.

The Bhutanese never accepted these decisions. For example, in 1811 a letter to the Company from 'Penlow Sahib, a chief of Bhutan', complained that an officer of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar had been causing trouble over the boundary for the previous three years, and expressed fears that war might ensue.²⁴ Similarly in 1812 a letter from the Deb Raja again referred to Maraghat, appealed for assistance in resolving the dispute, and said that 'Diwan Rammohan' knew all the facts of the case.²⁵ In May 1814 the Maharaja of Cooch Behar appealed to Norman McLeod, the Commissioner of Cooch Behar, asking him to arrange for the deployment of 50 sepoy to protect the Maraghat frontier from Bhutanese infringements.²⁶

The Maraghat dispute was therefore far from being resolved in late 1814 when it was overtaken by the outbreak of the Company's war with Nepal. At that point Maraghat became one factor in a much wider set of strategic calculations on the part of the British, and it was these that in due course led to Krishnakanta's and Rammohan's mission to Bhutan.

The Nepal war and the mission to Bhutan

In the course of the 18th and early 19th centuries both the East India Company and the House of Gorkha had extended their control over vast new swathes of territory. In the Gorkha case these included much of Sikkim as well as Kumaon, Garhwal and the Himalayan foothills as far west as the river Sutlej. The immediate cause of the Nepal war was a boundary dispute in northern Bihar. However, the rival interests of these two expanding South Asian powers arguably were bound to lead to conflict sooner or later.²⁷

British policy in the war was formulated in Calcutta by the Governor-General, Francis Rawdon Hastings (1754-1826), who was then known as Lord Moira and from 1817 became the First Marquess of Hastings. Moira had two concerns with regard to Sikkim and Bhutan. The first was to ensure that they either remained neutral or joined the Company's cause. Sikkim was to be encouraged to join forces with the Company in the hope of regaining territory that had earlier been lost to the Gorkhas.²⁸

24 Letter from 'Penlow Sahib', received 26 November 1811. In Sen (1942), pp. 48-49.

25 Letter from Deb Raja, received 18 August 1812. In Sen (1942), p. 50.

26 Raja of Cooch Behar to McLeod, received May 1814. In Sen (1942), p. 58

27 This argument was in fact made by Henry Prinsep, one of Moira's senior officials. See his account of the Nepal war in Prinsep (1825). On the events leading to the war, see also Pemble (1971), Stiller (1995) and Michael (1999).

28 For Sikkim's role in the war, and the eventual success of Moira's strategy, see Bray (forthcoming)

At a wider geostrategic level, Moira was concerned about the potential conflict's impact on British relations with China, which since 1792 had claimed Nepal as a tributary.²⁹ He therefore hoped that it would be possible to send a message via either Sikkim or Bhutan to the Chinese authorities in Lhasa, emphasising that the Company's quarrel was solely with Nepal.

The Company's prospects of achieving these objectives were impeded by its weak diplomatic connections and poor intelligence sources for all the Himalayan kingdoms, including Nepal as well as Bhutan and Tibet. One of its first tasks was therefore to review the sources that were in fact available. Eager to be of service, the veterinary surgeon and explorer William Moorcroft (1770-1825) reviewed his own contacts at the outset of the war, and these evidently included "fakirs" (Gosains) as well as a Kashmiri merchant named Ahmed Ali.³⁰ However, none of these traditional sources were available for Bhutan and Tibet, and the Company therefore had to find other means of making contact.

Alarms in the north-east

In the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of war, British officials in the north-east were primarily preoccupied with local concerns. In early November 1814, Norman McLeod, the British Commissioner in Cooch Behar, reported rumours that the Gorkhas had sent a *vakil* to incite the Deb Raja to join forces with them against the British, and that he was mobilising armed forces along his western frontier.³¹ Captain Barré Latter, who commanded the Company forces in the north-east, expressed the "decided opinion that no time ought to be lost in preparing to repel the first aggression on the part of the Deb Raja."³² If he had possessed any firm information regarding the reported Bhutanese mobilisation, he would on his own initiative have occupied the Bhutanese post of Kyrantie.³³

Scott's view from Rangpur was more balanced: on 28 November he wrote to Calcutta suggesting that the Deb Raja's deployment of troops on the Western Passes might be "merely precautionary, to prevent our attempting to enter Nepaul [i.e. the parts of Sikkim then controlled by the

29 Nepal's quinquennial tribute missions to China continued until the early 20th century. See Mandhar (2004).

30 For a far-ranging analysis of the Company's intelligence limitations see Bayly (1996). On Ahmed Ali, see Bray (2010).

31 See *Papers Respecting the Nepaul War* (hereafter *PRNW*), pp. 410-412.

32 Latter to MacLeod, Titalia, 19th November 1814, *PRNW*, pp. 411-412. See Bray (forthcoming) for an account of Latter's part in the Nepal war and his alliance with Sikkim.

