

Travails of Border Trade

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Border Trade with Western Tibet

History of Trade marts in Tibet-Conventions and Agreements

To cover the lack of definite information as to when the border trade had started, there has been a tendency to describe it as an 'age-old' trade. Late Shri Ram Singh Pangtey in *Johar ka Itihas and Vansavali* suggested that the border trade with Tibet from Johar Valley was approximately 600 years old. Besides the age of the trade, there is also no definite information whether there had been any written agreement or orders regulating the border trade before the British signed the first Trade Convention in 1890.

The British Government was keen to establish Commercial and Trade relations with Tibet. Apprehending Tibetan resistance, the British approached the Chinese whose authority had extended to Tibet during 18th Century and signed a Convention in March 1890 with them which covered among other things, the delineation of boundary between Sikkim and Tibet and recognition of Sikkim as a protectorate of British India. A set of regulations regarding trade, communication and pasturage was also signed in December 1893 as an appendix to the Convention of 1890. The regulation provided for the establishment of a trade-mart at Yatung and permission for free movement of British subjects between Sikkim border and Yatung. The Convention and Trade Regulations had been signed between the Britishers and the Chinese without the consent and knowledge of Tibet who refused to accord the concessions agreed upon under the 1890 Convention.

The Tibetan refusal to accept 1890 Convention and 1893 Trade Regulations signed between the Britishers and China was a provocation for the Britishers to dispatch a military expedition to Lhasa and to force a Trade Agreement on Tibet. The agreement known as Lhasa Convention was signed at Lhasa on 7th September 1904 which inter-alia provided opening of trade marts at Gyantse and Gartok in addition to Yatung.

It also provided that Tibet would consider the question of establishing new trade marts if the development of trade so required. Apparently under this provision of the Convention, the then Deputy Commissioner, Almora(UP) had during his trip to Western Tibet in 1905, obtained the consent of Tibetan authorities for opening of additional trade marts in Western Tibet². The Convention also mooted a proposal of appointing Tibetan and British Trade Agents to monitor the progress of British Trade. Thus trade marts' officially came into existence and British Trade Agencies were opened at Yatung and Gyantse in Central Tibet and Gartok in Western Tibet³.

Simla Convention of 1914

Great Britain, China and Tibet signed Simla Convention - 1914 on 3rd July 1914. The Government of China later declined to ratify the Convention. Great Britain and Tibet declared that the convention would be binding on the countries. Under the Convention, the Trade Regulations of 3rd July 1914 which, among other issues, dealt with the procedure regarding the taking of land on lease for building houses and godowns at the trade marts by British subjects, administration of trade marts, procedure for settlement of disputes between British and Tibetan subjects, etc.

In political terms, Great Britain and China recognised Tibet being under the suzerainty of China. They also recognised the autonomy of outer Tibet. Britain adopted a policy based on the idea of autonomy for Tibet within the context of Chinese suzerainty and articulated it in the Simla Convention.

Agreement on Trade and Cultural Intercourse-1954

An Agreement on Trade and Cultural intercourse between Tibet region of China and India was signed by China and India on 29th April 1954 which naturally superseded previous trade agreements regarding Tibet. Under the new agreement, India and China agreed to the establishment of the Chinese Trade Agencies at New Delhi, Calcutta and Kalimpong and Indian Trade Agencies at Gartok, Yatung and Gyantse (which had originally been opened as British Trade Agencies under 1904 Lhasa Convention). The agreement specified the trade marts, where border traders could trade and six border passes and routes through which the traders and pilgrims may travel. The important points of the agreement as mentioned in the notes exchanged after the agreement related to India's agreeing to withdraw within 6 months, the military escorts stationed at Yatung and Gyantse, and also to hand over at reasonable price, the post telegraph and telegram services with equipments, as well as, 12 rest houses built along the Yatung-Gyantse route.

There had been severe criticism of India's signing the agreement, in main, on two aspects, namely, India's accepting without any ambiguity of Tibet being an integral part of China and India surrendering certain ancient privileges even without setting the question of Indo-Tibetan boundary.

Barter Trade between Shauka traders and Hunia (Tibetan) 'Mitras'

Barter Trade System in Western Tibet is as old as its history. Even before the Regional Tibetan dynasty was established in Ngari (Western Tibet) in 10th Century AD, the original settlers - Dards, Mons and Tibetans used to procure essential commodities through barter trade with each other. As the regional Tibetan rule expanded towards Indian borders, particularly to Ladakh, Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur areas, the base for barter trade widened,

and it was, perhaps the starting point of Indo Western Tibet border trade based on the barter system.

The Tibetan monetary system was conducive to the growth of the barter system of trade. The important establishments such as the Department of Finance in Tibet was based on natural produce and all the taxes were collected in kind-in the shape of barley, cattle animal produce etc.

Not only this, there was no Tibetan currency. Tibetan 'Tanka' (Silver Coins) was introduced in 1781 and paper currency much later. Apart from direct taxes, other revenues like duties on Gold Mines in Ngari and Kham and rental of government land holdings and estates were also collected in kind. With this background, it is understandable as to why barter trade system flourished in remote areas like Western Tibet and for that matter, in all the areas across the Indian borders from the very beginning of Indo-Tibet border trade.

'MITRA' system of barter trade covered exchange at a pre-fixed ratio of foodgrains to Tibetan salt and wool. Western Tibet was deficient in food supply and Indian border residents required Tibetan salt and wool for their home consumption and for further barter trading in the interior areas of border districts. To secure on a permanent footing the supply of these items, Indian Shauka traders and Hunias (Tibetans) entered into 'MITRA' agreements, which bound them to barter foodgrains for salt and wool with each other only. Once signed, Mitra agreement become hereditary and permanent unless the Indian party sold his Mitra rights to a third party. Drinking alcohol or tea from one cup and exchanging gifts between the two parties to the agreement marked the initiation of the Mitra agreement. This ceremony was followed by splitting of a stone into two halves-each party retaining one half as a proof of the agreement in the event of any dispute over the trading rights.

The salient features of the Mitra agreement were:

- The agreement was hereditary and once signed continued for generations.
- The Shauka Traders had exclusive rights to barter foodgrains for salt and wool with their Hunia (Tibetan) Mitras.
- In case a Sauka trader was not in a position to supply foodgrains, he could arrange a third party to carry out barter with his Hunia Mitra and claim a 10% commission from both the parties.
- The Shauka trader had the right to sell his Mitra rights to another Shauka trader without obtaining prior consent of his Hunia Mitra.
- Mitra agreement was legally binding on both the parties and complaints about its violation were filed in the office of TSASHYO (Tibetan Tax Collector) or the Trade Agent.

