

**CHARLES BELL AS AN INTERMEDIARY IN ANGLO-TIBETAN RELATIONS**

**(1908-1921)**

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## **Abstract.**

The main aim of this thesis is to show that Sir Charles Alfred Bell, a political officer of the British Raj could be understood as an intermediary, especially in his role in the Simla Agreement of 1913-14, and in the drawing of the McMahon Line between British India and Tibet on the North Eastern frontier of British India where he was chosen to advise the British plenipotentiary on issues pertaining to Tibet. Secondly, this thesis introduces the term “scholar intermediary” to help define Bell’s role as an intermediary as well as to broaden the definition of the term itself. The thesis argues that Bell wrote several of his scholarly works not only to raise interest in Tibet but also to shape the foreign policy of British Empire in favor of Tibet, by suggesting, for example, what British foreign policy concerning Tibet’s role in the region should look like.

## **Acknowledgment.**

One cannot help but acknowledge that as a human we require assistance in all its shapes and forms. And this thesis and the process of writing it is no different. I have had immense help in writing it from people whose names if I were to put down in the paper would take ages to fill it. Thus, I include them all in the broad contour of Family and Friends. I would like to show my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Jan Hennings and Sanjay Kumar, who, firstly, willingly took me under their supervision and secondly for their endless patience for going through all those incoherent writings that I presented to them. If the current thesis has any merit in it then it is their hard work and not mine. Although I do have to point out that whatever incoherency and mistakes that are present in the thesis ( and there will be) are all my own and my inability to include their suggestions and comment.

I would also like to thank the university for providing me with a grant which made the Archival sources available. Thanks also to the librarian and all the staff members who took care of many of the issues, which otherwise would have wreaked havoc in the writing of this thesis.

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## **Introduction:**

### **The concept and the Officer.**

The New Diplomatic History has produced studies which give not only a bird's-eye view of events and developments in international relations but also “ zoo[m] in on the complex, multifarious, and interconnected practices of diplomacy in the early modern period”.<sup>1</sup> New concepts such as that of the 'intermediary' are emerging to describe practices, individuals or groups that were important in early modern diplomacy, as they help to explain the intricacies of relations between states.

In this Introduction, first, I will introduce the concept of Intermediary as understood by scholars of Diplomatic History as well as those studying the Early Modern Period. Then I will broaden this definition by analysing the case study of Anglo-Tibetan relations especially focusing on the role of Sir Charles Alfred Bell. Second, I will be introducing Sir Charles Bell and his Office and the overall historical context under which I will attempt to situate his role as an Intermediary.

### **1.1 The concept of Intermediary.**

The emergence of the notion of Intermediary in diplomatic history could be seen as an outcome of the widening scope of studies within the Diplomatic history in the Early modern period;

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<sup>1</sup>Tracy Sowerby and Jan Henning, "Introduction," in *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World C. 1410–1800*, ed. Tracey Sowerby and Jan Hennings (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 2.

especially with the rise of New Diplomatic History. While the present thesis is on a later period, it is worthwhile to consider the core aspects that research on early modern diplomacy has highlighted in terms of intermediaries and their role in relations between states. This introduction serves to show how I apply these aspects in this work. With researchers focusing not just on the “pivotal Moment”<sup>2</sup> in the diplomacy best exemplified in the signed treaties and negotiations but also on the whole process that leads to that particular moment. One of the crucial changes in the methodology of the new diplomatic history was along with the “what, when and who the question of “How” too began to make its appearances. This change in methods had a huge impact on the whole scholarship, bringing into the purview of diplomatic history a wide range of practices that were ignored in the earlier scholarships. For example, the practices of gift giving between the sovereigns, ceremonial interactions between the diplomats and looking into the symbolic gesture embedded within these practices in the early modern period of diplomacy. And this proliferation in the subject matters has a lot to do with the recognition that the early modern period was the formative period of diplomatic practices as we understand it today.

Another important aspect that emerged within New Diplomatic History was a focus on the question of “who Influenced the diplomatic relation ?”<sup>3</sup> - a question which made it important to have an actor-centric approach on the issue. Consequently, this lead to studies that began to focus on individuals or groups who did not had any patrician roots. For instance, individuals or groups which did not fit into Mattingly’s models of a secular and increasingly professionalized Renaissance diplomatic corps,<sup>4</sup>including, the roles played by women, especially the wives of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> E. Natalie Rothman, "Afterword: Intermediaries, Mediation, and Cross- Confessional Diplomacy in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015)

ambassadors,<sup>5</sup> which gave rise to the notion of “Working Couple”; courtiers and other nonstate actors or as Rothman puts it “non-ambassadorial agents”<sup>6</sup> or rather intermediaries who facilitated the diplomatic relations but they themselves did not hold a position of ambassadors.

The rise of the above concepts has a lot to do with the recognition that diplomacy in the early modern era in particular when it came to understand the relationship between European and non-European polities that did not follow the usual prescriptive diplomatic literature and the legalistic understanding of the rules and regulations that governed diplomatic engagements. This was also true for the discovery of other actors that did not fall under the existing definition of Diplomats. And indeed, many of these studies that deal with the concept of intermediary has emerged largely from studies about regions falling within the Mediterranean. Especially the Ottoman Empire and its multicultural capital Constantinople, where subjects with different confessions, languages and polities met;<sup>7</sup> thus requiring the need for a “mediation” and hence leading to the demand for various “Intermediaries”<sup>8</sup>. And another issue that leads to the rise of Intermediaries was as Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić point out,

“the notions of cultural mediation and connectivity have taken center stage in the study of the Mediterranean, which has become a sort of laboratory for historians theorizing new models of cultural and religious interaction, often attempting to obviate the “clash of civilizations” approach”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Florian Kuhnel, Minister-like cleverness, understanding, and influence on affairs’: Ambassadors in everyday business and courtly ceremonies at the turn of the eighteenth century, in *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World C. 1410–1800*, ed, Tracey Sowerby and Jan Henning (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) 130-146

<sup>6</sup> Rothman, “Afterword: Intermediaries, Mediation, and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in the Early Modern Mediterranean”

<sup>7</sup> See, Emrah Safa Gürkan, Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1600, *Journal of early modern history* 19 (2015). 107-128.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Maartje Van Gelder and Tijana Krstić, “Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015), 93-105



This led to an exploration of “Intermediaries” who not only performed the task as its name suggested but was “Intermediary” in the literal sense. To better capture their status Rothman has christened these Intermediaries as a “Transimperial Subject”<sup>10</sup> to denote individuals who had either experienced a change in their juridical and or confessional status in the past or whose status was in flux or in question, and who “regularly mobilized their roots ‘elsewhere’ to foreground specific knowledge, privileges, or commitments to further their current interests.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, whether it is the self defining nature of the term “Intermediary” itself or the complexity surrounding it, the scholars have not defined the term properly yet. On the one hand, this situation is advantageous since it leaves a room for broader perspective without the constraints of a single definition; but without a definition one does face a problem of choice of definitions and properly understanding the concept. Thus if we were to define it in the context of Early Modern Period, then it was the acts which intermediary performed that defined them, which was acting as a *mediator* and along with it, other characteristics that defined them were their “in-betweenness and liminality” by being a Transimperial Subject.<sup>12</sup> However in this definition, it is the act of “Mediation” that plays the crucial role, for example, Joshua M White in his article shows how Şeyhülislam, the Mufti of Istanbul and religious and legal head in the hierarchy of Ottoman Empire himself acted as an intermediary, through his “*Fetwa*” whereby he issued nonbinding legal opinion to anyone of other confessions. These *Fetwas* were highly sought for as it could veer the interest of the one seeking the *Fetwa*, thus making Şeyhülislam as a very important

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<sup>10</sup> E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca, 2011)

<sup>11</sup> Maartje Van Gelder and Tijana Krstić, "Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015),93-105

<sup>12</sup> See Emrah Safa Gürkan, Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1600, *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015),107-128

individual within the empire making the representatives of a foreign power to cultivate a close relationship with him.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in his case, the Şeyhülislam, the supreme legal and religious authority of the Ottoman Empire did not need to be religiously, culturally, or politically hybrid or marginal in order to function as Intermediary.

Thus, if we take this definition of Intermediary which is defined by the act of Mediation by “non-ambassadorial agent” and if we overlook the idea of liminality, in-betweenness and the idea of the Transimperial subject than this notion of Intermediary can be used to understand many aspects in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history during the colonial period in Asia. Especially the colonial power’s relations with the Princely states, for example in the *Manual of Instructions to Officers of the Political Department of the Government of India*, insists that Political officers should “assume an identity of interest between the Imperial Government and the Durbar ( Prince’s court)”.<sup>14</sup> In this case, we find that the colonial power is intentionally creating an Intermediary that can further its goal.

Another example is the role of Charles Bell, the Political Officer in Anglo-Tibetan Relations for which he took to learning Tibetan to build a relationship which was to last till his death in 1945. A relationship which he was able to build due to his position as a Political officer. This not only gave leverage to communicate with the Tibetan government but also as a “man on the spot”, this made his suggestions to his own government more authoritative.

Hence, I understand Intermediary in this work as a “Mediator” who owing to his position as “Man on the Spot” with the acquired knowledge of the region is not only able to communicate

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<sup>13</sup> Joshua M white, Fetva Diplomacy: The Ottoman Şeyhülislam as Trans-Imperial Intermediary.” *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015), 199-221.

<sup>14</sup> Alex Mckay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* (London , Curzon Press,1997)

and further the interest of one's own Party but once again owing to its position as “Non-Ambassadorial agent” is able to forego diplomatic channels that otherwise restricts Ambassadors.

## 1.2 Historical Background.

The opening of Tibet was attempted in the 18th century under Lord Warren Hasting, then the Governor-General of British East India Company in India. At this time, a mission was sent under a young Scotsman named George Bogle to Tibet in 1774. However, his mission felt short and instead of meeting the Dalai Lama in Lhasa he was stopped at Shigatse, a town few miles away from Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, where he met another Tibetan Buddhist master, Tashi Lama or otherwise known as Panchen Rinpoche.<sup>15</sup> Although the meeting itself did not have any impact on Anglo-Tibetan relation but it sure changed Bogle.<sup>16</sup>

After this incident, Tibet once again was left on its own, with its own problems but the seismic change was to occur with the appointment of Lord Nathaniel Curzon as the viceroy of India in 1898 who had a very different interest up his sleeves; he wanted to open Tibet. Alex McKay points to three reasons which compelled the opening of Tibet: one, he says, was the pressure from the Trade Lobbyist wanting to open Tibet for free trade. Secondly “a contemporary spirit of inquiry demanded that the 'unknown' should become 'known'. Tibet's policy of isolation increasingly produced, in the European imagination, a series of enticing images of a hidden

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<sup>15</sup> See Kate Teltscher, *High Road To China: George Bogle, The Panchen Lama and the First British Expedition to Tibet* (London, Bloomsbury, 2006) and Sam Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011) 146-149.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

spiritual enclave on the 'Roof of the world'"<sup>17</sup>, and thirdly, securing the empires Northern Border from the Russian forces, which came to be known as "Great Game". The third aspect although hidden under the façade of the Russian incursion held another motive that later came to be known as "Forward policy" which was basically expanding the British Empire to the northern part of the British Empire in India and the Political officers who were posted in this part of the region along with his trade agents, were basically security forces disguised as trade agents to secure the post adhered to the "forward Policy" as propounded by Lord Curzon<sup>18</sup>.

There were also other reasons which have to do with Tibet's policy of isolationism, which seldom led to any genuine information to flow from the country, thus making it hard to understand the exact nature of its status. Thus, all the treaties that were maintained regarding Tibet were always with the Manchu government of China, until it fell in 1911. For example, the Chefoo Convention of 1876, or the trade agreements of 1893, 1906 and 1908. The existing idea was that Tibet was under Manchu China, but issues began to emerge when Tibetans retaliated and broke those agreements. Especially when Tibetans made an incursion into British held territory of Sikkim in the North Eastern frontier and Chinese were unable to control Tibetan. Which made Lord Curzon rethink his policies on Tibet.<sup>19</sup> This issue of Tibet was named the "Tibetan Problem"<sup>20</sup>

Thus, several attempts were made to reach Tibetan government but all in failure, which led to the Younghusband expedition of 1903-4 and the opening of Lhasa by the British, forcing the 13<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* (London, Curzon Press, 1997) 7

<sup>18</sup> Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* (London, Curzon Press, 1997) 1-16

<sup>19</sup> See Wendy Palace, *The British Empire and Tibet 1900-1922*. (Abingdon, Routledge Curzon 2005) 3

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

Dalai Lama to flee from Tibet to Mongolia and then later to China. Although this forced opening of Tibet did not usher in an era of any closer relationship between British India and Tibet, this status changed when in 1910 forces under Manchu General Chao Erh Feng made its way to Lhasa, forcing once again the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai to flee but this time, he chose India for it. There he was welcomed by none other than Sir Charles Alfred Bell. Who was then the Political Officer for Sikkim, Tibet, and Bhutan.

