

## Trade Politics Between British And The Dogras In Ladakh (19<sup>th</sup> Century)

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### *Abstract*

*The recent events leading to the standoff between India and China in the Galwan valley has brought forward the significant role a place like Ladakh can play in the present day geo politics. Strategically Ladakh is the only place in India, whose territorial boundary extends from LOC (Line of Control) to LAC (Line of Actual Control). This geographical location of Ladakh has capacitated it in acquiring such strategic importance in the modern times.*

*However, as we delve on the past, we find that the very geographical location of Ladakh has shaped its history and helped it evolve as an important centre on the commercial and political map of western Himalayas by the nineteenth century. Reflecting on some important events that took place in Ladakh in the nineteenth century finds relevance in understanding the present day geo political scenario.*

*Nineteenth century is a very significant period in the history of Ladakh. It was the period when Dogras disturbed the peaceful and independent existence with its subjugation in 1842. The period also witnessed a greater external intervention with the expanding colonial influence in the western Himalayas. This exposed Ladakh to a bigger political arena where two great powers of the Dogras and the British were already contesting and contending with each other in a diplomatic and judicious manner. The fallout of this contact with the external powers can be reckoned with such episode, when Ladakh's political frontiers got expanded and retreated depending on the colonial aspirations and Dogra interest. In this political imbroglio that emerged between the Dogras and the British centred around Ladakh, trade occupied a key element.*

*The paper attempts to assess these political development from the commercial perspective and underscore this centrality of a region which now lies at the periphery. The investigation in these events is expected to unravel the importance of commercial position of Ladakh which stands battered in the present day geo political discourses.*

*For the bulk of this paper, I have used archival sources from both National and State Archives of Jammu and Kashmir. Travelogues of late nineteenth century also constitute an important primary source for this work.*

**Keywords:** *Ladakh, Dogras, Western Tibet, Karakoram, Shawl wool, Kashmir, Boundary.*

### **TRADE POLITICS BETWEEN BRITISH AND THE DOGRAS IN LADAKH (19TH CENTURY)**

The Strategic position of Ladakh is well recognised in the present day geo-political scenario of India, gathering more attention after the Galwan debacle that took place between Indian and Chinese forces in the eastern Ladakh in June 2020. In view of overemphasising on this aspect of Ladakh's identity, one very important attribute

of Ladakh's historical position pertaining to its commercial significance remained neglected. This historical identity of Ladakh is revealed to the best of understanding by investigating the events that took place in the western Himalayas with the expansion of Dogra power and the growing British influence.

Though the strategic importance of Ladakh for the two external forces prevailed in the nineteenth century also, but this consideration was accompanied with their respective commercial interest as well. In the present day discourse centred around Ladakh, this aspect of Ladakh's identity stands eroded.

This paper provides a reflection on the political developments taking place in the western Himalayas in the nineteenth century, particularly centred around Ladakh, which are crucial in highlighting the region's economic importance. In light of the current circumstances, it is necessary to investigate this aspect of Ladakh's historical identity, because certain past events are essential to comprehend the current state of affairs.

'One of the most difficult place for habitation', a perception held commonly by the people about Ladakh based on its topography, sparse vegetation, thin air, highly elevated lands and freezing temperature. With limited scope for production, it presents a picture of a region which is incapacitated to perform any substantial role in the political and commercial arena. However the very geographical position with elevated terrain engendered such environment and conditions which attributed in the emergence of Ladakh as an important stake holder in the western Himalayan politics.

The purpose of this article is to shed light on how a place manages to become a significant hub for trade and strategy despite several physical obstacles. Such physical constraints and obstacles were not daunting for the neighbouring regions of Ladakh, who formulated their policies so as to gain the maximum advantage of its commercial and strategic potentials. Within this framework, the nineteenth century became the most significant period in Ladakh's history, when its political boundary was delineated in response to the commercial aspiration of the British and the Dogras.

There were two important geographical aspects of the region which worked in tandem in securing the important position for Ladakh in the commercial network of the western Himalayas. These are; the high altitude Himalayan valleys, which served as a perfect place for the breeding ground for the goats and sheep from where the shawl industries of Kashmir received their raw wool, and its location which placed Ladakh astride an important trade route between India and central Asia.

