
The Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 and its Historical Significance

Dr. Chhawang Subba¹

¹Assistant Professor,
Department of History,
University of Gour Banga,
Malda, West Bengal, India
E-mail: csubba0082@gmail.com

Abstract: *The Treaty of Sugauli which was signed on December 2, 1815 and ratified on March 4, 1816 is a very significant treaty with regard to the demarcation of boundary between the kingdom of Nepal and the colonial India. This treaty ended the long lasting adventure of subjugation and annexation of nearby territories by the Nepali kings. Their expansionist policy was halted by the Anglo-Gorkha war of 1814 and the subsequent peace treaty greatly curtailed the territories of kingdom of Nepal won over the long period of time. The event also prompted Nepal to revise their hostile policy with British and a more friendly relationship was established between the two parties. The treaty of Sugauli has a lot of historical significance. According to the treaty, the territorial integrity of Nepal was guaranteed but the Gorkha king was deprived of a part of the territory conquered between 1760 and 1808. The Treaty of Sugauli effectively ended the military ambitions of Nepal on all sides except the north. It also conveyed the message that, for military and economic reasons Nepal would have to maintain good relations with British India.*

Keywords: *British, Boundary, Dispute, Friendship, Kingdom, Nepal, Treaty of Sugauli*

Date of Submission: 05-05-2022

Date of Acceptance: 15-05-2022

Introduction

Prithvinarayan Shah¹ ascended the throne of Nepal in 1743 and started his quest for the conquest and expansion of the boundaries of his kingdom. He used persuasion, force, matrimonial alliance and economic measures to subjugate other kingdoms and gain control over

The Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 and its Historical Significance

the entire Nepal valley. He shifted his capital from erstwhile Gorkha to Kathmandu in 1770. Prithvinarayan Shah continued with one expansionist step by another which the British resented. The Gorkha occupation of Makwanpur in 1763 and Vijaypur in 1774 alarmed the British. These conquests gave the Gorkha king several revenue yielding tracts in the fertile Terai regions of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In August 1774, Governor General Warren Hastings wrote a letter to Prithvinarayan Shah asking him to remove his troops from Amirpur and Vijaypur which were part of the province of Bengal under the East India Company. Prithvinarayan did not want to agitate the British and promised to pay to The East India Company the revenues of Vijaypur just as he had paid that, of the other villages like Makwanpur. But under the instruction of the king, Commander Abhiman Singh occupied the territory up to river Tista in 1774.

The British were greatly alarmed by the expansionist policy of the king of Nepal. Therefore, Warren Hastings sent George Bogle to Panchen Lama² at Tashilhunpo Monastery to inform him of the encroachment of Indian territory by the king of Nepal and the attack on Sikkim which was the subject of Lhasa. In reply Panchen Lama sent a letter to Pratap Singh Shah and asked him to relinquish Morang and Vijaypur which his father Prithvinarayan had conquered and which he thought belonged to Bhutan. Panchen Lama raised a huge army which demoralised the Gorkha commander who proposed peace. Nepal evacuated Kirat and Morang and became the part of Sikkim as fixed by the treaty. Therefore, for some time there was peace between Nepal and Sikkim, largely due to the strong stand taken by Tibet towards Nepal for interfering in Sikkim and Bhutan. The apprehension of antagonizing the East India Company by advancing further towards the east was a deterrent factor for the Gorkhas. Thus, during the next decade, the Gorkha Kings concentrated on expansion towards the west and went on annexing one kingdom after another till their kingdom extended up to Sutlej in 1808.

In the year 1788, Nepal broke the non-aggression treaty with Sikkim and mounted a massive attack on it. The attack on Sikkim and then on Tibet was prompted by the motive to establish economic domination of the region. Nepal wanted to maximize its earning from custom duties by controlling the Tibetan trade through the trade routes to Chambi Valley. There was very little resistance to this military adventure of the Gorkhas and the king of Sikkim fled to Lhasa where he died in 1793. Tibet did not give much help to Sikkim through Bhutan provided some financial help to the king of Sikkim who had taken shelter near its border. Without encountering much resistance the raiding Gorkha army annexed the territory up to the east of

The Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 and its Historical Significance

Tista River which included the present Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-divisions and then unilaterally stopped further advance. They also got hold of the Sikkim-Terai and the present Siliguri regions. Gorkha army was stationed at Darjeeling and Nagari. But the occupied parts of Sikkim did not reconcile with the Nepali rule and used to harass the Gorkha soldiers and commanders.

In the year 1791, the Nepali army invaded Tibet on the ground of non-payment of the stipulated indemnity. The main motive behind this invasion was to plunder the property of Panchen Lama and his seat at the Tashilhunpo monastery. As the Gorkha army advanced, Tibet appealed to the British on the basis of the promise of friendship made by them. But due to the commitment elsewhere, Lord Cornwallis could not help Tibet. This led Tibet to sought help from China. In return, Chien Leng, the Manchu Emperor of China sent a big army which drove the Gorkha army out of Tibet. In 1792, Nepal offered a peace and according to the provisions of the peace treaty, the Nepal-Tibet boundary was drawn as Tibet was considered a feudatory kingdom of China. Sikkim being a protectorate of Tibet was not represented in the negotiations. It was assured that, its original territories would be restored.

The British were apprehensive about the emergence of Gorkha power in the northern side of its empire which posed a threat to its Central Asian trade through Nepal. Using frequent raids on the British Indian territory by Nepal on the northern borders and the occupation of a part of the territory in Bihar as a pretext, the British Government declared War on Nepal in 1814 which culminated in the defeat of Nepal and the treaty of Sugauli was drafted on December 2, 1815. The treaty was signed by Raj Guru Gajaraj Mishra aided by Chandra Sekhar Upadhyaya on behalf of the king of Nepal and Lt. Col. Paris Bradshaw on behalf of the East India Company. The treaty of Sugauli is played a very significant part in the boundary demarcation between India and Nepal. The terms of the peace treaty of Sugauli were as follows:

*There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the East India Company and the king of Nepal.

