

CONFLICT BETWEEN BIR SHUMSHERE AND C.E.R. GIRDLESTONE

Kashi Kanta Mainali

On 6 August, 1856 King Surendra had granted Jang Bahadur a *Lal Mohar* which stated that the post of *Maharaja* of Kaski and Lamjung would pass onto Jang Bahadur's direct descendants. As Jang Bahadur's brothers played a key role during his rise, he had formulated a "Roll of Succession" according to which his brothers would succeed proceed to Prime Minister and his sons to *Maharaja*. Furthermore, Jang did not want a minor to succeed the 'throne' of the *Maharaja-Cum-Priminister*. But after Jang Bahadur's death in 1877 the tug of war between Jangs and Shumsheres started. Jang Bahadur died at Pathargatta hunting camp and the message was sent to Commander-in-Chief Ranoddip Singh. His shrewd brother Dhir Shumshere didn't publicised published the news at once. He told Jang Bahadur's son and their supporters that Jang Bahadur was seriously ill at the hunting camp. He asked them to proceed towards the camp. Soon after their departure of the rivals from the capital, Ranoddip Sing acquired the post of *Maharaja* and Prime Minister. Jagat Jang who had the right to the post of *Maharaja* was ousted by Ranoddip. Jagat Jang was very upset as his right to the post of *Sri 3 Maharaja* was usurped by his uncle Ranoddip. He grumbled about it and used to stake his claim to *Maharaja* in the presence of his brothers and well-wishers. Thus the Nepal *Darbar* was clearly divided into two-one supporter of Jangs and other supporter of Ranoddip and Dhir Shumshere.

Dhir Shumshere was the only brother who would speak against Jang Bahadur. He was favoured by his brother Jang Bahadur as he had shown a remarkable presence of mind during Kot Massacre and confrontations with Tibetans. He stood against Jang Bahadur when Jang Bahadur was going to help British in the Indian Mutiny in 1857. Dhir Shumshere wished to support Indians. Thus it was clear to everyone that Dhir was an anti-British leader (Husian, 1970: 133) Dhir Shumshere was taken as one of the important men in the country and no division was taken without his advice. Dhir's alertness and timely action frustrated the conspirator Jagat Jang when Dhir discovered his plot to take life of *Maharaja* and Commander-in-Chief. When Dhir died in 1884 he had left behind his seventeen sons. His sons were very enthusiastic in politics. Dhir's death was greatly welcomed by the Jangs party. Now the two parties, Jangs and Shumsheres, were left for the real combat for power. The royal family was also divided to two fractions. The Shumshere took the lead when they staged the coup in 22 November, 1885 and killed Ranoddip Singh. Bir Shumshere became *Maharaja* and Prime Minister and the other posts of military and civil administration importance were divided among his brothers. Bir had to do a lot to get his government recognized. He did mainly of things to show that he was

112 *ONFLICT BETWEEN BIR SHUMSHERE*

not anti-British and thus helped British India in several aspects like extradition of Nagli Gurung, Gurkha recruitment etc.

During this period C.E.R. Girdlestone was the British Resident at Kathmandu. He knew well that Dhir Shumshere was an anti-British. Thus C.E.R. Girdlestone was biased against Shumsheres and was a strong supporter of the Jangs. He had been sending message to British India which showed his dislike towards Shumsheres. Even when British India granted recognition the resident advised his government not to give prompt recognition to Bir's government. The Resident was also very unhappy on the *Darbar's* policy on Iraki merchants.

The cold war between Bir Shumshere and the Resident Girdlestone became open during an incident that took place in a temple at Phashupati on 3rd August, 1887. An affray between the Residency *Sepoys* and the Nepalese crowd took place in the temple. The Residency *Sepoys* took three persons into their control and kept them at British Residency under their custody. The Nepalese side and the Residency *Sepoys* gave their own versions of the incident although the real cause of the incident could not be pinpointed.

The Nepalese side approached *Maharaja* Bir Shumshere and gave their own description of the incident. *Maharaja* accepted all what Nepalese side told as true and wrote an angry acrimonious letter in which he went out of his way and accused the Resident being the cause of the affray. *Maharaja* Bir was very angry about the steps taken by the Residency in a disturbance that took place outside Residency limits. The Resident also replied to *Maharaja* Bir in a most undignified manner. Thus the incident of Pushupati temple had given rise to a very unpleasant quarrel between the Resident and the *Maharaja*. This wordy warfare was then referred to Viceroy and Governor-General of British India. An extract from a report submitted by W.J. Cuninghame, Esq., Officiating Secretary of the Government of British India, Foreign Department; to the Secretary H.M. Durand dated 28th October, 1887 is as following:

These papers refers to a very unfortunate state of affairs at Katmandu. On the 3rd of August a disturbance took place in a temple at Pashpati. Very different accounts are given as to the origin and course of the disturbance; but this much is certain, that three Nipalese subjects were brought, at 10 o'clock in the morning, in custody of some sepoy's of the Residency guard.