Such close interaction with British India and with the “modernity” of the West brought in a remarkable change in the policy of Tibetan government and with Dalai Lama. With the violence that was brought by the Chao Erh Feng’s force and realization of China’s design to usurp the Independence of Tibet under 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama’s rule, especially the government under Yuan Shi Kai after the revolution. The 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama broke the age-long ties which Dalai Lamas had with Manchu China and proclaimed that in future there will not be any relation with China.<sup>21</sup> Since Tibet broke its ties with China, the country still needed support from other countries, and this is where Tibetan government and Dalai Lama turn towards British Government of India. A plea which Government of India courteously declines, the reason they give is the Anglo Russian treaty of 1907, which forbade any form of intervention with Tibet.

Thus, the period following 1904 until the British rule was overthrown by the Nationalist movement in India, the British government always took its interest into consideration. The British Government of India never considered turning Tibet into its protectorate, unlike Sikkim or Bhutan, since it would have broken their hard-earned peace with Russia but secondly, it did

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<sup>21</sup> Shortly after his return to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama issued a proclamation to all his officials and subjects throughout Tibet in 1913. In where he refuses Yuan Shih-kai's offer of rank, and break the ties with China, is regarded in Tibet as formal declarations of independence.

not serve any interest to them- they needed Tibet to be aloof, untouched by China from the east and Russia from the north, so that it could act as a Buffer for its Northeastern frontier.

### **1.3 The Officer and The Office.**

In the next section, I will briefly give a short biography of Charles Bell focusing on his role in Anglo- Tibetan relation followed by a general discussion about the office of Political Officer, its nature and its role prescribed by the Political Department under the Viceroy of India.

#### **1.3.1 The Officer. Charles Bell.**

Since the object of my study is Anglo- Tibetan relationship, then it is hardly possible to avoid Sir Charles Alfred Bell and especially his works on Tibet. But surprisingly when it comes to Bell, himself one can hardly find a proper biography<sup>22</sup> that deals with his trajectory, especially his career as Political Officer and then later after his retirement, as a scholar on Tibet.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Only substantive work on Bell and his life is dealt by C J Christie in his article titled *Sir Charles Bell; a memoir* published in 1977 and by Alex McKay in his work *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* published in 1997, recently Emma Martin has completed her Phd Dissertation on Bell's collection of Tibetan artefacts, however, the work is yet to see the light of publication.

<sup>23</sup> There are many aspects which is still not dealt with when it comes to Charles Bell, although in his work he portrays Tibet and Dalai Lama in a very positive term but in his private papers one often encounters comments that portrays Tibet in a very negative light.

Bell joined Indian Civil Service in 1891 and the service required him to serve in various regions in the Indian plains. However, his failing health forced him to hilly terrains of the Eastern part of the Himalayan region of British India, a place called Darjeeling in 1900. There he began to take interest in Tibet and took to learning Tibetan which resulted in a dictionary and a grammar book on the Tibetan language named “*Grammar of colloquial Tibetan*”. His sickness and his transfer proved advantageous to him at the later stage as from there his career in the frontier region took off. First, he was given administrative charges of Chumbi valley, a small but strategically vital wedge of Tibetan territory adjoining Darjeeling and Kalimpong that was temporarily occupied by the British Government as a security for the Tibetan Government's compliance to the terms of the convention Younghusband had negotiated in Lhasa in September 1904.<sup>24</sup> In 1908 he was promoted to the Position of Political Officer of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet and from that moment onwards that the impact of Bell was felt in the Anglo-Tibetan relations.

Although Bell's acquaintance with Tibet began early on when he was posted to Darjeeling in 1900 where he started learning Tibetan with individuals such as Anglo- Sikkimese David McDonald, who was later Bell appointed as trade agent and others. But he became intensely involved when 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai and his entourage in 1910 tried to escape the onslaught of General Chung Yings army and sought asylum in India. The Dalai Lama was brought to Darjeeling where Bell was stationed at that time. As a Political Officer, he was given the charge of looking after the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's wellbeing while he was in India.

Being fluent in Tibetan as well as familiar with the importance of the Dalai Lama in the Himalayan region, Bell treated his guest with the respect which he believed he deserved. This

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<sup>24</sup> The convention was named as Lhasa convention and for the indemnity as well as compliance of the articles signed in the convention, Chumbi was kept as a security.

eventually gained him respect among Tibetans and a lifelong of friendship with the Dalai Lama. For example in *Tibet: A Political History*, by former Government Minister, Shakabpa, Bell is referred to as “a very close friend of the Dalai Lama”.<sup>25</sup> Bell himself quotes the 13th Dalai Lama as telling him “I have complete confidence in you, for we two are men of like mind”<sup>26</sup> and he records a leading monastic official as having written to the Dalai Lama that,

“When a European is with us Tibetans I feel that he is a European and we are Tibetans; but when Lonchen Bell is with us, I feel that we are all Tibetans together”<sup>27</sup>

The trust he was able to build after this meeting with the Dalai Lama in 1910 made Charles Bell indispensable when it came to forming policies on Tibet. His expertise on the subject was considered paramount, which is why in 1913-14 when the Simla convention was initiated so as to solve the “Tibetan problem” once and for all between China, Tibet, and Britain, as an advisor to the British plenipotentiary, Charles Bell was chosen to advise him on the matters pertaining to Tibet. And on one occasion when Tibetan delegates were not able to attend the convention it was Charles Bell who took over the discussion for the Tibetan side.

Confidence in Bell and his friendship with the Tibetan government could also be seen when attempts were being made to draw the McMahon line in the Northeastern region of British Empire, the agreement was between Tibetans and Britain, and it was to be a secret agreement outside the purview of Chinese government and delegates present in the Simla Agreement. Moreover, this secret agreement was also needed to be signed before Simla Agreement could be signed, since Britain wanted to include the McMahon line into the Simla Agreement. Hence,

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<sup>25</sup> W.D.Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* ( New York, Potala Publishers, 1984) 271

<sup>26</sup> Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present* ( Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924) 206

<sup>27</sup> As found quoted in Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947*, 73



once again Bell was chosen for the task and he was able to bring Tibetan delegates to sign the agreement before the Simla Agreement was signed.

Charles Bell was the first British official who was invited to Tibet by the Tibetan government officially, a journey he was rooting for, for a long time.<sup>28</sup> Although on several occasions the Tibetan government had invited Bell to Lhasa but owing to precarious Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 he was never allowed to visit Lhasa but in 1921 he was finally given permissions to visit officially as a British Officer.

Bell passed away in 1945 but before he died he wrote four books on Tibet, a work on grammar and innumerable essays, where he portrayed Tibet in a very sympathetic light so that the reader could have a sympathetic view on Tibet and the policymaker could see the importance of Tibet for its own interest.

### 1.3.2 The Office

After the Government of India act of 1858, the Indian subcontinent which was till now ruled by East India Company under the auspices of British parliament was transferred to the British crown. Along with the territories, India was now to be ruled under the name of the queen thus, converting India into yet another colony under British rule. Which lead to restructuring in the administration of India. It was officially ruled by the British parliament and administered by the India Office at Whitehall which was headed by the Secretary of State for India, a member of the British Cabinet. Thus, British-Indian relations were distinct from relations with other foreign

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<sup>28</sup> See Alex Mckay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947*

states, for example, Russia or China, which were under the responsibility of the Foreign Office and its head<sup>29</sup>.

Another change that came with the Act was the changes in the titles of the top officials; earlier the head who ruled India under the name of British Parliament was named “Governor General” which was now changed to Viceroy. The Viceroy was appointed directly by the British Government; he had the supreme authority over India until the expiration of his tenure. And though theoretically, it was under the India Office and thus under Secretary of State of India, but it depended on the ability of Viceroy, since the government of India managed its own finances as well its security, it had to a large extent autonomy from the mother government in London.

As pointed out earlier, the government of India was largely autonomous when it came to the administration whether it was within the Indian subcontinent or maintaining the foreign relations, which came under the responsibility of the Indian Political Department, a diplomatic corps of the Government of India. This department came directly under the responsibility of Viceroy since it was responsible for maintaining relations both with the “Princely States' (self-governing territories within the borders of British India) and with neighboring states whose affairs were of direct consequence to India, such as Nepal, Afghanistan, and Tibet”.<sup>30</sup> And Political officers as an employee of this department were posted to these areas of importance.

The term “political” might make us think differently of the roles of Political officer. However Terence Creagh Coen clears the doubt altogether, as he writes that the officer’s role was “not 'Political' in the sense of having anything to do with party politics or with 'political activities' in

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<sup>29</sup> ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid,4-5

the sense of espionage or anything of that kind” and in here he provides a letter written by Lord Macauley to Warren Hasting to further clear the doubts:

“The English functionaries at Fort William had as yet paid little or no attention to the internal government of Bengal. The only branch of politics about which they much busied themselves was negotiation with the native princes. . . . We may remark that the phraseology of the Company's servants still bears the traces of this state of things. *To this day they always use the word 'political' as synonymous with diplomatic*”<sup>31</sup>

However, even though these officers took on negotiations and talks, they themselves did not have the authority to seal any negotiations, as McKay points out the different channels the whole process must go through:

“The decision-making process within the Political Department depended on a hierarchical passage of paper. Reports from the positions in Tibet were forwarded to the Political Officer in Sikkim, who added his own comments before sending them to his headquarters. These reports were considered and commented upon at the Secretariat and might be shown, officially or unofficially, to other relevant departments. If important, they were passed via the Foreign Secretary to the Viceroy, and thence to the India Office in London, which in turn reported to the British Government”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Charles Bell was one of the Political Officers who had the responsibility of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet. In his tenure and even after his retirement he was able to leave behind a huge mark.

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<sup>31</sup> Terence Creagh Coen, *The Indian Political Service: A Study in Indirect Rule* ( London, Chattos and Windus, 1971) 4-5

<sup>32</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947*, 5

## Chapter I

### Charles Bell as Intermediary.

In February 1910, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama of Tibet was once again<sup>33</sup> forced into exile, and this time “turned to those, towards whom until recent years they had been invariably hostile”, that is, British India.<sup>34</sup> The reason for this was that under the guidance of Chao Erh Feng, General Chung Ying, along with 2000 Chinese soldiers, had entered Lhasa. The Dalai Lama was barely able to escape from falling under the hands of the general. Soon after the Dalai Lama's escape, an imperial proclamation was issued on 25 February, deposing him for the second time<sup>35</sup> and directing that a new incarnation should be chosen in his place. Tibet was now under the rule of General Chung Ying. Charles Bell gives the reason for the Dalai Lama's escape as follows: “if captured, they would have held [him] in close restraint, affixing his seal to their decrees and to the higher administrative acts of the new Chinese executive”, thus legitimizing their rule.<sup>36</sup>

The Dalai Lama had traveled two hundred and seventy miles, in nine days to reach Darjeeling, a hilly town in North Eastern part of India where for the first time he met Charles Bell, the political officer for Sikkim, Tibet, and Bhutan. Bell as the political officer of that region took the

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<sup>33</sup> In 1904, under the Younghusband Expedition, when the the English army forced open Lhasa, the capital of Tibet under Dalai Lama's government, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai lama was forced to take refuge in Mongolia and then in China until December 1909.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present* ( Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924) 109.