33 *Ibid.*

Gorkhas] by the roads leading from Bhutan".³⁴ In any case, he thought that Bhutan's lack of military capability rendered it "highly improbable that the Deb Raja should seriously think of engaging in a war, in which he can gain nothing, and may lose, without an effort on the part of his enemy, the whole his territories below the hills [i.e. the *duars*]."³⁵ Two days later he reported that a party of Bhutanese merchants had arrived with horses and other products of the hills for sale. He had made secret enquiries but could not find any evidence of preparations of a warlike nature in Bhutanese territory.³⁶

The British authorities in Calcutta ultimately agreed with Scott's assessment, noting that Latter's proposed occupation of Kyrantie might have involved the British Government "in a state of hostility with an unoffending, friendly neighbouring chief."³⁷ The conflict with Nepal made it all the more important to maintain good relations, and on 26th November 1814, John Adam, the Secretary to the Government of India, wrote to Scott requesting him to make contact with both Tibet and Bhutan:

His Excellency [the Governor-General] further desires that you will be pleased to endeavour to open a channel of communication with the administration of Lassa, in order to afford the means of conveying to the authorities there such an intimation of the origin and objects of our proceedings towards the Nepaulese, and the encouragement which it is proposed to afford to the Raja of Siccim, as shall enable them to appreciate the justice and moderation of our conduct. A similar communication might also be conveyed to the Deb Raja.³⁸

He added that the deputations to these countries need not be particularly grand:

It is not necessary that either of these communications should assume the appearance of a regular mission. The deputation of a decent person to each court, furnished with the necessary information, and known at the same time to proceed from an English authority, will enable you to convey the communication in an authentic and satisfactory manner, without the parade of a formal mission.³⁹

34 Scott to J. Monckton, Acting Secretary to Government in the Political Department, Rangpur, 28th November 1814, *PRNW*, pp. 411-412.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Scott to Monckton, Rangpur, 30th November 1814, *PRNW*, p. 412.

37 Monckton to Scott, Fort William, 6 December 1814. *PRNW*, p. 413.

38 Adam to Scott, 26 November 1814, *Papers relating to the Nepaul War* (hereafter '*PRNW*'), p. 266.

39 *Ibid.*

The letter to the Deb Raja, which was composed by the Government's Persian Department,⁴⁰ duly emphasised that:

The utmost harmony and friendship have always subsisted between the British Government and you; and I am perfectly satisfied of your disposition to maintain those relations in the true spirit of cordiality.⁴¹

The letter went on to request the Deb Raja to refuse entry to any Gorkhas seeking to enter his country “for the purpose of exciting disturbance in the British territories.”⁴²

Scott initially had difficulty in forwarding the letter. On 10 January he reported that he had had to apply for permission to the Deb Raja for permission to send a person to his court because of the “jealousy of the Bootan government inducing it to refuse admission to strangers into the interior of the country.”⁴³ He commented:

The precautions taken to prevent the entrance of strangers into Bootan rendered it necessary for me to choose between making a formal application of this nature, and sending a person in disguise; and the latter was a mode of procedure which was neither likely to prove agreeable to any person duly qualified for the duty in question, nor appeared to me to be compatible with the dignity and views of the British Government.⁴⁴

While waiting for the Deb Raja's response, he had sent a message to Bhutan via the Raja of Bijni, a small territory on the borders of Bhutan.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, he also reported difficulties in opening communications with Tibet:

I have hitherto been prevented from forwarding a letter to the Court of Lassa, from not being able to find a person who could write it in the language of Tibet. I however expect that a man who understands that dialect will arrive in the course of a few days, and his Lordship may depend

40 Persian was still the main language of diplomatic exchange in South Asia, although it seems—as will be seen below—that the Deb Raja's response was in Bengali.

41 To the Deb Raja, from his Excellency the Vice-President, 29th November 1814. *PRNW*, p. 414.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Scott to Adam, Rangpur, 10 January 1815, *PRNW*, pp. 430-431.