The Residency sepoy's say that the Nipalese assaulted them without provocation and snatched away a puggri belonging to one of them. The Nipalese who were in the temple say the crowd was pushing and shoving, and one of the sepoy's lost his temper and pushed a man down the steps, and then they beat him and others and took them in custody, and illtreated them on the way to the Residency.

Of this part of the case it is, I think, safe to say that it is impossible to fix the blame of a disturbance arising in a crowd, unless we know that one or other side meant to raise it. The man who first used violence may not be to blame so much as the man who first lost his temper. In other words, the

responsibility for breaking the peace may be rather with him who was ready to take offence than with one who pushed or shoved or otherwise gave offence.

Next in this case, as probably in every one of the kind, each side goes beyond the truth in making out himself the injured or offended party and the other the unprovoked aggressor. That a handful of escort sepoy- whether there were five, as they say, or thirteen, as the Nipalese say, makes no matter- would, at a distance of two miles from the Residency, provoke a fight in a crowd of Nipalese, assault and beat them, and drag off three of their number, ill-treating them on the road, and speaking disrespectfully of their Mabaraja (as the Nipalese version has it), is as unlikely as is the assertion of the sepoy that, though they were unprovokedly assaulted in the temple where a hundred Nipalese were assembled they were suffered to take away their assailants. That they were undoubtedly allowed by the crowd to take away three men shows very conclusively how small a matter the disagreement really was, and that it was confined to the two or three persons between whom a misunderstanding arose.

The next phase is the really important and melancholy one. This incident in the Pashpati temple has given rise to an unseemly quarrel between the Resident and the Minister, the wordy warfare of which is now referred to the Governor-General in Council.

As is probably always the case when two men quarrel both are decidedly in the wrong.

When the sepoy brought their prisoners to the Residency, Mr. Girdlestone received a report of the occurrence, and waited until the usual Cutcherry time of 1-30 P.M. before he instituted an inquiry. The three Nipalese were kept in custody in the meanwhile. Mr. Girdlestone sent word to Captain Bul Bahadur to say he would enquire at once if the matter was serious. He waited till 1-30 because he got no reply. But the disturbance took place outside Residency limits: the justification advanced by the Resident for the sepoy bringing the three men to the Residency was that otherwise their identity could not have been established, and it would have been more prudent, I submit, for Mr. Girdlestone to have merely taken sufficient steps to insure their identification and to have let them go.

On the 5th of August, the Minister, who had been absent on the 3rd, sent Mr. Girdlestone an angry and acrimonious letter in which he recounted the incidents of the 3rd at the temple according to the version of the Nipalese, and accepted all they said as true, and not only that, but went out of his way to take up several causes of complaint against Mr. Girdlestone and accused him of being the cause of the affray, saying "I think this could not have occurred unless you had so wished and that all this has happened on account of your unkindness towards me."

Mr. Girdlestone replied in an unfortunate manner. He gave the version of his sepoy and relied as firmly on its truth as the Minister had done upon the veracity of his side of the story. He wrote angrily and with want of courtesy. He took up every irrelevant point and charge in the Minister's letter and repelled each with vigour, but with language which, I submit, no man in his position should use. For instance-

"The orderly officer was instructed to tell you . . . I was ready to send those of my sepoy concerned to be examined by you if you so wished."

"This friendly reference of mine has been met by a Yaddasht containing serious imputations on myself which you must have well known to

114 CONFLICT BETWEEN BIR SHUMSHERE

be unfounded and serious mis-statements which ordinary care on your part could have prevented."

Further on in the 4th paragraph is a very unfortunate sentence-

"Subadar Dwarka Tewary's report, dated 10th August, which I herewith send for your perusal (to be returned, please), exposes in detail several of your misstatements. His truthfulness is beyond suspicion."

It is to be hoped that the vernacular version, if this did not go in English, did not place the contrast between the subadar's contrast truthfulness and the Minister's mis-statements in such uncompromising prominence.