<sup>35</sup> The first was when he fled to Mongolia during the Younghusbands Expedition.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Bell. *Portrait of a Dalai Lama* (London: Collins, 1946) 82

responsibility of looking after the Dalai Lama during his stay in India where he stayed for two years, returning to Tibet only when the Chinese forces had been forced out of Tibet via India. This was the period when Bell was able to develop a close relationship with the Dalai Lama on a personal level.<sup>37</sup> Residing in India for two years, and in close contact with the upper echelon of Tibetan government under Dalai Lama, Bell, with his knowledge in Tibetan, was able to generate confidence from the Tibetan side. His farsightedness, especially treating the head of Tibet with respect, paid off. The trust he was able to garner while the exiled leader of Tibet was in India proved fruitful, too, when China, Tibet, and Britain came to negotiate in 1913-14, which resulted in the Shimla agreement and the drawing of McMahon line. During this time, Bell acted as the chief advisor for Sir Henry McMahon for the Tibetan side.<sup>38</sup> The degree to which the Tibetan government under the Dalai Lama rely on him was immense. For example, even after his retirement and after his Lhasa Mission in 1921, the Tibetan government still depended on Bell's advice and wrote to him constantly on issues ranging from modernizing Tibet to other crucial matters such as communication with China. A letter dated in 1922, by the Tibetan Cabinet (Kashag), for example, requested Bell to write to the British government as often as possible about the negotiation with China, in favor of Tibet.<sup>39</sup>

However, especially during the period leading to the Simla agreement until his retirement one has to look Charles Bell as a "Tibet Cadre"<sup>40</sup> who like most of the officers of that era had grown

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<sup>37</sup> Closeness of Bell with Dalai is fairly described in his work *Tibet Past and Present* and in *Portrait of Dalai lama*.

<sup>38</sup> He was the representative of British Plenipotentiary and one who broke the negotiation between Tibet and China.

<sup>39</sup> "Yet we request you to kindly remind the British Government about the negotiation and as well as to favour us..." British Library. India Office Record and Private Papers( IOR)MSS EUR F 80/81, Letter to Charles Bell by Tibetan council (Kashag) 6<sup>th</sup> November 1922.

<sup>40</sup> A term coined by Alex McKay to describe those officers who served for more than one year in the

up “with a profound belief in the British Empire”<sup>41</sup> and with firm conviction in the Curzonian “forward policy”, which were those policies that involved the expansion of imperial responsibilities beyond existing boundaries. It is only in the later stage of his life that we see a gradual shift in his position with regard to Tibet, a theme which will be dealt with in the subsequent chapter. Thus, Bell, with adequate knowledge of the Tibetan language and contacts with not just the upper echelon of the Tibetan government under Dalai Lama but with the Dalai Lama himself, proved to be a perfect intermediary for the British government, who not only broke the communication barrier between the two parties but was also able to make the Tibetan government listen to the demands made by the British government, suggesting concrete policies as the “man on the spot”.

In this chapter, I will look into the roles of Charles Bell not just as a political officer, but as an intermediary who was able to carve out in the Simla Agreement and in the drawing of McMahon line a niche agreement that worked in favor of the British Raj in India. Using his published works as well as his private papers, that contain the discussions which occurred between Bell, Henry McMahon, the British plenipotentiary, and Lonchen Shatra, the Tibetan plenipotentiary prior to the signing of McMahon Line. This episode in Charles Bell’s career points to his role as a classic intermediary, who acts as a mediator in negotiations. He was chosen for the position as “the advisor” to the British plenipotentiary in recognition of his knowledge of Tibet as well as his connection within the Tibetan government. As defined in the introduction, an intermediary is a mediator who is not only able to communicate and further the interest of his own party but –

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senior positions as Political Officer for Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet and senior Trade agents who were posted in various trade marts inside Tibet, who significantly influenced the encounter between Tibet and the British Raj.

<sup>41</sup> Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* (London , Curzon Press,1997) 77

owing to his position as “non-ambassadorial agent” – is able to sidestep diplomatic channels that otherwise restricts ambassadors. We see how Bell used this position in his negotiation with Lonchen Shatra to draw the McMahon Line which was negotiated secretly by Bell in order to avoid Chinese interference.

Keeping this definition in mind, the subsequent discussion will look at two pivotal moments in Bell’s career which defined him as an intermediary, first, his role as an advisor to the British plenipotentiary in the Simla agreement on the issues related to Tibet, a position for which he chosen due to his expertise on Tibet; second, his role as a chief negotiator in drawing the McMahon Line in the Northeastern frontier of India where under the pretext of avoiding future friction between Tibet and British India he was able to bring the Tibetan plenipotentiary to sign the agreement.

## **2.1. The Simla agreement and the role of Charles Bell.**

Prior to the downfall of the Manchu emperor of China, General Chao Erh Feng had initiated a military expedition in the Eastern Tibet, and by 1906 many regions in Eastern Tibet were under his control. By 1910 his forces were in Lhasa taking over from the Tibetan government.<sup>42</sup>

Although this did alarm the British in India, but the ruler of India of that time, British comforted themselves with two treaties they had signed in 1906 and in 1908 with China, and with another

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<sup>42</sup> For further discussion on Chao Erh Feng see Elliot Sperling’s essay “*The Chinese Venture in K’ am, 1904-1911, and The Role of Chao Erh-Feng*” *The Tibet Journal* 1(2)(1976), 10-36.

which they had signed with Russia in 1907, which forbade both countries from interfering with Tibet<sup>43</sup>.

However, alarm bells began to ring when this force began its intrigue in the neighboring region of British India, especially in Bhutan and Nepal but more importantly when in 1910-1911 Chinese troops from Lhasa undertook the process of subjugating Pome, a Tibetan district in the Southeastern part of Tibet which bordered on British Indian territories, especially its North Eastern “tribal territories”. This process was further intensified with Chao Erh Feng’s decision to incorporate Zayul, a territory in the South Eastern part of Tibet which shared a border with the British Indian territory of Assam. Since people have moved from place to place without any restrictions in the past, the Chinese army frequently interacted with the inhabitants of Assam. Alaister Lamb points out that this visit from the Chinese in Indian territory was not designed to take it but was rather meant to secure peace in the frontier region, which they saw themselves compelled to do. However, the British administrators interpreted this as further evidence of a Chinese offensive directed at the North Eastern frontier of British Territory in India.<sup>44</sup>

In here we see the role of Charles Bell. Although these regions did not fall under his jurisdiction, he felt that the regions needed to be secured. While he was in his post in Darjeeling, news reached him of the Chinese army marching towards the North East frontier. Another reason was that the Chinese had made their influences felt in Bhutan as well as in Nepal which shared a long

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<sup>43</sup> Along with not sending representative to Lhasa, and non interference in the matters related to Tibet, the convention also included, to enter into negotiations with Tibet only through the intermediary of China, except on matters arising out of the Lhasa Convention of 1904, not to seek or obtain concessions for roads, mines and not to appropriate any part of the revenue of Tibet.

<sup>44</sup> For detailed discussion on the events leading to Simla Agreement see Alaister lamb, *The McMahon Line: A Study in the Relations Between, India, China and Tibet, 1904 to 1914- Volume II: Hardinge, McMohan and The Simla Conference* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966)



continuous border with India.<sup>45</sup> Bhutan's border was secured with the treaty of Punakha in 1910 and Nepal under the Gurkha was strong enough to fight against China. However, the problem was the huge stretch of land in the North Eastern region of India. Hence Bell, concerned about these regions, writes:

“The treaty with Bhutan secured our needs over this portion of the frontier. But it had always seemed to me that this was not enough. East of Bhutan, between South-Eastern Tibet on one side and Assam and Burma on the other, are a number of savage tribes, among whom the Abors and the Mishmis are the most prominent”

and he further adds,

“I feared Chinese intervention and influence-and eventually a measure of control in these tribal territories. They cover seven hundred miles of the Indian frontier”<sup>46</sup>

The assessment of the situation was from a “man on the spot”, as it was him who feared that the region located in the lower elevation with fertile land would “appeal to them as suitable for those Chinese colonies, which were being attempted even in the colder regions round Ba-tang”<sup>47</sup> Thus Bell in 1909 did make suggestions on securing these regions and try to gather information on how far these regions were cultivable and how far the hills and valleys of this region could be relied on as a barrier for the plains of India, and lastly its status, whether any of the tribes had in any way recognized the suzerainty of Tibet or China. In the first instance, his suggestions were rejected. However, in 1910 when information of Chinese forces moving in Eastern Tibet was shared by Bell with the Indian Foreign Office and when finally Chinese forces made their appearances in these regions, the suggestions of Bell were taken into consideration, resulting in a group of officers being sent to this region to gather information and to map the territories.

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924) 101

<sup>46</sup> Ibid 107

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

Along with the suggestion of securing the North Eastern frontier, Bell also suggested appointing a political officer in the particular region which would be under the direct order of either the Foreign Office or under the Assam government<sup>48</sup> rather than being a subordinate of the local district officer so that the man on the spot there could have authority in making decision needed in a precarious situation without going through the bureaucracy. This suggestion was also taken into consideration.<sup>49</sup> Bell writes that,

“this part also of the border was thus secured. The northern and eastern frontiers of India are now fenced off with a difficult mountain barrier, from Kashmir in the north-west to Burma in the south-east, a distance of over two thousand miles”<sup>50</sup>

But marking and understanding of the boundary did not guarantee a recognition of that boundary, the respective parties who shared it needed to come to a single table to understand the ramification of it. Thus, British India wanting to secure its border region in the North Eastern frontier called for a treaty to be signed between the three countries of Tibet, China and British India. This treaty came to be known as the Simla Agreement. And in here Charles Bell was appointed as an adviser on Tibetan affairs to Sir Henry McMahon, secretary in the Indian foreign department and British plenipotentiary for the Simla Agreement. Bell writes:

“From 1910 to 1912 I saw a great deal of the Dalai Lama, his Ministers, and other officers when these fled to Darjeeling, and had during this period frequent private conversations with His Holiness. 1913-14 found me in Simla and Delhi attending the Conference between Great Britain, China, and Tibet called to settle the political position of Tibet. Here again, the insight gained at first-hand from the Prime Minister of Tibet and other leading Tibetans into the affairs of this large but little-known country was a valuable aid to my work”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> These region which was later named as NEFA ( North Eastern Frontier Region) was under the jurisdiction of Assam ( Currently a state in India), a unit of government to rule the North Eastern region of British Empire in India

<sup>49</sup> Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 108

<sup>50</sup> Ibid,

<sup>51</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 3

It was his experience and the knowledge which he had acquired in his position as a political officer for Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan as well as trust he was able to gain among the Tibetan authorities during his tenure that facilitated his position of advisor. The example of a trust which Tibetan delegates had in Bell could be seen when the delegate (plenipotentiary) Lonchen Shatra was willing to honor the demand of 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama prior to the Simla agreement.<sup>52</sup> Also, at one point during the negotiations of the Simla Agreement, when the Tibetan delegate was not able to participate, it was Charles Bell who took over in their absence.<sup>53</sup>

However, one must understand that Bell during this period was a “Tibetan Cadre” and his sympathy for Tibet could not compromise the interest of the British Raj, which was during that period to secure its frontier against Chinese forces. The threat was now well appreciated by the new viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who shared the view that the frontier needed to be secured. Charles Bell in his work *Tibet Past and Present* writes about a meeting with the Tibetan plenipotentiary prior to the conference where he suggests the Plenipotentiary to “bring down all the documents which he could collect bearing on the Tibetan relationship to China in the past, and on the former's claims to the various provinces and districts which had from time to time been *occupied* by China”<sup>54</sup>

These words point to the sympathetic nature of Bell towards Tibet. However, one aspect during this period leading to the Simla Agreement was that the interest, which the Dalai Lama’s government had, and what the British wanted coincided, that is to push Chinese forces out of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 152

<sup>53</sup> Alex Mckay, *Tibet and The British Raj: The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* ((London , Curzon Press,1997) 57

<sup>54</sup> *Italic* is my own.

Tibet and make it either an independent Tibet or a strong, autonomous polity. Hence, it was the British Raj's interest that drove Charles Bell to work for the Tibetans.

The participants in the Simla Agreement, China, Tibet and Britain, had very different interests, including the diametrically opposed interests of China and Tibet, with China claiming the whole of Tibet while Tibet was seeking complete independence from China. Britain, on the other hand, wanted to secure its frontiers and settle the "Tibetan Problem" once and for all,<sup>55</sup> while keeping in mind the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907,<sup>56</sup> that kept Britain from interfering with the affairs of Tibet and with the Dalai Lama's government.

