

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06135-3 - An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama, in Tibet: Containing a Narrative of a Journey through Bootan, and Part of Tibet

Samuel Turner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PART I.

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY

FROM

BENGAL TO TASSISUDON, &c.

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06135-3 - An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama, in Tibet: Containing a Narrative of a Journey through Bootan, and Part of Tibet

Samuel Turner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The material originally positioned here is too large for reproduction in this reissue. A PDF can be downloaded from the web address given on page iv of this book, by clicking on 'Resources Available'.

NARRATIVE, &c.

BENGAL.

CHAPTER I

Leave Calcutta—proceed through Plassey to Moorshedabad—cross the Ganges near Bauleah—arrive at Rungpore—Calamatty.—Tuffoon, or tremendous Hurricane.—Mungulhaul, respectable for its Manufactory.—Zeenkaubs.—First View of the Mountains of Bootan.—Cooch Bahar.—Bungalo—singular Custom in this District—extensive Woods—Practice of felling Timber—wild Elephants—Pine-apples, present Abundance of—first Introduction into India.—Inroad of the Moguls into Assam—Fate of the Invaders.—Chichacotta.—Frontier of Bootan.

THE beginning of the year 1783, I received my final orders and instructions, and left Calcutta, to execute the service which was intrusted to my care. Lieutenant Samuel Davis, and Mr. Robert Saunders, were included in the commission with which I was honoured, and appointed to accompany me, the former as Draftsman and Surveyor, the latter

in the capacity of Surgeon. I had every reason to congratulate myself on the choice which had been made of these gentlemen as my associates; and in their kind and friendly attention, I had the satisfaction to find a constant source of comfort, amidst all the toils and difficulties of a long and tedious journey.

Notice of the Governor General's intention to send a Deputation to the Court of Teshoo Loomboo, had been previously given to the Daeb Raja, the independent chieftain of the intermediate mountains, which separate Bengal from Tibet. This measure was indispensably necessary, since, without his permission and assistance, it was impossible to accomplish the object of my mission.

In the first part of my journey, as far as the Company's most northern station, nothing occurred which deserves particular notice. I ascended my palanquin at Ghyretty, on the opposite side of the river Bhagirathy, the name of the principal branch of the Ganges, which at this place bears the descriptive appellation of the Hoogly river; an appellation given to it by the first European inhabitants of Bengal, and since retained in the common modes of speech and writing. Hoogly was anciently the principal port and mart of this province. I forded the Bhagirathy at Aughadeep; thence travelling over the island of Cossimbazar, across the plains of Plassey, rendered ever memorable by the brilliant and decisive victory of Lord Clive, and passing near the suburbs of Moorshedabad, I arrived on the banks of the Ganges, almost opposite to Bauleah. After ferrying across the river, I traversed as wide a space of flat and fertile country as that which I had already passed; and at the expiration of four days from the commencement

B E N G A L .

5

of my journey, was set down at Rungpore, which is distant two hundred and sixty miles from Calcutta.

Upon my arrival at Rungpore, I found my progress impeded for the present, in consequence of the indispensable necessity of obtaining previous license for our admission into Bootan from the Daeb Raja, without whose special authority no person is permitted to enter the passes of the frontier mountains. Having therefore waited for an answer to the letters which I had dispatched to acquaint the Daeb Raja with our intended departure for his dominions, and received his passports, I proceeded on my journey from Rungpore, accompanied by Mr. Davis and Mr. Saunders.

We travelled in our palanquins; the road lay through an open level country, inferior to no part of Bengal in cultivation and fertility. The chief produce was rice, of which it yields two harvests in the year, and sometimes an intermediate crop of mustard seed: a great quantity of good tobacco grows also in this district, and some indigo. We came at noon to Calamatty, a plain of wide extent, sixteen miles from Rungpore, and having pitched our tents near the centre of it, with a small village upon our right, and a fordable brook in front, we halted for the remainder of the day. At night there came on an excessively high wind and heavy fall of rain, attended with thunder and lightning, which was succeeded at break of day, on Wednesday the 7th, by another storm equally violent and awful.

It may be observed, that this sort of tremendous hurricane, which is not unfrequent at this season of the year, is distinguished by the name of *Tuffoon* in Asia, and is known among the English in Bengal

by the familiar appellation of *North-wester*. It is a storm of extreme violence, but of short duration; rarely coming on in the open day, or twice during the absence of the sun, but usually commencing about the time of the evening twilight.

These storms rage with greatest force between the passage of the sun from the vernal equinox to the summer solstice. His vertical power then loads the atmosphere with humidity; and his action diminishing as he goes down, a dense cloud advances from the edge of the horizon, which is seen to come on with slow and solemn motion, till it has attained a certain altitude, when a most tremendous gust of wind bursts forth at once with sudden fury, frequently tearing up trees by the roots, and carrying away before it every light substance it can take up; filling the whole surrounding atmosphere with obscurity. A burst of loud thunder, with flashes of vivid lightning, next succeeds, which seems to clear a passage for a torrent of the heaviest rain, that descends with wonderful impetuosity. After this commotion of the elements, which seldom exceeds half an hour in duration, has subsided, a tranquil, temperate season ensues; all oppression is removed, and the air refreshed and cooled: a most grateful close, in this torrid region, to an intensely hot day.

We were detained on Wednesday the 7th of May, by waiting for a part of our baggage, which had not yet come up from Rungpore; and in addition to this impediment, many of the coolies, or porters, had left us in the course of the night, so that we were unable to go on until Thursday.

At about ten o'clock in the forenoon of the following day, having

B E N G A L.

