Opium Trade and Smuggling in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century Nepal

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Research on the Nepalese opium trade and its smuggling has been limited, with historians primarily focusing on the production and transportation of either Malwa or Bengal opium. This article examines trade and smuggling activities in and around Nepal's southern Tarai region during the second half of the nineteenth century. These activities were likely facilitated by neighbouring territories through various channels established by petty merchants with strong connections across the Indo-Nepal border. Owing to its porous nature, Nepal became a conduit for smuggling numerous commodities, including opium. The article also explores the conditions of cultivators in this region, whose subsistence relied heavily on opium cultivation, at a time when prices set by the British government were low. Amidst these circumstances, cultivators found ways to smuggle opium through such merchants. Besides opium, the export of timber via rivers also found its way into British territory, where it was used to make opium chests for export to China. In contrast, British agents played a crucial role in controlling this ongoing trade and smuggling. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the British government faced setbacks in opium production in the Banaras and Bihar regions, which were partially offset by the importation of Nepalese opium. The import of Nepalese opium into British territory highlights the conditions faced by cultivators, revealing their reliance on opium cultivation and, to some extent, the treacherous game involved in the smuggling of opium outside British territory. The British government's policy regarding Nepalese opium focused on its import and on monitoring its smuggling into areas beyond its control.

Keywords: Nepal, Smuggling, Opium, British rule, Merchant Capitalism

Introduction

After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the English East India Company (EIC) began taking a keen interest in trade to run its mighty empire. The import and export of various commodities played a crucial role. However, the trade in opium worked as fuel for the empire. The EIC was far from manufacturing and monopolising opium; initially, it was mainly done by local traders. Later, a system was established to monopolise and regulate opium cultivation and its trade in India. Governor General Warren Hastings further centralised control over it in 1773, instituting opium agencies across regions like Faizabad, Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. The Company implemented a contract system, auctioning opium production rights to the highest bidders or the zamindars, who forced and penalised farmers, but this system failed to meet quotas in 1797. In the same year, the contract system was replaced by the agency system through the Regulation Act VI of 1799, a change which lasted for over a century. This system brought total control over the opium industry. Instead of exporting opium to China, the EIC decided to concentrate on producing it within India itself. Part of the

reason for the success of the opium trade was military. Two wars forced China to open its doors to British-Indian opium. The expansion and durability of the colonial opium trade in India were mostly due to a sizable and well-functioning governmental machinery. The EIC established dominance over opium in the late eighteenth century, which included de facto monopoly control. The state regulated the sale of opium, and all forms of production were carried out for the state's vested interests. To manage and regulate its monopoly, the EIC set up an Opium Department.[1]

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, due to the expansion of British rule over a large part of the subcontinent and Britain's growing dominance in the global money market, India's foreign policy underwent certain structural changes in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.[2] Opium became a major commodity in India's foreign trade. The monopoly of colonial rule over opium carried from Bombay for the same purpose accounted for a sizeable portion of its income. The commodity was brought to China by British traders and swift-moving clippers, where its sale brought in enormous profits despite the fast-growing addiction. In addition to helping India transfer its export excess from the China trade to England's credit in Chinese accounts, opium shipments allowed India to fulfil its financial obligations to England. Launching steamers, boats, ships, clippers, and ferries on river for exporting opium to China was another initiative taken by the British government; it was previously transported via roads. The EIC required these services for a variety of other reasons: to transport newly arrived cadets and officers to their joining stations, to transport exported saltpetre, indigo, textiles, cotton, and other bulk commodities such as grain, and to convey troops.[3]

The British EIC held a monopoly over the manufacture and sale of the Patna and Benares varieties of Bengal opium, and managed its production so well that the Chinese accepted the Company's trademark as a mark of quality for this contraband, as they did for legal goods. Malwa opium, produced in other Indian states, was of lower quality and was first brought in small amounts by the Portuguese through their settlements in Goa and Daimon on India's north-west coast. Turkish opium from Smyrna, which British speculators could not import directly, reached China via American merchants. The Company was concerned about these imports, but Turkish opium was inferior and came from far away. It was mainly mixed with the more

[1] Rolf Bauer, *The Peasant Production of Opium in the Nineteenth-Century India* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 2.