Guidelines: In due course of time, some confusion and complications arose particularly about the scope of Mitra agreement and the British Trade Agent issued a guideline on 14th August 1945 which inter alia specified that:

- The written Mitra Agreement should be registered within a year with the office of British Trade Agent, Gartok and his approval obtained.
- The agreement about sale and purchase of Mitra rights should be drawn on stamp Paper and British Trade Agent, Gartok informed about it within a year.
- Any person found guilty of doing trade with the Mitra of another person, in Tibet or in India by force or through forgery was liable to be fined Rs. 100.
- An Indian party would have no Mitra rights on the children of his Hunia Mitra who are married off in other families.
- The Indian party to the Mitra agreement would have trading rights over his Hunia Mitra who has left his original illage and migrated to a new area.

During my 8 years posting in the Indian Trade Agency, Gartok from 1955-62, there were no applications for the registration of Mitra agreement or complaints of the violation of Mitra agreement. This was apparently an indication of the changing pattern of trade.

Opening of Border Trade-Visit of Tibetan emissary

Every Year in the month of June a Tibetan emissary called 'Surji', nominated by the concerned Tibetan District Commissioner (Dzongpons) visited the last Indian border village of Milam in Johar valley (now in Pithoragarh District) to ascertain the prevailing situation political and health related. He met the headman of the village to exchange information. On return to Tibet he submitted a report to the Dzongpon. If he reported the situation to be normal on the Indian side of the border, the Dzongpon ordered opening of the borders for trade. Similar emissaries were also sent to other valleys on Indian side of the borders. It is however, not known when and under what circumstances the system of sending emissaries to Indian side of the borders to ascertain the situation - political and health related began. According to Sri Kedar Singh Fonia, former minister and now MLA in Uttarakhand, the Maharaja of Chandpur in Garhwal and a representative of the Dalai Lama had an agreement under which the Tibetan emissary called 'SURJI' used to visit Niti valley every year before the start of seasonal border trade. His mission was to ascertain whether the situation on Indian side of the border was conducive for border trade⁹. In his Thok Jalun Diary-1867, Pandit Nain Singh Rawat mentions about the visit of Tibetan emissary (Surji) nominated by Chaprang Zongpon to Mana or Badrinath in the month of June every year. It appears that apart from political favor which could affect Tibet's self chosen policy of 'isolation' the Tibetan authorities were concerned about the incidence of epidemics etc. on the Indian side of the borders, which could spread to Tibetan areas. In his Thok Jalun Diary, Pandit Nain Singh Rawat

also mentions that the Bushahri traders were not allowed to visit Tibet in 1867 for reasons that during previous year an epidemic had occurred in the areas inhabited by them.

Immediately after the Tibetan authorities declared opening of borders for trade, Hunia (Tibetan) Mitras of Shauka traders visited Indian border villages with large flocks of sheep and goat laden with salt to barter for foodgrains with or through their Shauka trading counterparts. They camped with their livestock outside the villages for about a week and visited the houses of their Shauka Mitras for food. During their stay, they sheared the wool of their sheep and bartered wool and salt for foodgrains. The visit of Tibetan traders in the last week of June or first week of July cleared whatever uncertainties prevailed about the seasonal trade and paved the way for Shauka traders' visit to Tibet.

Both Tibetan and Indian traders used sheep and goats as pack animals for transportation of salt, wool and foodgrains. Each sheep or goat carried a load of about 10-15 kgs. To avoid loading and unloading of a large number of livestock every day, Tibetan traders during their visit to Indian border village and Trade Marts in Tibet, unloaded the animals only after reaching the destination.

Johari Traders going to Tibet for trade

Gonkhal Dhar, a ridge forming the eastern border of Milam village, used to be the spot where the traders going to Tibet for trade were given a hearty send-off and accorded a warm welcome when they returned. They were accompanied to this place by relatives and friends and escorted by drum beaters and professional singers¹ dancers known as 'mirasis' who sang songs praying for traders' well being during the Tibet visit. Before they stepped out of their houses their women folk used to bid them farewell with teary eyes. The scene was, to a small measure, like the soldiers going to the

battle field. Those days, it was an amusement to see the goings-on for us children who went to Gonkhal Dhar as on lookers. Later, when I was posted to Tibet and personally saw the hazardous conditions under which the traders traveled and lived in trade marts in Tibet, I realized that their trips to Tibet were as risky as going to a battle field. They fought the fury of nature, suffered from high-altitude problems, had lingering fear of bad elements committing theft and dacoity and over and above, always worried about the trade prospects. A bad trading season could upset their system as the traders used to buy trade goods, particularly textile on credit and were required to clear the accounts at the conclusion of the trading season. The Johari traders endured the physical hardships the very next day of starting their journey from Milam, as after crossing Unta Dhura pass (17,950 ft), they were required to negotiate two additional passes of Jayanti (18,500ft) and Kungrbingri (18,300ft) in a single day as it was not possible to camp in the gaps between these three passes due to severe cold and non availability of fuel. The distance from Dung, the first stage to Chhurchin, the next stage is about 31 km Unta Dhura pass route was the most difficult among the trade routes to Western Tibet. The traders suffered from acute breathing problems while negotiating these three mountain passes in a single day. While the well-to-do traders had ponies to ride, the others, marginal traders, not only marched on foot but also drove the pack animals or live-stock laden with trade goods. Once at Gyanima or Shivchilam or Tarchen trade marts, these Johari traders set up their shops in kuchcha, low mud-walled enclosures roofed with single-fly tents. The trade goods were arranged in such a way that chill wind did not filter in. The shops served as living/sleeping space for the traders. Some of the traders had joint kitchens. The traders used the open area around the market to answer the call of nature.

Some of the Johari traders visited Tarchen (61 km from Gyanima), located at the foot-hill of Mount Kailash during July/August each year. The nomads of Changthang (northern plateau) visiting Tarchen area with a large number of their live stock were not bound by any agreement to barter their wool, etc to Johari traders as was the practice, elsewhere. The nomads (dokpas) grazed their live stock in the vast plains between Tarchen and Parkha, sheared the wool of their sheep and sold the same to Indian traders. By the month of September, the majority of Johari traders returned home from Tarchen and Gyanima. They hired Tibetan yaks to transport wool, etc to Milam. One of the frequent problems faced by the Johari traders was unwillingness of Tibetan transporters to go to Milam with wool if weather conditions deteriorated. Some well- to-do traders visited Gartok, summer capital of Western Tibet and an important trade mart, for trade at the conclusion of trading season at Tarchen and Gyanima. Like at Gyanima, Shivchilam and Tarchen, Johari traders set up their shops in tents which also served as their living and sleeping space at Gartok. The constant high wind and falling temperature rendered life miserable. This is explained in more details in the following paragraphs. The trading season at Gartok concluded in the last week of October and if the passes remained open, the traders were home by the first week of November.

