

# The North-Eastern Frontier of India and China's Claim

Sahdev Vohra

China has laid claim to the area of Arunachal Pradesh north of the Brahmaputra river. While the Chinese admit that there is a natural, customary, traditional boundary between India and Tibet, here as elsewhere on the long Indo-Chinese border, they assert that it lies, not along the main Himalayan crest, but along the right bank of the Brahmaputra. In support of their claim, the Chinese officials who sat together with the Indian officials in 1960 to exchange information regarding their respective border claims cited the case of Nepal. If Nepal can lie south of the Himalayas, they said, why not the same in the case of Tibet further east? They rejected the Indian claim that the Arunachal Pradesh area had formed part of India not only under the British but also under the Ahoms since the thirteenth century and, in fact, from earlier historic times.

The agreement between India and Tibet at Simla in 1914 regarding the Indo-Tibetan boundary east of Bhutan was fixed on the basis of the best evidence available to the two parties. The Indian Government had sent survey parties since 1911 all over this area to ascertain the line of demarcation. Among the men who were specially selected for the frontier surveys was the then Captain F. M. Bailey who managed to escape into Tibet from the Abor country and trekked back to India into the Tawang area in 1913. He describes the journey in detail in his book *No Passport to Tibet*.<sup>1</sup> Tibet, for its part, had maintained in meticulous manner all the documents and evidence regarding its administration in the border region. It was this evidence which Tibet now produced and the basis on which it agreed to what has come to be called the McMahon Line. It is on the basis of the same evidence that in 1960 the Chinese claimed that Tibet extended to the area of Arunachal Pradesh. Of the three parties at the Simla Conference, 1913-14, Tibet was the most well prepared for arguing its case for a boundary demarcation. And it was the boundary between China and Tibet that the Chinese Government denounced, the day after their plenipotentiary had agreed to a line demarcating the boundary of Tibet with India as well as China. The Tibetans had withdrawn the claim to Tawang south of the Himalayas though the monastery at

Tawang had ecclesiastical links with the Drepung monastery at Lhasa. The evidence by which China sought later to prove its claim was none other than what was contained in the Tibetan records. It does not, therefore, make for plausibility of the Chinese case when on the same evidence they claim that Tibet's boundary lies roughly a hundred miles to the south of what Tibet agreed to in 1914 under the name Monyul. There is an ancient Lama monastery here which is accounted for by the fact that Bhutan to the west of it also came under the influence of Tibetan Buddhism. The Chinese claim the Tawang area adjoining Bhutan to the east. Except for the Tawang area, no other area south of the Himalayas had any religious connection with Tibet. As checked personally by Lt. Col. Bailey in 1913, the Tibetan outpost for collecting taxes on goods passing to and from Tibet was situated to the north of the Tawang area at the pass to Tsona Dzong. East of Tawang is the Subansiri Basin which the Chinese now call Loyul. This area was also visited by Lt. Col. Bailey on his way back from Tibet. He checked that Migyitin on the Himalayan crest was the border point of entry, where both sides, Tibet and India, collected taxes. Going further eastwards to the Lohit valley and the territory of the Mishmis, the frontier town was Rima. But the Chinese laid claim to the area south of Rima, under the title Lower Tsayul.

The maps of the Chinese themselves are clear that these did not include Arunachal Pradesh in Tibet. These maps are enumerated at pages 107-109 of the *Report of the Indian Officials, 1960*. They date from 1737 to 1925. In addition to them, the *Chinese Postal Atlas, 1917*, also shows Arunachal Pradesh as part of India.

We have to trace the history of Anglo-Chinese relations from 1907 to describe the background of the Simla Conference of 1913-14. In 1904, Lord Curzon made a determined attempt to open Tibet to a British presence and to British influence. Younghusband led a force through the Chumbi valley to Lhasa. Curzon's justification was to forestall Russia, but already the rise of Germany in Europe had necessitated a detente between Russia and England. An Anglo-Russian Convention was signed in 1907 about Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. It made the following arrangements about Tibet:

"Arrangement concerning Tibet. Recognising the suzerain rights of China in Tibet and considering that Great Britain by reason of her geographical position, has a special interest in the maintenance of status quo in the external relations of Tibet..... not to enter into negotiations with Tibet except through the

intermediary of the Chinese Government..... not to send representatives to Lhasa..... not to obtain concessions regarding roads and telegraphs and mines."

This enabled China to take initiatives to alter the status quo, vis-a-vis Tibet in her favour. China made a determined attempt to absorb eastern Tibet into China proper. During the course of negotiations leading to the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention, the question of the boundaries of Tibet had arisen. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, wrote to Sir J. Jordan, Minister at Peking, that the "Government of India consider Tibet is bounded on the north by Kuen-Lun and Tan Shan ranges, on the east by districts in the vicinity of Tsaidam which are under the direct control of the Chinese and by China proper."<sup>2</sup> The Chinese reply was wholly evasive and Jordan informed his Government as follows: "In a private conversation with Tang today, the question of the boundaries of Tibet was touched upon and views of the Government of India mentioned. He was ignorant of the boundaries of Tibet in the north and east but said that the Board concerned would be consulted"; and to the Viceroy, Jordan telegraphed in February, "Tang applied to the President of the Board concerned who were unable to supply any information and said the Chinese Government possessed no maps later than the 18th century."