### **NORTHERN PROFILE: KARAKORAM RANGE**

Ladakh lies in the western Himalayas in the extreme north of India, in present times as a newly framed union territory in the Union of India. The region is situated between 32.15 to 36 degrees latitude and 75.15 to 80.15 longitudes. The elevation of the region which is quite high varies with Leh the capital which lies at the altitude of 11,500 ft, making it one of the highest inhabited cities of the world. The most striking feature of the Ladakh landscape is the mountains. The country contains 'a great portion of what is the biggest massif of the mountains in the world, the Karakoram' (Hassnain 1997:8). The term Karakoram traces its origin in the Turkic language, signifying the 'Black Mountain' (Cunningham 1970:45) as in some regions it was known by native terms, e.g. in Baltistan, it was known as 'Mustang' i.e. ice mountain and 'Bolor' mountains (Gazetteer 1908: 434). The earliest reference on Karakoram is found in the ancient geography of India, known as 'Karsnagiri' (Law 1954:18). But it was the British explorers (Moorcroft in 1820, Hayward and Montgomerie's survey from 1855-1865) who popularized the nomenclature of 'Karakoram' assigned to these mountains which formed the natural boundary of Ladakh (Burrard 1929: 278). Ladakh lies to the southern part of the Karakoram in an extension of Kailash range.

Identifying these mountains as mere natural boundaries of India will reduce its significance. Rather, their importance is immensely recognised in shaping the history of Ladakh, a region lying in the foothills of these two ranges. The historical relevance of these mountains are acknowledged more for providing Ladakh's linkages to central Asia and Tibet, than for limiting the connectivity of the region to the outside world.

The natural breakages in these rocky mountains, the frozen river beds in winter, and the traverse valleys between the ranges, accompanied by human desire for scientific exploration all contributed in dispelling the appellation of 'isolation' and 'inaccessibility' to Ladakh in the past.

It is a common understanding among many scholars that mountain ranges act as a barrier and at times separate civilizations. Mountains do act as a big constrains in the flow of civilization and culture making it a micro world in itself. From a cursory glance Ladakh too seems to have existed in such a seclusions being surrounded by the high mountains, due to which its ties with the outside world appears minimal.

However, no matter how restrictive the high mountains must have been in facilitating the interaction of Ladakh with outside world, yet this relative isolation did not make Ladakh a complete Cul-de-sac. The Karakoram mountains facilitated the flow of goods since pre historic period. The evidence of their being traversed for trade network has been traced to the Neolithic sites of Kashmir. The well-established lapidary industry found at the Neolithic sites of Burzahom and Gufkharal in Kashmir, used to get most of its semi- precious stones from central Asia, which found its way through Ladakh (Lahiri 1992:153). According to Harjit Singh, the linkage provided by Ladakh in India's central Asian trade was so important, that even after economic changes were brought by colonialism; Ladakh continued to be an important link in the communication system of Asia (Singh 1976:70).

### **EASTERN LADAKH: ROUTES AND TRADE**

The routes connecting Ladakh from the eastern frontier has its own significance from the commercial point of view. The trade taking place from this part of the country involved the 'shawl wool'.<sup>1</sup> This route connected Ladakh with Naris-Skor-Sum in the western Tibet, the region which was the main supplier of 'shawl wool' to the industries of Kashmir, on which the economy of Kashmir depended since the medieval time.

Kashmir was celebrated all over the world for its shawl, which was the main source of income for a large section of people whose livelihood depended on the shawl industry. But it's an irony that the product for which Kashmir was known in the world so much so that the wool itself came to known as 'Kashmere', was not produced in Kashmir,

The flow of 'shawl wool' <sup>1</sup>to Kashmir, became one of the most important determinants, in shaping and regulating its political ties with Ladakh, precisely from the seventeenth century onwards. It was in the period (1679-1684), that Ladakh witnessed an invasion from Tibet, known in its history as the Tibeto-Mongol invasion, for the invading contingent included both Tibetan and Mongol forces. Like the many early invasions that Ladakh faced from Kashmir, this too was a raid of little political significance. Though the Ladakhi forces were completely defeated and the Tibetan aggression could only be contained by seeking the timely assistance from Kashmir, at that time as a province of the Mughal empire. The bargain struck by Kashmir with Ladakh for providing

<sup>1</sup> The wool consisted of raw unprocessed wool called 'Pashmina' extracted from under fleece of the goats reared in the high-elevated areas of Western Tibet. It also included another material called 'Toosh' or 'Tus', often referred to as 'aasli' or genuin 'Tus', a fibre even softer then the ordinary Pashmina also had considerable commercial value. This is extracted primarily from the Chiru or Tibetan antelope. (See Rizvi 1999) rather Kashmir had to depend on Ladakh, western Tibet and central Asia for the raw wool (Keenan 1989:175).

the timely assistance, culminated into a treaty known as the 'treaty of Temmisgang'. This tripartite treaty concluded at the end of the battle left a proverbial impact on the economic history of Ladakh. Its implication resulted in the establishment of the commercial ties between Ladakh, Kashmir and Tibet on such a pattern that it continued for years to come.