Trade Agency Gartok: a seasonal office

As mentioned under Chapter "History of Trade Marts-Convention and Agreements", the Trade Agency at Gartok was established under 1904 Lhasa Convention to oversee trade in the marts in Western Tibet. In the absence of office and residential accommodation, the Trade Agency functioned on seasonal basis. Till 1942, the Trade Agency at Gartok was under the administrative control of British Political Agent at Shimla and as such the Trade Agent and staff moved down to Shimla during winter months. Later

on, all the three Trade Agencies in Tibet were brought under the administrative control of the Political Office in Sikkim. It may be of interest to mention that Capt. Hayat Singh Rawat of Johar was appointed as British Trade Agent, Gartok in 1928 but was removed from his post within a few months as he misbehaved with Daba Dzungpon.

The Indian Trade Agency had as in 1955 a Manpower of 18, which included the Trade Agent, Accountant, medical officer, Compounder, two clerks, 8 peons, 2 chowkidars and 2 Mail Runners. Johari Shaukas dominated the set-up as all the posts except for medical Officer, Compounder and a clerk were held by them in 1950's. the composition of staff had undergone changes after the winter headquarters of the Agency had been transferred from Shimla to Gangtok (Sikkim) in 1942. The staff members belonging to Rampur Bushahr and Ladakh left their jobs as they found it inconvenient to go to Gangtok. This afforded an employment opportunity in lower ranks to Johari Shaukas, who had established themselves as physically hardy and adventure loving. Padmashri L.S. Jangpangi who had been continuously in this difficult post for 29 years helped poor Shaukas in getting jobs in the Agency. A note on him is at Annexure-1 .After 1942 the Political Office in Sikkim posted for some seasons Sikkimese officers and staff as Trade Agent, medical Officer, Accountant and clerks to the Trade Agency. However, this practice was discontinued as Sikkim based officer and staff preferred to serve in Political Office, Consulate at Lhasa and Trade Agencies at Gyantse and Yatung. During about 6 months Annual Tour of Western Tibet, the Trade Agent and team spent almost two and a half months on travel both through Indian territory and within Tibet, stayed at Gartok, summer headquarters for nearly two months in two phases and remained in trade marts during the remaining one and a half month. The Trade Agency hired about 40 yaks for transporting camp equipments mainly heavy tentage, camp furniture, office records, rations and personal baggage etc. In addition riding ponies/yaks

were hired for individual staff members. Two mail runners were required to carry by turn diplomatic mail bags from Gartok or camp office at trade marts to Gunji or Garbyang in India and back. They had to travel all alone through wilderness for days together. Their job was physically tough and full of risks. Fortunately, nothing untoward ever happened. For such a tough job they were paid a consolidated salary of Rs. 100 per month plus Daily Allowance @ of 6 annas per day for the period spent away from Gartok. Other seasonal staff like 4 peons and 2 chowkidars also received salary and D.A. at the same rates. During Travels from Indian border towns like Almora or Shimla to border passes and then to Gartok trade marts, the Class-IV staff was hard pressed with unending and tiring chores. From early morning they had to remain busy in handling dismantling of camps, packing of heavy tentage and other equipments and helping Tibetan transporters in loading the animals. Dismantling the tents in the morning and pitching them again in the evening at the next halting place was physically exhausting especially when there was high wind and a fall in temperature. With frozen ground it was difficult to fix or take out iron pegs of tents unless hot water was poured on them. After reaching next halting place and setting up camps the staff members would go out to collect fuel - mostly dried roots of thorny bushes and dung of wild animals. In river valleys however, there was not much problem of firewood. Once all these were done, the staff would cook dinners in three kitchens. At times, one or two staff members would go hunting for barhal. Fording of rivers presented big problems in the absence of bridges over them. During summer when snow melted, most of the rivers originating from mountain ranges were in spate, with very strong current in the afternoons. We had a serious problem in 1958 in crossing Par-Chu, the same river which ravaged some areas in Himachal Pradesh a few years back. In the afternoon on that day the current was so strong that the pack animals battled to ford it. I crossed the river several times to guide the animals

across. The Chinese gave me the nickname of 'Tam' (river cat) and the Trade Agent who always gave me fatherly advice against drinking offered me small amounts of brandy each time I crossed the river. There was another problem in fording the rivers in Western Tibet. In the beds of the rivers passing through plain areas or marshy land like Gartung Chu near Gartok, Indus near Gargunsa, and Parkha plains, there were holes and many times feet of animals got trapped into them. The Tibetan transporters used to guide us to the points from where we could safely ford the rivers. During these travels we attended to urgent work only. The messages received from the Ministry of External Affairs had to be replied to immediately. During our stay at Gartok or in trade marts, we would open office from morning to evening on all the days of the week. Our office work was frequently interrupted by Indian traders or other visitors coming to the Agency camp for some work or to pay courtesy calls. The ministerial staff remained extremely busy for two days after receiving weekly mail bags from India as they had to prepare materials for sending mail bags to India on third morning. They worked up to late hours to prepare replies to letters from Political Office in Sikkim and the Ministry of External Affairs on various subjects including developments in trade marts, The Trade Agent and the Accountant devoted a couple of hours in the evenings to prepare a report of political nature.

All the messages to or from the Ministry of External Affairs which were transmitted through the Chinese wireless network were coded. Manual coding and decoding of such messages was tedious and time consuming. I would mostly do this work at night hours when there was no disturbance. A cup of coffee courtesy night chowkidar or a large peg of whisky if available at midnight would invariably give relief from freezing cold and fatigue. Hunting of wild-life like 'barhal' was the only diversion for the Agency personnel during arduous touring till 1957. The Trade Agency had a couple of

good marksmen who never missed a shot. The Tibetans and the Chinese did not object to our hunting of barhal. The Chinese themselves used to hunt for wild horses called 'kiang' and wild yaks though very discreetly. Cold water Trout fish was in abundance in all the rivers and streams. It was child's play to catch them. During his official visit to Western Tibet Sri S.K. Roy had brought his fishing rods etc. One day accompanied by his wife he went for angling in Gartung Chu at Gartok. He was surprised to catch a couple of large fishes within a few minutes. The Tibetans do not take fish and the Chinese as well as Trade Agency personnel avoided hurting their religious sentiments (till 1959) by openly catching fish. After the Tibetan uprising of 1959, the Chinese however resorted to using explosives to kill fish.

According to some Tibetans of Gartok area the Chinese carried truckloads of fish to their military posts and road construction sites in western Tibet.

The Trade Agent and staff spent winter months at Gangtok (Sikkim). The office and residential accommodation was provided by the Political Office. It was almost a fixed routine for the Agency personnel to leave Gangtok for annual tour to Tibet in the last week of May. A couple of staff visit Calcutta to procure medical, stationary and forms stores, tinned food, confectionary items, liquor, both scotch and IMFL and gift items. The Trade Agent visited Delhi for consultation with the External Affairs Ministry. The main group accompanied the office records and equipments and proceeded to the main border towns like Almora or Shimla on the routes to be followed for the entry into Tibet and made final preparations-buying food provisions, etc-for the tour. The seasonal staff like doctor, Compounder, chowkidars, dak-runners and temporary peons joined duty at this border town.