44 *Ibid.*

45 On the status of Bijni see Deb (1972), pp. 49-51.

upon every precaution being taken to ensure its safe and speedy conveyance to that Capital.⁴⁶

Scott added that if the Deb Raja agreed to his request to send a person to his court, then “the obstacles which at present oppose themselves to the journey to Lassa will be removed.”

The Deb Raja eventually replied to Scott in a letter received on 20 March 1815.⁴⁷ He insisted that there was no truth in the report that the Gorkhas had sent a request for military aid. At the same time, he referred to the continuing boundary disputes—which evidently were his own principal concern—and duly enclosed a passport for a trustworthy British representative to come to Bhutan so that both sides should be informed of each other’s affairs.

Selecting the messengers

Scott now had the task of selecting a suitable representative, and eventually decided on Krishnakanta Basu. Krishnakanta himself described the background in an application for a pension (translated from Bengali by Scott) which he wrote in 1821. Like Bogle’s Tibetan merchants, he observed that the contrasting climates of the plains of India and the Himalaya presented a major obstacle:

....no person at Rungpore could be found to undertake the duty, the Climate of the hilly Country being from the snow and extreme cold exceedingly hostile to the Constitutions of the natives of Bengal...⁴⁸

Religious ritual concerns were another major factor. Bengali Hindus were:

...further deterred from proceeding into those Countries by the difficulty and occasional impossibility they experience in getting those articles of provision to which they are accustomed, as well as by the manners and impure habits of the people which are so repugnant to the customs of the Hindoos that few persons of the latter religion will venture into Bhootan from fear of losing their Caste.⁴⁹

46 Scott to Adam, Rangpur, 10 January 1815, *PRNW*, pp. 430-431.

47 Sen 1942, pp. 60-61.

48 The Petition of Kishun Kunt Bose inhabitant of Baluakoudee purgannah Kassinnuggur in Zillah Idalopore. OIOC. F/4/810/21274, p. 17.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 8. The Gosains evidently did not share these ritual concerns. However, it is interesting to note an echo of similar preoccupations in the case of early 20th century Newar traders returning from Tibet to Nepal.

Krishnakanta nevertheless decided to take on the task, partly for material reasons:

Notwithstanding the above considerations your petitioner being grateful for the subsistence afforded by the Government and hopeful for future advancement and eventual benefit, bound himself with the girdle of courage and regardless of the consequences, not to say despairing of returning alive, agreed to undertake the journey.⁵⁰

It seems that he received an immediate benefit in that his salary was raised from Rs. 14 per month as a ‘Mohurrer’ (a writer in local languages) to Rs. 70 when he was in Bhutan. However, Scott confirmed that Krishnakanta had not been exaggerating when he referred to the difficulty of finding someone to undertake the journey:

For the accuracy of such parts of his petition which relate to the unwillingness displayed by the natives at Rungpore to undertake the journey to Lhasa and the danger attending to it, I can safely vouch, as no capable person but himself could be found to undertake the business and the risk from the climate at the particular season was such that thinking it not improbable that the petitioner who was ill at the time of his departure might die on the way, I sent another man to go along with him as far as Bhootan in case of the occurrence of such an accident.⁵¹

From the Deb Raja’s subsequent correspondence, it is clear that Rammohan Ray was this ‘other man’ and—particularly since he would have been senior to Krishnakanta—it is odd that Scott does not mention him by name. Very speculatively, one wonders whether this was because he was no longer in formal government service by the time he travelled to the Deb Raja’s court, and therefore had no official status.⁵²

According to Taladhar (2004, p. 18), returnees were kept in ‘ritual quarantine’ for two weeks. He adds: “The family kitchen and chapel were off-limits to them. They had only one meal a day and washed the dirty dishes themselves. They had to get a note from the royal priest detailing the procedure they had to follow to cleanse themselves. At the end of the period, they performed a purification ceremony and invited their relatives and friends to a feast.”

50 Ibid, pp. 18-19.

51 Ibid, pp. 12-13.

52 For a discussion of Rammohan’s status during this period see also pp. 39-41 of the ‘supplementary notes’ by Biswas and Ganguly in Collet (1962).