Already in May 1905, O'Connor who had been posted in Tibet as a result of the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 after the withdrawal of the Younghusband expedition, reported that the Chinese Government was making a determined attempt to reabsorb the province of Nyarang and that "with the conclusion of the disturbances of Batang, the Chinese (had) appointed a new Commissioner of the Frontier."<sup>3</sup> The Viceroy, Lord Minto, had, therefore, suggested that "we inquire if China accepts this boundaries of north and has no special claims to advance on east of Tibet beyond Tachien Lus or possibly Litang. . . . . It is reported that China is trying to assert rights in E. Tibet which did not possibly exist." He referred to Kham as "a large tract lying in the south-east of Tibet." As we have seen, the Chinese pleaded a bland ignorance in the face of the enquiries that were then made from them, but this was only a cover up for the advance into Tibet which had already been launched. The British authorities in India could not watch this with equanimity. The then Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, Sir Louis Dane, noted on June 26, 1907:

'Before the restoration of Chinese authority after the Tibet Mission, (of Younghusband) Tibet was almost entirely autonomous and may easily become so again. It is, therefore, to the interest of China to reduce the area of Tibet as much as possible, though such a course hardly seems consistent with our interest."<sup>4</sup>

Sir Louis referred to a report in the *North China Herald* of June 25 that Tibet is turned into the province of Hsitsang and the west part of Szechuan is to be called the province of Ch'uanhsi.

Chinese troop movements began to be reported near eastern Tibet. The Government of India informed the Home Government that "it is to the interest of China to reduce the area of Tibet as much as possible and this they appear to be doing rather rapidly." The report mentioned "strong evidence that the Chinese are ambitious of making Tibet into a Chinese province and that they are pushing forward their frontier."<sup>5</sup> Information regarding troop movements and the Chinese advance were received, among others, from Nepalese sources. In a letter dated June 12, 1907, to the Nepalese Prime Minister, their envoy at Peking had reported:—

"The Chief Chinese Military Officer whom he had met at Litang in Eastern Tibet possessed 2500 men under his command of whom 300 were in Litang. (The Chinese officer) mentioned that he would be proceeding to Lhasa. . . . . and the troops would proceed via Draya and Chamdo, and after bringing them under Chinese control, they would advance further down to Lhasa."<sup>6</sup>

Again on September 2, 1907, the Government of India learnt from Nepalese sources that "Lhasa authorities had received information that Chinese troops had advanced as far as Sangchu Tsong in the Kham district giving out that the range of hills known as Sya Jhoula had been declared to be the boundary between Tibet and China."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the Convention of 1907 about which China had been informed (but not Tibet), calling for non-interference by Russia or Bhutan in Tibet, had been seen by China as an opportunity to absorb eastern Tibet into China proper and to convert Tibet into a province of China. The Chinese appointed a warden of the Eastern Marches at Tachien Lu. The officer appointed, Chou Erh-Feng, subjugated the tribes in the remote areas through which passed the southern route to Tibet. Britain now informally told Russia that despite the Anglo-Russian Convention, India may have to

intervene in Tibet to ensure that the Chinese did not alter the status of Tibet, or make inroads in her territory. When the Chinese troops entered Pome in the Tibetan south-east, the local people fought them. Ultimately, however, the Chinese were able to advance to Lhasa in February 1910. The Dalai Lama who had returned from his exile from 1904 to 1909 only a few months earlier, again escaped—this time to India. As H. E. Richardson has stated in *History of Tibet*, this was the first time in Tibet's history that Chinese troops had entered as an invading force.<sup>8</sup>

Hitherto, China had been able to encroach upon the territory of Tibet and exercise control over Lhasa because, since the fifth Dalai Lama in 1642, it was only in the twentieth century that the Dalai Lama was able to assume direct power. In the previous one hundred and fifty years, successive Dalai Lamas had died while still minors. There was a change in the Sino-Tibetan relations after the Chinese republic was established in 1911 but that was due to the direct rule of a strong Dalai Lama, not because of any change in the attitude of the Chinese. The Dalai Lama had been in exile from 1904 to 1909 and again after only a few months' stay in 1910 when he had fled from the Chinese troops who had arrived in Lhasa in 1910. The revolution of 1911 led to the desertion of the Amban from Lhasa. The Dalai Lama after his return in 1913 to Lhasa, declared the independence of Tibet, though the Chinese republic later declared Tibet to be a part of China. Border fighting continued intermittently in Szechuan where the Chinese wanted to incorporate parts of Chamdo province of Tibet into China proper. The control of the republic over the administration in Szechuan and Yunnan provinces was non-existent; in fact, they broke away from the centre. It was with the local warlords that Tibet had to contend.