Till 1954, the Trade Agency had its own wireless sets for communication with headquarters. In view of the menace of dacoits in Western Tibet, the Agency personnel were issued with arms. After 1954, the Chinese provided communication facilities to the Agency through their wireless network and

hence the wireless unit of the Agency was withdrawn from 1955. Similarly, the arms and ammunition held by the Agency were withdrawn and deposited with Ministry of External Affairs in December 1957 after the Chinese detailed a section strength of armed guards with the Agency.

Route followed by Trade Agent

There were five main trade routes to Western Tibet which the Trade Agent followed. These routes were via Almora-Dharchula-Garbyang-Lipulekh Pass, Shimla- Chini-Shipki Pass, Joshimath-Chor Hoti-Niti Pass, Milam- Untadhura-Kungribingri Pass and Zojila-Taglungla Pass. The Trade Agent had not followed the last two trade routes after the winter headquarters of the Trade Agency had shifted from Shimla to Sikkim in 1942. The Trade Agent followed the same route for entry into Tibet by which his party had returned to India at the conclusion of previous trading season. This compulsion was due to the fact that while returning to India, the Trade Agency stored all its bulky camp equipment like tentage, camp furniture, etc near the last Indian border village to be picked up during the next annual tour.

Till 1957-58 there was not much progress in road construction towards Indian borders. For our annual visit to Western Tibet, we were required to cover journey from Almora to Lipulekh Pass-Taklakote (283km) on foot, which took about twenty days. From Lipulekh pass to Gartok via Kailash-Mansarovar took another ten days. In 1957, motorable road had been extended to Chaukori and in 1958-59 to Thal via Bageshwar, which had cut down the journey time through this route by seven days. Lipulekh pass (16,750ft) was the easiest pass leading into Western Tibet. During 1957, the Trade Agent and party returned to India via Shipki-Shimla route and stored their heavy equipment at namgia village. Compared to other two routes, Gartok-Shipki-Shimla route was shorter. It took us twenty-two days only to reach Shimla. Moreover, the Hindustan-Tibet road was well

maintained right up to the top of Shipki pass. There were Dak Bangalows at every stage. Fresh fruits like apple and grapes and dried fruits like apricots, walnuts and nyoza (chilgoza) were available in plenty and cheap too. Senior Governor of Western Tibet, Rimshi Lobzang Tsewang, was proceeding to Kalimpong along with his family to meet his wife's relatives. He also followed Gartok-Shipki-Shimla route and was one stage behind us. He met US at Rampur on 18th November 1957 and we travelled together to Shimla, 138km by vehicular transport. Kuccha road had been extended up to Rampur. I accompanied the Governor and family to see Nangal-Bhakra hydel project which was still under construction.

In 1958, we entered Western Tibet through the same route (Shimla-Shipki-Gartok route). Shimla- Rampur road was, this time, open only up to a distance of 80 km Half way between Chini and Namgia, there is a village called Rarang, which during those days was known for brewing 'angoori', a grape-based hard liquor, which cost Rs. 14 per bottle, at a time when Solan whisky was much cheaper. The best part of this route was a gradual ascent to the pass from where green valleys of Shipki, Mayang and Tiag villages and a portion of snow-capped Shirang-La pass (17500 ft) were clearly visible. Besides Shirang-La pass, four other smaller passes had to be negotiated on this route. Mayang-Chu, a tributary of Sutlej had plenty of hill trout. This route was a hunter's paradise as a large number of wild-life like 'barhals could be seen almost at every stage.

We followed Niti pass route for our return journey to India in 1958. We passed through Tholing and Daba. It took us nine days from Gartok to Niti village. Since we had left our heavy tentage and camp furniture at Niti village, we were scheduled to enter Western Tibet by this route in 1959. In fact, we had reached Niti on way to Gartok but could not proceed further as the Chinese had advised us through Ministry of External Affairs not to enter Tibet through Niti Pass route for security reasons. We later learnt that in

view of March 1959 Uprising, the Chinese had taken certain measures in border areas to prevent Tibetans from fleeing to India. With no other option with us, we collected our tentage etc from Niti village and came all the way to Almora and then proceeded to Tibet via Lipulekh pass. As in 1958, motorable road had been extended up to a point short of Joshimath.

Visits to Trade Marts

During about six months annual tour, the Trade Agent and team visited most of the trade marts in Western Tibet to see the progress of trade and to look into the grievances of traders. After 1955, a section strength of Chinese military and wireless personnel accompanied the Trade Agent during tours to the trade marts.

The main hurdle in the smooth conduct of the tours of the trade marts by the Trade Agent was the non-availability on time of animal transport. Under the then existing system the jurisdiction of individual Tibetan area or village was fixed for the purpose of providing animal transport (on hire) and the villagers would not provide transport beyond the stipulated points. It was the responsibility of the next village/area to arrange transport for the onward journey. In some areas the transport was required to be changed within or after a day's journey which invariably resulted in avoidable enforced halts. In the absence of regular "Tarzam" posts (dak and transport change stations) in the interior areas, the arrangements for animal transport were done by the heads of the concerned Tibetan villages. To ease this transport problem, the Trade Agency had been hiring for some years, some two dozen yaks on contract basis through an Indian trader. But still the Trade Agency had to depend on the local Tibetans for riding ponies, as also for additional pack animals.

As and when the Trade Agent entered Tibet via Lipulekh pass, the tour of trade marts began at Taklakote in Purang valley. This trade mart was visited

for trade by Indian border residents from Darrna and Bians-Chaudas valleys, besides Nepalese traders from Changru and Tinkar villages. Lipulekh pass route being the main pilgrimage route to Kailash and Mansarovar, a clerk of the Trade Agency was stationed at Taklakote for some months. The Trade Agent stayed at this trade mart for about a week.

He met the Dzongpon (District Commissioner) and the Chinese representative, invariably a military officer posing as a civilian. He called a meeting of Indian traders and also invited them to tea or lunch. From Taklakote, the Trade Agent and team proceeded to Tarchen Trade and Pilgrimage Centre, located at the foot-hill of Mt. Kailash. Some Johari traders used to come to Tarchen, a Bhutanese enclave, for trade during July/August. From Tarchen, the Trade Agent usually proceeded to Gartok. Journey time from Taklakote to Gartok via Tarchen was about twelve days. Before proceeding to other trade marts, the Trade Agent and team usually stayed at Gartok for about a month during which period, there was exchange of courtesy calls with Tibetan Governors (till 1958) and the Chinese Foreign Bureau officials. This was followed by lunch-cum-dinner parties hosted by the Tibetan Governor, Chinese Foreign Bureau Chief and the Trade Agent. In between, there were official discussions with the Chinese, mainly about the problems of Indian traders.