Thus, we see the existing draft of the agreement proposed in March 1913 in line with the Agreement of 1907. It was a carefully drafted document which retained all the crucial aspects of 1907, especially the Article I and II of the Agreement. It clearly states that both the Russian Empire and British Empire will not interfere in the "internal administration" of Tibet and will "respect the territorial integrity of Thibet".<sup>57</sup> This created Tibet as a buffer zone between the two. Hence, the Agreement that was drafted on the one hand would not only secure British territory attacks from the North but most importantly it intended to remove the ambiguity surrounding the "Status" of Tibet vis a vis China, which was now under the *Suzerainty* of China and not under its *sovereignty*, with exact demarcation of Tibet vis a vis British territories in the North Eastern part of India that shared borders with Tibet and what roles China was to play in Tibet.

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<sup>55</sup> See Wendy Palace, *The British Empire and Tibet, 1900–1922* (Abingdon, Routledge Curzon 2005), 92–105

<sup>56</sup> The Article I, II, III of the agreement all deals with keeping Tibet out of influences from both Russia and Britain. The main idea was to keep Tibet aloof and any negotiation were to be held related to Tibet, has to be done with China as an intermediary.

<sup>57</sup> See Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, Appendix IX, Convention Between Great Britain And Russia, 1907.

This was a huge setback for Charles Bell and those who promoted the forward policy, since Bell, like rest of the Curzonians wished the 1913-14 Simla conference to initiate a reconfiguration of Britain's policy towards Tibet and to end the "self-denial" policy, that is, the policy to reconsider the 1907 treaty with Russia and the agreement to keep Tibet aloof. Bell also wanted the reduction of Chinese influence in Tibet to nothing more than a nominal form of suzerainty, and for the British, a strong provision that supported its presence in Tibet, both diplomatic, military and commercial. What Bell generally seemed to be hoping was the creation of an “informal British satellite in Tibet, in which Britain would provide practical support for Tibetan autonomy with the provision of arms, army instructors and so forth – without interfering in Tibet's internal affairs”,<sup>58</sup> thus we see a difference between the Foreign Office based in London and the designs by man on the spot – Charles Bell. The former wanted to have as little to do with Tibet as possible, whereas the latter sought to interfere with the internal matters of Tibet and, as a “Forward Policy” proponent, wanted to retain British influences there.

This is where we see the influence of Charles Bell in the Simla Agreement, especially in article 8 which states that

“the British Agent who resides at Gyantse may visit Lhasa with his escort whenever it is necessary to consult with the Tibetan Government regarding matters arising out of the Convention of September 7, 1904, between Great Britain and Tibet, which it has been found impossible to settle at Gyantse by correspondence or otherwise.”<sup>59</sup>

The Simla Agreement allowed China to retain its representative (Amban) in Lhasa with 300 Chinese armed escorts<sup>60</sup> which were not what the Curzonian expected. In order to outdo this

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<sup>58</sup> C J Christie, *Sir Charles Bell; a memoir* (Asian Affairs 8, no 1, February 1977): 48-62.

<sup>59</sup> *Political Treaties of Tibet 821-1951* ( Dharamsala, Office of Information & International Relations Central Tibetan Secretariat) 31-32.

<sup>60</sup> See Article 4.

aspect of the agreement, the suggestions of Bell to permit Gyantse Agent to Visit Lhasa “with his escorts” was a major change in the agreement compared to the draft where there is no intention of going against the Anglo -Russian agreement of 1907. But this Article in the Agreement was not only at odds with the Anglo-Russian agreement but also brought the Curzonian “Forward Policy” to the forefront. Another crucial role of Bell is also clear in article 6 and 7 of the same agreement which basically cancels the previous Anglo-Chinese agreement on trade and which had also restricted British trade agents at trade centers of Gyantse, Yatung from moving freely in the Tibetan region. And the addition of Article 8, that removed those restrictions from the Trade Agents.

These articles which were added in the agreement clearly shows Bell’s awareness of the need for securing the frontier of the empire but also to help reach an agreement that was acceptable to all the participants. For example the Article 4 of the Agreement which retains the rights of Chinese Officials in Tibet to keep their own army, a point which was able to satisfy China’s demand to a level. But a point which was strongly objected by the Tibetan government, hence addition of Article 8 in the agreement which, overlooked the agreement with Soviet not only brought Tibet into the agreement, since Dalai Lama has urged that if Chinese were to retain its Representative in Lhasa, then Britain too was needed to keep their representative there. Hence by adding Article 8, we see that on the one hand Bell was able to shape an agreement that fulfills the demands of the Tibetans, on the one hand, but leaves behind many of the responsibilities which Britain was not willing to take, on the other. Since, by not stationing any representative in Lhasa but granting trade agents free mobility, it not only kept the façade of Anglo-Soviet agreement alive but was also able to fulfill the “Curzonian Forward” Policy of opening Lhasa and securing its North Eastern Frontier. Such was the success of Bell in his role as a diplomatic intermediary.

But the agreement in Simla was not enough to secure the North Eastern frontiers, especially the region of Tawang, which historically had shared a close connection with Tibet. Thus, the British delegates kept a distrust, as they feared that in future Tibet might want this territory back. Hence they wanted another, bilateral agreement with Tibet, a clandestine agreement without the knowledge of the Chinese delegates or the Republic of China. So they had to negotiate again in order to bring Tibetan into this agreement. And for this again Charles Bell was chosen, not as an official ambassador but as an intermediary. The agreement was basically to draw a demarcation line in the North East frontier and to bring the region of Tawang into British Raj. This border was called after the British plenipotentiary Sir McMahon who officially negotiated the agreement: the McMahon Line.

### **2.1.2 Bell and his Role in drawing the McMahon line.**

The region which McMahon wanted to be demarcated in the North Eastern Frontier and wanted to bring under the British Empire was unquestionably part of Tibet prior to 1914, a fact that was accepted by both Bell and the government of India, including territories such as the Upper Siang, Siyom, Lohit and especially Tawang.<sup>61</sup> A glimpse of this can be seen in the discussion which Charles Bell had with the Tibetan plenipotentiary, Lonchen Shatra, a transcript of which was

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<sup>61</sup> These territories now are under the state of Arunachal Pradesh in India, it is the far east of the Indian territory

later sent to Sir Henry McMahon. The discussion was on the private properties owned by Tibetans in the region of Tawang and what their status would be after the demarcation.<sup>62</sup> The idea to include these territories had come to fruition with Williamson's expedition in these regions in 1910, known as Abor Expedition.<sup>63</sup>

Charles Bell – already well acquainted with Tibetan delegate – was in a very good position to bring the Tibetan delegates to the agreement that would be favorable to Britain. Although as Alex McKay points out “there is no record of how Bell persuaded Lonchen Shatra, the Tibetan chief minister and representative at the Simla Convention, to agree to cede Tawang. Certainly, it was not with the Dalai Lama's approval”.<sup>64</sup> Whether the Dalai Lama was aware or not is certainly debatable since in many instances Lonchen Shatra in his communication with Bell and later with the British plenipotentiary clearly mentioned his communication with the government of Tibet in Lhasa. The decision he came up with surely seems to have had the blessing of the Tibetan government.<sup>65</sup> But how he was persuaded is still a question, since Bell in his work, when discussing the Simla Agreement in “*Tibet Past and Present*”, never mentions the annexation of Tawang, let alone the discussion on the drawing of McMahon line.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> British Library, IOR MSS EUR F 80/193 Bell, Charles Alfred. “Notes of Discussions between Charles Bell and Lonchen Shatra on the Indo-Tibetan Frontier Sent to Henry McMahon and Related Material.” 1914.

<sup>63</sup> The need for this expedition was to see how Raj could secure its territory in the region of Assam. Unfortunately in this expedition Williamson was killed by the native of that region in the upper siang region of Arunachal Pradesh. Which gave British an excuse to bring many regions in the current Arunachal Pradesh under its rule.

<sup>64</sup> Alex McKay, *Tibet and The British Raj: The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* ((London , Curzon Press,1997) 57

<sup>65</sup> British Library, IOR MSS EUR F 80/ 193. In his letter to the Plenipotentiary of Britain Lonchen Shatra (Tibetan Plenipotentiary) he writes “I have now received orders from Lhasa, and I accordingly agree to the boundary..” 1914

<sup>66</sup> See Bell ,*Tibet past and Present*, ch. xiii and ch. xvi.



However, if we look into the discussions, the notes and letters that were shared, the overarching idea on which the drawing of McMahon line was based can be surmised, especially in Lonchen Shatra's letter to the British plenipotentiary after accepting the suggested demarcation. He wrote: "as it was feared that there might be friction in future unless the boundary between India and Tibet is clearly defined".<sup>67</sup> Thus, the need for the demarcation was presented to Tibetans as a need to avoid future friction. Thus, to the Tibetan delegates, the need for demarcation was not "security" but was rather to avoid antagonism in future. A proposal which the Tibetans did seem to have a disagreement with. There were two ways in which Tibet presented its case.

One of the points they brought forth is the issue of private properties in now to be Indian territory, especially the properties owned by noble families,<sup>68</sup> from where they collected taxes.<sup>69</sup> But Bell's adamant demand to the Tibetan delegates and shrewd tactics prevailed. He made it clear to the Tibetan plenipotentiary that the private properties will be left untouched and that the ownership of the land would not change and that after the signing of the agreement, Tibet and Britain could always discuss these issues if any problem emerged related to private properties.<sup>70</sup>

Secondly, Tibet had an issue with the pilgrimage sites which after the demarcation if it went along with the demand of Sir Henry McMahon would have fallen under the jurisdiction of India. Bell, aware of the religious sentiment of the Tibetan and the repercussion that might follow, was able to convince McMahon on leaving those territories with the Tibetan. The area under

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<sup>67</sup> British Library, IOR MSS EUR F 80/193 Lonchen Shatra (Tibetan Plenipotentiary) to British plenipotentiary, letter. 1914

<sup>68</sup> Many Noble family, for example Lhalu Family had their properties in Tawang, the Ruler Kanam Depa had its own region in now North Eastern Frontier, which was overlooked while forming the policy.

<sup>69</sup> British Library, IOR MSS EUR F 80/193 Notes of discussions between Charles Bell and Lonchen Shatra on the Indo-Tibetan frontier sent to Henry McMahon and related material. 1914

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

discussion was Tsari, a sacred site for the Tibetan that lies North of Tawang, to which Bell suggested McMahon that

“We are well aware that the Tibetan attach the highest importance to their sacred places and pilgrimages. To insist on claiming such as are in Tibetan occupation would not only be unjustifiable but would put the priestly power and especially the three state monasteries with their great influence against us”<sup>71</sup>

This was just a small piece of land that was being lost. On the other hand, British were gaining almost 200 kilometers of land controlled by Tibetan.

This clandestine agreement between Tibet and Britain was being carried out while the Simla Agreement was still in progress. The intention of Britain was that while the other issues were being discussed in the Agreement, the matters related to North Eastern border should be resolved secretly without the knowledge of Chinese plenipotentiary. When the agreement reached between the two, this agreement on North Eastern Border issue with the Tibetan would be included within the Simla agreement. Hence it was required that the frontier issue with the Tibetans be solved as fast as possible, a task which Bell completed in a crucial moment. Bell sent the maps and the demarcation on the last day of February 1914 to Lonchen Shatra and it is on 25 March of 1914 when Shatra signed on the agreement. A month before the Simla Agreement had been signed by all three participants.<sup>72</sup> As rightly observed by C J Christie:

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<sup>71</sup> British Library, IOR MSS EUR F 80/193 Letter from Lonchen Shatra (Tibetan Plenipotentiary) to British Plenipotentiary 1914

<sup>72</sup> On 27 April 1914, the Agreement was proposed all three participants initialed on it but two days later the Chinese Plenipotentiary Ivan Chen disavowed the agreement and Chinese government refused to allow Chen to sign the agreement, On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June the British Minister at Peking informed Chinese Government that Great Britain and Tibet regarded the Convention as concluded by the act of initialing, and that in default of China's adherence they would sign it independently. In July the Chinese and Tibetan Plenipotentiaries quitted Simla. At the end the agreement was signed by Tibetan and Britain plenipotentiaries and all the rights won by China through the agreement was revoked.