[2] K. N. Chaudhuri, "India's Foreign Trade and the Cessation of the East India Company's Trading Activities, 1828-1840," *The Economic History Review* 19, no. 2 (August 1966): 345-363; Asiya Siddiqui, *Trade and Finance in Colonial India 1750-1860* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1995), 385.

[3] Nitin Sinha, "Contact, Work, and Resistance: Boatmen in Early Colonial Eastern India, 1760s–1850s," *International Review of Social Society* 59, no. 22 (2014): 11-43.

expensive Bengal opium, and by the 1830s, its annual sales remained below 900 chests.[4]

Amar Farooqui, in the context of Malwa opium, which was a non-monopoly opium, focuses on the role of bankers, brokers, and moneylenders, who emulated the role of the EIC and maintained a network for the export of opium, thereby aiding in the overall progress of the system as a whole. Their distribution networks lubricated the mass markets necessary for the establishment of Indian capitalism in western India. These same distribution networks contributed to the development and maintenance of the expansive marketplaces that made it possible for Indian capitalism to flourish in western India.[5] Secondly, unlike Bengal opium, which was under the control of the British government, Farooqui traces how the British attempted to eradicate Malwa opium to control or end the trade. This included pressure to forbid the passage of opium through their territories, which became a threat to Indian revenue.[6] Thirdly, historians like David Edward Owen and Beinoy Bhushan Chaudhuri[7] assumed that the cultivation of Malwa opium was free and therefore lucrative for the peasants. However, Farooqui argues that these Sahukars, Banias, Mahajanas, and *Gomastas*, who took responsibility for making advances to the peasants and gathering up the harvested opium, compelled cultivators to succumb to pressures in terms of crop choice.[8]

John F. Richards, in his article, states that opium is neglected in all-India studies because the British contained peasant production of opium within two relatively small regions in northern and western India. Despite its high value as a narcotic, opium in nineteenth-century India did not occupy large tracts of land. Even in the opium-growing regions, poppy rarely exceeded 2-3 per cent of the total cultivated area. Opium cultivation, despite being regulated under a state monopoly and grown under restricted conditions, held significant economic importance for the peasant economy in the opium-producing regions of the north. Despite the unique circumstances and regulations surrounding opium production, it served as a crucial cash crop that contributed significantly to the economic well-being of peasants in these areas. Richards aims to highlight the dual impact of state-controlled opium cultivation that is constitutive of a) its economic significance for local peasants, and b) its unique regulatory framework under state control. The rise of opium cultivation in Bengal and Bihar was driven by the competition between the Dutch and the British EIC to fulfil

[4] Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 108.

[5] Amar Farooqi, *Smuggling as Subversion: Colonialism, Indian Merchants, and the Politics of Opium, 1790-1843* (Oxford and Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, "Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal, 1859–1885," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 7, no. 1 (March 1970): 25–60.

[8] Farooqi, *Smuggling as Subversion.*

the demands for opium in South-East Asia. One of the ancillary advantages of the British EIC's conquest of Bengal (completed between 1757 and 1764) lay in the trading company's new power to monopolise the production and sale of Bengal opium. A series of agreements granted the other European trading companies the right to obtain fixed, but continually diminishing, shares in the export crop from the new British territory. Gradually, by means of trial and error, the Bengal Government of the EIC perfected a state-run system whereby it could control the production and sale of opium. Richards offers a significant perspective on the farmers of northern India, examining their role within the framework of Indian capitalism. By focusing on their conditions and contributions, he offers an opportunity to delve deeply into this aspect at the grassroots level. This approach not only highlights the economic dynamics at play but also underscores the pivotal role of farmers in shaping broader socio-economic structures. Understanding their realities can illuminate critical insights related to the interconnectedness of agriculture, capitalism, and local economies.[9]

This article is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the conditions of cultivators in opium cultivation and their livelihood. The second section deals with the smuggling activities of cultivators and their relationship with merchants. The third and final section deals with various routes used by these merchants to export opium across the Indo-Nepal border.