Usually, the Trade Agent and team proceeded on tour of other trade marts like Tholing, Nabra, Daba, Shiv-Chilam and Gyanima in August-September. The journey from Gartok to Gyanima via Tholing/Daba took twelve days excluding the days of haltage. The Trade Agent also visited Gyanima-Chakra, the trade centre of Darma traders for a day. Gyanima was the most important trade mart in Western Tibet which was mainly visited for trade by Johari traders for about three months till September. The Trade Agent halted at Gyanima for a period from one week to ten days, during which he met the Tibetan Government representative called "Tshasyo" (Tax Collector), held

meetings with Indian traders and entertained them to tea or lunch. From Gyanima, the Trade Agent and team returned to Gartok, usually at the end of September, via Tirthapuri/Minsar (122km), which took seven days. The Trade Agent had last visited Tashigong, located opposite Demchok border in Ladakh, in 1958. Tashigong was a trade centre of Ladakhi traders. Rudok, a strategically located place on the Western Highway passing through Aksai Chin, was not recognised as a Trade Centre under the 1954 Trade Agreement. The Trade Agent did not visit that place after 1954, though some Ladakhi, Himachali and Niti traders did go there for trade. By the time the Trade Agent returned to Gartok from the tour of trade marts, it was already October. The second round of social meeting like attending lunch-cum-dinner hosted by Tibetan Governors and the Chinese Foreign Bureau took place in October. The Trade Agents also hosted lunch-cum-dinners for the Tibetan Governors and the Chinese Foreign Bureau officials. These were in a way, farewell parties. Several rounds of official meetings with the Chinese Foreign Bureau officials followed during this period in which the trade disabilities faced by the Indian traders were discussed. Preceding these official discussions with the Chinese, there were interactions with the Indian traders at Gartok during tea parties and luncheon hosted by the Trade Agent. The Trade Agent and team left for India in the last week of October. The traders followed a few days later after concluding their trade at Gartok.

Trade Marts

The location of and route to the trade marts which the Trade Agent visited annually were:

- (a) On Gartok -Tholing-Gyanima route

Tholing trade mart

The distance between Mana pass (18,400') and Tholing (about 12,000') is about 114 km. From Gartok (15,100'), it is about 45 km or 3 days journey. The route passes through Dunkar village which is in a green valley and has a good area under cultivation. The route has plenty of wild animals. Located in Sutlej Valley, Tholing is the site of the first and famous Tholing Monastery built by Tsenpo Khore alias Lha Lama Yeshe Od in the 11th century AD. As in 1960 there were about a dozen Tibetan houses in Tholing and a few cave dwellings could also be seen in the nearby low hills. Tholing is a warm valley where Tibetans grow barley, buck-wheat, peas etc. "Zimbu" (a scented grass) grows in plenty on the slopes of surrounding hills. Chaprang also known as Guge is at a distance of about 13 km from Tholing mart, which was under the administrative control of Chaprang Dzongpen, was visited by some traders from Mana and Niti area in July-August.

Nabra Trade Mart

Under the administrative control of Daba Dzongpon, Nabra is located at a distance of about 40 km from Niti Pass (16,600') and about 48 kms from Tholing. The route from Tholing to Nabra passes through Manglang, Dongsha and Daba. There were a few Tibetan houses and a monastery at Manglang. The Tibetans grow one crop of barley etc. Dongsha is in a green valley. Daba, headquarters of Data Dzongpon, has many Tibetan houses and a monastery. Some cave dwellings could be seen on the surrounding hills. The land around the village was under cultivation.

A sizeable number of Niti traders used to visit the Nabra trade mart during the summer months. Earlier the trade mart was located at Daba but due to some problems between the Indian traders and Dzongpan over the collection of taxes etc the trade mart was shifted to Nabra, which is in a green valley.

Shivchilam Trade Mart

Located at a distance of about 97 kms from Niti pass and 45 kms from Gyanima, this trade mart was visited by some Niti traders during the summer months.

Some Johari traders from Gyanima also used to visit this trade mart as their Tibetan trading partners from Khyunglung village used to come to the area closer to Shivchilam for grazing their livestock. The trade mart was under the administrative control of Daba Dzongpon.

At a distance of about 23 kms from Nabra on the way to Shivchilam, there is a sizeable village called Dongbu which has a monastery at the top of a hill. The land in the village was under cultivation.

Gyanima Trade Mart

It is located at a distance of 105 km from the last Indian village of Milam. Johari traders used to cover the journey from Milam to Gyanima in 4 days. Halting at Dung (14 km) on the first day, they used to cross three mountain passes, namely, Unta Dhura pass (17,950'), Jayanti pass (18,500') and Kungri Bingri pass (18,300') in a single day and camp at Chhurchin (31 kms). Gyanima was the biggest trade mart in Western Tibet till 1961. Situated on a vast plain at the height of about 15,000 feet from sea level, there was no permanent Tibetan settlement in or around Gyanima. Some ruins on a hill at some distance from the market site suggest existence of some Tibetan establishment like a fort or a Gompa (monastery) in the area long back. There is a hillock type raised ground by the side of the marketplace on which there was a 'Mani-wall'.

A large number of Johari traders used to visit this trade mart from July to September each year till 1961. Some of these traders used to open branch business establishments at Tarchen and Gartok. Besides the Tibetans from the neighboring areas, a large number of traders from Sinkiang, Central Tibet and Kham area used to come to this trade mart to buy merchandise on

cash or credit basis. A few traders from Rampur Bushahr, Ladakh and Bians-Chaudas as well as from Garhwal also used to come to Gyanima during the trading season. Gyanima trade mart was under the administrative control Daba Dzongpon.

Gyanima Chakra Trade Mart

It is located at a distance of 122 km from the Darma pass (18,500') and 87 kms from Taklakote via Harkong, and 8 kms from the Gyanima trade mart. The traders of Darma valley used to visit this trade mart for 2-3 months for trade. They also used to visit Gyanima from time to time. Chakra mart was under the administrative control of Parkha Tarzam.

(b) On Taklakot (Purang) - Tarchan - Gartok Route

Taklakote Located in Purang valley at a distance of about 50 kms from Garbyang via Lipu Lekh pass (16,750'), this trade mart was/is visited by traders from Bians-Chaudas and Darma valley as also. by the Nepalese traders from border villages of Chhangru and Tinkar. Some Nepalese from Jumla-Humla also used to come to Taklakote during summer months. Lipu Lekh pass being easier to negotiate, trade mart at Taklakote functioned a little longer as compared to other trade marts in Western Tibet.