“Clearly Bell was prepared to risk Tibetan friendship in order to take what he considered to be necessary steps to protect Britain's vital strategic interests”<sup>73</sup>

This could be seen in the notes exchanged with the Tibetan plenipotentiaries, which were in a tone which could be read as coercive as well as dominating. First, he insists on the Tibetan plenipotentiary to arrive on the decision as soon as possible by reminding the Tibetan that he would have to send the message to the Tibetan government in Lhasa and that he was in the position to take the decision; and secondly, when the issue of Tibetan private properties potentially being incorporated into Indian territory emerged, Bell suggested that this could be discussed “later on”.<sup>74</sup>

Mckay has pointed out that the reason behind the Tibetan’s willingness to come to an agreement pertaining to its region in the South East of its territory is quite puzzling. C. J. Christie argues that Bell undoubtedly gave the Tibetan plenipotentiary the impression that Britain's claim to Tawang was a *quid pro quo* for British support for the Tibetan claim of autonomous status at the conference.<sup>75</sup> We get this sense from the exchanges between Lochen Shatra and Charles Bell between January and March in 1914. In response to Bell’s letter on the issues of the frontier between Tibet and India in which Bell has asked the Tibetan plenipotentiary whether the demarcation of these regions would be accepted by the Tibetans, the diplomat replied positively, saying:

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<sup>73</sup> C J Christie, *Sir Charles Bell; a memoir* (Asian Affairs 8, no 1 ,February 1977): 48-62.

<sup>74</sup>British Library,IOR, MSS EUR F 80/193, Notes of discussions between Charles Bell and Lonchen Shatra on the Indo-Tibetan frontier sent to Henry McMahon and related material 1914

<sup>75</sup> C J Christie, *Sir Charles Bell: A Memoir*, 48-62.

“ in view of the great help rendered by the British Government in this China-Tibet Conference for the present and the future welfare of Tibet, they ( the Tibetan Government) will consider this question of the boundary favourably. So please bear in mind”<sup>76</sup>

But to place the bet only on one reason would be ignoring the political situation of Tibet during the period. The country had just ousted the remaining Chinese forces out of Tibet and had just broken the historical ties that the Dalai Lama's government shared with Manchu China through the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's declaration of 1913, which is also known as Tibet's “formal declaration of independence”.<sup>77</sup> Along with the recognition of its status in international law, Tibet was also in need of a strong ally, since the concern for the Tibetans was not India but rather China by this time of history.

Moreover, the overall process was known by Charles Bell, who during the two-year exile of the Dalai Lama in India took the responsibility for his welfare during his stay. It was his idea overall to provide the Dalai Lama with the respect he deserved:<sup>78</sup>

“ it seemed important to utilize this opportunity of strengthening our friendship with Tibet, by according good treatment to the sacred personality of the Dalai Lama”<sup>79</sup>

With his experience as a political officer of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet, he was well aware of the power of the Dalai Lama and his influences, thus he argues that it was in the Raj's interest to

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<sup>76</sup> British Library, IOR MSS EUR F 80/193 Letter from Lonchen Shatra (Tibetan Plenipotentiary ) to British Plenipotentiary 1914

<sup>77</sup> See W D Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New York, Potala Publication, 1984) 246-259

<sup>78</sup> In *Tibet Past and Present* we see his concern where he writes “We had to consider how we should treat him and his Ministers, the heads of the country with which we had lately been at war”.

<sup>79</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 110

show respect to the head of Tibet since even though it requires the expenditure from the Raj's coffer during his stay in India, he writes:

“ The total cost during the two years or so that the Lama remained was, I think, less than five thousand pounds, an insignificant amount, when compared with the lasting good name that we gained. For His Holiness not only occupies a commanding position throughout Tibet, but wields also a very strong influence in Mongolia, and is revered by many throughout China and Japan, and even in parts of Siberia and European Russia”<sup>80</sup>

And there is a possibility that this would have played another crucial role since the Tibetans were very grateful to Bell and his government for sheltering them during their exile. Since material evidence does not exist to point out the reason behind Tibetan to cede the region of Tawang to India. All this qualified Charles Bell as an intermediary whose services to British diplomacy were indispensable. In the end, the agreement signed was in favor of Britain. Not only did the Tibetans surrender the revenues they received from the lands now under the control of British India, but they also did not seek any form of compensation for it either.

Thus, without any problem incurring to the British plenipotentiary and on the integrity of Britain's territory in India, Charles Bell with his acumen and connection in the Tibetan government was able to acquire territories from Tibet. And though the line of demarcation is named after the British plenipotentiary as McMahon, it was Bell – the intermediary – that helped to draw the line. Bell had freedom as well as the knowledge which the British plenipotentiary did not enjoy owing to his position as an accredited ambassador. He had constraints on two levels, first, he as an ambassador from Britain lacked the knowledge pertaining to Tibet, let alone an intricate understanding of Tibet's relation to this part of the region. Secondly, the agreement was

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid*

supposed to be a secret agreement between Britain and Tibet, the negotiation of which would have put the official ambassador into a precarious position, hence the importance of Bell as an intermediary to McMahon's mission.

## Chapter II.

### Charles Bell: A Scholar Intermediary.

Before we tackle the contribution of Charles Bell's works on Tibet which ranges from history to society and religion, it becomes pertinent to discuss the notion of "scholar intermediary".

Although Bell as an intermediary has been discussed in chapter 1, the attribute of "scholar" attached to "intermediary" has been left out from the discussion intentionally. The foremost reason is the vagueness of the term itself: how can we define someone as a scholar? Is it the consensus among other scholars that help define someone a "scholar" or are there any other means to define it? This question could lead us to a completely new arena of discussion.

However, here I understand Charles Bell as a scholar, first, because he took genuine interest in understanding his subject and took pains in studying it, from studying language under various Tibetan and Non-Tibetan teachers<sup>81</sup> who were well versed in the language; secondly, the work he produced is rooted in researches that are based on both primary as well as secondary sources available to him at that time; and lastly, his description of the life of Tibetans<sup>82</sup> as well their religion, which is based on the experiences he had while he was posted as Political officer. His

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<sup>81</sup> For example this individuals help translate many of the Tibetan text to Bell and taught him the language David McDonald, Kazi Dawa Samdup, Palhese, Angchuk Tsering, Laden la. Except for Palhese all others had non tibetan parents.

<sup>82</sup> See Charles Bell, *People of Tibet* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1928), *Religion of Tibet*.(Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1931)

ability to move across all sections of the population in the Tibetan society owing to his position and his general curiosity to understand and study that society makes the very work he produced, a very reliable source for the period he was dealing with.

Thus, in that sense, I believe one can judge the works produced by Charles Bell as scholarly and Bell himself as a scholar.

Bell after his retirement in 1918 from the active duty of being a political officer of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet began to write works that dealt extensively with Tibet. His four works (except for his “*Manual of Colloquial Tibetan*”)<sup>83</sup> came out between 1924-1931, and the last one in 1946, a year after his death. Here in this chapter, I will explore the following four books: *Tibet: Past and Present* (1924), *The People of Tibet* (1928), *The Religion of Tibet* (1931), *Portrait of Dalai Lama; The Life and Times of the Great Thirteenth* ( 1946).

Although the works of Bell and his contribution to Tibetan Studies is duly noted and are often used to describe bigger events in Tibetan history as well as the life of Cadres in the frontier where he was posted<sup>84</sup>, one aspect of his life does not feature at all in the discussions: his intermediary functions between Tibet and British India. Thus, with an intention of furthering the studies and bring into discussion the aspect of intermediary in it, I will attempt to portray how these works of Bell could be read as a work of a scholar intermediary and how his function as an intermediary has influenced these works. And since all of his scholarly works were intended to influence on the one hand the policymakers to come up with a just policy towards Tibet but also

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<sup>83</sup> It was first published in 1905 and in 1919 another version of it was published with larger content.

<sup>84</sup> See Alex Mckay(1997 ), Alaister Lamb (1966) Wendy Palace (2004)



to educate the readers as well as future officers who would be implementing these policies, the idea of Bell as a scholar intermediary could be justifiably applied.

Hence, in this chapter, keeping in mind the intermediariness of the Bells work, I will focus on some of the key aspects that best exemplify it. This includes his portrayal of Tibet, which on the one hand brings forth the importance of Tibet to British India as a buffer zone for the Northeastern frontiers. And the other, information which he provided on Tibet especially its socio-cultural practices to help build commensurability. A crucial component in his work that shows him as a “scholar intermediary”.

### **3.1 Portraying Tibet.**

In 1924, when *Tibet Past and Present* was published, there was a marked change in the policies of the Indian government regarding its Northern neighbors. The gusto with which the “Forward Policy” of Lord Curzon was pushed in the pre-first world war period had now diluted. Especially the demand for a permanent resident of British officials in Lhasa which was now deemed less advantageous.

In the eyes of the British, the overall significance of Tibet had waned. There were multiple reasons for this change in the attitude towards Tibet. One crucial reason was that the dominant position which Britain held in the world itself was in decline. Its hold in Asia was in a precarious situation. There was also a growing nationalist movement in India which was now gradually overtaking the rule from Britain and marching towards its freedom from their rule.

As Wendy Palace puts it, “in this new world the ‘problem’ of Tibet would fade into relative insignificance as the main aim of British policy in Asia was reduced to one of basic survival”.<sup>85</sup> Charles Bell was well aware of this development, but he still retained a certain optimism in the longevity of the British Empire. He writes: “But a considerable time is likely to pass before the need for this withdrawal is fully recognized”.<sup>86</sup> Thus, he points to the need for maintaining and forming a concrete policy on Tibet, which so far had not been successful.<sup>87</sup> The reasons that Wendy Palace points out was the overwhelming ignorance surrounding the nature of the intricate network of alliances and informal understandings that governed the conduct of policy in Central Asia, which she says was the result of misinformation supplied by the Chinese and by the Tibetans themselves, “but was also often the result of their own failure to appreciate the nuances of diplomatic etiquette other than in purely western terms”<sup>88</sup>. Bell, with his immense experience in this matter, was fully aware of the scenario. He clarified his intention of writing the works on Tibet in order to provide the British electorate with information when they had to decide questions of foreign policy regarding Tibet: “It seems therefore essential that they should have at their disposal-whether to accept or to reject the facts and opinions put forward by those who have been long connected with foreign relationships”.<sup>89</sup>

However, before we start discussing his works. It is crucial to understand certain key elements which could mislead us in understanding Charles Bell, especially between Bell, the political officer and Bell who later took to writing about Tibet. There is a marked difference between the

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<sup>85</sup> Wendy Palace, *The British Empire and Tibet 1900-1922*. (Abingdon, Routledge Curzon 2005), 142

<sup>86</sup> Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present* ( Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924) 244

<sup>87</sup> Prior to Shimla conference of 1913-14, the agreement on Tibet has been kept on behalf of it by china, as British India took China to be the one having sovereignty over Tibet, starting from Chefoo convention signed in 1876, treaty between china and British on 1906 regarding trade and on 1908.

<sup>88</sup> Palace, *The British Empire and Tibet 1900-1922* ,148

<sup>89</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and present* , 4

two roles. The first one could be seen as a “Tibet Cadre”<sup>90</sup> who grew up believing in British imperialism and his support for independent Tibet or strong autonomy which Tibetan themselves sought needs to be understood in the larger context of the Curzonian Forward Policy, as it coincided with it.<sup>91</sup> Since in this policy they wanted Tibet to be beyond any influence of foreign power, especially Russia. And for that, they needed a strong centralized rule, the one which 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama was able to give. If the interest between the two were different what trajectory his function would have been, is hard to fathom.