Working Conditions and Livelihood of the Opium Cultivators

Nepal, a landlocked country in South Asia, was a native state on the northern frontier of British India, with a frontier spanning five hundred miles.[10] Jahar Sen cites the accounts of Ralph Fitch, Father Della Penna, and Father Ippolito Desideri to conclude that a vast amount of various goods was traded between India and Tibet via Nepal up to the nineteenth century.[11] Opium was extensively grown for local use by cultivators in the southern Tarai region of Nepal. It was annually brought in large quantities to opium godowns and sold to the British government. The government purchased opium at fixed rates, similar to the prices paid to farmers in British territory who grew opium, under an advance system in which farmers received a loan or advance before

[9] J. F. Richards, "The Opium Industry in British India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 39, no. 2-3 (2002): 149-180.

[10] From the north-west to the east between 80° and 88° east longitude, the most northern and eastern angle reaches as low as 26°, and its most northern and western corner as high as 30° North latitude. On the east, it is bounded by the state of Sikkim and Darjeeling; on the south, it is bounded by Bengal and the United Provinces; on the west, it is bounded by Kumaon and the River Kali; and on the north, it adjoins Tibet. Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia that borders India to the South. Stretching over 500 miles from the west to the east, the majority of the country is located within Himalayan region.

[11] Jahar Sen, *Indo-Nepal Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd, 1977), 17-18.

cultivation and were required to sell their produce back to the government at predetermined prices.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, opium became a new commodity in Nepal's commercial ties with India, as it became a highly sought-after commodity, primarily for export. Its cultivation began in the eastern and central Tarai regions in the late 1840s and was, most likely, a result of the surge in India's opium shipments to China following the first Opium War (1840–42).[12] A list of Nepalese villages in which opium cultivation was carried out, and the amount of opium brought in by the Nepalese during the last few years of the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century, is provided below.

Table 1: Villages in the Southern Tarai region of Nepal where opium was cultivated.[13]

Pawarwah	Mema	Gambaria
Parsatimpore	Bisrampore	Bhawalia
Pipra	Bageserai	Bhatowra
Pakareah	Basuntpore	Bhatinia
Pasrumpore	Betowna	Jagarnathpore
Parastoka	Bahooarwa	Joimangulpore
Patni	Banjari	Jaswalie
Peeparpanti	Bagahi	Ratunpore
Patowrah	Bariarpore	Ramporara
Piparia	Banjaria	Ramnagari
Tetah	Bahrampore	Rajwalia
Foolwaria	Beldari	Latmari
Foolkawal	Baswareah	Lachumanwa
Foolgawan	Bariaiporetola Bhunisa	Lalchandwa
Bankool	Belahia	Luchimpore
Burwah	Bhugwanpore	Lalkantwa
Bohooari	Bhowra	Itwa
Indurwa	Fechaha	Itiahi
Indurhari	Mananpore	Gahargoma
Aharaila	Majharia	Gahawatolah
Amowah	Majhariatola	Khoerawa
Aoraha	Mookhiapali	Ghioora
Achawnie	Motepore	Dhosaraha

[12] Mahesh C. Regmi, *An Economic History of Nepal, 1846-1901* (Varanasi: Nath Publishing House, 1988), 199-200.

[13] "Memorandum on Opium-Smuggling," by A. V. Knyvett, Esq., District Superintendent of Police, Chumparun, dated 8 September 1881, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,* Revenue Department, Branch: Miscellaneous Revenue, Head No. 1 — Opium (Manufacture and Provisions), Calcutta, July 1891, West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).