Krishnakanta's stay in Bhutan

Krishnakanta gives a vivid description of the journey in his 'Account of Bootan'. Before reaching the hills, he had to pass through the Bhutanese Duars, and he describes a series of perils in the jungles:

The jungle is of such height that an elephant or rhinoceros cannot be seen in it when standing up, and it is so full of leeches that a person cannot move a hundred yards without having his body, wherever it has been scratched by the grass, covered with these animals, so that a single man cannot get rid of them without assistance. In this jungle, when the sun shines, the heat is intolerable, and when the sun ceases to shine a person cannot remain in it without a fire on account of innumerable musquitoes [sic] and other insects with which it is filled.⁵³

His account of the terrain once he reaches the hill is more matter-of-fact, noting the various habitations that he encountered en route, the degree to which they were cultivated, and the extent to which the roads would be passable for horses or elephants.

At all events, the two men duly arrived in 'Wandipoor' (Wangdi Phodrang), and presented their credentials. The Deb Raja responded by sending a letter to Scott in Rangpur in which he acknowledged a present of five pieces of broadcloth, five coats and a telescope.⁵⁴ He said that Scott's letter to the two representatives of China—presumably the two Ambans—had been forwarded to Lhasa. The two emissaries had explained that one of them was to stay in Bhutan while the other—Rammohan Ray—was to return to Rangpur.

The rest of the letter is a clear indication of the Deb Raja's priorities inasmuch as it mainly concerns his grievance over the continuing boundary disputes with Cooch Behar and Baikunthapur. He only refers to the Nepal war—which from Scott's point of view was by far the most important matter at a hand—in a postscript. There he notes the Gorkhas had wronged the Company, according to what he had learnt from Rammohan and Krishnakanta, and he will therefore reject any Gorkha approaches in connection with the war. He then returns to the boundary disputes, requesting that Scott either come to the frontier for a local enquiry, or send Rammohan back with a clear decision in the matter.

53 Kishen Kant Bose [Krishnakanta Basu], 'Account of Bootan', 1865 edition, p. 203.

54 Deb Raja to Scott, received 12 November 1815. In Sen (1942), pp. 64-65.

In the event, rather than returning to Bhutan, Rammohan moved to Calcutta where he soon achieved prominence as the founder of the Brahma Samaj, and one of the leading Bengali intellectuals of his generation.⁵⁵ Krishnakanta was therefore left to fulfil his role as the resident Company *vakil* in Bhutan as best he could. According to his own account, this was far from being a pleasant experience:

During the period of your petitioner's residence in Bhootan, he as well as all the people who accompanied him, remained almost constantly sick, and one of the latter died from the cold and unhealthiness of the climate and owing to the want of their accustomed food, and on account of the impure habits of the people and their hostility to the Hindoo Religion, your petitioner also passed the time in a most disagreeable manner.⁵⁶

Scott later noted that Krishnakanta did not seem to “possess all the discretion requisite for such an employment.”⁵⁷ However, he went on to say that Krishnakanta's diplomatic role was in any case limited by the fact that the Bhutanese watched him with “extreme jealousy”, and he therefore had “little opportunity of learning anything except what the Bootan Government wish him to know, and which they would probably communicate at any rate”.⁵⁸ The Deb Raja had repeatedly prevented Krishnakanta from sending messengers to India, a practice which naturally limited his value as an intelligence source.⁵⁹

While Krishnakanta was in Bhutan the main events of the Nepal war unfolded elsewhere. The Company's armies met fierce Gorkha resistance in the first campaign which took place in late 1814 and early 1815.⁶⁰ However, the British General David Ochterlony had rather greater success in the second campaign which began in the autumn of 1815. By early November British and Gorkha representatives were negotiating a draft treaty at Segauli. Fighting briefly resumed in early 1816 before the treaty was signed and ratified in March, thus bringing the conflict to an end.

Krishnakanta spent all this time in Bhutan. In June 1816 Scott reported to his superiors that he was “now exceedingly desirous of returning home in consequence of continued and severe sickness”, and requested

55 There is of course an extensive literature on Rammohan's subsequent career. Classic texts include Collet (1962), and Chanda & Majumdar (1938). For a more recent study, see Robertson (1995).

56 OIOC. F/4/810/21274, pp. 19-20.

57 Scott to Adam, Rangpur 24 Sept 1816. OIOC. F/4/552, p. 112.

58 Ibid.

59 Scott to Adam, Rangpur 24 Sept 1816. OIOC. F/4/552, p. 110.

60 For a detailed account of military developments in the war see Pemble 1971.

instructions as to how he should respond.⁶¹ John Adam, the Government Secretary, duly replied that Krishnakanta could now return from Bhutan “agreeably to his own desire”.⁶² However, it seems that the Deb Raja prevented Krishnakanta from receiving Scott’s message, which was sent via a Bhutanese official since it did not contain anything of consequence, and he was still in Bhutan two months later.