And the later Bell, i.e. not the officer but the scholar who was well aware of the historical trajectory of the British Empire in East and its limited days in this part of the world, being aware of the entanglement that shaped Tibet under the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Thus, unlike Bell, The Political officer, Bell the scholar was genuinely working towards securing Tibet’s desire for independence. In that sense, one can understand why he writes that he had “sympathy”<sup>92</sup> for the people about whom he was writing. This point is elucidated by Emma Martin, that is the idea of “Tibetanisation”<sup>93</sup> of Charles Bell in his understanding of things Tibetan. He was as she points out not only interested in

“to not only *knowing that*, but to *knowing how* (and to a certain extent why). What I mean by this is that, he was not only simply interested in recording the facts and information given to him, but that he wanted to recognize the significance of a gesture or an act, he wanted to know how to act Tibetan”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See Alex McKay *Tibet and the British Raj*, (London, Curzon Press, 1997.), the term is coined by McKay to differentiate with other Political Officer who were posted in other princely state under British rule in India.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid 74

<sup>92</sup> Bell, *Tibet past and Present*. 4

<sup>93</sup> Emma Martin. *Charles Bell's Collection of 'curios': Negotiating Tibetan Material Culture on the Anglo-Tibetan Borderlands (1900-1945)*. PhD diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, 2014

<sup>94</sup> Ibid 31

Thus, his work in its entirety could be understood in three ways, first, to provide facts and opinion from a person who was on the spot so that nuanced policies could be formed; second, providing the Tibetan side of the story;<sup>95</sup> and third, equipping the people on the spot and the new officers would occupy that space with nuances of Tibetan culture and society, creating a space for commensurability.<sup>96</sup> Hence, it is important to discuss from his works certain crucial aspects that will point out the above points, especially the way in which he has portrayed Tibet in his writings.

### 3.1.1 Tibet and the British Empire.

In late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a shift in the ways in which Tibet began to be portrayed in the literature, unlike the writings of missionaries and travelers the views put forth were different in nature, which Tsering Shakya refers to as “ diplomatic views” where

“the political nature of their encounter with Tibet radically changed the perception of it as remote and isolated, at least for the diplomats and officers concerned. To them, Tibet was a country of strategic importance with whose leaders European governments now sought to enter into formal correspondence. To support the attempt to define its status and its boundaries, there was an urgent need for information about its economy, geography and political system, all of which was seen in terms of the possibilities it offered to British interests in the region”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “we should do more than is done at present towards putting before the public the Tibetan side of incidents that arise from time to time, especially when misrepresentations are published in the Chinese, the British, or the Indian Press. People naturally become imbued with the idea that the Tibetans are an aggressive or a savage people, whereas the aggression and the savagery have proceeded in almost every case from the Chinese” *Tibet past and present* 269,

<sup>96</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his work *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2012) points out how commensurability between two distinct culture could be build, that commensurability itself was a gradual process and that intricacies in the other culture could be learned.

<sup>97</sup> Tsering Shakya, “Introduction: The Development of Modern Tibetan Studies” in Robert Barnett (ed.), *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 3-4.

Bell's work did not differ much in this regard however one aspect we can add in Shakya's analysis when it came to Bell was that he did give the Tibetan side of the story. Since the interest of the two coincided, the presentation of Tibet which Bell saw fit was advantageous to Tibet as well<sup>98</sup>.

Although in this chapter I will not be able to discuss his works in its entirety, it could be shown how his work was aimed to better inform British policymakers on the issues of Tibet and introduce to the "men on the spot" the various ways of the Tibetans. And this could be seen in three different ways he did through his work, first locating Tibet geographically, so as to give the geographical extent of Tibet along with the extent of Dalai Lama's rule within it; second, to point out the status of Tibet in relation to China; and third, to describe what advantages British Empire in India will have with an independent or strong autonomous Tibet.

If we look at these issues individually, since Bell was a British official, he was very familiar with issues surrounding the empire, and one of that was securing its border regions. One of the crucial reasons for this was Chinese aggression in Eastern Tibet, starting from 1906 under the Manchu General Chao Erh Feng and also the general fear was that this force might come to South Eastern part of Tibet, which was more fertile. Bell notes "the south-eastern portion of the country, being

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<sup>98</sup> The period when Bell wrote his work The Dalai Lama's government was seeking help that was other than china, hence one can often see in the Bell's work when the tone of letters which he often quote sent to Indian government at that time was rather friendly and amiable in its content and language. An important example is regarding the Younghusband expedition of 1903-4, which was a forceful attempt to open Tibet to British India however Tibetan after 1912 began to portray it in very different light, they would call it "when the British officials and troops kindly came to Lhasa".

the lowest in elevation and therefore the most fertile, was bound to appeal to them as suitable for those Chinese colonies”<sup>99</sup>

The borders surrounding Bhutan and Assam had been secured with the treaty of Punakha in 1910. The only problem British Empire in India had was the large tracts of land that lies between India and Tibet, the North Eastern part of British India or the “Tribal Territories”<sup>100</sup> which were still unsettled. Territories where the Chinese forces were feared to be headed by the British. Thus, the knowledge of the exact location of these territories had become quite crucial. Unless Tibet’s geographical extent was not understood, the extent of Tribal territories would not be clear either, hence Bell consistently begins by giving us the coordinates of Tibet in all his works. This is interesting at two levels, first, the coordinate itself which he writes are “from the 78th to the 103rd degree of east longitude and from the 27th to the 37th degree of north latitude”<sup>101</sup>. On the one hand, he is clever enough to exclude the Tawang region from these coordinates which came under British rule only after the 1914 Shimla Agreement. He thus negates the agreement’s division of Tibet into two zones, Inner and outer Tibet,<sup>102</sup> in this coordinate he includes (along with the outer Tibet which was as per the agreement under Dalai Lama’s rule but also eastern Tibet) the areas which were highly contested between China and Tibet, especially Ba-tang, Li-tang, Tachienlu, and a large portion of Eastern Tibet. This means that he is portraying Tibet as the Tibetans wanted it in the Shimla Agreement of 1914.

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<sup>99</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present* ( Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924) 107

<sup>100</sup> Bell, *Tibet past and present* , 156

<sup>101</sup> Ibid , 5

<sup>102</sup> Outer Tibet was those areas near to India and under Dalai Lama’s rule whereas the Inner Tibet were those areas in eastern Tibet that were closer to China.

This gives us an example of reconciliation of Bell as a British official on the one hand and an advocate of independent Tibet or autonomous Tibet on the other. However, Bell masked this reconciliation under the umbrella of the Forward Policies, which advocated a strong independent Tibet since this was more advantageous to British India<sup>103</sup>.

Aside from the thorny issue of the geographical position of Tibet, the status of Tibet also complicated concrete policies on Tibet, especially concerning the frontier regions that bordered Tibet and British India. One recourse which British India took was to negotiate these issues with Manchu China.<sup>104</sup> The idea was that Manchu China had suzerainty over Tibet but when the Tibetans began to openly defy the agreements that were reached between the two, a complete revaluation of the status of Tibet began *vis a vis*, China began.<sup>105</sup> This aspect of the Tibetan history is interesting. As Dibyesh Anand points out, it was the period when Tibet encountered British imperialism and Britain encountered Tibet, whereby the imperialist began to understand Tibet *vis a vis* China in European terminologies. This period (1905-1950) “saw the explicit use of European terminologies to define Tibet using the terms of *suzerainty and autonomy*.”<sup>106</sup>

Bell too used such terms. However, he was well aware of the fact that there was a marked distinction between the East and the West in many aspects. He notes: “Asia does not think along European lines,”<sup>107</sup> and presents to us the intricacies of Tibet-Chinese relations which had

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<sup>103</sup> This idea could be clearly seen in *Tibet Past and Present* “It may be hoped, in the interests both of Tibet and ourselves, that we shall not endeavour to follow any such policy in Tibet. We should but increase our responsibilities very greatly without an adequate return : the Himalaya and Tibet would no longer form our northern barrier. But it showed clearly once again how necessary and urgent it was in our own interests to have an autonomous Tibet as strong as possible, a barrier against outside influences”

<sup>104</sup> For example Chefoo Convention 1876, treaties that were kept in 1906 and later in 1908.

<sup>105</sup> Wendy Palace *The British Empire and Tibet 1900-1922*. (Abingdon Routledge Curzon 2005), 3

<sup>106</sup> Dibyesh Anand, “Strategic Hypocrisy: The British Imperial Scripting of Tibet’s Geopolitical Identity” *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 68, No. 1 (February 2009), 227–252. Italic is my own.

<sup>107</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*. 215

emerged during the Seventh Dalai Lama's reign (1708-1757) where he gives us the Tibetan perspective:

“The Tibetan Government maintain that the Dalai Lama is the spiritual guide and the Chinese Emperor his lay supporter. All who are well acquainted with the East know what this relationship involves. It is the duty of the layman to help his priest in all ways possible, but the priest does not on that account become the layman's servant. Whatever help China may have rendered to Tibet was rendered in that capacity and does not in any sense put Tibet under China. ' You will find no treaty ', they used to continue, ' by which Tibet recognizes that China is her overlord' <sup>108</sup>

Looking at historical antecedents<sup>109</sup> he says that “whatever might be the opinion as to Chinese actions in Tibet, the country was undoubtedly under the *suzerainty* of China.”<sup>110</sup> However, writing all his major works after his retirement he does point out that there was a strong will within the Dalai Lama's government for independence from China.<sup>111</sup>

Now, as pointed out by Wendy Palace,<sup>112</sup> the position of the British Empire in the east was gradually losing its ground, and its most prized colony, India, was about to free itself from British rule. Under such circumstances, the issue of Tibet was never brought into a larger discussion: it was relegated to the position of insignificance, although when Lord Curzon became the foreign secretary he did try to solve the “ Tibetan problem” once and for all but it never came

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid,

<sup>109</sup> During Seventh Dalai Lama in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the grip of Manchu in Tibet began to grow, they installed Amban, representative of Manchu emperor with 300 escorts, they even initiated new method to recognize Dalai Lama known as Golden Urn system, there were also other instances for example paying off Nepals claim of war's indemnity on behalf of Tibetan Government in Lhasa.

<sup>110</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 215, Italic is my own.

<sup>111</sup> “There is no doubt that they desire to be free of Chinese control in their political affairs. They are a homogeneous people and, though they are akin to the Chinese, the relationship is no closer than that between Frenchmen and Italians” ( *Tibet Past and Present*, 217)

<sup>112</sup> Palace, *The British Empire and Tibet 1900-1922*



to fruition.<sup>113</sup> In that sense one question that arises is why Bell constantly insists in his writings to come up with consistent policies on Tibet,<sup>114</sup> being well aware as he was of the above facts. A policy that guaranteed an independent Tibet under his friend,<sup>115</sup> the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, “a unique figure in world history.”<sup>116</sup> In his writings, we are left seeking for the answer. However one does get a glimpse of it when he quotes the Tibetan saying, “British are the road makers of Tibet”, meaning the British prepared Tibet to be occupied by another power.<sup>117</sup> The Younghusband Expedition of 1904 and the failure of the Simla Agreement in 1914 and the overall failure to come up with any concrete policies on Tibet, brought it to the ever-growing powerful China. Thus, to make policymakers to come up with concrete policies that will favor Tibet he never shies away to point out how important Tibet is to the British Empire in India. As Alex McKay, while describing Bell writes:

“Bell was also a master of the art of presenting a case to the government in which minor policies, designed to buttress his main lines of argument, could be used as 'bargaining chips', to be sacrificed if necessary. Bell's expertise in this subtle art of influencing government means that we cannot necessarily accept any particular statement of his as indicating his real beliefs and aims. His proposals must be seen in the context of his long-term goals”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> He became British Foreign secretary in 1919 and in that very year and then in 1921 and in 1922 he did made attempt to solve the issue but without any result.

<sup>114</sup> A brief remark is necessary here, Charles Bell was highly respected when it came to the knowledge on Tibet, his suggestions were taken seriously, crucial elements during Shimla agreement was suggested by Bell and was added into it, for example enabling trade agents in Gyantse ( a small outpost near Sikkim,India)to visit Lhasa.

<sup>115</sup> In the dedication of his work *Portrait of a Dalai Lama*, he writes “In recollection of a long and affectionate Friendship”

<sup>116</sup> Charles Bell. *Portrait of a Dalai Lama* (London: Collins, 1946) 15

<sup>117</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 114.

<sup>118</sup> Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947* (London , Curzon Press,1997)

And this acumen of Bell could be seen in the way in which he portrays Tibet, especially the need for an independent one. He argues that even if the British government withdrew from governing India, a considerable time is likely to pass for that to be fully recognized and even the new government might benefit from the policies because of the likelihood that India will join the British Commonwealth<sup>119</sup>. Thus, making it pertinent to secure the northern frontiers and making Tibet a “buffer state”<sup>120</sup> under the Lhasa government, that is under 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, was important to him, that is, a unified Tibet without the false demarcation of outer and inner Tibet<sup>121</sup> that was drawn during the Simla agreement. The key argument he brings is that Tibet could become a strong buffer only if it could be under a single rule. And since, he writes,

“Tibet desires freedom to manage her own affairs, her people resent foreign interference. And it is well that it should be so, for thus is the barrier most efficient”<sup>122</sup>

And secondly he argues that if enough attention is not paid on the issue of Tibet properly the danger especially in the Northern frontier is not far, he insists that the peace which British India saw in the Northern Frontier from 1910 onwards was because of Tibet and its “elevated plateaux” and to retain it in future British government must assist Tibet in ways that would modernise it and bar China from making any incursion into Tibetan territory.