7

received a reinforcement to our numbers from Rungpore, we left Calamatty plain, and half an hour after passed Saftabarry, crossing a wide nullah, or creek, over which was thrown an elevated bamboo bridge, constructed upon forked props. Bamboos resting in the fork, and covered with split bamboos woven into mats, composed the platform. It was strong enough for foot passengers, but unsafe, as I should suppose, for carriages, or cattle. On the opposite side of the river was an extended high bank, which had the appearance of having been intended for a line of defence. It was situated about two hundred paces from the edge of the nullah. Its sides formed a square, and at the extremities of the embankment, on the side facing the plain, there seemed to be the vestiges of two bastions. We continued our way, passing at noon by Ootney nullah, and afterwards came to Mungulhaut, a large manufacturing town, twelve miles from Calamatty, situated on the south side of the river Durlah, which divides the district of Cooch Bahar from that of Rungpore. The inhabitants of Mungulhaut seem to pay more attention to the comforts and commodiousness of living, than those of any other town I have seen in India. Their houses, composed of mats inserted between frames of bamboo, were neatly thatched, and each had a portion of land encircled with a bamboo palisade. The streets were spacious, and the principal one conducted us to the river side, whence we ferried across, and encamped at Ghiddildow, upon the northern bank. We saw many boats of large burthen upon the river, which, added to the striking neatness and regularity of the town, gave it an air of industry and traffic. Coarse cotton cloths I understand to be the staple commodity; and that they furnish the most

considerable part of the large returning cargo, which is carried by the Booteea caravan annually from Rungpore.

We found the Zeenkaubs^a and their party, who had been lately deputed by the Daeb Raja to the Governor Général, waiting at Mungulhaut. Their departure from Calcutta had been accelerated, that they might conduct me to the capital of their master. They came to me in the afternoon; and, as they were encumbered with much baggage, and many attendants, to avoid the inconvenience of travelling with so large a party, I persuaded them to go on before us. They accepted my advice; and we parted, not to meet again, as I expected, until we reached Chichacotta.

Departing from Ghiddildow, we continued to pursue the course of the river Durlah for some distance, until it turned short to the left. We then proceeded through a very highly improved and fertile country, where the luxuriant growth of the trees, among which the most conspicuous were the sooparee^b, semmel^c, and bannian^d, intermixed with clusters of the bamboo^e, and the rich verdure of the fields, covered with rice almost ready to shoot into ear, presented on every side a most pleasing prospect. We came late to the ground on which we intended to encamp, and it was much later when our provisions and baggage arrived. The tents were pitched upon an open eminence, overlooking the villages of Pahargunge on the left, and Balladinga

^a Zeenkaubs are officers of government under the immediate command of the Daeb Raja, a large party of whom are always personally attendant on him, and ready to be employed, either in a civil or military capacity, as he directs.

^b Areca cathecu. *Linn.*

^c Bombax pentandrium. *Linn.*

^d Ficus indica. *Linn.* Bhur, *Ind.*

^e Arundo bambos. *Linn.*

B E N G A L.

9

on the right, ten miles from Ghiddildow ; immediately in the front was a large jeel, or marshy lake, in the form of a crescent. The ground on the opposite side, rising as it receded, was covered with a variety of shrubs, and exquisitely adorned with a wild but lively verdure.

The country through which we advanced on the following day, had less cultivation than that we had just left. We ferried over the river Maunsi, about half a mile above the point where it meets with the Toorsha ; after their confluence, they assume the name of Neelcoomar, and shaping their course through Baharbund, fall with their united streams into the Berhampooter^f. As the day dawned, we obtained a transient view of the summits of the mountains of Bootan, which resembled a deep shadow on the distant horizon ; but the sun soon raised up an impenetrable veil of thick vapour from the marshes at their base, and they were no longer visible. The vastness and obscurity of this enormous boundary, remote and indistinct as it appeared, when it first burst upon the sight in ill-defined and fantastic shapes, could not but excite very powerful emotions in the mind ; and I looked upon the formidable barrier I had to pass, with mingled awe and admiration.

On our approach to Bahar we were met, at a short distance from the banks of the Toorsha, by the Aumils, or principal officers of the revenue, who conducted us to a spot of ground that bore the ruinous remains of a large bungalo^g, fourteen miles from the camp near Balladinga. Their preference of this spot arose not from its superior plea

^f Properly Brahmá pootra, offspring of Brahma.

^g This is an appellation given to any single building covered with thatch. It has its name from the province of Bengal, where they are most in use, and whence other countries have borrowed the mode of constructing them.

C

santness, but because it had been inhabited by the first English gentlemen who resided here, before these districts were reduced under entire subjection to the Company. A lofty artificial bank of earth, which still surrounded it, shewed that its original proprietor chose rather to rely for his security on the strength of his fortifications, than on the fidelity of the people. The ground around it was extremely low, and the situation acknowledged to be singularly unhealthy; but as we intended only a short stay, we set up our tents, and in the course of the day a messenger arrived, with offers of assistance, from Nazir Deo^h. We also received visits from the Dewanⁱ, the Buckshee^k, and other officers belonging to the household of the Raja, who offered me every service in their power: indeed we stood much in need of their assistance, to supply the deficiency of carriage, which, at every stage, occasioned us much perplexity and trouble.

The Raja of Bahar, an infirm old man, was absent at a place called Bahrissar, about ten miles off, performing his devotions. I was strongly pressed by his officers to wait his return; but I excused myself in consideration of the advanced season, and resolutely withstood the solicitations, both of his servants and of my own, who were equally urgent for my stay.

In the district of Cooch Bahar an usage of a very singular kind has prevailed from remote antiquity, and I was assured by many of the inhabitants of its actual existence at this day. If a Reiat, or peasant, owes a sum of money, and has not the ability to satisfy his creditor, he is compelled to give up his wife as a pledge, and possession of her

^h Superindant.ⁱ Treasurer.^k Paymaster.