After Scott had sent a further message in August, the Deb Raja responded on his own account, explaining that Krishnakanta had now recovered from his illness. Since the roads were now impassable anyway because of the rains, he requested that Krishnakanta should stay a little longer until the Maraghat border dispute had been settled.⁶³

A Chinese army in Tibet

By this time a new diplomatic crisis was beginning to unfold following news that a Chinese army led by Sai-Ch’ung-a, a senior Manchu official from Sichuan, had arrived in Tibet with orders to investigate the outcome of the Nepal war.⁶⁴ Lord Moira had been long feared that the conflict might lead to a dispute with China, which claimed Nepal as a tributary, thus imperilling Britain’s growing economic interests in East Asia. Now it seemed as though his worst fears were about to be realised. The crisis therefore reinforced the need for accurate intelligence from the Himalayan states, and the information that Krishnakanta might be able to gather in Bhutan took on a new importance.

Krishnakanta’s main contribution was a detailed report of a conversation in September 1816 with the Deb Raja’s brother which touched on developments in Tibet. The conversation was wide-ranging, but selective in that—to echo Scott’s earlier observation—the brother was presumably telling Krishnakanta what he wanted the British to know. He began with the ingratiating observation that “the Goorkha Raja was a Villain” who had “wantonly made war on the British Government”. Having found himself unsuccessful, the Raja had appealed to China for assistance, and the commander of the Chinese army had in his turn called on Bhutan to provide aid.

The Deb Raja’s reply was reportedly to the effect that “...his army consists of Bhotiahs who would die if they were sent into the plains, and

61 Scott to Adam, Rangpur, 10 June 1816. OIOC. F/4/551 13382, p. 110.

62 Adam to Scott, 22 June 1816. OIOC. F/4/551 13382, p. 115.

63 Scott to Adam, Rangpur 24 Sept 1816. OIOC. F/4/552, p. 111.

64 Fu (1966), pp. 401-402 and pp. 618-619. This episode is also discussed in Rose (1971), pp. 75-95; Lamb (1986), pp. 34-38; Richardson (1973) and Manandhar (2004), p. 196 ff. British archival sources refer to Sai-Chung’a variously as ‘Sheo Chanchoon’, ‘Teo Chang Chan’ and ‘Thee Chanchan’.

that his Country is quite destitute of supplies".⁶⁵ He went on to suggest to the Chinese general that "it is not proper to make war on the Company as many lives will be lost on either side, and that is therefore advisable for him to make peace."⁶⁶ In his own analysis, the Deb Raja's brother commented that:

We will give not assistance at all for there is a close friendship between the Company and Dhurum Raja, & as our country affords no supplies we are enabled to subsist only by means of the traffic carried on with the Company's territories.⁶⁷

If the Chinese tried to exact Bhutanese assistance by force, he would appeal to the British for aid. Playing the diplomat in his turn, Krishnakanta assured him that such aid would be forthcoming, although it is highly unlikely that the Company would in fact have risked a confrontation with China over Bhutan.

Krishnakanta's despatch also contained an amalgam of information on Chinese forces in Tibet compiled from various "persons of credit." According to his sources, the Chinese had designs on both Calcutta and Assam. Indeed, an army of about ten or twelve thousand men had already set out from Lhasa in the direction of Assam. Another army of nearly twenty thousand men had advanced towards Nepal. Making the most of all available information, he concluded with an analysis of the military implications of local market prices:

In consequence of the number of troops which have marched from Lassa to the westward, Tea has become scarce here, for this place is supplied from Lassa, and the consumption there has been greatly increased. The price is accordingly double what it was before. From this circumstance I infer that the army is of considerable strength.⁶⁸

In forwarding the report to Calcutta on 24 September, Scott commented that there was no doubt that there had been a great increase in the strength of the Chinese army in Tibet.⁶⁹ However, he rightly added the cautionary note that Krishnakanta's accounts "do not appear to be probable or consistent" in all respects, and he doubted that China really had designs

65 Translation of Enclosure in a letter from the Magistrate of Rungpore to the Political Department, dated 24th September. OIOC. F/4/552, pp.121-123.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., pp. 123-124

68 Ibid., .p. 128

69 Ibid, p. 110.

in Assam. He nevertheless observed that there had recently been a dispute between the Dharma and Deb Rajas, and there was still a risk that this would lead to civil war. If that happened:

... it seems not improbable that that one or other of the parties may call in the Chinese to their assistance and that the authority of that Government may finally be established in Bootan to the same extent as it is at present in Thibet.⁷⁰

Fortunately for all parties, the threat of Chinese intervention in both Nepal and Bhutan was soon averted. Already on 13 September, Captain Latter had been able to report that he had received favourable news from Lhasa via Sikkim to the effect that the Gorkha envoys to Sai-chung'a had been put under constraint and were now in close confinement.⁷¹ It seems that the Chinese general took a sceptical view of Gorkha claims, and blamed them rather than the British for the outbreak of the conflict. The British were able to send a series of messages explaining their view of the war, and Sai-chung'a in due course responded that he was "perfectly satisfied" with the British response.⁷²

In those circumstances there was from the British perspective no further need for Krishnakanta to remain in Bhutan, and in October 1816—no doubt much to his own relief—he was duly recalled.

The settlement of the Maraghat dispute

There remained the unfinished business of the Maraghat dispute. In 1816 the Deb Raja sent agents to Rangpur to explain the nature and ground of his claims to the territory.⁷³ At the same time, the authorities in Calcutta instructed Norman McLeod, the British Commissioner in Cooch Behar to conduct an enquiry concerning his claims.

The enquiry was eventually carried out on the orders of Scott who by that time had succeeded McLeod as Commissioner. In 1817 he decided the main part of the disputed territory had—with the exception of twenty-six isolated and very inconsiderable villages—been in the undisturbed possession of Bhutan from 1780 to 1811. Important government documents from the 1770s, which were not taken into account in 1809, expressly stated that the territory belonged to Bhutan, and it was duly returned to the Deb Raja.⁷⁴ This relatively generous attitude may in part

⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 114-115.

⁷¹ Latter to Adam, Titalia, 13 September 1816. OIOC F/4 552.

⁷² Latter to John Adam, Titalia, 30 October 1816. OIOC, F/4/552, p. 175

⁷³ OIOC F/4/771/20906.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

have been a reflection of the Company's gratitude at Bhutan's neutrality during the Nepal war.

In 1818 year Krishnakanta was given the task of staking out the new Maraghat boundary with bamboos and transferring the disputed land to a Bhutanese official, thus bringing the affair to a close.⁷⁵

Krishnakanta's contribution to Himalayan studies

Krishnakanta remained in the service of the East India Company until 1821, still working for Scott in his capacity as Commissioner in Cooch Behar. At this point he announced his desire to resign "on account of urgent private affairs" and, as noted above, applied for a pension.⁷⁶ Scott duly forwarded Krishnakanta's application to Calcutta along with two of the products of his stay in Bhutan. These were his 'Account of Bootan', which Scott had himself translated from Bengali, and his 'Grammar and Vocabulary of the Bootan Language'. Scott's accompanying letter vouched for the facts of the case, as represented in Krishnakanta's letter.

The Governor-General in Council eventually decided that Krishnakanta's length of service did not entitle him to a pension. However, the Council nevertheless decided to present him with a "pecuniary donation" as a "recompense for his trouble" and "in consideration of the zeal and industry displayed by him in compiling the vocabulary and interesting account of Bhootan".⁷⁷

The 'Account of Bhutan'

Krishnakanta's report gained a wider audience in 1825, when it was published under the title "Some Account of the country of Bhútán" in *Asiatic Researches*, the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The Asiatic Society was the leading learned society in India, and played a major role in the development of Western scholarship on the region.⁷⁸

The only previous published description of Bhutan in English had appeared in Turner's *Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo*

75 Gupta (1974), pp. 67-70.

76 Scott to George Swinton, Cooch Behar, 21 September 1821. OIOC. F/4/810/21274, pp. 15-16.

77 Swinton to Scott, Calcutta, 24 November 1821. Ibid, pp, 130-131. Scott was invited to state his opinion "as to the extent of the remuneration which it might be proper to grant him". I have not been able to find Scott's answer in the British Library archives but Gupta (1974, p. 68), perhaps drawing on records available in India, says that the figure was Rs 2,000.

78 On the scholarly contributions of the Asiatic Society see Kejariwal (1988).

Lama in Tibet, which had come out in 1800. Turner's book is written with a degree of literary flourish, and represents one of the earliest examples of Western romantic travel writing on the Himalayan region. Krishnakanta's Account on the other hand is a much more workaday document, crammed with economic and political detail: it is more of a proto-gazetteer than a literary text.