Thus, in his final two chapters of his book “*Tibet Past and Present*”, Bell presents his suggestions on framing policies on Tibet. And in here we encounter Bell who is sympathetic to the cause of Tibet but also aware of the British interests. Thus, he presents his case on the issue

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<sup>119</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*. 244

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 244-246

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 251

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 246

of making Tibet a buffer state under a single rule of Dalai Lama, “guided by, or in close alliance with, the British-Indian Government”,<sup>123</sup> but without making Tibet a protectorate of British Empire.<sup>124</sup> For this to happen Bell points out two key issues: reaching an agreement with China with the British as a mediator and helping Tibet economically.

Bell points out that unless and until a suitable agreement cannot be reached between Tibet and China, the “Tibetan problem” was there to stay. And even then, if an agreement was to be made Bell points out that the Tibetan representative should be included along with the Chinese and it should be held either in Lhasa or in India, not in Beijing.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, Bell is aware of the needs of modernizing Tibet if Tibet were to retain its independence and if the British wanted to secure its northeastern frontier. In here we see Bell willing to forego the convention that was kept in 1904,<sup>126</sup> especially *Article 4*, whereby the Tibetan government in Lhasa was made to levy any taxation on goods coming from India to Tibet. He suggests that even though the Tibetan government is doing its best to generate income to sustain its growing military and its process of modernization through different modes of taxation and through mining, Tibet was still in need of another source of income. Thus, he suggests

“In these circumstances, it seems to me that we should in equity agree to the imposition by the Tibetan Government of a customs tariff on moderate and clearly-specified lines. In this way, justice will be met, and money will be found for Tibetan needs, which are also the needs of India. For, when Tibet acquires the means of defending herself, she defends India also”.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 246

<sup>124</sup> Not making Tibet a protectorate of British Empire was one of the key issue; with Empire itself weakened, it was considered an unwise policy to be followed.

<sup>125</sup> This was one of the demand from the Tibetan, as they feared if the agreement were to be held in China they might be coerced by the Chinese.

<sup>126</sup> The convention of 1904 kept in Lhasa after Younghusband expedition.

<sup>127</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 257

Bell as an intermediary presenting the case for Tibet can be seen clearly in the final chapter of the same book<sup>128</sup> where the focal point is not British India but Tibet itself and the need of the country, along with the suggestion to include Tibet in a future agreement if ever to be made with China regarding Tibet. He brings forth key remarks which he bases on the idea of strong Tibet and reverting the policies of aloofness<sup>129</sup> from the British side. As the danger of Tibet falling under China was not very far – the country was militarily weak – the chance of jeopardizing the peace in the North Eastern frontier was real.

Since ignoring the issue of Tibet was not an option, Bell suggests what Do's and Don'ts the policymakers, as well as officials who were posted in that region, should keep in their mind. He begins by providing some basics. For example, he wants officials to be sympathetic to Tibetans, who, in general, are people who have the "capacity for getting on well with them". However the official should be of faith other than that of the "Mahomedans", he writes. "The people of Tibet, Bhutan, and Sikkim, and indeed those of Nepal also, Hindus as well as Buddhists, do not, as a rule, live harmoniously with Mahomedans from India".<sup>130</sup> He also points out that the officials should know the language, that is, Tibetan which was a *lingua franca*, preferably the Lhasa dialect, as it was more generally spoken than any other language.

Along with the above suggestions, he also wants the policymakers to put on checks on, for example, the missionaries who, according to Bell, were often associated with the Chinese invasion since their dominance in Tibet coincided with that. Moreover, he says, since "Tibetans

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 258-270

<sup>129</sup> The key issue with British at that period was the treaty with Russia which was signed in 1907, where both agreed not meddle with Tibet, it was to be kept aloof from its neighboring regions.

<sup>130</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*. 260, Bell writes in here about the prophecies in religious text of Tibet, where "Turuka(Turks) would do their utmost to destroy the Tibetan religion"

do not try to push their creed in Christian countries; they are opposed to Christian missionaries preaching religion in Tibet”.<sup>131</sup> Another check he wants is on the Marwaris, “a large class of traders and money-lenders” whose business method he is skeptic about, especially after his encounter with them in Sikkim. Where they were seen to levy a hefty interest coming up to thirty-seven and a half percent. Hence, he points out: “we should not encourage Indian money-lenders-or indeed British if there be any so desirous-to settle in Tibet. As matters stand even now, many Tibetans feel that an undue proportion of the profits from their trade goes to Indian dealers living on the Tibetan borderland and elsewhere”<sup>132</sup>

But the most crucial points he makes is the “ misrepresentation” of Tibet in the press whether it is in Chinese, British or in Indian Press, as those reports were in full ignorance of the Tibetan side of the story. Tibetans were often portrayed as “ aggressive” and “ savage”<sup>133</sup>, against which he takes on the task of writing about the people and society of Tibet.

### 3.1.2. Society and Culture

Bell claims that he would not be writing a “complete study of Tibetan domestic life. A miscellany of facts, and occasional ideas to clothe those facts are all that I can offer”.<sup>134</sup> However, if we look into his work *People of Tibet* and *Religion of Tibet* the theme he has included are immense and varied. In the *People of Tibet*, he introduces people from all walks of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 264

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 262

<sup>133</sup> Charles Bell. *People of Tibet* ( Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928) 109

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, vii

life. He introduces beggars as well as nobles of Tibetan society and deals with issues from marriage to death ceremonies. He does leave out a huge section of the population that is Monks and nuns (there is little mention of them) because he covers this part of people of Tibet in his other work *Religion of Tibet* which looks at the gradual shift in the religion from pre-Buddhist practice which he refers to as Pon<sup>135</sup> to gradual *Buddhicization* of Tibet starting from 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In here one of the most pertinent points he looks at is how priest rule came to be in Tibet and the nature of its rule. These two works of Bell describe two distinct aspects of Tibet, one which is on the people and their practices, which one can place in the domain of the profane and another which is in the realm of the sacred. But when we combine these two, we get a fuller picture of society and culture of Tibet according to Bell's interpretations.

Emma Martin in her work describes the gradual process of Tibetanisation of Charles Bell through his sensibility towards Tibetan culture which she says was thanks to his acquaintances with Tibetans in Tibet and those who understood the Tibetan language present in Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Kalimpong.<sup>136</sup> Bell often relied on the help of the latter, a fact he mentions in all the works he has produced on Tibet and themes related to Tibet.<sup>137</sup> This sensibility of Bell can be seen in ways in which he describes the life of Tibetans, which is neither patronizing or demeaning. He understood simply the way in which Tibetans thought they understood themselves. However, it needs to be pointed out that Bell never went “native”, as it were. He did

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<sup>135</sup> Although in more recent work by Per Kvaern, Matthew Kapstein, they are reluctant in using the word “Religion” to this pre Buddhist practices but here Bell understand it as a religion, it is an idea which is rooted in Buddhist historiography of Tibetan history, which he uses abundantly in his work.

<sup>136</sup> Emma Martin. *Charles Bell's Collection of 'curios': Negotiating Tibetan Material Culture on the Anglo-Tibetan Borderlands (1900-1945)*. PhD diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, 2014. 31- 58

<sup>137</sup> Individual such as David McDonald, as son of scottish tea plant owner and lepcha women, Phalese, Tibetan noble, Kazi Dawa samdup, Achuk Tsering, a Sikkimis from the royal family, along with Tibetan in Tibet all provided valuable teachings to Bell, from translating important historical text to religious one.

not convert to Buddhism or took any Tibetan name. One of the reason could have been that those who went “Native” were less trusted by their own Government, whatever was the reason Bell remained English to the core till the end.

With Tibetanised sensibility and his natural curiosity, he was able to gather much information on Tibet and for this his position as a political officer proved advantageous. He was able, owing to this position, to roam freely and converse with the lower stratum of Tibetan society, on the one hand, and greet and meet the upper echelon of that very society, on the other. For example, in his works, along with the names of the prime minister of Tibet, Lonchen Shatra, and other ministers, mention is made of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political head of Tibet as well as of Tashi Lama or Panchen Rinpoche, a high incarnate Buddhist master who willingly provided sources for his works related to Tibet.<sup>138</sup>

Michael Aris in the preface of Alex Mckays works “*Tibet and the British Raj*” writes about the education of various political officers who were responsible for the relations with Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan and “there was no aspect of Tibetan life of the past or present that did not interest them”<sup>139</sup>. The observation of Aris is no doubt true when it comes to the works of Bell: in his attempt to write about the people of Tibet he includes almost all the aspects that he considers to be the trait of that particular group of people, for example when he gives an account of beggars in Lhasa<sup>140</sup>, where we see the aspect of his Tibetanisation as well his curiosity and very clearly: “you cannot disregard the beggars. Though they swarm, you must give to all-once. Having done

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<sup>138</sup> Bell, *Religion of Tibet*

<sup>139</sup> See McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj: The Frontier Cadre 1904-1947*

<sup>140</sup> Lhasa is the capital of Tibet

so, you are free of them for a season. If they are still importunate, a reminder will move them away, for they, too, recognize the rules of the game. But once you must give”.<sup>141</sup>

And on the very issue of beggars, he deals with how they greeted people:

“No doubt a wide diversity marks the forms of salutation current in different countries of the world, but few can be more out of the ordinary than that used by the humbler classes in Tibet towards their social superiors. Peasant, shepherd, or labourer will put out his tongue when addressing-or addressed by-one of the gentry<sup>142</sup>. A beggar adds the further compliment of putting up his two thumbs, thus signifying that the person addressed is of the first quality, and may be expected to give a present in accordance with his quality”<sup>143</sup>

Such minute details fill the works of Bell which makes it, on the one hand, entertaining but on the other brings forth distinctiveness of the people which sets them apart. And he proceeds this with great care without bringing into it his own judgments but the logic behind the practices that he describes, for example when he describes the idea of beauty in women:

“As to standards of beauty, who shall decide? Many English people deny beauty to the generality of Tibetan women; the almond eyes, flat noses, and high cheek-bones are causes of offense. But to many Tibetans, it appears that some of the European features are abnormal and ugly”<sup>144</sup>

Another such description he makes is on the “last rites”,<sup>145</sup> that is, the funeral practices of Tibetans, especially in the central part of Tibet, a practice which is currently known as “sky burial” where the corpse of the deceased is chopped into pieces and fed to vultures. He writes:

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<sup>141</sup> Bell, *People of Tibet* ,132

<sup>142</sup> In here Charles Bell is particularly describing practices in Central Tibet especially areas surrounding Lhasa where these practices were upheld.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid 134

<sup>144</sup> *People of Tibet* 147

<sup>145</sup> *People of Tibet* 285



“ This method has much to recommend it in a country like Tibet. Burial is difficult, for the ground is frozen hard during the winter. Cremation is difficult, for there is no coal, and but little firewood. Casting into rivers pollutes the drinking supply”.<sup>146</sup>

Observations as such are abundantly recorded in his work which he claims are the result of “interest and sympathy” which he had acquired in his long career as a political officer but it could also be read as a tool to engender within the new political officer the similar traits. Since it portrays Tibet, not as a mystical realm hidden in the Himalaya but rather a place with its own peculiarities which could be understood if one is sympathetic to the place.

In that sense, Bell’s works could be understood, first, as a tool for building commensurability between two cultures (Britain and Tibet). As Sanjay Subrahmanyam points out, “commensurability had to be made by agents, and bridges between cultures had to be built rather than naturally existing in nature”<sup>147</sup> Thus his works were based on the materials he collected as a political officer after a year-long process of his Tibetanisation in his sensibility.<sup>148</sup> He presents the Tibetan side of the story, how they perceived themselves, what was their peculiar practices. He presents “facts and opinions put forward by those who have been long connected with foreign relationships”<sup>149</sup> or an opinion of a “man on the spot”<sup>150</sup> thus making it more authoritative.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid 290

<sup>147</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2012) 30

<sup>148</sup> See Emma Martin, Phd Dissertation (2014), *Charles Bell's collection of 'curios': negotiating Tibetan material culture on the Anglo-Tibetan borderlands (1900-1945)* chapter 1.