The shawl industry in Kashmir achieved its highest watermark during the Mughal period (1586-1758) (Zutshi 2003:81). Since the beginning, the dependence of the Kashmir shawl industry on Ladakh for the supply of the wool had been established. So when Ladakh sought the help of Kashmir to drive away the Tibetan army, the Mughal governors came forward to capitalize the opportunity to their benefit. Though there were many clauses to the treaty which was intended to determine their political ascendancy over the rulers of Ladakh. But, the greatest achievement for Kashmir was the acquisition of monopoly over the 'shawl wool' produced in Ladakh as well as from the provinces of western Tibet. 'It was agreed in the treaty that the 'shawl wool' from western Tibet (Naris-Skor-Sum) will not be sold to any other country then Kashmir. Only the court merchants of Ladakh will be allowed to Rudok (in western Tibetan region) for the purchase of wool which in turn will be sold only to the Kashmiri merchants, four of whom were stationed at Spithub near Leh and only they could take it further to Kashmir (Ahmad 1968:352-353).' It was laid down that no other Kashmiri was to be admitted to the wool producing areas, nor were these court merchants allowed to carry the wool to Kashmir themselves (Rizvi 1999: 54-55).

After the Mughals, the political power in Kashmir kept changing. During such phase of transition, its ties with Ladakh remained unchanged, mainly due to the continuation of one important postulate of the 'treaty of Timmisgang' which granted monopoly to the Kashmiri traders in the wool trade. Even when Kashmir faced such political vicissitudes, of passing from the hands of the Mughals to Afghans (1753), Sikhs (1819) and thence to the Dogras (1846), the wool trade continued uninterrupted. Authorities at Ladakh also made sure that the 'shawl wool' is supplied only to Kashmir and if an attempt is made to divert it to some other destination, it was punished by confiscation, as observed by Moorcroft, when he visited Ladakh in 1820. (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1989: 347).

Likewise the Tibetan authorities also strictly upheld the postulate laid down regarding the sale of wool to the Kashmiri merchants. When the *garpon* (governor) of Gartok (western Tibet), sold a little amount of raw wool to Moorcroft,<sup>2</sup> after getting a bribe from him during his Mansarovar visit in 1812, he (*garpon*) was arrested for the breach of law and was imprisoned for three years (Rizvi 1999: 56).

Hence, the stability in the ties between Ladakh and Kashmir depended on the trade in 'shawl wool'. It was not much of a consideration for the Kashmir governors, whether the ruler of Ladakh adhered to the conditions acknowledging their supremacy as long as the flow of 'shawl wool' remained uninterrupted.

In the framework of this tripartite treaty, lied the grounds based on which the future ties of Ladakh with Tibet was also established. 'It was agreed that the king of Ladakh, will send offering to Tibet for the salutation of New Year placing himself under the protection of the Dalia Lama. The offering were to be sent to Tibet along with other presents every three year (Ahmad 1968: 354).' This arrangement was known as *lopchak*. Although the content of the articles to be included in the mission was not specified, yet over the period standard sets of goods viz., 'gold, perfume, saffron and cotton cloths etc came to be included in *lopchak* (Ahmad 1968:354).

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<sup>2</sup>Moorcroft was the first Englishman to reach Mansarovar.

Throughout the stay of *lopchak* mission at Lhasa, all the logistic services in the form of essential provisions and the *beggar* (voluntary transport) services to the mission coming from Ladakh was provided by the Tibetan government.

Thus, the monopoly of Kashmir in the 'shawl wool' trade and the *lopchak* became the two determinants in shaping the ties of Ladakh with Kashmir and Tibet. Ladakh's role became cardinal in this link between the western Tibet and Kashmir as an intermediary between the producer of 'shawl wool' and its consumer; the shawl factories of Kashmir. And it was this central position of Ladakh, which became an important factor in drawing the attention of two external powers of the Dogras and the British towards the region in the nineteenth century.