*The king of Nepal renounces all claim to the lands which were subject of discussion between the two states before the war: and acknowledge the right of the Company to the sovereignty of those lands.

*The king of Nepal hereby cedes to the East India Company in perpetuity all the undermentioned territories, viz_

The Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 and its Historical Significance

*The whole of the low lands between the rivers Kali and Rapti.

*The whole of the low lands (with exception of Bootwal Khass) lying between the Rapti and the Gunduck.

*The whole of the low lands between the Gundak and Koshi, in which the authority of the British Government has been introduced or is in actual course of introduction.

*All the low lands between the rivers Mechi and the Tista.

*All the territories within the hills eastward of the river Mechi, including the fort and lands of Nagari and the Pass of Nagrakote, leading from Morung into the hills, together with the territory lying between that Pass and Nagari. The aforesaid territory shall be evacuated by the Gorkha troops within forty days from this date.

*With a view to indemnify the Chiefs and Barahdars of the State of Nepal, whose interests will suffer by the alienation of the lands ceded by the foregoing Article, the British Government agrees to settle pensions to the aggregate amount of two lakhs of rupees per annum on such chiefs as may be selected by the king of Nepal, and in the proportions which the king may fix.

*The king of Nepal renounces for himself, his heirs, and successors, all claims to or in connection with the countries lying to the west of the River Kali and engages never to have any concern with those countries or the inhabitants thereof.

*king of Nepal engages never to molest or disturb the rajah of Sikkim in the possession of his territories: but agrees, if any differences arise between the state of Nepal and the king of Sikkim, or the subjects of either, that such differences shall be referred to the arbitration of the British Government, by whose award the king of Nepal agrees to abide.

*The king of Nepal hereby engages never to take or retain in his service any British subject, or the subject of any European or American state, without the consent of the British Government.

*In order to secure and improve relations of amity and peace hereby established between the two states, it is agreed that accredited Ministers from each shall reside at the Court of the other.

*This treaty consisting of nine Articles, shall be ratified by the King of Nepal within fifteen days from this date, and the ratification shall be delivered to Lieut-Colonel Bradshaw, who engages to obtain and deliver to the King the ratification of the Governor-General within twenty days, or sooner, if practicable.

The treaty of Sugauli was ratified on March 4, 1816.

The Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 and its Historical Significance

Conclusion

The treaty of Sugauli has a lot of historical significance. According to the treaty, the territorial integrity of Nepal was guaranteed but the Gorkha king was deprived of a part of the territory conquered between 1760 and 1808. The territory that was returned was less than what was annexed. The area between Kankai and Mechi in the plains and Tamer and Mechi in the hills which according to king Prithvinarayan belonged to the Gorkha king as result of the annexation of the Vijaypur kingdom in 1774 was not restored. On the other hand, Nepal was asked to withdraw its military posts from Darjeeling hills within 40 days.

The Treaty of Sugauli effectively ended the military ambitions of Nepal on all sides except the north. It also conveyed the message that, for military and economic reasons Nepal would have to maintain good relations with British India. During the rule of Jung Bahadur Rana (1846-1877), he offered military assistance to Britain in the Anglo-Sikh War and also sent troops to enable the British to suppress the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. During the Rana rule, a policy of appeasement was followed towards the British Government and as a reciprocal gesture the British Government increased the quantum of recruitment from Nepal in the British Indian army.

Notes & References:

1.Prithvinarayan Shah was the last ruler of the Gurkha Kingdom and the first monarch of the Kingdom of Nepal. He conquered the three Malla kingdoms of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaon in 1769 and consolidated them to found the modern state of Nepal. He is also called the founder of Nepal.

2.Panchen Lama is the head of Tashilhunpo Monastery in Tibet and holds religious and secular power. It's a title given to the head of Tashilhunpo Monastery. The current 11th Panchen Lama is Gedhun Chowkyi Nyima who was recognized by the 14th Dalai Lama on 14th May 1995.

Reference:

1. Mukherji, Sumit. *Gorkhaland, the Dormant Volcano*, New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2014.
2. Wangyal, Sonam *Sikkim and Darjeeling, Division and Deception*, Jaigaon: Dolma House, 2002.
3. Subba, T.B. *Ethnicity, State and Development*, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Ltd. 1992.
4. Dash, Arthur Jules. *Bengal District Gazetteers*. Calcutta, 1947.
5. Bomjan, D.S. *Darjeeling-Doors: People and Place Under Bengal's Neo-colonial Rule*, Darjeeling: Bikash Jana Sahitya Kendra, 2008.
6. Gurung, Suresh Kumar. *Sikkim: Ethnicity and Political Dynamics. A Triadic Perspective*. New Delhi: Kunal Publishers, 2011.
7. Moktan, R. *Sikkim: Darjeeling: Compendium of Documents*, Kalimpong, 2004.

The Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 and its Historical Significance

8. Northey, W.B. and C.J. Morris. *The Gurkhas: Their Manners, Customs and Country*, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1976.
9. O'Malley, L.S.S. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*. Logos Press, New Delhi, 1999.
10. Riseley, H.H. *Gazetteer of Sikkim* Gangtok: Sikkim Nature Conservation Foundation, 1989.
11. Sankritiyan, Rahul. *Dorjeling Parichaya* Calcutta: Paramananda Poddar, 1950.
12. Rennie, D.F. *Bhotan and the Story of the Dooar War*. New Delhi, 1970.