

## Anglo-Abor Treaty-1862 and Its Significance in relation to the Inner Line regulation, 1873 and Arunachal History

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The vast area in southern Himalaya and northern Patkai in the North-eastern tip of India, now known as Arunachal Pradesh, was a *terra incognita* for centuries. Innumerable tribes of Mongolian stock are the dwellers of this hostile terrains and inaccessible mountain ranges. Till very recent time they were mostly savages and nomadic in nature. The kings of Assam from ancient time to the Ahom rule neither had control nor had they sufficient power to disturb these ferocious tribesmen. Away from the influence of any civilisation these hill tribes remained savage and wandering in groups in the sparsely populated hill ranges they become ferocious in their internecine conflicts and clashes. In their hill dwellings every tribe, even sub-tribe, had its own territory with sovereign authority. Whenever that sovereignty was threatened by any foreign force the whole tribe rose to the occasion as one and never feared to die for the defence of their territory. Due to their wandering habit for better habitat and easy sustenance the inter tribal clashes and conflicts were frequent. It is due to their ferocity and inaccessibility of the hostile mountains, perhaps, that the Assamese Kings adopted the policy of aloofness with these hill tribes as far as possible.

With the advent of the British to the North-East India following the famous treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the situation, however, changed abruptly. After occupation of Assam the British authority encouraged the English entrepreneurs for plantation of tea in the vast fallow land of Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts. Coincidentally these three districts had the common borders with the savage hill-tribes of the present Arunachal Pradesh. Occasionally these tribes pounced on the Assamese villages near the border, within the British territory and either killed the villagers or carried them away as slaves. Another factor that was responsible for such raids, particularly on the north bank of the

Brahmaputra, was the tribal notion that some of the people now residing in the bordering plains were their vassals in the mountains' in the past to their rough judgement these people were vassals even in the plains and so they extracted shares of earnings of the men in the plains. In a bid to protect the plains people from the occasional forage of the hill-men the Ahom kings introduced *posa* system - a system of payment in cash or kind in lieu of their forceful extraction from the villagers. The system continued in certain cases when the British occupied Assam.

The British Government reluctantly followed the *posa* system. In spite of this system some of the hill tribes preferred collection directly from the villagers thus leading to conflict. The Abors (now they call themselves Adi) posed a problem to the British authority with their claims of different nature. The British Government could have annexed Abor Hills had they so desired but that would entail the huge responsibility of administering the savage tribes whom the British did not know beyond the foot of the hill. Moreover, financial involvement in administering the savage tribe in hostile mountain was not considered worthwhile. So the British Government adopted a policy of protection and conciliation<sup>2</sup> with various tribes including the Abors. In execution of this policy, however, they had to take the policy of show-down of power with a view to keeping the tribal people daunted in the mountains.

The Abors had the axe to grind. Because of their position away from the cultivable land in Assam, separated by the Brahmaputra, the Abors could not claim *posa*.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand the British protection to the Miris over whom the Abors claimed sovereignty annoyed the tribe. Another factor was that the British Government also gave protection to the gold-washers in the bank of Dihang, Dibang and some other rivers flowing through the tribal land. Earlier the Abors got some taxes from the gold-washers for washing gold from the sands of these rivers on which they claimed their absolute right. Under the British protection the gold-washers refused to give the tribe-men's share. All these caused Anglo-Abor conflict which reflected itself on frequent Abor raid on Assamese villages within British territory and resultant British punitive expedition. Besides former Abor action of carrying away the refractory gold-washers there were three serious Abor raids on Assamese villages within British territory - 1848, 1858 and 1861 - in each of which the hill-men either killed or carried away the Assamese people. Each such tribal raid was followed by puni-

tive expedition of the British : in 1848 the British authority was successful in forcing the Abors to submission though the British had to face a raid by the tribal people in its troop itself . 1858 expedition ended in a fiasco and 1862 earned the British a Treaty with the Abors. This is called the Anglo Abor Treaty 1862 at Lalee Mukh. In fact the very preparation for the expedition forced the Abors to come to terms and the British troops did not have to go beyond Lalee Mukh.