China's energetic policy also brought its troops on to the border of India in the north-east region. On the suggestion of the Chinese Amban in Lhasa, Chou Erh-Feng's troops tried to establish authority in those regions of Tibet which adjoined India's north-east frontier. The position was well-defined by the main Himalayan axis, though there was a spillover of the tribes of India's north-east area into Tibet, as in Pemakoe, and<sup>9</sup> of Tibetan Buddhism into the Indian frontier region, as in the case of the area of Tawang adjoining Bhutan. From Tsa Yul (Zayul) in Tibet, Chou Erh-Feng's troops crossed over at Rima for a few miles into the Mishmi territory in the north-east corner of India and then withdrew. This alerted the Indian authorities to build a road towards Rima. They

placed a memorial plaque regarding their visit, as the Chinese had done in 1910. Kaulbek wrote:

"The boundary stone is a large rock on which are carved two inscriptions. The first of these is in English and simply says '15th COY 1st Batt. KGI Sappers and Miners 1912'. It marks the spot where the road they built came to an end. The other notice is in Chinese showing the limit of their claims when they overran Tibet in 1910."<sup>10</sup>

Not only this, the British authorities in India sent a number of survey parties in 1911 to the other areas of the north-east frontier to define precisely the frontier line with Tibet. Col. Bower was in charge of three survey parties into Abor country and one of these was sent up the Dibang river to its east. Bailey, an officer attached to this last mission, however, penetrated into Tibet along with Morshead in 1913. Bailey had already tried to enter Tibet from Szechuan and he says: "I was turned back owing to the outbreak of fighting between the Chinese and the Tibetans in Pome."<sup>11</sup> In 1911, he had returned to India via Tsayul. Now he decided to go into Tibet from the south. The two of them marched from Mipi in the Dibang valley to Chimdro in Tibet, and found a "spillover" of Abors from India at Kapu and other areas in the Tsang-po valley en route. Next he went to Pome where there had been a fight between the local tribes and the Chinese troops in 1910. "Hatred and fear of the Chinese was the greatest factor in the region" according to an official of the Po area—the Nyerpa. "The Chinese came in and announced that they were going to make a road to Lhasa through Pome. The Pobas resisted and killed 1700 of them" (300, according to what Bailey had heard earlier in Szechuan). The Nyerpa continued, "The Chinese sent more troops and defeated the Pobas." But, he said, "The Pobas rallied and once more they were victorious."

Col Bailey wrote: "Uptill about a hundred years ago before our journey, the whole of the Tsang-po below the great bend was inhabited by Abors."<sup>12</sup>

We have already mentioned Kingdon-Ward's tour in 1935. He stayed in Pemakoe where he found that the population was of Abors. Pemakoe is situated in the bend of the Tsang-po as it takes a U-turn into India. This is a kind of "Shangrila" of Tibetan tradition, where they could take refuge when the country was threatened with foreign invasion. He says: "Being hemmed in on three sides by the Tsang-po gorge and on the fourth by a snow range, where

passes are open only a for a few months, it. . . ."<sup>13</sup> was secure. The Abors, called Lopas by the Tibetans were the main inhabitants and Kingdon-Ward says that to the original Abors here, were added the Monbas of Bhutan more than a hundred years ago, and later on the Kongbos, the Pobas from Pome and Kampas from Kham. Bailey narrates how he found the non-Tibetans, as already mentioned, in Tibet at Kapu, the first village in the Tsong-po valley and other nearby villages. They were called Lopas by the Tibetans. Bailey writes, "The Lopas lived here in isolated villages. . . . . The term Lopa meant to Tibetans what barbarians meant to the Greeks." He found that they were actually Monbas and Drukpas who had come in search of the promised land who elbowed out the Abors from Kapu.

From Pemakoe, Bailey went west to Kongbo and south to Migyitin which he found was the frontier of the Daflas with Tibet. He says he found that "the people of Migyitin paid double taxes." Bailey wanted to explore the direct route to Tawang from Tibet. He was told that the direct route over the mountains was blocked by snow and manned by an agent of the Tsona Zongpon and "duty was charged on goods going to Tibet."<sup>14</sup> Bailey was yet to report on the results of his journey when the representatives of China, Tibet and India met in Simla in October 1913. MacMahon, the Indian representative was still awaiting reports from the other missions sent. McMahan later explained that the 500 miles which "formed the boundary between India and Tibet, owing to our greater local knowledge and more detailed survey, supplemented by special survey parties sent out to examine the less known areas, admitted of more detailed and exact definition. For a great length of it, lofty mountain ranges and watershed buried on external snow facilitated verbal definition, and rendered demarcation on the ground (except in a few small special and more inhabited areas) either impossible or superfluous."<sup>15</sup>

### **China's Claim to Arunachal Pradesh**

#### *China's Claim of 1960*

The full extent of China's claim on the north-eastern frontier of India was made clear at the conference of the officials of India and China, agreed upon between the Prime Ministers of India and China in 1960. There were, however, earlier indications of respect for the existing boundary along the Himalayan watershed in the meetings between the Prime Ministers in 1956 and 1960 coupled

with a formal denunciation of the McMahon line. The *volte face* at the meeting of the officials was unequivocal to the effect that the Chinese claimed virtually the whole of the present Arunachal Pradesh, and this stand has been asserted from time to time, although it has been coupled with hints of mutual accommodation between the two countries on the border issue, including, of course, the area of Aksai Chin at the north-western end of Tibet.