Ahar	Mohoowna	Ghoormi
Semarbari	Motihari	Chikani
Santpore	Mohuahi	Charampore
Sisiari	Murli	Chatonowa
Sidhowa	Motiarma	Jhitkahia
Santgunge	Madhuni	Jhahooab
Sekhowna	Kachorawa	Jhakhara
Siripore	Kuhari	Taigraha
Sisurah	Kallanpore	Taita
Sitalpore	Kewoohi	Tera
Soomermia	Kolooa	Dookoila
Houswa	Kalia	Digarwa
Hariharpore	Dhangadhowa	Tooshiahi
Hardia	Dhasamnuggur	Dasowta
Moosaili	Khootwa Pursoni	Narkatia
Maniari	Gadiani	Nagawah
Madhowal	Gardwal	Nagardaho
Moheshpore		

The list provided by Jahar Sen and Upadhyaya differs from the above-mentioned list, which has been derived from colonial records. Because it could be cultivated alongside other crops like maize, millets, and safflower, opium cultivation appears to have been popular among farmers in the areas under scrutiny. The government of Rana Bahadur (1775–1806) imposed a monopoly on exports in an effort to absorb the profits, but this initiative proved infeasible and was subsequently abandoned. Thereafter, cultivators were granted freedom to raise and sell the crop as they pleased. In the early 1880s, Nepali opium producers were urged to deliver their goods directly to British Indian Territory government depots for sale.[14] British sources claimed, "the Nepal cultivators are reported to be well satisfied with the present arrangements, under which the opium is received directly from the Nepalese raiyats and paid for under the conditions which apply to cultivators in British territory."[15] Later, Jung Bahadur (1846-1877) introduced the monopoly system for the first time in the Tarai region. Opium and sugarcane were the primary commodities used for these purposes. However, the accomplishments were far from adequate. In the 1840s, the growing of opium for commercial purposes began in the eastern Tarai districts. Over time, production volume increased to the point where a monopoly on exports could be justified.

[14] Government of India, *Report of the Administration of Bengal, 1880-1881 (*Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1882), WBSA.

[15] Government of India, *Report of the Administration of Bengal, 1893-94* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1895), cited in Mahesh C. Regmi's, *An Economic History of Nepal, 1846-1901*, (1988), 200.

Smuggling of Opium

Smuggling, as a term, refers to the act of exporting a commodity without paying taxes to the government. In the second half of the nineteenth century, opium was one of the many commodities that were smuggled via different channels by local traders. Local farmers from the Tarai region of Nepal used to cultivate opium in collaboration with village chiefs and the representatives of their receivers in Calcutta and Chandernagore. For the same reason, smugglers from Assam and Punjab migrated to the Tarai region. The main locations where the smugglers deposited the opium, on their way to Calcutta and Chandernagore before sending it to overseas ports, were Baidyanath and a location in the Tarai region close to the Gorakhpur frontier.[16]

Brian Houghton Hodgson, the Assistant Resident in Nepal, prepared a report titled *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal Vol. XXVII*, which advocated the recruitment of a large number of Nepalese in the British Army; for this purpose, trade relations with Nepal were mandatory. The data collected by Hodgson included the commercial route to Kathmandu, marts of the Tibetan frontier and other centres of Central Asian trade, the manner and expense of conveying goods, the amount and nature of the duties levied thereon by the Nepal Government and the places where they were levied, the length of each stage in the route, the estimated purchasing price in Calcutta of numerous articles of Central Asian trade, their selling price in Nepal, the total import of each into Nepal, and total consumption within Nepalese territory.[17] In 1816, after the establishment of the residency at Kathmandu, the Government of India had to bear all the expenses of the establishment. By 1829, the expenditure could be covered by the gains of trade.[18] The British resident, in collaboration with the Nepal administration, encouraged the native merchants of Benares to establish not less than ten *kothis* (factories) at Kathmandu. In the third decade of the nineteenth century, attempts were made to systematise Indo-Nepalese commercial relations within the framework of a treaty.[19]

In a letter to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Home Department, A. Mackenzie, Secretary to the Government of Bengal in the Judicial Department, declared that if any farmers were found guilty of being involved in opium smuggling, their licences to cultivate poppy would be cancelled and might not be granted again. To facilitate this identification, an order was issued by the Lieutenant Governor to transfer to the jails of their own districts all persons, residents of districts in Bihar, who could be apprehended and convicted of opium smuggling in other districts. But, in

[16] Jahar Sen, *Essays in Indo-Nepal Trade: A Nineteenth-Century Study* (Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1991), 56-57.