The Account begins with a short summary of the arrival from Tibet of the first 'Dhurma Raja' (Zhabdrung), the foundation of the Bhutanese state, and the Zhabdrung's subsequent reincarnations. The descriptions of the court summarise the roles of the main officials, together with their sources of income—information that would have been important to Krishnakanta in his official capacity. Examples include the specialists who are responsible for the court's external correspondence in Bengali and Persian, and are seen as people of high status:

Kaiti are the Bengal and Persian Secretaries. They get each 2 lbs of rice and have each two Poes [described elsewhere as 'fighting messengers'], and receive from the Soubahs and Pillos about 1,000 Rupees, and also something for causes and liberty in the lowlands.⁷⁹

Krishnakanta took a critical view of Bhutanese politics noting that:

The intestine broils, which so frequently occur in Bootan, are usually occasioned either by the Deb Raja doing something contrary to custom, or by his remaining too long in his office, in which case the Zimpens, Pillos, & c., assemble and require him to resign, and in the event of refusal a battle ensues.⁸⁰

As Scott had noted, these internal disputes at the top of the government made Bhutan potentially vulnerable to Chinese intervention. The lower ranks of the administration were unstable for similar reasons:

When a person gets a good appointment he is not allowed to keep it long, but at the annual religious festivals frequent removals and arguments take place. The Deb Raja himself after a time is liable to be thrust out on some such a pretence as that of his having infringed established customs, and unless he have either Tongso or Paro Pillo on his side, he must, if required to do so, resign his place or risk the result of a civil war: on this account the Deb Raja strives, by

⁷⁹ 'Account' (1865), p. 192.

⁸⁰ 'Account' (1865), p. 196

removals and changes at the annual festivals, to fill the principal offices with persons devoted to his interest. The Booteahs are full of fraud and intrigue...⁸¹

In his capacity as a Company official, Krishnakanta naturally was interested in the country's imports and exports:

Bootan produces abundance of tangun horses, blankets, walnuts musk, chowries or cow tails, oranges and manjeet (madder) which the inhabitants sell at Rungpore; and thence take back woollen cloth, pattus, indigo, sandal, red sandal, asafoetida, nutmegs, cloves, nakhi and coarse cotton cloths, of which they use a part in Bootan and send the rest to Lhasa, and from the latter country they import tea, silver, gold and embroidered silk goods... Besides the Officers of Government and their servants no person can trade with a foreign country, nor can any of the inhabitants sell tangun mares without the Deb Raja's permission.⁸²

As discussed above, Krishnakanta felt that the Bhutanese lifestyle was incompatible with Hindu ritual requirements, but he nevertheless thought that he detected similarities with his own religion:

The religion of the Booteahs assimilates in some points with that of the Hindoos; they worship the images of the deities, count their beads at prayers, and offer clarified butter to the gods by throwing it on the fire... The image of Laberem buche [Lama Rinpoche?] resembles that of Ram; his countenance is similar, and he holds in his hands a bow and arrow; the Bootan deity is, however, made of copper and gilt. There are also many images of deities with four arms, the manufacture of which is constantly going on in the palace, and together with the subsequent ceremonies, occasion the chief expense of the government.

Overall, the Account naturally reflects the time at which it was written, and must be read with the particular political and religious preoccupations of the author in mind. At the time, it represented a significant advance of Western knowledge of the Himalaya. In 1865, some 40 years after it was first composed, it was still considered to be of sufficient merit to justify republication under the slightly different title "Account of Bootan" in a collection of reports on *Political Missions to Bootan*. Clearly it needs to

81 'Account' (1865), pp. 201-203.

82 'Account' (1865), p. 198.

be balanced by additional sources from Bhutan itself,⁸³ but it is still of value as an important historical record.

The Grammar and Vocabulary of the Bootan Language

Scott placed a high value on Krishnakanta's Grammar and Vocabulary commenting that:

The chief merit of the performance is the perfect accuracy with which the pronunciation of the Letters and words has been marked, being likely to be impaired by being transposed into the European Character by a person not conversant in such matters.⁸⁴

At the time Tibetan studies was in its infancy, and Krishnakanta was studying the language entirely on his own. However, rudimentary his researches may have been, they amounted to a work of true originality.