We have seen how China was attempting to extend her hold over Tibet even after the declaration of independence by the Dalai Lama in 1913 and there was intermittent warfare between China and Tibet in the Szechuan province. In the meanwhile, Britain was making efforts through diplomatic channels to define and stabilise the boundary of Tibet. In a memorandum of August 17, 1912, submitted by Sir J. Jordan, the British Minister, to Wai Chiow-Pu, it was stated that China had no right to interfere in Tibet's internal administration. On May 23, 1913, the British Foreign Office invited the Chinese Government to take part in a "Joint Conference in India with a view to settling the Tibetan question by means of a tripartite agreement." A similar invitation was sent to the Tibetan Government. The Simla Conference met in October 1913. The Chinese case on the outcome of the Simla Conference is discussed later. They claim that neither the agreement between Tibet and India on the boundary between Tibet and India east of Bhutan nor the one between the three parties, i.e., Tibet, India and China, on the boundary between Tibet and China, is valid. The Chinese case against the McMahon Line, as the boundary between India and Tibet east of Bhutan is called, did not, however, affect their acceptance of it as a line of actual control. In a Press conference in India in April 1960, the Chinese Prime Minister said *inter alia*: "We have asked the Government of India to adopt an attitude towards this area (the western sector) similar to the attitude of the Chinese Government towards the area of the eastern sector, that is, it may keep to its own stand, while agreeing to conduct negotiations and not cross the line of China's administrative jurisdiction as shown on Chinese maps." He also said that when agreement was reached, "we shall revise our respective maps in accordance with the agreement between both sides."

When we examine the evidence of the administrative jurisdiction in the eastern sector as was made available in the Report of the Chinese officials to the committee of officials set up after the above mentioned visit of the Chinese Prime Minister to



India, we find that it is really the evidence from Tibetan sources that is presented. This, of course, was only to be expected as the Chinese had no direct contact with this area. The Chinese officials' Report of 1960 claims that the boundary on the eastern sector "roughly follows throughout the line where the southern foot of the Himalayas touches the plains on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra river" (CR-3). After that, "from Nizamghat, the boundary line turns south-eastwards into the mountain terrain. . . . where it meets the lower stretch of the Tsayul river. . . . and it leaves it. . . . and runs in a south-easterly direction upto the tri-junction of China, India and Burma."

The Chinese officials stated that the area is "divided into three parts : Monyul, Layul and Lower Tsayul." The Indian officials pointed out that the Chinese "did not state what they considered to be the area of these three localities and judging from the evidence, these appeared to be only three small pockets of the large areas claimed" (p. 122 of the Indian Report). In the Monyul area (east of Bhutan), it was stated by the Chinese that the fifth Dalai Lama had, by mandate, "established the rule of the Lama" in 1680,<sup>16</sup> and in 1725, the seventh Dalai Lama also had a mandate about the Tawang monastery which *inter alia* stated: "This monastery is responsible for guarding our frontier and cannot be compared with other monasteries, therefore, this mandate is confirmed."<sup>17</sup>

British rule in Assam was extended in the nineteenth century and the Chinese Report comments, "Although the British at this time concluded with the Monbas an agreement of a mutual non-aggression nature and undertook the obligation of paying the Monbas 5,000 rupees a year," they nevertheless assured the "local" Tibetan authorities in a letter handed over to them in 1853, pledged by "the Tawang monastery and the Babus and head men." Coming to recent times, the Chinese officials claimed that in 1940, Monyul submitted records of households as required by Tsona Dzong, including those of Taklung Dzong, Kalakatang, etc. And in 1942, the Tsona Dzong officials toured the Monyul area.