### **DOGRA CONQUEST OF LADAKH**

Nineteenth century is one of the most significant periods in the history of Ladakh. It was the period when the Dogras ended the independent position of Ladakh with its subjugation in 1842.<sup>3</sup> Not only was the political status of Ladakh was changed, but for the first time it was also exposed to a bigger political arena, where the two great powers of Dogras and the British were already contesting and converging with each other in a diplomatic and judicious manner. And at this stage, Ladakh too got involved in the political imbroglio between these two powers.

Precursor to this important event can be found in the atmosphere of uncertainties and apprehensions that had started appearing among the Ladakhis with the emergence of the Sikh power in Kashmir in 1819 CE. Prevalence of such condition is inferred from the records of Moorcroft, when a plea seeking British protection for Ladakh was made through him, during his visit in the year 1820 (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1989: 420). This fear was found on the grounds, that the Sikh governors of Kashmir had started demanding tribute from Ladakh, but its acceptance was rarely followed owing to its distant location (Cunningham 1849: 213). The kings of Ladakh lived in continual apprehension of the invasion of the Sikh governors of Kashmir, but the governors of that province were so frequently changed and watched over by the Dogra chief Gulab Singh<sup>4</sup> and his brothers to be able to carry out such a design and Dhyani Singh the brother of Gulab Singh who was serving under the Sikhs had resolved that no one but his brother should obtain the possession of Ladakh and Baltistan (Cunningham 1970: 331-332). In this anticipation, the grounds for a favourable condition was made in the Sikh durbar with the collective efforts of all the three Dogra brothers (Suchet Singh being the third one), which helped Gulab Singh not only to extend his authority over the brother Rajpoot but also eventually to Ladakh (Cunningham 1849: 190).

Gulab Singh succeeded in ingratiating the support of both Sikh and the British, for carrying his expedition to Ladakh. He made a confidential enquiry to the company and on being informed that the British government had no objection to his expedition, a well-equipped force was prepared under General Zorawar Singh to carry his

<sup>3</sup> Ladakh had existed as an independent kingdom since the foundation of Lhachen dynasty (tenth century CE) by king Spal-Ki-Gon, whose origin is traced from the family of Strongstan Gampo (569-650 CE), the first Buddhist king of Tibet. The subjugation of Ladakh by the Dogras was completed within a span of eight years (1834-1842). (See Angmo 2022)

<sup>4</sup> Gulab Singh (1792-1858) started his service under Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1809 and was granted the independent possession of Jammu in 1820 with hereditary title of Maharaja and founded the Dogra Empire. And in 1846, with the treaty of Amritsar, he founded the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

most ambitious expedition (Pannikar 1930:76-77). Ranjit Singh (1801-1839), the Sikh ruler also did not have any objection of his expedition, and expressed his view that he would never bother to conquer such a difficult and poor country like Ladakh (Singh 2018:20). But for Gulab Singh one of the most important sources of motivation for sending this expedition was to grasp the potentialities of 'shawl wool' trade of Ladakh (Dutta 1973: 93). And also the fact that, possession of a far off region like Ladakh would secure him a territory which is out of reach of any attack either by British or by the Sikh (Pannikar 1930: 56).

Gulab Singh wanted to divert the wool going for the shawl industries of Amritsar and Nurpur from Kashmir and wanted a direct route through Kishtwar (**Rizvi 1999:93**)<sup>5</sup>. His ambition was not only limited to Ladakh rather he wanted to conquer the entire wool producing region of the western Tibet. This caused a breach in the friendly alliance formed with the British (discussed in the next section) and even Ranjit Singh seemed bit vary, when Zorawar Singh expressed his readiness to invade Tibet during their meeting after the first expedition of Ladakh in 1836 and the former had politely declined him from undertaking such an arduous expedition (Singh 2018:20).

Despite the concern raised by the Sikh durbar, the Dogra advance in Tibet did not bring any adverse ramifications on their ties, because after the decline of Sikh power, Gulab Singh was given the independent possession of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, with the signing of the 'treaty of Amritsar' in 1846. However, for the British, the Dogra movement in the western Himalayas, remained a perpetual source of concern and the situations which arose with the Dogra ascendancy in Ladakh became an important factor in shaping their policy towards Ladakh.