A manuscript copy of the Grammar and Vocabulary survives in the National Library in Calcutta.⁸⁵ It bears the title in Bengali, *Bhot Deshiya Bhashar Vyakarana O Shabda*, and consists of 216 pages, of which the first 40 are an introduction to the Tibetan alphabet and grammar. The remainder list Tibetan words in Tibetan script with their equivalent in Bengali. A bibliographic note at the library states that this version was a copy made under the superintendence of the Baptist missionary William Carey (1761-1834) in 1821/22. The original had been sent back to the Political Department in 1834, and may therefore still exist in the Indian National Archives.

According to Scott, an earlier copy had been sent to Rev Friedrich Christian Gotthelf Schroeter.⁸⁶ Schroeter was a German Lutheran in the service of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) who studied Tibetan in Titalia from 1816 until his death in 1820, and started work on a Tibetan dictionary.⁸⁷ His main source was an earlier manuscript Tibetan-Italian dictionary prepared in Lhasa by the Capuchin missionary Orazio della Penna

83 For a study making use of such sources see Aris (1994).

84 Scott to Swinton, Cooch Behar, 21 September 1821. OIOC. F/4/810/21274, pp. 13-14.

85 Chattopadhyaya 1984, p. iii. I am grateful to Géza Bethlenfalvy for drawing this reference to my attention. I have not myself been able to examine the manuscript, and the details that follow come from the same reference.

86 Swinton to Captain Lockett, Secretary to the Council of the College of Fort William, 24 November 1821. OIOC. F/4/810/21274, pp. 132-133.

87 On Schroeter and the Serampore dictionary, see Bray 2008. Titalia is now known as Tetulia, and is in northern Bangladesh.

(1680-1745). However, he supplemented della Penna's work with his own enquiries, and therefore presumably made use of Krishnakanta's vocabulary.

After Schroeter's death his unfinished manuscript came into the hands of the government, which had paid his salary while he was working on the dictionary. The Governor-general in council appointed Carey to evaluate Schroeter's draft: he duly recommended publication, and was given the task of revising the text for the press together with his younger colleague John Clark Marshman (1794-1877). In 1826 the final version was published in Serampore with the title *A Dictionary of the Bhotanta, or Boutan Language*. Despite the title, the work is explicitly a dictionary of Tibetan.

The Serampore dictionary is a composite work bearing the mark of at least four contributors: della Penna, Schroeter, Carey and Marshman. It is entirely possible that at least some of Krishnakanta's contributions may have found their way into the final text either via Schroeter or via Carey, both of whom had copies of his manuscript.

One feature of the Serampore dictionary is that it contains repeated references to the Hindu equivalents of Buddhist deities. To take a random example, page 142 contains the definitions 'Krishna' for *dgra po*, 'Indra' for *dgra mtshing 'dzin* and 'Ganesha' for *dgra lta can*. These definitions could scarcely have come from della Penna from his time in Lhasa. It is possible that they might have been introduced by Schroeter, Carey or Marshman, all of whom worked in India. However, since Krishnakanta was a devout Hindu, he is perhaps the more likely candidate. A definitive answer can only come from a careful comparison of Krishnakanta's manuscript with the Serampore dictionary. At all events, it is clear that his pioneering linguistic researches deserve further study.

Conclusions

In his 1821 pension application, Krishnakanta presented his own achievements in the self-effacing manner of a lowly supplicant seeking the munificence of his superiors. Even if we take this humility at face value, it is clear that he deserves respect for—as he puts it—binding himself with the “girdle of courage” and travelling to territories that were then considered remote and inhospitable. Despite the apparent discomforts of his stay in Bhutan, he proved to be a keen and diligent observer. He merits an honourable place in the lineage both of officials and of scholars who worked in the Himalayan region.

In placing him within this lineage, it is appropriate to look both forward and back. As a source of intelligence, Krishnakanta was in many ways a successor to the 18th and early 19th century Gosains and Kashmiri

merchants who travelled between India and Tibet, and provided news and information to officials, traders and ordinary people on both sides of the Himalaya. However, he contrasts with them in that he had no previous experience or personal contacts in the region, and was a full-time government servant. In many respects, he was as much of an outsider in Bhutan as a British official would have been.

His Account, though originally written in Bengali, addressed the kinds of question that a European observer would have asked, and was readily adapted to the purposes of the Asiatic Society. Similarly, his Grammar and Vocabulary was compiled at a time when Western scholars, officials and missionaries were in the early stage of developing a more systematic understanding of other Asian languages. Like Rammohan Ray, he belonged to the first generation of Bengali intellectuals who were both influenced by and contributed to Western learning.

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