The Anglo-Abor Treaty was signed on 5 November, 1862 at Lalee Mukh by Major Bivar, Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur on behalf of the British Government and thirty four Minyong gams representing eight clans.

A critical study of the relevant Articles of this Treaty on boundary may prove it historically much more significant than its surface value. Most of the writers on history of Arunachal Pradesh tend to document this Treaty as an independent happening bearing nothing on the course of history that brings us to Arunachal Pradesh today. Alexander Mackenzie, one of the earliest recorders of history in this region sums up the result of this Treaty : "Since these forms of agreement were instituted, the Abors have given but little trouble..... it is reasonable to hope that every year of quiet, every visit paid by them to the markets of Sadiya, renders this more improbable. New wants are being created and new ideas imbibed, which can not fail to have effect."<sup>4</sup> Even Dorothy woodman, that meticulous researcher on the Himalayan Frontier remained satisfied with recording the event as "On November 5, 1862, the Meyong Abors signed an agreement with the Government of Bengal at Camp Lalee Mukh, whereby their acts of hostility 'towards the British Government, and for which the assembled heads villages have sued for pardon, are overlooked and peace is re-established."<sup>5</sup> She also did not care to trace any significance of this Treaty on the subsequent events though she mentioned Inner Line and Outer Line with their bearing on future event like McMohan Line. Mr. L. N. Chakravorty, one of the first historians of Arunachal Pradesh simply made a statement on the Treaty, "As a result an agreement was concluded in 1862 between British Government and eight Communities of Meyong Adis."<sup>6</sup> He even did not mention about Inner Line introduced - this region in 1875. M.L. Bose, who has two books to his credit on the historical events of this region, aslo remains satisfied with quoting from a note of Foreign Proceedings (Assam) December, 1909, "There exist treaties (Treaties or 1862, Treaty

of 1863) with some of the Abor tribes which distinctly mention that British territory extends to the foot of the hills.”<sup>7</sup> But he has not tried to link the Anglo-Abor Treaty 1862 and Inner Line Regulation 1873. Speaking about the Treaty of 1862 Hamilton writes “After a considerable discussion a treaty of peace was arranged under which, in return for an annual Posa of iron, salt, opium and other articles. . . . an ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’ line was set up.”<sup>8</sup> But Hamilton also seems to have been confused between the boundary demarcation in the Treaty of 1862 and the Inner Line set up under the Inner Line Regulation 1873. And copying Hamilton, Chandrika Singh also writes, “In this conference (at Lalee Mukh in 1862) an agreement was concluded according to which the Meyong Abors were guaranteed an annual Posa or some materials. . . . Secondly an “Inner’ and ‘Outer’ line was set up.”<sup>9</sup> The fact is that the boundary demarcation made under the terms of the 1862 Treaty and two other Treaties that followed at heel remains the same as the Inner Line set up under the Regulation 1873.

Significance of the Treaty of 1862 can be seen from a study of the terms of this Treaty and similar treaties closely following this and then passing the Inner Line Regulation 1873. Let us have a look at the Treaty.

The relevant Articles are :

**Article 2 :** The limit of the British territory which extends to the foot of the hills is recognised by the Meyong (Minyong) Abors, who hereby engage to respect.

**Article 3 :** The British Government will take positions on the frontier in the plains, will establish stations, post guards, or construct forts, or open roads, as may be deemed expedient, and the Meyong Abors will not take umbrage at such arrangements, or have any voice in such matter.

**Article 4 :** The Meyong Abors recognise all persons residing in the plains in the vicinity of the Meyor Hills as British subjects.

**Article 6 :** The communication across the frontier will be free both for the Meyong Abors and British subjects, going to the Meyong villages for the purpose of trading or other friendly dealings.