The Indian officials pointed out in reply that the mandate of 1680 was, in fact, addressed to all the countries of the world. Far from establishing rule, the mandate referred to the collecting of voluntary contributions and indicated that the Dalai Lama was authorising the collection of such contributions.<sup>18</sup> The mandate of 1725 enjoined the Monbas to guard the frontier and was "the exhortation by a religious pontiff to the adherents of his faith that

they should guard against neighbouring tribes" not of the faith. The payment of Rs. 5000 by the British to the Monbas was an "administrative arrangement similar to others entered into with the tribes of the region to keep the peace." As for the pledge of 1853 to the Tibetan authorities, the Chinese later admitted that, in fact, no such pledge existed. The 1940 document cited by the Chinese dealt with donations by villagers for celebrating the enthronement of the Dalai Lama. The report of 1942 of the Tibetan official sent to Tawang showed that "neither the official nor his entourage visited any place south of Tawang."<sup>19</sup>

The evidence regarding the rest of Arunachal Pradesh is equally thin and unsustainable. Regarding Loyul to the east of Tawang, the Chinese officials stated that it "was long ago a part of Tibet." The Chinese case is that Loyul was originally under the administration of Pome and then it was put under Pemakoe. The mandate of 1680 referred to above about Monyul is also addressed *inter alia* to Lopa, as it begins thus:

"Have all ye nations of the world, big and small areas of the snow abode of Tibet and Great Tibet, the sacred land of India, the places east and west, above and below, the Mow area in the south, Kagar, Kan of a land, Kakra of Lopa. . . . ."<sup>20</sup>

The word Lopa is used by the Tibetans for people living south of Tibet. The Tibetans sent a "living Buddha," Kuru, to inspect the Loyul area in 1914, say the Chinese, and he pointed out to "the British personnel who had intruded into the Loyul area," that "Lokar, Lonag and Lokhra" were in Tibet. In 1921, the general officers in charge of commerce in Pemakoe inspected the Loyul area, and in 1927, two Tibetan Commanders were sent to quell the revolt of the Prince of Pome, and they reached Padam, not far from Pasighat. The Chinese claim continues that an administrative unit (CSO) was set up at Danfam in 1946-47. This was south of the "so-called McMahon Line."

The Indian officials pointed out that the reference to Loyul by the Buddha Kuru in 1914 was unsupported by any evidence as to the extent of Loyul. The document of 1921 that was furnished by the Chinese referred to the stages of some particular route and contained no reference to Pasighat, as was claimed. The rebellion of the Prince of Pome in 1927 and his pursuit cannot be evidence of Tibetan jurisdiction. In short, the evidence produced by the Chinese officials, was of little value to lay either a claim to the Loyul area or to its extent when in fact the word just means "the land of the south."

Regarding the lower Tsayul area, the Chinese stated as follows:

"The Lower Tsayul area originally belonged to Sangugachos, a Dzong of China's Chamdo area... In the mandate given by the Dalai Lama to (this) Dzong in 1896, it was clearly stated that there were places in upper and lower Tsayul in the area under the administration of (this) Dzong."<sup>21</sup>

Next the Chinese Report refers to the despatch of officers by Chou Erh-Feng to this area in 1910 for an inspection "and guard against British intrusion." The report Chou received from one of them was that the dividing line between Tsayul and Lo-Lo is along a stream at Yapichulung at the third stage to the south-east." The other report of a survey of the Yapichulung is quoted as mentioning Waloon, "a rather famous village on the lower Tsayul area which was invaded by Britain around 1944," say the Chinese officials. We have already noted that Kaulbek who accompanied Kingdon-Ward in the 1930s trekked to Tibet from the Mishmi area. As stated by him and by many recent travellers like G.N. Patterson,<sup>22</sup> Rima was the last town of Loyul on the border of the Mishmi territory. In 1910, soldiers of Chou Erh-Feng marched a few miles to the south of Rima and inscribed the fact (in Chinese) on a rock. As Kaulbek stated, he saw this rock which also had an inscription by the British Sappers who constructed a road to this point from the south.<sup>23</sup> As in the case of Loyul, so also in the case of Tsoyul, the Chinese officials had no evidence to produce regarding the extent of the area claimed nor did they produce any evidence to substantiate their claim to the Mishmi area or the Lohit valley.

The area claimed by China south of the Himalayas in 1960 is, after all, a large area. If we consider Arunachal Pradesh as a whole, its area is 83,743 sq. km. It is inhabited by numerous tribes, eg., the Monpas, Lopas, Akas, Daflas, Miris, Apa-Tanis, Mishmis, Marus and others. Their present population is nearly 800,000. Differing from Tibet in climate, and geography and ethnicity, they were left by the British and by their predecessors—the Ahom rulers—to lead their own ways of life under the mistaken belief that they were opposed to any contact with settled life. It is only in independent India that they have become rapidly a part of the mainstream of the country's way of life and have taken to development. When we examine the Chinese claim, we should begin at the western end of the north-eastern region. The boundary claimed by India for Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh is based on treaties. Article I of the convention signed by Britain and China in March 1890

regarding the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet reads: "The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluent from the waters flowing into the Tibet Mochu and northwards into other rivers in Tibet." On this there has been no discrepancy or dispute since. The Bhutan-Tibet boundary is also "a natural, traditional and customary one. It follows the crest of the Himalayan range which forms the main watershed." Here also there is no dispute, though the Chinese have mentioned "only a certain discrepancy in the sector south of the so-called McMahon Line." After Bhutan, it continues along the crest of the Great Himalayan range, "which is also the watershed between the Chyub Chu in Tibet and the Kamla, Kamla and Khru rivers in India, proceeds east and north-east. Thereafter, it crosses the Subansiri river and then the Tsari river just south of Migyitin, and taking a north-easterly direction crosses the Tunga Pass (94° 10' E and Lat 28° 59' N)." It then runs east and crosses the Dihang and ascends the watershed between Chimdru-Chu and Rongta Chu in Tibet and the Dibang and its tributaries in India. It then crosses the Yonggyab P and the Kangri Karpo P and crosses the Lohit river, a few miles south of Rima. It then joins the tri-junction with Burma at Diphu Pass.