<sup>149</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present* 4, the term feudal does not exist in Tibetan vocabulary until recently, it was with the Chinese occupation of Tibet and to describe the society before the occupation, new word was created “Shingdren”.

<sup>150</sup> A Man on the spot were those individuals that had been posted or were posted at a particular place, in the circle of political department of Indian government under viceroy, their opinions were regarded highly.

Second, Bell along with the process of building commensurability through his works is also working on delegitimizing the narrative that has engulfed Tibet, which portrays Tibetan as an “aggressive” and “savage”<sup>151</sup> people. And third, he provides information about Tibet and the Tibetan way of life especially its customs and practices.

Thus, let us investigate a few of the aspects with which Bell deals in his works which encapsulate all three of his objectives. Bell presents Tibetan society to be feudal<sup>152</sup>, with “two classes; the landed gentry on the one side, the peasantry, and shepherds on the other. The trading community stands between the two, forming a middle class with middle-class aims, but they have so far little power. There is no strong middle class”.<sup>153</sup> He writes that the check on this upper class is done by the priest, from Dalai Lama downwards. But he points out the peculiarity of the feudal system in Tibet and contrasts it with the reincarnation and the system of Priesthood which challenges the privileges of the feudalist.<sup>154</sup> Through this system, in theory, anyone could become a Dalai Lama, head of Tibet, both spiritually and politically<sup>155</sup>. To become head of any monastery, religious knowledge was important, not the birth into a noble family.

While discussing different aspects of Tibetan society he takes a subject which is unique in its way, the position of Tibetan women in society<sup>156</sup> which he describes as “remarkably good”<sup>157</sup>. This announcement of his is coming after the comparison with Tibet’s neighbor India and China and after what other contemporary scholars of Tibet have to say about Tibetan women forcing him to even quote one of them: “The condition of Tibetan women with regard to men, especially

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<sup>151</sup> Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, 269

<sup>152</sup> Bell, *People of Tibet*. 109

<sup>153</sup> Ibid

<sup>154</sup> Bell, *The Religion of Tibet*, 119

<sup>155</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama was recognized in a family of a peasant.

<sup>156</sup> Bell, *The Religion of Tibet*, 156-169

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 156

in the provinces, may be considered as surpassing the ideal of Western women, so far as the theory of equality of rights between the sexes is concerned”.<sup>158</sup>

In here Bell discusses two crucial aspects when it comes to the position of women in Tibetan society. First, he looks at the inheritance of wealth by women which in case of the absence of a husband or of his death falls under her supervision until her son reaches the right age. In case in which there is no son in the family, the daughter marries a husband into the family, whereby the husband adopts the family name of her and takes subordinate position in maintaining the estates. Another is the practice of polyandry, where the wife takes multiple husbands, most probably the brothers of the husband whereby wife becomes the center of the family, whose interests pivot around her. And he says: “it follows naturally that her influence is thereby augmented”.<sup>159</sup>

Another point he makes is on the division of labor, whether it is in the field or in the house. He writes that these are equally performed by both husband and wife with minor differences, for example, women will milk the cow and make butter whereas men will plow the field, while planting the seeds, harvesting is to be shared between them. Even carrying water is a shared activity between the couple. Thus, with this regard to the position of women, he brings forth an example of a nun, a reincarnation of Goddess Dorje-Pamo of Sam Ding Monastery, where she is the head and overlooks more than fifty monks.<sup>160</sup>

Now if we turn from societal aspects to the cultural sphere especially in the sphere of ceremony and etiquette, Bell gives us insights into interesting practices and symbolic meaning embedded

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid

<sup>159</sup> Ibid 159

<sup>160</sup> He brings forth this discussion on the ground that the Tibetan are religious people and to show in the religious sphere how does the position of women were, a sphere which he describes is male dominated.

within it. He writes: “Nothing exposes a Tibetan to greater contempt than the saying, 'He knows not the way nor the Custom.’”<sup>161</sup>.

In Bell’s observations, it is the social as well as official ranking that determines how an individual will be treated socially and privately and whose observance if avoided could lead to grim repercussions and embarrassment. He narrates an incident that occurred between the Prince of Sikkim and the Regent of Tibet, when saying farewell to the prince, the ceremonial scarves (Ka-ta) was handed to the young prince by the secretary of the regent which was judged to be an insult, since it was customary that the Ka-ta to be presented by the regent himself, whereupon acknowledging the mistake the regent himself offered the farewell Ka-ta the. Once the guest had departed, the regent had ordered the chiefs who shared a border with Sikkim to strengthen their forces<sup>162</sup>.

This brings us to the discussion of receiving and giving the *Ka-Ta*,<sup>163</sup> a theme that Bell deals with at great length. He points out that the *Ka-Ta* has variant sizes and quality. And as the *Ka-Ta* differs in size and quality so does the mode of presenting it: “The gradations of rank must be scrupulously observed,” he says.<sup>164</sup> If the recipient is of much higher position than the giver, the receiver remains seated while the other lay the scarf at his feet and only if their ranks are of minor differences, then it is placed on the table. Only when both are equal, they stand and place their scarves over each other's hands. Placing of *Ka-Ta* on someone’s neck by the giver is the sign of superiority of the giver and inferiority of receiver<sup>165</sup>.

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<sup>161</sup> Bell, *People of Tibet*, 246

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 246

<sup>163</sup> Ka-Ta, a ceremonial scarf which is given and received in the important occasion in the Tibetan culture.

<sup>164</sup> Bell, *People of Tibet*, 249

<sup>165</sup> He writes in *People Of Tibet* “ Among the peoples of India it is an exceptional honour to receive a garland round the neck, but the same rule does not apply to the ka-ta of Tibet. And thus, the foreigner

Although Bell does points out cumbersomeness of these myriads of customs and ceremonies, which, according to Bell, even the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama found distasteful and “likes nothing better than to escape from it”; however, when the religion and policy require he says even the 13<sup>th</sup> is careful to observe it.<sup>166</sup> He writes, it is appreciated when foreigners observe these customs and ceremonies when they are in Tibet. Thus, his suggestions are, it is better to learn and follow these practices since neglecting these customs and practices could lead to a creation of hostile surrounding around oneself. As he writes, “the usages of courtesy in all its branches stand forth prominently in the teaching of the young Tibetan”, and “it permeates their conduct, and helps greatly to shape their character”, a custom and practice even seen in Britain. Thus to make it more familiar to the reader and to appreciate the nuances, he brings forth a famous English quote: “Manners makyth man”<sup>167</sup>.

Hence, Bell in these works does his best to portray Tibet through scholarly nuanced aspects that not only shows the Tibetan side of the story through his discussion of history, society, and culture. Along with this he also explains why Tibet still matters to the British Empire. A discourse if presented by a Tibetan would not have had the same weight as that of Bell, who was a “political officer” of the Empire, with the knowledge of the place by being “Man on the spot”, which allows us to think of Bell, as does this thesis, as a scholar intermediary. Although the term scholar intermediary does have strict conceptual limitations as for the conventional understanding if the intermediary is exclusively understood as someone with direct involvement in negotiation or cultural brokerage, which of course scholarly work is not. But in the case of

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from India has sometimes been misled, not understanding that, when a ka-ta was placed round his neck, he was being marked with a status of inferiority”

<sup>166</sup> Bell, *People of Tibet*, 261-262

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 262.

Bell and his work, this term – scholar intermediary – help us to define Bell’s involvement in British-Tibetan relations even after his retirement from his active duty as a political officer. As discussed, the works were the outcome of his many years of being a political officer, who was constantly engaged with the regions where he was the officer. Thus, familiar with the aspiration of the regions as well as the need of the Raj, he was well equipped to make suggestions on the policies about the regions where he acted as political officer, which he did abundantly. And all of these suggestions came as a scholarly work, which qualifies his role – even if only for heuristic reasons – as a scholar whose scholarship mediated between cultures with the clear aim of influencing policy.

Hence, this term scholar intermediary not only distinguishes Bell who was an active intermediary while being a political officer but it also brings into light his engagement as an intermediary even after his retirement in the form of his scholarly works.

## Conclusion.

For this thesis, I defined an intermediary as someone who is a “mediator”, who, owing to his position as the “man on the spot” is not only able to communicate and further the interest of his own party but, owing to his position as “non-ambassadorial agent”, is also able to forego diplomatic channels and achieve the kind of diplomatic success that ambassadors could not achieve because of formal restrictions. I have attempted to show how Sir Charles Alfred Bell was an intermediary, especially focusing on the roles he played in Anglo-Tibetan relations from 1908-1921. This I have done through focusing on a series of a pivotal moment in Anglo-Tibetan relations as well as on the works he wrote on Tibet.

First, in the chapter *Charles Bell as Intermediary* I looked into the roles Bell played in the Simla Agreement and in the drawing of McMahon line. The focus is placed on the question of why he was chosen as an advisor to the British plenipotentiary, Henry McMahon. The simple answer is that he was a political officer and the “man on the spot”, and Bell had amassed huge knowledge of the region. He was equipped with the knowledge to serve the interests of the British Empire, but also with the means to fulfill them. Since he understood the interests of the Tibetan government as well, which coincided with the those of the British Raj, he was able to bring the Tibetan delegates to agree with the terms which British plenipotentiary brought to the negotiation.

Thus, in the Simla Agreement, when Chinese delegates demanded to retain “Amban” (the representative of the Chinese government in Lhasa along with 300 Chinese army escort) the

Tibetan delegate vehemently opposed the demands. But Bell aware of the Tibetan situation, especially Tibetan's distrust of the Chinese Government, came up with the solution which was suggested to the British plenipotentiary, which proposed to ignore the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement of keeping Tibet out from the influences either from Russia or Britain, and which led to the addition of *article 8* in the agreement that allowed trade agents posted in Gyantse to visit Lhasa whenever they needed without any restrictions. This was a crucial article, as it appeased not only the Tibetans but the Chinese; but most importantly, it served the British interest, since the British did not have any intention of turning Tibet into one of its protectorates and stationing a permanent officer in Lhasa would have implied exactly that. A demand which the Tibetan plenipotentiary would have made if Chinese were to retain Amban in Lhasa. Bell was able to provide an alternative, which the plenipotentiary took up, hence Bell's role as an intermediary.

Secondly, in the drawing of McMahon line, once again Bell was chosen to break a deal with the Tibetan delegates. This again was a recognition of his amicable relationship with Tibetan representatives which he had built as a political officer. The British plenipotentiary needed this frontier issue with the Tibet to be solved prior to the conclusion of the Simla Agreement so that the agreed demarcation could be added within the Simla Agreement. The maps and the demarcations proposed by the British plenipotentiary were handed to Bell on the last day of February 1914. Bell handed them to the Tibetan plenipotentiary and by mid-March, the agreement was reached. In here we again see how Bell undertook the negotiation, where he pointed out that the core issue is to reduce any chances of friction between Tibet and British India in the future. We also see the card of *quid pro quo* being played here by Bell, especially the recognition of the sovereignty of Tibet, which Tibetan demanded in the Simla agreement, and the compliance of the British plenipotentiary to include it in the agreement.



In the following chapter *Charles Bell: A Scholar Intermediary* I have attempted to broaden the notion of intermediary in the context of Bell's scholarship by bringing into discussion his works. I argue that his books are the work of an intermediary and was influenced by his role as one. These works were clearly intentioned to further the interest of Tibet. As I shown, Bell as a political officer was well aware of the British interests as well as those of Tibetans. He disguises the interest of Tibetan under the mask of being advantageous for the British Raj in India. By portraying Tibet as strategically important as a buffer zone and claiming that a strong independent Tibet was more advantageous than a weak one, which was of course in the interest of the Tibetans.

Thus, it is because of these activities that we might rethink Bell's role in Tibet as that of an intermediary: Bell not only performed the roles as an active intermediary in the actual negotiation; after his retirement he also took to writing about Tibet in order to make suggestions to the British government for forming a concrete and favorable policy towards Tibet. In this double perspective, one can safely conclude that Bell was not only a political officer and a scholar, but that in these roles he was an intermediary.

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