**Article 10 :** In event of any grievance arising, or any dispute taking place between the Meyong Abors and the British

territory, the Abors will refrain from taking the law into their own hands' but they will appeal to the Deputy Commissioner for redress and abide by his decision.<sup>10</sup>

By any standard of historical documents these Articles of the Treaty decided the boundary commonly agreed upon by the British Government and a section of the Abors. It is to be borne in mind that a section of Abors does not mean the whole Abor tribe; and as such the boundary demarcation made by the Treaty was not for all Abor Hills. To cover some more areas of Abor Hills, the most troublesome spot for the British Administration of Assam, two other Treaties with some other Abor sub-tribes followed quickly. It is significant to note that many of the clauses of these two Treaties are almost identical. The two Agreements are:

1. Agreement with the Dehang Debang Abor Doars - 1862,
2. Engagement with the Kebang Abors - 1863.

In fact the 1st one, signed on 8 November, 1862 is the same Agreement as with the Meyong Abors with different numbering of the clauses. For example, Articles 1, 4, 5 and 9 of this Agreement are similar with 2, 3, 6 and 10 respectively of the Treaty with the Meyong Abors. After about two months the Engagement with the Kebang Abors was signed on 16th January, 1863 by A.K. Comber, Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur. In this Engagement Articles 2, 3, 6 and 10 are almost identical with the same Articles of the Anglo-Abor Treaty except in the name of the Sub-tribe. I quote one each from these two Agreements for the convenience of the reader.

**Article 1 :** (Agreement with the Dehang Debang Bor Abors Doars, 1862) : The British territory which extends to the foot of the hills will be respected by the Abors of the communities named in the Preamble.<sup>11</sup>

**Article 2 :** (Engagement with the Kebang Abors, 1863) : The limit of the British territory, which extends to the foot of the hills, is recognised by the Kebang Abors, who hereby engage to respect it.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, on 5 April, 1866, fourteen gams of Bor Abor area signed an agreement with the DSP, Lakhimpur. The gams, representing 12 Bor Abor clans "agree to abide by the provisions of the Anglo-Abor Treaty 1862-63." These Abor gams 'hereby express desire to enter into the same compact as that agreed upon between the other Abor tribes and the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur.'<sup>13</sup>

By Article 2 (Anglo-Abor Treaty 1862 and Engagement with the Kebang Abors, 1863) and Article 1 (Agreement with Dehang Debang Abor Doars, 1862) the boundary demarcation between Assam and Abor hills was laid. By Article 2- (1 in respect of Dehang Debang Abors). The boundary demarcation between Assam and the Abor territory was fixed at the foot of the hills.' Article 3 (in respect of the former two) and Article 4 (in respect of the latter) ascertained the right of the British Government to 'take positions the frontier in the plains'. to 'establish stations, post guards, or construct forts, or open roads'. By Article 6 in respect of the former and 5 of the latter the British authority gained the right to enter into the Abor territory for trading and other friendly purposes and by 10 of the former two and 9 of the latter the British authority gained the right to introduce loose administration into the border areas of Abor Hills. One may even say that this is the beginning of British administration in Arunachal Pradesh.

It can now be said that as the Anglo-Abor war 1911-12, followed by a series of Missions and Promenades, provided the basis for McMahon Line 1914, this Anglo-Abor Treaty 1862 provided the basis for the Inner-Line Regulation, 1873. The Inner Line Regulation 1873 is authorisation of the Lt. Governor of Bengal by the Secretary of State for India in Council for applying "the provisions of Act XXXIII Vic. Chap. 3 Section to the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgaong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasia and Jayantia Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Chettagong Hills. The Regulation itself, however, was not the boundary until and unless the Regulation was notified by the local Government with previous approval of the Governor General in Council. Major W. S. Clarke, Deputy Commissioner submitted his proposal of the Line to Govt. of India which notified the Line (in respect of Lakhimpur) on 3 September, 1875 in the Gasetter of India."<sup>14</sup> In respect of Darrang, however, the Line was notified on 8 March, 1876.<sup>15</sup>

With the completion of the Inner Line in these two district the boundary of present Arunachal with Assam was laid. The lying of this boundary of Arunachal Pradesh with Assam is significant in many respects.

A focus on the different aspects may give a new direction to the study of Arunachal history.