The Ahoms became masters of Assam around 1228 AD and held sway in the area for nearly six centuries. A seventeenth century work, *Political Geography of the Assam Valley*, contains the names of tribes who were tributaries to the Ahoms. The Daflas, Akas and Bhutias are among those named as are the passes by which they descended to the plains. It describes certain villages of the Mikker and Miri tribes which were directly under Ahom rule. "Relations with the tribes were in the hands of duly appointed Frontier Wardens and Governors. For instance, the Sadiya-Khowa Gohain was in charge of conciliating the tribes of Sadiya country and the Barphukan and Darrang Rajas were in charge of the Bhutias. They had in their offices a number of men versed in the language, customs and habits of the tribes."<sup>24</sup> The Moghul historian Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied a Moghul expedition in 1662-63 wrote. "Although most of the inhabitants of the neighbouring hills paid no taxes to the Raja of Assam, yet they accepted his sovereignty and obeyed some of his commands." An interview of the Assamese Ambassador Madhav Charan Kataki with Raja Man Singh refers to the tribal regions of the Ahom Army.

Ahom authority in these areas is also testified by the British who occupied Assam in 1826. Michell in his "Report of the N.E. Frontier of India" reported, "In 1820, before we took possession of Assam, the Mishmis were obedient to the order of the Assam Government and paid tribute to the Sadiya-Khowa Gohain." Michell reports about the Abors: "1825, Captain Neufville reported to the Quartermaster General that the Abors were giving assistance to the Gohain of Sadiya against the Singphos." About the territory near the Dihang bend, Michell wrote, "About the neighbours of Mishmis to the north, we have fairly accurate information. To their (Mishmis') north lies the country of Poba or Poyu and independent people dwelling on a table land."

The early travellers in Tibet were rare but we have the evidence of Desideri, the Jesuit priest who stayed in Lhasa, to show that these tribes lived south of Tibet. Desideri who was in Lhasa from 1716 to 1729 and travelled extensively in Tibet, states: "The other place Tibetans venerate exceedingly is called Ceri on the extreme border of Takpo-Trulung (and going east) all the Cong-bo provinces lying to the south of the river march with the above mentioned people called Lhoa which means southern people... Not even the Thibettans, who are close neighbours and have many dealings with them, are allowed to enter their country, but are obliged to stop on the frontier to barter goods." (*An Account of Tibet* pages 143-45). Tibetan jurisdiction is seen to be up to Tsari (Ceri) hills in the Subansiri and Cong-me, to the north of Abor region, further east.

Another missionary who arrived at Lhasa a little later (1720), Horace Della Penna, wrote that Tibet "on the south is bounded by Bengal, Lho-ten ke, Altibari, Mon Srukpa, Lhoba, Lho K'Haptra, Shapado, Bha..."<sup>25</sup> An Alapuehim monk, he lived in Tibet for 20 years and came for a second visit also. He explains that "Lho" means "South", and he refers to Mons, Lhoba, etc. lying south of the boundary of Tibet.

The history of the Ahoms who ruled Assam from 1228 to 1826 shows the relations that existed between the tribes of the trans-Brahmaputra area with the people of the Brahmaputra valley. After the recovery of western Assam from the Moghuls in July 1682, the boundaries of Assam remained fixed and unaltered.<sup>26</sup> It included a portion of the Sadiya frontier tract and was bounded on the north by a range of mountains inhabited by the Bhutanese, Akas, Daflas and Abors; and on the east by another line of hills peopled by the

Mishmis and Singphos. The Ahoms maintained a frontier administration to deal with the tribes. The Sadiya-Khowa Gohain ruled in Sadiya since the overthrow of the Chutiya Kingdom. The tribes were prone to raiding the valley people. An expedition was sent to punish the Daflas, but there were heavy losses in men and provinces. The tribes near the Darrang Duars were Pachchima Daflas and those on the border of N. Lakhimpur, Tangri Daflas. They were conciliated by assigning to them a number of Paiks, in the Duar areas, called Dafla-Bahalias. A contingent of Daflas and Dafla Bahalias and Mons was also raised to help against the Moamaria on the north bank.