## **EMERGENCE OF BRITISH IN THE WESTERN HIMALAYA**

British interest in the Himalayas started founding on firm ground with their occupation of Bengal. The company's interest in the unknown lands north of Himalayas was based on both political and commercial matrix. So when George Bogle was chosen to lead the first mission to Tibet in 1772 (MacGregor 1970: 125-126), he was expected to convey not only the political aspiration of the British, but to explore the prospect of commercial avenues between the two countries. Although Bogle did not succeed to extract a trade agreement with Tibet, his mission was nevertheless a success as he had been able to establish a friendly contact with Tibet. Following Bogle, William Moorcroft also distinguished himself among the earliest Britisher for having crossed the Himalayas to Tibet. In 1812, he entered Gartok and Mansarovar in western Tibet and in 1820 he entered Ladakh to carry his further journey to central Asia. Like Bogle, Moorcroft was also asked to explore the trade prospect with a country about which so little was known at that time (Moorcroft 1831: 233-247).

The British interest in the trade of western Tibet grew with the beginning of shawl manufacturing in Punjab, following the migration of some Kashmiri artisans towards the end of eighteenth century (File No. 543: 1841). The surplus wool found its way to the shawl industries in Punjab which also came to depend on western Tibet for the raw wool. Thus, any kind of movement of the Dogra forces in that sector was expected to have an adverse impact on the supply of the wool to British industries also. The Dogra movement also caused concern for the British in Garhwal sector, from where the Bhutia traders were involved in the trade with western Tibet (File no. 19-20: 1841). And as the Dogra advance went ahead in western Tibet the flow of 'shawl wool' to British

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<sup>5</sup>At this stage, Gulab Singh was yet to acquire Kashmir, and his territory contiguous to Ladakh was Kishtwar.

territories of Bashahar<sup>6</sup> and other border areas dwindled (Huttenback 1961: 482). A reason, significant enough to change the friendly attitude of the British towards Gulab Singh.

Under such circumstances, the British agent at Lahore durbar felt that there was an urgent need of intelligence to be gathered from western Tibet, where the Dogra movement was going on. Acting on their advice the British government sent Lt. J.D Cunningham an assistant at Ludhiana on a special political mission in that sector (Dutta 1973: 159). He was given a strict instruction of only recording the events taking place there, mostly concerning the trade and to abstain from interfering in the matter of Sikh (Dogra) Ladakh's clash (File No.157:1842). The letter addressed to Cunningham from the agent to the governor, north-west frontier, clarified his status and apprised him of the given instruction of abstaining from interfering in the ongoing Dogra-Ladakh clash, and to keep away from the politics of the region (File no. 82-83:1842).

Cunningham's report raised many concerns about the ongoing movement of the Dogra forces in the western Tibet, and communicated a distress call regarding its repercussion on the 'shawl wool' trade to the British territories (File No. 543 A: 1841). Based on these reports and the political developments taking place in western Himalayas, the British government warned the Dogras for having reached an invidious position by entering Tibet and demanded immediate withdrawal of Zorawar Singh. Accordingly, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1841 was set as the deadline for their withdrawal which was achieved on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1841, when Zorawar Singh was defeated and killed in western Tibet (Dutta 1973: 165).

According to C.L Dutta the political considerations for the British also outweigh at this stage even after assessing the commercial potential of the region. Taking a very calculated step, the company did not want to gain something after losing on the other front; the company was apprehensive lest any interference in Ladakh should provoke Chinese resentment thus endangering British commerce with China by sea (Dutta 1973: 102-103). Evidently from Datta's view, the political consideration also coalesced with the economic factors and it became inevitable to maintain a strict vigil in this sector. Even after the defeat and complete withdrawal of the Dogra forces from Tibet by 1842, the need for keeping a close watch on their activities in Ladakh remained unchanged.

Such fear of antagonizing the Chinese, amidst the developments taking place between Tibet and the Dogras necessitated the British to send a boundary commission in 1846 to determine the boundary between the Punjab government and the Dogra durbar consisting of Capt. Alexander Cunningham, Dr. Thomas Thomson and Lt. Henry Starchy as its members (File No. 138-C:1884). Cunningham states that the British could not remain assured of the over ambitious overtures of Gulab Singh in the Tibetan territory, 'should an expedition similar to the one of 1842, takes place again, the repercussions could be felt on the flow of 'shawl wool' to the British territory and might close whole of the petty commerce of British hill states with Tibet.' The detrimental impacts of the given scenario on the British empire in India is clearly understood from Cunningham's opinion;

...our (British) peaceful relations with the Chinese emperor might be considerably embarrassed by his Celestial Majesty's ignorance of any distinction between the rulers of India and the rulers of Kashmir (Cunningham 1970:12-13).