Mr. Girdlestone's letter lectures the Minister on the shortcomings of Nipal as contrasted with Mysore and Kashmir, gives him a lesson in humanity towards the brute creation, which unfortunately implies contempt for some of the most sacred tenets of the Hindur religion, taunts him with the reluctance with which "Lord Dufferin's Government" recognized him as Prime Minister, and finally threatens him with the possible vengeance of the English people.

To this the Minister replied in a long Yaddasht on the 1st September. This continues the angry controversy and prolongs the recriminations. The language is perhaps not so blunt as the passages of Mr. Girdlestone's letter which I have quoted but accusations and imputations of misstatements and inaccuracy are pretty freely made. Mr. Girdlestone returned it. He does not appear to know that he has written anything to the Minister which was out of place or discourteous. He calls (in his letter No. 70-P.) his yaddasht of the 17th August a "detailed explanation," while the Minister's reply is an "insolent yaddasht."

The real gravity of the case seems to me to lie so entirely in the unbecoming language used on both sides, and the impossible relations which now subsist between the Minister and the Resident, that an examination of the merits of the disputed matters is unnecessary.

The matters they are quarrelling about are whether British subjects who are tradesmen in Katmandu have been prevented free access to the Residency; whether British or Nipalese began an affray in a temple, whether the Resident behaved unkindly to certain Brahmini bulls which had annoyed him and had wandered into the Residency grounds, whether the escort sepoy's have carried sticks when they went into town; whether the Resident was right or wrong in believing that Khargo Shamshere (since deported) meant to make a clean sweep of the Residency, and so on.

Taken by themselves they are not serious questions, but Mr. Girdlestone represents them as part of a system, and he says that the undemonstrative attitude of the Government of India has been misconstrued by the Darbar, and if such misrepresentations and imputations as the Minister has now made remain unnoticed worse is likely to ensue. He is convinced that no political officer in India has such difficulties to contend with habitually as the Resident in Nipal, or stands more in need of the support of the Government of India.

H.M. Durand, the Foreign Secretary of Government of British India, after going through the report submitted to him wrote a brief report to the Viceroy of British India. The report was submitted to the Viceroy on 8th November, 1887. In this report he has given his own opinion on this quarrel between Bir Shumshere and Girdlestone. An extract from his report is as quoted as below:

This is a very troublesome case, and it seems to me impossible to discover any satisfactory solution of the difficulties involved. Mr. Girdlestone and the Nipalese Minister have fallen out. The facts upon which they are at issue cannot ever be conclusively demonstrated, one way or the other; while both have used improper language and thereby put themselves in the wrong. Both have now appealed to the Government of India, and some orders must be passed.

Briefly, the actual subjects of dispute are two,- first the treatment by the Nipalese Darbar of certain British subjects who are said to be debarred from free access to the Residency, and whose letters are examined before being posted, and secondly an unimportant affray between some of the sepoy of the escort and certain Nipalese.

As to the latter case, I cannot come to any decided opinion. I think the only course is to say that the evidence is too conflicting to admit of a decision, but that the matter does not seem to have been a serious one and that it may now be allowed to drop. At the same time, I would give the men of the escort a rather strong warning and would tell the Minister that it had been given. Natives of India are very apt to show arrogance and high-handedness in their dealings with the subjects of subordinate States if they think they have an English official behind them. The Minister on his side should be warned that British sepoy must not be insulted by his people, or the consequences may be serious.

As to the case of the Iraki traders, I would insist upon all British subjects being allowed free access to the Residency and proper treatment in the Courts. But in a country like Nepal one ought not to expect elaborate judicial arrangements, and I (raise) am not at all sure that it was wise to raise the question about the examination of letters. As the Resident has remonstrated, I would not interfere; but it is evident that the British post might be used by the Irakis to support the intrigues of the Darbar's enemies, the refugee Sardars, and it is not surprising that the Darbar should wish to guard against this. If the letters are freed from examination, the Irakis should be warned that they must not take advantage of the position to engage in political intrigue. Mr. Girdlestone has warned them, but a repetition of the warning from the Government of India would be beneficial.

There remains one small connected question upon which Mr. Girdlestone should I think be set right. He has told the Darbar he has no concern with Kashmiris, Marwaris, &c. But our representatives in foreign countries are always regarded as having charge of the interests of the Indian States, and if Marwaris and Kashmiris should come to Mr. Girdlestone for aid he should not refuse it.