[17] B. H. Hodgson, *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet* (London: Trübner, 1874).

[18] Sen, *Indo-Nepal Trade*, 27-29.

[19] Ibid., 33.

case a smuggler convicted in Bengal involved a native of Benares in the North-Western Provinces, he could not be transferred to his native district in the absence of sanction from the Government of India under Section 32 of Act V of 1872.[20] Yet, the transfer of the prisoners convicted of opium smuggling in other districts to the jails of their own districts could not be generally accorded; although, in one particular case of a smuggler who was the native of Benares but was convicted in Bengal, the government of Bengal authorised his transfer to the Benares Jail under the provision of Section 32 of Act V of 1872.[21]

Besides railway stations and inland and overland trade routes, there were several other channels of smuggling. The post office was another major development. In a report, a post office situated in Bihar was found to contain a suspicious parcel filled with opium. The postmaster quickly gave notice to the police under section 369 of the *Code of Criminal Procedure*.[22] Opium was also brought through dense forests from Nepal and smuggled through Meerut, Saharanpur, and Gorakhpur on its way to the princely states of Punjab and beyond.[23]

The smuggling of opium spread rapidly, and it became absolutely necessary for the government to implement strict regulations to prevent it by imposing rigorous penalties and even imprisonment. A report from John Edgar, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to all District Magistrates and Deputy Commissioners, referred to two fresh cases of opium smuggling. In the first case, an accused who was found in possession of 12 maunds of opium, was convicted and sentenced by the Sub-Divisional Officer who tried the case to six months of rigorous imprisonment. However, upon appeal by the Magistrate of the district, the sentence was reduced to three months of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 100, or, in default, two more months of rigorous imprisonment. In the other case, the opium that was smuggled amounted to 2½ maunds, and seven persons were implicated in this case, of whom six were allowed to turn Queen's evidence, meaning they consented to testify in favour of the prosecution in exchange for leniency. This allowed the authorities to strengthen their case against the remaining suspects. The punishment inflicted on the convicted person was four months' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 400, or,

[20] *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,* Judicial Department, Branch: Jail, File No. 3187, Proceedings 46, August 1872, WBSA.

[21] *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,* Judicial Department, Branch: Jail-A, Nos. 187–188, August 1872, WBSA.

[22] *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,* Judicial Department, Branch: Police, File No. 463A, Proceedings 12, 139–140, October 1881, WBSA.

[23] *Report on the Administration of the Opium Department, 1889–90,* "Revenue Department (1890), Miscellaneous Revenue, No. 55N, Camp Benares, 3 December 1890. From J. H. Rivett-Carnac, Esq., C.S., C.I.E., Opium Agent, Benares, to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, L.P. — Annual Report on the Operations of the Benares Opium Agency, 1889–90," National Archives of India (NAI); cited in Anirudh Deshpande, "An Historical Overview of Opium Cultivation and Changing State Attitudes towards the Crop in India, 178–2000 A.D.," *Studies in History* 25, no. 1 (2009): 109–143, at 117.

in default, a further period of three months' rigorous imprisonment. The Government of India was concerned that the penalties imposed in some cases of fraud were far too low compared to the potential loss to public revenue, and that many of the accused were allowed to turn Queen's evidence. It stressed that the future conduct of such cases should properly reflect the seriousness and scale of the fraud attempted.[24]