Besides Tibetans of neighbouring areas, traders from central Tibet used to visit Taklakote to buy goods. The Indian traders from this trade mart also used to go to Thokar Mandi, located at south eastern shore of Mansarovar during wool shearing season to buy wool from nomads who used to visit the area for grazing their live stock.

Purang is a large fertile valley consisting of about twenty villages including Khojarnath and other villages which till 1959 were under Bhutanese control. The Chinese have since given a facelift to Taklakote and turned it into a modern border town. Purang has an historical background. Kyido Nyimagon

started his campaign to establish the Western Tibet lineage of Tibetan kings from Purang in 10th century AD. Zorawar Singh's forces were defeated in Purang and he was killed at Toyo, a village about 4-6 kms away from Taklakote. Some of the soldiers of Zorawar Singh stayed back in Tibet. It is said that the Tibetans with thin beard living in Purang are descendants of Zorawar Singh's soldiers. During his visit to Kailash and Mansarovar in 1670 AD, Raja Baz Bahadur Chand fought a war with Tibetans at Taklakote to secure Indian pilgrimage to Kailash-Mansarovar.

Tarchen Trade Mart

Located at the foothill of Mount Kailash at a distance of about 61 km from Gyanima and 100 km from Taklakote via Mansarovar Tarchen (15,100') was a trade mart and more importantly a centre of pilgrimage to Kailash. It is the base for parikrama of Kailash. Till 1959 Tarchen was under the administrative control of Bhutan. Some Johari traders used to visit Tarchen during summer months for trade. Some Indian traders from Taklakote also visited Tarchen sometimes. Tibetan nomads from areas beyond Kailash range used to visit sheep during July-August.

Gartok Trade Mart

The summer capital of Western Tibet-Gartok (15,000') is located on a vast plain on the right bank of Gartung Chu, and is surrounded by hills on the east and west. Till 1959 two Tibetan Governors had their summer headquarters at Gartok which was also the headquarter of Indian Trade Agency and the Chinese Foreign Bureau (sub office). There were a few Tibetan houses in Gartok. Traders from Johar, Rampur Bushahr and Ladakh used to come to this trade mart, which functioned till the last week of October.

c. On Gartok-Tashigong-Rudok route

Tashigong Trade Mart

Located in Indus valley, Demchok border which is at about 29 km can be seen from Tashigong. There was a sizeable Tibetan settlement and a monastery at Tashigong. Gargunsa, the winter capital of Western Tibet is situated at a distance of 55 km towards Gartok. Some Ladakhi and Himachali traders used to visit this trade mart in July August. The Indian Trade Agent had last visited Tashigong in 1958.

Rudok and Rawang

Though officially not recognized as trade mart even by the Sino India Agreement of 1954, the Indian traders from Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh had traditionally been visiting these places for trade since long. These places were under the administrative control of Rudok Dzongpon. Rawang is located quite close to Ladakh border and Rudok is on Sinkiang-Gartok highway. The Indian Trade Agent, who had visited these places in the past, had not been there after 1954.

There were restrictions on travel by Indian traders or Trade Agency personnel from Western Tibet to Central Tibet through the interiors of Tibet and vice-versa as the 'existing routes' through which Indian traders were allowed to visit the trade marts in Tibet under the 1904 Lhasa Convention and 1954 Panchsheel Agreement did not include the routes through the interior of Tibet from Western Tibet to trade marts at Gyantse and Yatung. There was only one case of a Shauka trader visiting Lhasa to recover his dues from a Tibetan trader. His name was Kharak Singh Pangtey later nicknamed Kharku Lhasa. He traveled to Lhasa through Kalimpong and Chumbi valley in the garb of a Tibetan.

Living Conditions

During their sojourn in Tibet, the Indian traders as well as the Trade Agency personnel lived in camps. The basic differences between them were that the traders camped in a cluster. They used ordinary tents. The Trade Agency camped in open areas and had special double-fly tents with attached bath for emergency use. These tents were procured from the famous Elgin Mills of Kanpur. The Indian traders and assistants/servants crowded in their shop-cum-residences while the Trade Agency personnel had comfortable living accommodation. The Trade Agent, Doctor and Accountant had separate tents with floor coverings, folding cots, table and chairs. Two clerks shared a tent and the compounder was accommodated in the Dispensary. Class IV staff were accommodated in a separate tent and two kitchens. Apart from tents for individual officers and staff, the Agency had an elegant double-fly tent for entertainment purposes, which could accommodate over a dozen guests for sit-down lunch or dinners, besides the bar and service tables. The Indian traders had advantage over the Trade Agency personnel in the matter of social life and recreation. The older lot of traders met in the evening in the evenings in one or the other shops to gossip, while the younger ones played football (even at that high altitude) or indulged in card games. The Trade Agency personnel remained confined to their camps and worked till late hours. They received newspapers and magazines only once a week, through couriers.

Unlike their counterparts at Yatung and Gyantse across Sikkim borders, Indian traders in Western Tibet had no communication facility. They depended on fellow traders or transporters for exchanging letters with their families in India. In emergency, sending of messengers was the only option for them. A good news from home like a birth in the family called for celebration. Individual traders used to host small parties on such occasions in which the main fare used to be meat and local drinks. The Indian traders

celebrated national days like Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanti in their respective trade marts. They also observed Hindu festivals like Janmashtami.

The common factor causing discomfort and anxiety to both the traders and Agency personnel was unpredictable weather conditions. Come the month of October, an appearance of even a small black cloud in the sky would lead to apprehensions about early snow fall and blockade of the passes. From the last week of October, temperature steadily dipped, reaching below freezing point. The fall in temperature coupled with constant high wind threatening to sweep away the camps made life really miserable. To prevent wind burns of nose and lips, the Agency personnel used to put on surgeons mask, while traveling. In 1956, a Keralite had joined the Agency on deputation. He was newly married and had left his wife at his native place. He used to remain depressed and had grow beard and moustache. Once on reaching the camp, he removed his surgeons mask. He was amused to find two ice-balls hanging on his moustache. He wanted to remove them with hand, but we advised him against it lest the moustache should fall. He rushed to the kitchen to melt the ice balls. On reaching Delhi, he started narrating exaggerated stories to his old friends about the life in Tibet. One of the Stories he told was that the temperature had fallen below freezing point and when he urinated, the urine instantly turned into an icicle.