The next and the main question is the tone of the communications which have passed between the Resident and the Minister. As to this point, I can only say that I agree to a great extent in Mr. Cuninghams views. Mr. Girdlestone has scolded the Minister in a most undignified manner, and he ought, I think, to be sharply rebuked for doing so. On the other hand, the Minister began the quarrel by his Yaddasht of the 5th August. Paragraph 11 of that paper is very improper, and it may, I think, be pointed out to him that such an accusation against a British Resident cannot but be gravely disapproved by the Government of India. What more to say I do not know. If the Minister is told that Mr. Girdlestone's language is also considered objectionable, the position of the latter will become very difficult, and yet it seems unfair to pass this over in silence. It is to be remembered that Mr. Girdlestone's action in detaining at the Residency for some hours the Nipalese concerned in the affray

116 CONFLICT BETWEEN BIR SHUMSHERE

was to say the least of it rather high-handed. Perhaps we might say that Your Excellency regrets that certain passages in the Resident's letters were of a nature to hurt the Minister's feelings, but that the Minister should not have allowed himself to attack Mr. Girdlestone in the first instance in the way he did.

The moral of the whole affair is that the sooner Mr. Girdlestone is out of Nipal the better. Fortunately he is going in March, and during the cold weather he will be on tour. When he goes he should be replaced by some one with a more equable temper and less trenchant pen.

The matter which would have been solved by the negotiation between the Nepalese side and the Residency took the bitter mode when both *Maharaja* Bir Shumshere and the Resident C.E.R. Gardlestone plunged themselves into quarrel. Both of them had no idea how to pacify this incident and had appealed British India Government to resolve the argument amicably. The incident was discussed in the council of the British India Government. In order to avoid such mishaps in future the Officiating Secretary W.J. Cuninghame dispatched a letter to the Prime Minister of Nepal. He had requested the Nepalese Government to ensure proper treatment of the British subjects in Nepalese Courts. He had also requested *Maharaja* to abolish the policy of examining the letters as he assured Nepalese Government that the Irakis are warned against their indulgement in political intrigue in Nepal. He also conveyed to *Maharaja* that the Government of India was very much displeased the way he used the incident as an opportunity of making serious and unfounded accusations against the Resident. The letter sent by the Officiating Secretary to Prime Minister of Nepal dated 27th December, 1887 is as following.

Mr. Girdlestone, the Resident in Nipal, has at your request submitted to the Governor-General in Council certain correspondence which has taken place between you and him regarding two separate matters in which your opinions have differed. The first matter relates to the complaints made concerning the treatment by the Nipal Darbar of certain Iraki merchants who are British subjects. The Governor-General in Council is ready to make all allowances for difficulty in establishing in Nipal a system of judicial procedure entirely beyond criticism, but I am directed to state to you that it is necessary to ensure proper treatment in Nepalese courts to British subjects, and no interference with their right of access to the British Resident can be tolerated. Mr. Girdlestone has protested against the examination of correspondence of British residents, and the Iraki merchants have been warned that the protection thus afforded to them must never be abused by their using their freedom to intrigue against the Darbar.

The second matter mentioned in the correspondence has reference to an affray, which took place between some sepoy of the Residency escort and certain Nipalese subjects. The quarrel itself was an insignificant occurrence, and it is impossible to say who was most to blame. Neither is it necessary for the Resident to do more than warn the sepoy of the escort against any behaviour likely to excite towards them the resentment of the Nipalese. But the Government of India views with grave displeasure the course which you adopted in using the incident as an opportunity for making very serious and unfounded accusations against the Resident.

In conclusion I am to convey to you the hope of the Governor-General in Council that the Resident will have in future no reason to complain of the contents or style of any communications addressed to him by your Government.

The British India Government was very much displeased about the dealing of their representative Resident C.E.R. Girdlestone with *Maharaja* and Prime Minister Bir Shumshere. The British India Government felt that it was Girdlestone's mistake to write to *Maharaja* in very undignified manner. As their representative was not dealing well with Nepalese Government as they had expected, it was their responsibility to remind the Resident of his duty. Thus the Officiating Secretary W.J. Cuninghame wrote a letter to the Resident C.E.R. Girdlestone. He reminded the Resident to repeat the warning he had given to the Iraki merchants not to engage themselves in political intrigues. He asked the Resident to give Resident *Sepoys*, who were involved in the affray, a strong warning for their arrogant or high-handed dealing with Nepalese people. He also mentioned in his letter British India Government's displeasure upon the Resident's tone of communication with Nepalese Prime Minister. The Officiating Secretary's letter to the Resident dated 27th December, 1887 is as quoted below:

1. I am directed to acknowledge who receipt of your letter relative to a recent correspondence between you and the Nipalese Minsiter.
2. The incidents which have immediately given rise to this unfortunate acrimonious interchange of letters are two- the treatment by the Nipalese Darbar of certain British subjects who are traders in Katmandu, and an affray between some of the sepoys of your escort and Nipalese subjects.
3. With regard to the first matter of despite I am to inform you that the Gvoernor-General in Council will insist upon all British subjects in Nipal being allowed free access to the Residency and proper treatment in Nipalese Courts, though it is impossible to aspect elaborate judicial arrangements. It is not surprising to find the Darbar exhibiting a jealous desire to guard against the British post being used to support the intrigues of their enemies the refugees; and I am to request that you will repeat, as from the Government of India, the warning you giva to the Iraki merchants against taking advantage of their position to engage in political intrigues.
4. Regarding the affray which took place in the Pashupati temple upon the 3rd of August, the evidence is so conflicting that it is impossible to come to a decision as to the exact blame attaching to either side; but in itself the disturbance does not seem to have been a serious one, and this matter may be allowed to drop. It is necessary to give the men of the escort a strong warning against arrogant or high-handed dealing with the people of Nipal, and the Minister on the other hand will be warned that British sepoys must not be insulted by Nipalese people, or the consequences may be most serious.
5. The most important question upon which the Governor-General in Council is called on by these papers to pronounce an opinion is the tone of the communications, which have passed between the Minister and yourself. The Minister's yaddasht of the 5th August contained accusations against you which were very improper for him to make, and which cannot but be gravely dis-approved by the Government of India. You were right

118 CONFLICT BETWEEN BIR SHUMSHERE

and justified in taking exception to the attitude which the Minister thought fit to assume, but the Governor-General in Council regrets that you should

have allowed yourself to be drawn into so sharp personal controversy not altogether connected with the questions at issue.

6. I am directed to enclose a letter for delivery to the Minister, and a copy of it is attached for your information.
7. In conclusion I am directed to advert to an incidental matter mentioned in your yaddasht to the Minister dated the 2nd September, which forms the fourth enclosure of your letter No. 65-P. In this you disclaim any concern with Marwaris, Kashmiris, and others who are not British subjects, but I am directed to say the representatives of the Government of India accredited to Foreign States are always regarded as having charge of the interests of subjects of feudatory States in India, who have no means of conducting international relations except through the medium of the British Government. You should not refuse your assistance to Marwaris, Kashmiris, or other people from Indian feudatory states when they apply to you for aid.

The Resident Girdlestone in spite of having many qualities was not successful man in his diplomatic functions in a country like Nepal. Due to his long stay (1872-1888) he had intimate knowledge of Nepalese politics. He was endowed with keen political sense, fortitude and had enough ideas to perform his duty. Despite these qualities he lacked sympathy, patience, tact and moderation which is essential to deal with a government. He was unduly suspicious of the Nepalese. The other drawback of the Resident was that he was unwilling to recognize Nepal as practically independent country. He used to take himself more as a political agent than as an Ambassador. The British Government was also very unpleasant by the splenic wording of his dispatches. This earned him nothing more than the censure from his Government. He thus failed to initiate a new go ahead policy in Nepal (Mojumdar, 1973: 34). After the incident that took place in a temple at Pashupati, the British India Government was greatly displeased by his dealing with Nepalese Prime Minister. Shortly after this incident he was replaced by Major E.L. Durand as an Officiating Resident in 1888. Although the actual cause of the incident was not known, it was the mistake of both Nepalese Prime Minister and the Resident to plunge themselves into quarrel. To prevent any deterioration in the relations of the British India and Nepalese Government, C.E.R. Girdlestone, who had anti-Shumshere feeling, was replaced by Major E.L. Durand with a hope to establish a good relation with *Maharaja* Bir Shumshere so that they can get allowance for Gurkha recruitment.

WORKS CITED

Foreign Department, Secret E, January 1888, Nos. 91-141, New Delhi: National Archives of India.

Husian, Asad (1970), *British India's Relations with the Kingdom of Nepal, 1857-1947*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Mojumdar, Kanchanmoy (1973), *Political Relations between India and Nepal 1877-1923*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.