Smuggling was also being carried out from the Tarai region of Nepal, as described by Jahar Sen. However, he mentions some cases of smuggling that leave us with a hazy picture. I have traced some more cases of smuggling in which the people were caught red-handed at railway stations while carrying opium with them, for local consumption in Punjab.[25] This led to a disruption in the delivery of the smuggled consignment. Those who were involved in opium smuggling belonged to a variety of castes, namely Bania, *Taeli, Arthi* and Fakir. They used to procure opium from shopkeepers in Nepal. However, the inability to deliver opium to godowns was further compounded by personal issues that individuals might have been dealing with. One case that sheds light on it is that of a farmer named Shiv Charan Sahu, a poppy cultivator of the village Parsauni in the Nepal Territory, at a distance of 33 miles from the British outpost of Segowli, who was found guilty of carrying 7 ½ *Chattacks*[26] of opium, and was caught by the railway head constable Danesh Ally. The opium found in his possession was the produce of his field, which he was unable to deliver at the government godowns at Motihari on account of illness. Not knowing what to do with the opium which remained with him, he was advised by a person from Parsauni village, whose name he declined to reveal, to take it down to Motihari; but, finding that the weighment was over, he came to Mahameh with the intention of taking the opium for sale to Calcutta. But on his arrival, he was arrested and set up for trial. Shiv Charan Sahoo was convicted on 11 September by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Barh with either six months' jail imprisonment and a fine of fifty rupees, or nine-months' Jail. Anirudh Deshpande states that the colonial state's anti-smuggling campaign was complicated by the fact that its allies often harassed honest poppy growers.[27]

Before monetisation, the opium trade was conducted by the exchange of commodities on a money valuation on the frontier of Awadh.[28] The Nepalese *mohar* was preferred in all important markets in comparison to the Indian rupee. Currency notes were not

[24] *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,* Judicial Department, Branch: Judicial, File No. 586, Proceedings, 1 July 1889, WBSA.

[25] For the list of villages where opium was cultivated, refer to Table-1.

[26] 1 *chattak/chatak* is equal to 4 *tolas.* 1 *seer* is equal to 16 chataks whereas, 40 *seers* is equal to 1 maund. See unit of measurement in Rolf Bauer, *The Peasant Production of Opium in Nineteenth-Century India* (Boston: Brill, 2019), xv.

[27] Anirudh Deshpande, "An Historical Overview of Opium Cultivation and Changing State Attitudes towards the Crop in India, 1878-2000 A.D.," Studies *in History* 25, no. 1 (2009): 109-143.

[28] Sen, *Indo-Nepal Trade*, 97.

used in transactions between the Nepalese and Indian traders.[29] Nepali coins were equivalent to Indian rupees. Kirkpatrick gives a description of the silver, gold and copper currency, which was minted in Kathmandu.[30]

Opium Trafficking Routes Across the Indo-Nepal border

Calcutta served as the main port of the British EIC. It was well connected to different production sites through a wide network of rivers, which made the export of goods easier and more productive. The Ganges, which was navigable throughout the year, was the main river highway across the vast Gangetic plains. The British found the Gangetic river suitable as a channel for trade primarily because of its natural connection to all the major rivers and streams in the agricultural plains of northern and southern Bihar. These rivers were used to ship large quantities of saltpetre, opium, and grain to the port of Calcutta. The rivers were expected to serve as primary highways after the British ruled the region, and the pre-modern roads along the Ganges lost their importance as the focal point shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. However, during the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, the colonial government invested considerable funds in building and maintaining a system of roads in the inland areas.