And a settlement was reached to demarcate the boundaries by which British taking a very astute move, induced the Dogras to cede Spiti from Ladakh to British, because from Spiti the Dogra maharaja recovered a nominal revenue of not more than seven hundred rupees and for the British, its possession meant a direct link to the shawl producing territories of Chang Thang (in eastern Ladakh) and western Tibet as Spiti lay not more than

6 Bashahar in Himachal Pradesh was an important region in the Shimla Hill State, through which British India was connected to Ladakh and Western Tibet.

thirty miles from Rampur the capital of Bashahar (Cunningham 1970: 13).

Lt. Starchy's observations and experiences gathered from coming in contact with the Tibetans and the Ladakhis, while working as the member of the boundary commission helped in the strengthening the already existing opinion regarding the stand to be adopted by the British viz-a-viz Ladakh. 'His letters mentions how the *garpon* (governor) of Gartok in western Tibet refused to forward the letter of the governor general of India to Lhasa, considering him to be a stranger, though out of respect held for the British government the letter was retained at Gartok. The letter could only be made comprehensible to the Tibetan authorities with the help of a Ladakhi scholar, Kaga Toldan and the message of the governor general was conveyed to the Tibetan authorities requesting them to uphold the terms of the 'treaty of 1842', concluded with Maharaja Gulab Singh after the defeat of Dogras in Tibet.

In response to this the Tibetans conveyed their refusal to acknowledge the political authority of the Dogras in Ladakh and emphasized that the Lhasa government acknowledges no other authority than that of the rightful prince of Ladakh the sole representative of the ancient line of the Tibetan kings (File No.71-73: 1848).' Though, this claim of the Tibetans seemed quite arbitrary at this stage, for having already sealed the 'treaty of 1842' with the Dogras acknowledging and accepting, their political ascendancy in Ladakh, besides agreeing to continue the traditional commercial ties. However, the relevance of the letter can be found in conceding the fact that for Tibetans, the position of the Ladakhi king still holds the same stature irrespective of his lost political status. And in days to come, to pass any kind of communication to Lhasa, the British government felt the need to obtain the favors and assistance of the deposed king of Ladakh.

These events in addition with the prospect of expanding the commercial ties with central Asia eventually contributed in the formulation of the British policy towards Ladakh. The strategic location of Ladakh with its close linkage with central Asia, also became an important factor in wake of the growing political pressure of Russia in Europe and central Asia causing a great threat to the British dominion in India. The information about the Russian movement in this part, with their interest growing in the commerce of Kashmir also became a cause of great threat to the British (Warikoo 1989:5).

These developments, made the British recognise the strategic and commercial importance of Ladakh, and they upheld the pertinence of having a direct link with Ladakh, which could be established through their agency deputed there. Working on it, the British secured the consent of the Dogra durbar to station an official at Leh in 1867. Accordingly Dr. Henry Cayley a medical doctor was chosen as the first British officer to be appointed to the post of 'Special Duty' at Leh in 1867 (File No. 82-83: 1867). The sole purpose of appointing an officer was to enquire into the prospect of India's trade with central Asia, guiding the interest of the traders and providing suggestions for improving the trade (File No. ¼-2/C: 1868). But at the same time, the other important role for the officer was to covertly collect information regarding Russian movements in central Asia.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, nineteenth century ushered a period in the western Himalayas, when the political dynamics was getting affected with the emergence of colonial power. In this scenario, the significance of place like Ladakh gets accentuated considering its relevance in the political and commercial arena of the region. The advent of two external powers of British and the Dogras in Ladakh to explore the commercial potential had a far reaching



implication on the history of Ladakh. 1842, the year when political ascendancy of the Dogras began in Ladakh and 1867 when the office of the British representative was established, are marked as two important years in the history of Ladakh. Though the initial ties between these two external powers was based on mutual cooperation, yet British did not remain complacent with the rise of Gulab Singh as their ally in the north; rather they became wary of their commercial aspirations in the western Himalayas getting effected with the presence of the Dogras. While upholding their commercial interest in the region, both powers took such steps which altered the territorial frontiers of Ladakh from its age old traditional status. And the boundary commission sent under the aegis of both British and the Dogras, demarcated the eastern boundary of Ladakh in such a way, so as to ensure that it took account of the needs of the British Indian Trans-Himalayan trade (Howard 2011: 221). In this attempt, the political boundary of Ladakh gets retracted, with the detachment of Spiti ( now a part of Himachal Pradesh) and ceding it to the British province of Bashahar facilitating the direct flow of 'shawl wool' from western Tibet. And the territorial boundary of the region of Ladakh in the eastern sector still lies on the same outline as has been demarcated in the nineteenth century.

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