These facts shows that the tribes were a part of India's border land and were kept at peace by a judicious use of punishment and conciliation. This system was continued by the British rulers. They placed these areas under the jurisdiction either of Political Agents or of the Deputy Commissioners of the adjoining districts. The introduction of the Inner Line in 1873 was a device to prevent traders from entering the areas beyond it for exploitation of the resources vide The Bengal Eastern Frontier, Regulation I. As the Report of the Indian officials, 1960, says (at p. 202) "the very use of the term Inner Line was to distinguish it from the Outer Line, that is, the international boundary." In 1880, the frontier Tibet Regs empowered political officers to exercise judicial and police functions in these areas. In September 1914, the areas of North-East Frontier Tract were divided into three divisions:

1. Central and eastern comprised the hills inhabited by the Abors, Miris, Mishmis and others. It was later named the Sadiya Tract.
2. Western, the hills inhabited by the Mobas, Akas, Daflas and parts of the Miri and Abor hills, later named the Balipar Tract.
3. Lakhimpur F. Tract comprised the hills inhabited by the Singphos, Nagas and Khamtis.

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, these areas were taken over for direct administration by the Government of India and in 1950, the Constitution of India also provided for their direct administration.

### **The McMahon Line**

The Chinese officials have in their Report of 1960 attacked and repudiated the Simla Conference of 1913 and repudiated the Simla

Convention to which it gave rise as an attempt by Britain to separate Tibet entirely from China and turn Tibet into an "independent state." They pointed out that the memorandum of August 17, 1912, (CR p.20) which the Indian side referred to as the "basis" of the conference did not mention the question of the Sino-Indian boundary at all. The letters exchanged between the Tibet local representative and the British representative on March 24-5, 1914, and the map showing "the so-called McMahon Line" were not placed before the conference. The Simla Convention did not have any validity as the Chinese representative "formally declared at the conference on July 3, 1914, that the Chinese Government would not recognise any treaty or similar document that might then or thereafter be signed between Britain and Tibet," stated the Chinese officials.

But the Indian officials have stated that the Chinese Government recognised the treaty-making powers of Tibet and the plenipotentiary and equal status of the Tibetan representative. The conference was to discuss all questions relating to Tibet *inter alia* the Indo-Tibetan boundary (p. 114 of the Indian Report). The British representative informed the Chinese Government on August 25, 1913, "that HMC noted with satisfaction the Chinese Government's acceptance of the principle of the equality of status of the representatives and of the tripartite character of negotiations." On April 24, 1914, the Chinese representative initiated the convention and the map attached to it which demarcated the McMahon Line as well as the boundary between China and Tibet. "On July 3, 1914, when the Chinese representative failed to sign the Tibet Convention which had been earlier agreed upon and installed by the three parties, the British Government concluded the agreement separately with Tibet."

The McMahon Line was negotiated between the representative of the Dalai Lama and the British representative after the two sides had studied each other's case and found that there was an agreed basis of the boundary between Tibet and India. The Tibetans had produced well maintained documents to show the extent of Tibet in the south and McMahon had satisfied himself with the evidence of survey parties despatched during 1911 to 1913 to survey the north-eastern border areas. The result was a boundary based on the best evidence available. The right of Tibet to make treaties was a matter of historical record. Tibet entered into a treaty with Kashmir in 1634 and again in 1842. Tibet also entered into a treaty with Nepal in 1792.

The Chinese side argued that the Simla Conference was for the purpose of settling the boundary between Tibet and China but they assert that the British coerced China into attending this. As against this, neither Tibet nor China has ever claimed that Tibet was coerced into signing the convention of 1914 regarding the boundary between Tibet and India. When China occupied Tibet in 1951, it inherited the McMahon Line, however, much China may choose to denounce it. It goes without saying that the Tibetans had acted on the basis of the evidence which they had carefully recorded and that the Tibetans were autonomous in administration. It is claimed by China that Britain did not publish the McMahon Line and the treaty of March 1914 between Britain and Tibet till the 1930s. This was because Britain wanted to give China a chance to affirm its adherence to the Convention of 1914 among China, Britain and Tibet. Delay in publication of the Anglo-Tibetan Treaty, therefore, cannot be held to invalidate the McMahon Line.

#### 1914-1950

Even as the Simla Conference was going on, there was desultory fighting between Tibetan and Chinese troops in the south-east of Tibet. The Governor of Szechuan, Peng, was particularly truculent and the British sent Telchman, an officer of the Consular Service to try and arrange a truce. The Tibetans had recaptured Chamdo and driven back the Chinese. The truce of Rongbasta was signed in August 1918. It was never ratified by the Chinese Central Government but continued in force for a number of years. In 1920, Sir John Jordan told the Chinese Government that unless the Chinese Government signed the Convention of 1914, "the British Government will provide material assistance for the development of self-defence in Tibet and would deal with that country without further reference to China".<sup>28</sup> No response was forthcoming, however, and about 1928, Erh-Feng's project to make a province of Sikang was revived by the Chinese. War continued between Liu Wen-Hui, the warlord of Szechuan, and Tibet from 1928 to 1932. In the north, the Muslim Governor of Chinghai (Sining) also took part in a dispute between two Tibetan monasteries. Again an attempt was arranged in 1932 by the Government of India, but "from now the Simla Convention was of no further interest to the Chinese Government." In 1933, the thirteenth Dalai Lama died. A period of regency was again taken advantage of by the Chinese. A Chinese mission was to be sent to