Before the advent of railways and their later expansion across India, people depended on roads, which were often in bad condition. Jahar Sen gives a description of roads heading from various districts of the North-Western Provinces to Nepal, which were partially fit for foot passengers, carts, pack ponies, and pack bullocks, which were a common means of transport and carried considerable amounts of trade.[31] In 1875, Mr H. G. Wilkins, District Superintendent of Police, found that the opium smuggling was carried on by some smugglers.[32] These smugglers had godowns at Parsauni and Hetowni in Nepal, at Govindganj and Bettiah in the district, and also at Patna, Calcutta, Benares, Kanpur, Rajmahal, and Delhi. The smuggling was supposed to be carried out almost entirely in the direction of Chandernagore and along the main routes that passed through Purnea and Bhagalpur. Merchandise within the district was transported by river to Govindganj, from where it was then taken by river to

[29] "Revenue A, August 1877, No. 16. The Deputy Commissioner, Gonda, to the Commissioner, Fyzabad Division, No. 964, dated 15 April 1876," cited in Jahar Sen, *Indo-Nepal Trade* (1977), 100.

[30] William Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul: Being the Substance of Observations Made During a Mission to that Country in the Year 1793* (London: William Miller, 1811), 216-219.

[31] Sen, *Indo-Nepal Trade*, 49-54.

[32] The names of the smugglers with their castes were: Chutoo Singh, Bunniah; Padaruth Sonar, Kalianpore; Doma Sha, Nakatwa; Chatoo Kandoo, Jai Maohto Dhanook; and brothers Harat Narain, Ram Narain, and Khoobari Narain.

Patna and then by sea to Chandernagore. It seems that, if not actively encouraged, this trade must have been at least connived at by the Nepalese officials themselves.[33]
Opium was smuggled not just in Behar and the north-western regions but even into the Punjab region. Smuggling from the Tarai region of Nepal into the Punjab region was primarily carried out by smugglers using carts via a jungle path that passed through Butwal and into Gorakhpur. Notably, Punjabis were granted passes for opium trading by the Punjab Government as late as 1876 and 1877. These individuals often approached the Champaran Magistrate for a similar pass to protect them while travelling through these provinces, and they were understandably shocked to find that Bengal had different regulations on the matter. Due to the closure of the direct route through Champaran, they only needed to transport the opium into Gorakhpur in order to avoid being arrested. As a result, the jungle route via the Bhikhna Thori pass and Butwal into Gorakhpur was used freely and safely, and Punjabis exported large amounts of opium from the Terai and transported it to Punjab via the North-Western Provinces.

In 1879-80, to curb the opium trade, the Punjab Government issued no more passes, and the carriage of opium through the North-Western Provinces became fraught with the same risks as in Bengal. As a result, the longer and more difficult route through Bootwal was abandoned, and the illicit traders in opium were driven to the more direct route through this district. Later, it was found that the post offices were used as a means of carrying the drug to the Punjab region; for instance, a small wooden box, wrapped in cloth and sealed as though for delivery by post, was seized by the Raxaul police and, on being opened, was found to contain three *sers* of opium. The parcel was addressed to Rajah (an assumed name) of Ambala. As a result, the police started to keep a watch on the post offices.[34]

Another mode of opium smuggling was through various railway stations. The significance of railroads as commercial conduits was acknowledged in the 1870s. In order to promote and ease trade relations with Nepal, branch lines from the existing railways were frequently constructed to advantageous locations along the border.

Numerous records reveal that smuggling was carried out by several Punjabi farmers or, possibly, by the smugglers themselves. In a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal from James Monro Esq., who was Inspector-General of Police in the Lower Provinces, it was reported that several Punjabi farmers were caught and

[33] "Memorandum on Opium-Smuggling," by A. V. Knyvett, Esq., District Superintendent of Police, Chumparun, dated 8 September 1881, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Revenue Department,* Branch: Miscellaneous Revenue, Head No. 2, Opium (Manufacture and Provision), Calcutta, August 1881, WBSA.