Swami Pranavananda, had for the first time visited Kailash and Mansarovar via Ladakh in 1927-28, and thereafter made several trips there. He stayed in Mansarovar area continuously for over a year twice. He has somewhere said that the climate of Western Tibet was a test of human endurance. I realised the truth in this statement on November 9th, 1956, when I was stranded under heavy snow on the Tibetan side of Lipulekh pass for three days. It so happened that the unladed yaks, which we had engaged to clear the trek of heavy snow, could not negotiate the ascent of Lipu pass and went back. The

remaining yaks laden with our records, camp equipment and personal luggage also returned to Taklakote. Our goods were abandoned in an open area. I and one of our staff members spent an uncomfortable night in the snow, On November some Johari traders passed through Lipulekh pass at mid-night when the snow had hardened. These traders could not go home via Kungri-Bingri pass which was blocked by heavy snow. A couple of pack animals of these traders had died after crossing the pass. On November 11th, the Chinese had arranged porters instead of yaks to carry our luggage. I crossed the pass at mid-night with the last group of porters. As I descended along the slope (on the Indian side of borders) on hardened snow, I saw a couple of sacks full of Chinese silver dollars (Da-yuan) lying on the road. I pushed them off the road lest the Tibetan porters should pick them up. These sacks belonged to Johari traders. At some distance, I found a 'hookah' and wanted to retain it as a souvenir, but unfortunately a Johari trader whom I met at Kalapani, the next day claimed it and I had to part with it. The Trade Agent had sent a riding pony to Kalapani for me. I reached Garbyang in the evening of November 12th, The Medical Officer rushed me to the dispensary for a thorough medical check-up. I had escaped the frostbite. I had passed the test of human endurance. I was then, just 21 years old.

Earlier in September, when the Trade Agent was at Gyanima, there was a report of early snowfall on passes leading to Mjlam. Tibetan transporters refused to go to Milam with wool of Johari traders. The traders took a panicky view of the development and insisted that the Trade Agent should not leave Gyanima till the problem was sorted out with his and local Tibetan officials' intervention.

Apart from unpredictable climatic conditions, the high altitude and non-availability of food provisions except for animal produce made life hard. Only healthy people could stand it. During his official visit to Western Tibet in

1956, S.K. Roy, Special Officer, Frontier Areas (SOFA) called the Agency personnel as 'Super Humans'.

Border Trade-Origin and Patterns

It has been suggested that trans-border trade between Johar Valley and Western Tibet, had developed in three stages. During the period of Halduwa and Pingaluwa, a small number of Tibetan-border residents visited Johar Valley with their livestock laden with salt and wool for bartering with locally produced food grains. During the period of Sunpati Shauka, the number of Tibetan visitors increased. The two way trans-border visits for trade by Tibetans and Johari traders began after the arrival in the valley of new settlers. The time period when this "age old" trade had started could be determined through approximation of the age of the Haldua and Pingaluwa and Sunpati Shauka. It has been suggested that Sunpati Shauka belonged to the 14th Century.

The pattern of border trade from Johar Valley had undergone changes with major political developments on both sides of the border. Originally, the border trade between Johar Valley and Tibet was purely based on barter system and that too between Johari traders and their Tibetan trading partners. After establishment of their rule over Kumaon and Garhwal in 1815, the Britishers started taking keen interest to promote Tibet Trade. Their aim was to establish, in due course, trade and commercial relations with Tibet. To begin with, they gave indirect help to broaden the trade base. They facilitated availability of British mill produced broad-cloth, etc, for export to Tibet. The British expedition to Tibet in 1903-04 and signing of Lhasa Convention, trade marts were established and British Trade Agencies were opened to oversee the progress of British trade. The volume of trade increased considerably with the export to Tibet of textiles, etc and import of Tibetan wool to meet the demands of woolen mills. This brought about a

major change in the pattern of trade as besides carrying out barter trade with their Tibetan trading partners, Johari traders started selling their goods to together parties against cash or on credit. After the occupation of Tibet in 1950-51, the Chinese flooded Tibetan markets with their silver dollars called 'Da-Yuan' in early 1950s and introduced Chinese currency notes as legal tender in 1959-60, elbowing out the circulation of the Tibetan TANKA/paper currency, as also Indian Rupees, which till then were freely accepted by the Tibetans. With the arrival of the Chinese, a variety of non- traditional trade goods were introduced in the market. A couple of enterprising Johari traders tried to introduce Indian motor cycles and Indian made Foreign Liquor in the Tibetan market. The Chinese had by middle of 1950s started buying goods like textiles from traders against payment in Da-Yuan. It was rumoured at that time the Chinese were buying textile, etc to sell the same on no- profit basis to Tibetan labourers working on road projects and also to nomads living in Changthang area who were forced by Tibetan officials and the government traders to buy goods from them at higher prices. By that time, Johari traders were seriously faced with the problem of repatriating to India their surplus money as there was no exchange facility. In 1956, Government of India issued an order allowing Indian border traders to import into India up to 500 Yuans per head, at a time. During the visit to Western Tibet in 1956 of Shri S.K Roy, Special Officer Frontier Area (SOFA), Ministry of External Affairs, Johari traders at Tarchen complained that 500 Da-Yuan was too meager an amount to solve their problems. Roy gave a sarcastic reply- Should the Government of India tell them how to make use of the loopholes in the orders which did not put restrictions as to how many times in a season, a trader or members of his family could bring in 500 Da-Yuan to India. In the meantime, the Chinese realized that Da-Yuan was being smuggled out of Tibet. This gave them an excuse to take control of Tibetan Customs offices along the Indo-Tibet border trade routes. Tsering Shakya

tells an interesting story about the background of introduction of the silver dollars called Da-Yuan in Tibet. "As a part of their propaganda, the Communists had always stated that they would pay for everything they acquired. The Chinese money was, however, not accepted by the Tibetans (since it could not be exchanged in India). With great ingenuity, the Chinese collected silver ornaments and religious objects in China, which were melted down into bullion. In Chengdu, a special mint was set up to produce old nationalist silver dollars known as Da-Yuan. This was used exclusively in Tibet. The circulation of Da-Yuan in Tibet served two purposes, first, it was acceptable to Tibetans because it could be melted down and resold. Second, the large scale use of Da-Yuan meant that the Chinese were able to undermine the circulation of Tibetan currency and make it virtually worthless" What a great ingenuity indeed to bring Tibet under the Chinese monetary system!!

The Tibetan uprising of March 1959 and the Dalai Lama's escape to India was .the last major political development in Tibet affecting Indo-Tibet border trade and leading ultimately to its closure in 1962. Consequent to the uprising, the old Tibetan administration had been arrested. These Tibetan officials besides performing their official duties were engaged in private trade and as such, had commercial relations with Indian traders. Their removal from the scene was certainly a loss to traders. Johari traders also lost contact, in the wake of the uprising, with many Tibetans from outside Western Tibet who had been buying goods from them on credit basis. They did not turn up during the 1959 trading season to pay the dues of previous years and order for fresh supplies. We compiled a list of such and other Tibetans with details of dues of Johari traders and took up the matter with the Chinese during 1960-61, who refused to entertain such cases. The Chinese took the stand that the Trade Agency was not assigned to Consular functions and thus could not raise such issues. About the

genuineness of the traders' claims, the Chinese made allegations that Indian traders had been exploiting the poor Tibetans by selling to them goods at exorbitant prices and then charging high rate of interest on pending dues. At the end of 1961 trading season, the Indian traders were not sure whether they would be able visit Tibet for trade in 1962 as there was a considerable suspense about the prospects of the renewal of 1954 agreement.