Lhasa on the death of the Dalai Lama but it never left. It was war between China and Japan in 1937 to which China devoted its attention, and Tibet continued its independent status till 1950. In the World War of 1939-45, Tibet adopted a neutral stand. It rejected a proposal of Chiang Kai Shek to make a road through Tibet to ensure supplies for India through the Lohit valley. From 1944-46, a goodwill mission was sent to India by the Tibetan Government. It was welcomed by the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, in Delhi. Another goodwill mission took over in Peking in 1942; the Tibetans sent a mission to them to offer their goodwill, but the mission was unable to get visa facilities to proceed from India to the mainland of China. It was still in India when the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950.

Whereas the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Abors, Mishmis, Monbas and Drukpas have lived in the area within the bend of the Tsang-po river beyond the Himalayan range, there are no Tibetans living on the Indian side, nor are the people of Arunachal Pradesh followers of Tibetan Buddhism, except some in the Tawang area adjoining Bhutan. Like the Ahoms, the British preferred to leave the area unadministered but, although the tribes were left to their own way of life, the area continued to be part of India, as under the Ahoms and earlier. There was never any Tibetan claim to it which the Chinese could have inherited when they occupied Tibet in 1950. The British wanted to balance Tibet and China against each other so that they could safeguard their own interest in India, but free India, despite the autonomy of Tibet and, in fact, its independence since 1913, decided to accept the Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

Another change from British policy made by independent India was that whereas the British posted political officers to deal with the tribes and only sent survey parties and expeditions into the tribal area now called Arunachal Pradesh, free India decided to extend all "development" activities like health services and scientific agriculture to the area. This has ended the people's isolation, and cleared misconceptions about their way of life. They are now as much part of the mainstream of Indian life as any other part of India. The Chinese claim to the area has no support in history nor have the Tibetans any racial affinity with the people of the area. The claim of China to these areas is without any substance. When the Tibetans never claimed these areas, how can China advance a claim on them?

## NOTES

1. By Lt. Col. F.M. Bailey, Rupert Hart Davis, London. Lt. Col. F.M. Bailey first went to Tibet with Francis Younghusband in 1904. He later made an unsuccessful attempt to penetrate into Tibet from Szechuan. Thereafter, in 1913, he (along with Morshead) set off up the Dihanginor. They mapped large parts of the Tibetan frontier for the first time, produced a detailed report of the border peoples—from James Morris, *Farewell to Trumpets*.
2. NAI—Proceedings—March 1907, pp 31-74.
3. *Ibid.*
4. NAI—"Question of the Boundaries of Tibet"—Proceedings, October 1907, nos. 240-73.
5. NAI—"Anglo-Russian Convention Relating to Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet"—Proceedings, December 1907, nos. 343-95.
- 6 & 7. *Ibid.*
8. H.E. Richardson, *History of Tibet* p.99.
9. See *Explorers All* ed. Brig. Sir P. Sykes, George Newnes, London, 1939, p. 81.
10. See Kaulbek, *Tibetan Trek*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1933, p. 62.
11. See Lt. Col Bailey, *No Passport to Tibet*, Rupert Hart-Davis, London 1957.
12. *Ibid.*
13. See *Explorers All*, Brig Sir P. Sykes, ed George Newnes, 1931, p. 31.
14. Lt. Col. Bailey, *No Passport to Tibet*, p. 239, Rupert Hart-Davis, London 1957.
15. Quoted in Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontier*, Cresset Press, London 1969.
16. The edict of the Dalai Lama of 1680 was given at a time when the "King" of Tibet was Dalai Khan, grandson of Gusri. It mentions the "Dual System", refers to royal and religious laws" as of old." The document shows that the Dalai Lama was anxious to assert the hold of the Gelugpa sect over this area (as in the rest of Tibet), vis-a-vis the Bhutanese Brogpa who had been extending their hold here.  
See *Notes on the History of the Monyul Corridor* by Michael Aris
17. Vide p. 45 of the Chinese Report (CR)
18. Vide pp. 122-3 of the India Report.
19. See p. 124 of the Indian Report.
20. See p. 44 of the Chinese Report.
21. G.N. Patterson, *Tibetan Journey*, Faber, London, 1954.
22. Vide p. 49 of the Chinese Report.
23. Kaulbeck, *Tibetan Trek*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1933.
24. Nirmal Kumar Basu, *Assam in the Ahom Age*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 1970.
25. C.R. Markham *Mission of George Bagle to Tibet* London, 1879, p. 314.
26. Nirmal Kumar Basu, *Assam in the Ahom Age*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 1970.
27. See the writings of the late Dr. Karunakaran Gupta.
28. See H.E. Richardson, *History of Tibet*.