## i) Process of making a geographical unit :

Till 1875 Arunachal as a geographical unit was indefinite. It has been already noticed earlier that as a result of the fluid condition of the boundary citizenship of the people on the border, dependent or otherwise, could not be determined. Till that date even some people in the Assam plains were claimed by the hill tribes. With the determination of the boundary people inhabiting outside the Inner Line became British subject. Since then the raids on the bordering villages by the hillmen claiming toll or revenue from them have been stopped. It may be specifically said of the Abor Hills that raid by the Abors did not occur outside the Inner Line, though some clashes during the 19th Century took place due either to the killing of British Sepoy guarding Bomjur and Nizamghat or to objection raised by the Abors to the activities of the Geographical survey of India within the Inner Line. With the boundary with Assam fixed the tribes beyond the Inner Line were left to themselves, engaged so far in extracting blackmail from the Assam villages near the foot-hill, for knitting themselves into a unit. In this particular respect the British policy behind the Inner Line Regulation helped to a great extent. The Inner Line Regulation not only laid the Inner Line along the foot of the hills but also laid an outer Line. One may like to ask what the outer-line was in addition to the Inner Line. M.L. Bose attempts to define these two lines quoting from a note of the Foreign Department, Political Branch : "The limits of the district were at first thrown very far forward, too far to enable us to exercise jurisdiction all the way up to them, so it became necessary to draw a line upto which we intend to work. This was the Inner Line. The limits of the district originally proposed became the Outer Line"<sup>16</sup> The Outer Line may thus be said to be an imaginary one without a definite demarcation and the depth into the tribal territory from the Inner Line could not be ascertained. Almost at all points the depth was ten or more than ten miles. "The area between the Outer and Inner Lines varied · it sometimes ran less than ten miles apart"<sup>17</sup> The above remark by Dorothy Woodman on the Outer Line sounds like some definite demarcation was laid. But, in fact, the Outer Line was kept opened maintaining a scope of expansion further and further. "The Outer Line was purposely left indefinite, so that we can advance the Inner Line to any extent circumstances may render necessary."<sup>18</sup> A further elaboration of the statement may give a picture like this ; the Inner Line

is a boundary mutually agreed upon by the British Govt and the hillmen with regard to pushing it further interior, however, the British seemed to have exercised authority without any agreement to that effect. Since the Outer Line was of an imaginary sort without any agreement with the hillmen the British Govt. would go on extending further interior from the Inner Line on being satisfied about feasibility.

One would like to enquire why the British Govt. maintained the Outer Line when they, with their military force, could extend their area of jurisdiction whenever necessity demanded. The answer to this question may be found in the British Policy of introducing loose administration in the area between the Inner and Outer Lines with a view to winning their mind for further penetration. After all, if many British writers, particularly those who were involved in British Administration in India do not agree that they did not have the policy of expansion especially in present Arunachal upto 1910, the time when General Chao-Erh Feng penetrated his people into Mishimi and Abor Hills, the British research scholars tend to believe that the British had all along the Policy of expansion in this area. For instance, "in 1875 the skeleton of an orderly administration was drawn up by applying to these tribal peoples the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1879. This formalised the result of half a century of expansion stimulated in 1826."<sup>19</sup> The Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur, Mr. Godfrey, remarked in 1886 : "I don't know that the limits of the Chief Commissionership have ever been specified so that we know precisely what the area within which the acts of the Governor General in Council are in force. I have been inclined to think that the Inner Line marked the boundary of our regular jurisdiction, that is, our Courts of law.....but the Inner Line Regulation is not one that defines jurisdiction. The Chief Commissionership of Assam extends upto the borders of China and Tibet and Burma."<sup>20</sup> This skeleton of orderly administration as introduced in 1875 was admitted by Lord Hardinge in 1910 when he wrote to London "I think I hardly brought out with sufficient distinctness one important consideration which should enforce us to press forward beyond the limits by which under a self denying ordinance our frontier is at present limited. We only now claim suzerainty upto the foot of the hills. We have an Inner Line and an Outer Line. Upto the Inner Line we administer in the ordinary way. Between the Inner Line and the Outer Line we only administer politically. That is our political officer exercise very loose jurisdiction,"<sup>21</sup> This introduction