Seasonal Nature of Trade in Western Tibet

The trade marts and the Trade Agencies at Yatung and Gyantse in Central Tibet have been functioning from the very beginning on round the year basis. The trade marts in Western Tibet and the Trade Agency at Gartok functioned on seasonal basis. The main reasons were severe climatic conditions, absence of sizeable permanent Tibetan population at or near the trade marts including at Gartok, headquarters of the Trade Agency, non-availability of residential accommodation and space for shops and godowns. Another important reason was the impossibility of procuring replenishment of stock of trade goods as also ration for at least six months during winter. The average altitude of Western Tibet is about 13,000 feet from sea level. Save the river valleys, the land is barren with no vegetation except for thorny bushes here or there. There is high wind most of the time. The temperature drops to freezing point by November end. During winter months, the surface of rivers and lakes freeze and animals can walk over them. A large number of local inhabitants are nomads who move with their herds and flocks from one pasture land to another. Except for at Taklakote (Pulan) there were no large and permanent Tibetan settlements at or around the trade marts like Gyantse and Gartok. Government of India had a plan to construct an office and residential complex for the Trade Agency at Gartok. In Panchsheel Agreement of 1954, the Chinese government had agreed "to render every possible assistance for housing the Indian Trade Agency at

Gartok". In 1958, a lease agreement was signed for the land at the existing trade Agency camp site at Gartok, but the plan for construction did not materialise.

1954 Panchsheel Trade Agreement lapses

The Sino-Indian Trade Agreement of 1954 on Tibet lapsed in June 1962 as the two countries could not reach an agreement to renew it. The mistrust had continued between the two sides beyond 1959 and the tension in border areas had increased. Restrictions had been imposed on the Trade Agencies in Tibet—they were no longer allowed to procure items of their daily needs like animals produce, directly from Tibetans. The Tibetans were discouraged from visiting Indian dispensaries. The Chinese instigated Tibetan transporters to raise hire charges of riding horses and pack animals in Western Tibet. During 1961, Government of India circulated a questionnaire seeking views of all concerned including Trade Agencies about the desirability or otherwise of renewing the Trade Agreement beyond 2nd June 1962. Till the end of 1961 trading season, we had no inkling of the status of the negotiations. Hoping that the agreement may finally be renewed, the Trade Agents had not been warned to prepare closure of their offices. Some Calcutta newspapers reported on 3rd of 4th June 1962 that the Chinese Trade Agency at Kalimpong had quietly been closed on 2nd June and its personnel had been transferred to Calcutta. It was then, that the Indian Trade Agents at Yatung and Gyantse were asked to pack up and come down to Gangtok (Sikkim), which they did. Indian Trade Agent-Gartok (Western Tibet) and staff had already moved to Gangtok (Sikkim) for winter at the conclusion of 1961 trading season. They had no moveable properties left behind in Western Tibet. However, the Trade Agent and a small group of staff visited Gartok after the expiry of 1954 Agreement to formally close the Trade Agency. During the return journey, they retrieved some trade goods

of Johari traders which they had stored at Tarchen. The Chinese provided a truck and pack animals to transport these goods to Taklakote and then to Garbyang village in India.

Resumption of border trade since 1997

Following the introduction of the Policy of Liberalisation in Tibet in 1980, the Chinese gave the impression to Tibetans that border trade with India may be resumed soon. Sometime in 1986, Ngopoi Ngawang Jigme, the former Chairman of Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the highest ranking Tibetan functionary under the Chinese rule toured Western Tibet and gave an indication at Taklakote about the possibility of resumption of border trade after a lapse of over 20 years. Almost during the same period, the Chinese were reported to be developing infrastructure on trade route across Nathula borders in anticipation of the resumption of trade. It appeared at that time that the Chinese were more interested than India in this regard, apparently to placate the Tibetans. The subsequent developments proved that the Chinese were indeed tough negotiators. What they agreed to was opening of the trade through only one route i.e. Lipulekh pass with Trade Centres at Taklakote on Tibetan side of the borders. While during last one decade a good number of Indian traders, mainly from Darma, Bians and Chaudas, visited Taklakote for trade, the number of Tibetan traders visiting Gunji suggests the unsuitability of the place as a Trade Centre. For Tibetan nomads living in the interior and the villagers inhabiting the Sutlej Valley area who were the traditional trading partners of Indian traders, it is a long distance to come to Gunji with their live-stock. The following is a table showing the number of Indian traders who visited Taklakote, the number of Tibetan traders who came to Gunji and the volume of export and import trade, during last one decade:

| Year | Nos. of Trade Passes issued by India | Nos. of Tibetans who come to Gunji | Import from Tibet (in Rupees) | Export to Tibet (in Rupees) |
|-------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1997 | 339 | - | 4,87,475 | 14,37,296 |
| 1998 | 346 | - | 32,99,230 | 7,34,444 |
| 1999 | 260 | 6 | 29,00,475 | 7,89,748 |
| 2000 | 322 | 4 | 29,50,750 | 9,30,380 |
| 2001 | 283 | - | 4,72,99,889 | 20,83,866 |
| 2002 | 449 | 2 | 7,20,96,717 | 24,69,557 |
| 2003 | 384 | - | 5,61,32,066 | 23,30,525 |
| 2004 | 457 | - | 14,87,87,772 | 38,41,840 |
| 2005 | 128 | - | 1,21,39,225 | 39,29,038 |
| 2006 | 115 | - | 81,64,306 | 2,40,665 |
| 2007 | 118 | - | 1,02,75,760 | 14,86,519 |

It would be seen from the above table that the balance of trade is in favour of China. Rawsilk, consumer durables and of course, wool constituted major portion of imports up to 2004.

Since 2005, Indian authorities have banned import of raw silk to protect Indian raw silk production and also import of live-stock and animals as no quarantine facility exists in the border area. Since these two items of import were profitable, the ban has discouraged some of the traders from going to Tibet and hence the decrease in their number: No Tibetan trader has visited Gunji, the Trade Centre on Indian side of border during the last five years. The agreement with China for opening of one trade route to Western Tibet has not proved beneficial to all the border traders who were badly affected

by closure of border in 1962. The traders from Johar Valley (Pithoragarh District) and Niti Mana (Chamoli District) cannot, for obvious reasons, visit Taklakote for trade. While conducting negotiations with the Chinese, Government of India does not appear to have strongly advocated opening of trade through other border areas including Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. Incidentally, a limited trade has reportedly been going on clandestinely through Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh borders.