[34] Ibid., 98.

arrested for smuggling opium from the Bihiya railway station.[35] The consignment was packed very carefully in wooden boxes, covered with canvas, sealed, and addressed like an ordinary parcel. After weighing, it was found that the parcel contained almost 280 *tollah* of opium.[36] Later, it was decided that the police of the districts bordering on the Terai region, viz., Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Munger, Bhagalpur and Purnea, should be provided with facilities for obtaining information from the postal authorities regarding suspicious parcels addressed to Amritsar, Patiala, Ambala, and other places in Punjab. On 15 February 1880, a sub-inspector of Adapur found that a large group of Punjabis was carrying opium. They left Parsauni en route to the Bihar railway station. The inspector telegraphed this information to the assistant Inspector-General of railway police and the district Superintendent of Shahbad, and seven Punjabis, with about 3 maunds of opium, were arrested. The sub-inspector, Mahomed Ariff, and his informer received rewards of Rs. 107-10 each.[37]

On 14 May 1881, the Shahbad railway police and the District Superintendent of Police again intercepted two Punjabis who were travelling with six pack-bullocks to Koelwar railway station. These Punjabis stated that they were going to Koelwar, but were arrested at Mughalsarai on 20 May 1881, and fined Rs. 50 each.[38] On 18 June 1881, the sub-inspector of Gobindganj arrested five Punjabis with three and a half maunds of opium and found that a second party had gone via Gorakhpur towards Mylapore on the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway. The sub-inspector telegraphed the information to the railway police and to the District Superintendents of Banares and Faizabad and later learned that the four *Cabulis*[39] mentioned in his telegrams were arrested in Lucknow.[40] Lastly, on 2 August 1881, he informed the railway police and District Superintendents of several districts through which the railway ran that further arrangements were now being made to smuggle twelve maunds of opium by rail. The movement of trains was being carefully monitored, and there was reason to believe that boats would be used, as every recent attempt to place opium on the railways had failed, as a result of the arrest of smugglers and the seizure and confiscation of opium.[41] In this whole process, it was important to note that the opium in all cases came from one 'Doma Sha' of Parsauni, who, according to the more recent information at hand, nearly monopolised the trade. Some smugglers were finally arrested in

[35] The names of the farmers were: Punjab Singh, Authun Singh, Andan Singh, Munraj Singh, Medaun Singh, and Bhagwan Singh.

[36] "Letter no. 8096, Fort William, 8 June, 1881, Nepal Residency Records, file no. 13-G, part-II," NAI, New Delhi.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] An anglicised version of *Kabulis,* who were the residents of Kabul, Afghanistan.

[40] "Letter no. 8096, Nepal Residency Records, file no. 13-G, part-II," NAI.

[41] Ibid.

Bengal with small quantities of opium, and were subsequently sent to Motihari jail.[42] It was informed that they were sent out by Doma Sha; however, there were others who had large quantities of opium in their godowns.[43]

Conclusion

In the greater part of the nineteenth century, opium occupied a central place in the global economy. Opium, a cash crop cultivated by farmers in different regions of India, was exported by the EIC to China and smuggled by local traders who had established a decent circuit across the Indo-Nepal border. The use of illegal opium was prevalent in most districts of Nepal, and violations of opium laws were common. We see that despite the EIC's monopoly over the manufacture and export of opium, and after 1858, under British rule, smuggling continued to be done by various traders belonging to various castes. After the construction of railways and post offices, it became easier for smugglers to export opium by using these channels as well. The British government tried every means to arrest the smugglers, and rewards were given to officers and informers. However, they were not entirely successful in containing it, and smuggling continued.

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[42] Ibid. The name of the smugglers with their villages name were: 1. Beekoo Kandoo from Nakatwa, 2. Seetahal Singh of Tenowa, 3. Gokhool Kandoo of Bunkatwa, 4. Rewal Kandoo of Pursowni, 5. Ram Dhani Kandoo of Tenowa, and 6. Ramdeehni Kandoo of Nakatwa.

[43] Ibid. Names are mentioned who had opium godowns, all belonging to the same caste: Sengolam Bhagat Teli and Moti Bhagut Teli from Nakatwa and Pursowni, Luchooman Teli from Pareyniya, and Fukeera Sah Teli from Pheyta.

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