of administration, though loose, started the process of knitting the tribes into a geopolitical unit, for ever extending till the other boundary with Tibet and China was demarcated with the Mc Mahon Line in 1914. It may, however, be mentioned here that in 1914 the McMahon Line was only theoretical boundary based on aerial survey - actual administrative control took another 30 years to complete Arunachal as a geopolitical unit. Bounded on the one side the tribal peoples living inside the bound started feeling like one for very many purposes. That sense of oneness was completed in 1914 when Sir Henry McMahon drew the other line known after his name fixing the boundary of Arunachal with Tibet, China and Burma. Without that sense of geographical oneness history, in the real sense of the term, does not take shape. Otherwise the people of Arunachal have history of their own for centuries : but in absence of a territorial unit history could not be shaped till today.

#### ii) Delay in the Process of Civilization :

The Inner Line system has got another significance so far as process of civilization in this area was concerned. As an inhospitable Mountain ranges sparsely inhabited by semi-naked tribes the British never considered this area as something of economic advantage to them. Nor was this area strategically important for defence of India (Assam) so far Tibet was in blissful lull till 1904, the year of young-husband's Mission to Lhasa. In fact, British Policy vis-a-vis this terra incognita was instigated that year by Chinese and Russian interest in Tibet. Till then the British did not think in term of occupation and administration of this area relying on their military force to occupy it whenever they felt like. So Mr. Godfrey, Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur wrote : "We have, of course, got an admitted political control over the border tribes which emanate from . . . . . our being possessed of superior force and so we command obedience to such orders as may be passed by the officers in their political capacity : it has accordingly been my opinion that the Deputy Commissioner has beyond the Inner Line a general political authority resting upon force, but no law as such can be enforced upon the inhabitants of those tracts."<sup>22</sup> But so far as the actual control was concerned the British Policy was to contain the tribesmen so that their fiscal issues were not disturbed by the conflicts between the tribesmen and the Assamese people near the border. The Lt. Governor of Bengal, as now advised held that he was bound either to abandon the extensive tracts in

Lakhimpur lately assigned to tea planters, or to give efficient protection to an industry already directly encouraged by the State".<sup>23</sup> This was the situation before 1862, and as a result this protection policy the series of treaties, as noticed at the beginning, were extracted by the British from the Abors. These treaties may be said, ultimately, to have been regularised by the Inner Line Regulation, 1873 alongwith certain other things.

One of the most negative effects of this Inner Line system is the prolongation of savage condition of the tribesmen till independence of INDIA in 1948. What with the economic unviability in hostile nature inside the Inner Line or with 'no law as such can be enforced upon the inhabitants of those tracts' the British policy was not to introduce the light of civilization in this tribal area. Their policy of allowing the tribal to get education at Sodiya in the third decade of this century is to get some youths for their own purpose. Otherwise they could have started a school at Pasighat in 1912 itself when they occupied it for their administrative purpose. It was only in 1920 that an L. P. School was given to Balek (at Pasighat) on the demand of the youths who had some education at Sodiya. This is the first school inside the mainland of Arunachal Pradesh and only one till 1947. But for the restrictions imposed on the outsiders by the Inner Line light of education would have been injected much earlier.

#### Notes & References

1. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, P. 34.
2. Ibid, p.53.
3. Ibid, p.54
4. Ibid, p. 44-45.
5. Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontier*, p.114.
6. L. N. Chakravorty, *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*, p. 37.
7. M. L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier, Agency*, p. 103.
8. Hamilton, *In the Abor Jungles of NEFA*, p. 36.
9. Chandrika Singh, *Emergence of Arunachal Pradesh as a State*, p. 42.

10. M. L. Bose, *Historical and constitutional Documents of North-East India*, p. 140.
11. Ibid, p. 146.
12. Ibid, p. 144.
13. Ibid, p.149.
14. M. L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 106.
15. Ibid, p. 109.
16. Ibid. p. 109.
17. Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontier*, p. 117.
18. M. L. Bose, *British Policy in North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 109
19. Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontier*, p.109.
20. M. L. Bose, *British Policy in North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 111
21. Ibid, p. 110,
22. Ibid, p. 111
23. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p. 42.