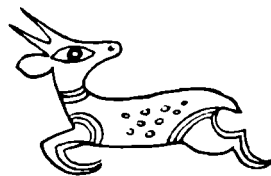


**INDIA'S
NORTHERN FRONTIER
AND CHINA**

by Ramesh Sanghvi



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To My Sister SUDHA

*who belongs to a generation
reared in Independent India
where friendship with China
was a dominant theme
and which is now confused and angry,
in the hope that this book
will help in
better understanding of the crisis
in India-China relations.*

I N T R O D U C T I O N

During the short period of her relations with the world as an independent nation, India has faced several trials, received some set-backs and has, unfortunately, been saddled with two problems, involving her territorial integrity and alien occupation of her soil, which seem to defy an early and peaceful solution. For the young Republic of the ancient nation, these experiences have been educative, even though painful. Of them all, the most heart-rending experience has been the rise and fall of her friendship with the People's Republic of China.

Undoubtedly, Chinese occupation of Aksai Chin, and claims over 50,000 square miles of Indian territory south of Himalayas is, potentially, the gravest international problem which India faces today. It involves far-reaching aspects, in Nehru's words, of "the utmost significance to the present and future of India and Asia". The Chinese aggression and claims on Indian territory have not only interrupted the ancient and recent tradition of friendly and intimate relationship between India and China, but have also created a problem which can develop into the most serious of post-war conflicts in Asia. Its magnitude is reflected in the passions roused among 1,000 million peoples of India and China, nearly one-third of humanity, leading to a clash of wills between the two largest Asian states.

Though many have striven to make Asia a continent of peace, several conflicts plague its rejuvenated life. All these conflicts, broadly speaking, fall into two patterns. First, there are unresolved territorial problems, left over from the era of classical colonialism. Some of the former European Colonial Powers have as yet not given up pockets of Asian territory. The Dutch-Indonesian, the Indo-Portuguese and Sino-British conflicts revolve round such issues. Second, there are the conflicts which are the direct and inevitable consequences of the cold war between Communism and anti-Communism. Most of them concern East Asia. The artificial sustenance of the Formosa regime, the division of Korea and the former Indo-China states and similar other problems fall in this category. The Sino-Indian conflict does not conform to either of these patterns.

India succeeded in keeping herself away from the main clashes of the cold war. Before Peking staked its claims to the Himalayas, there were only two international conflicts in which she was involved. The refusal of Portugal to quit Goa, Daman and Diu gave rise to one of them; the other was created by Pakistan, after it invaded Kashmir and annexed parts of Indian terri-

tory. The Indo-Pakistan clash over Kashmir is more in the nature of an extension of the Islamic fanaticism which led to the secession of some parts of India and the formation of Pakistan. The strange title which Rawalpindi claims in Kashmir is based on the religious beliefs of Indian citizens of Kashmir. Its real background is the hatred which was generated by certain Muslim leaders against the Indian freedom movement in the days of British rule in which imperial Britain played no insignificant part. Both these conflicts, in a sense, had a continuation with pre-independence Indian history.

The blow which was struck with the massive Chinese claims and aggression on ancient Indian territories was as sudden as it was shocking. The Himalayan boundary was as ancient as India and China themselves. Never in the past had it become a factor of conflict. This was admitted even by Chinese leaders. Premier Chou En-lai reminded the Indian people of this fact in a broadcast message from Delhi on June 26, 1954: "Since the very ancient days, profound friendship has existed between the peoples of India and China. A border line covering a great distance of nearly three thousand kilometres links together the two nations. Century after century, history has recorded peaceful and cultural and economic inter-change but never war or animosity between our two countries."

This was only too true and India, since her independence, had kept this fact firmly in the forefront while evolving her Chinese policy. There was no misunderstanding in Peking about it or about the role of its author, Nehru. Nehru, said Chou En-lai on October 20, 1954 in Peking, had "long cherished a sympathy for the Chinese people's cause of independence and liberation". He referred to Nehru's assistance to China during the anti-Japanese war and added: "Following the founding of the People's Republic of China, India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Nehru, speedily established diplomatic relations with our country.....It is a great pleasure for the Chinese people that, in the common cause of safeguarding peace, they have such a friendly neighbour as India and such an eminent friend as Prime Minister Nehru."

In 1957, Chairman Mao Tse-tung, after referring to friendly traditions of the past, stated that "1,000 million people of China and India standing together" were "a mighty force and an important guarantee for peace in Asia and the world". He was no less definite about India-China relations since 1949 and added: "We appreciate the brilliant contributions made by the Indian people to the cause of peace among nations. We are particularly grateful to India for the righteous support she has given to China in international affairs. We have no doubt that India will play a more and more important role in the world."

In the light of all this, it would have been strange if India were not shocked at the extensive Chinese territorial demands and the military means by which they were advanced.

II

When the first government of independent India was established, relations with China was one of the prime subjects for its consideration. Apart from historical ties, the Indian national movement had kept in close contact with the developments in China. During the war, the National Congress Medical Mission served with the Chinese armies fighting for their freedom. Several of the leaders of China, the Chiangs, Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, Chou En-lai, Madame Sun Yat-sen and others were personally known to the Indian leaders.

During the Chinese civil war, the sympathy of the Indian leadership, under normal circumstances, would have rested with the Kuomintang. But the amount of corruption coupled with political and other forms of gangsterism, which became the main basis of Kuomintang rule during that period, led them away from Chiang Kai-shek. Though the bulk of the Indian leadership did not welcome the prospects of a powerful neighbour ruled by the Communists, they could not help feeling a sense of admiration for the Communists who had fought so bravely against Japanese aggression and mobilised masses of the people on a programme of freedom with a social content.

It was against this background that the first Indian ambassador arrived in China in April 1948. Ambassador Panikkar's assignment in China in the last days of the Kuomintang was mainly to observe and report on the character and real strength of the Communists who were about to ride into power. This he did with unsurpassable zeal in long reports to Nehru. These reports spoke of the undoubted popular support to the Communists, their efficiency and the revolutionary transformation which was about to overtake China with inevitable consequences to the whole of Asia and the world.

By the middle of 1949 Delhi came to the conclusion that the new Chinese Government must be recognised. Krishna Menon began consultations with Britain by the end of the year on the question of recognition. After some persuasion, the British Labour Government agreed with India that a historic change had overtaken China and that since the Kuomintang was unlikely to regain power on the mainland, the change must be recognised in the interests of each country concerned as well as in the interests of better international relations. Thus, India took the lead in the matter of the recognition of the new Chinese Government, not only with her Asian friends like Burma and

Indonesia but also in persuading Britain. India recognised the new Government of China on December 30, 1949.

The course of India-China relations was influenced not only by the assessment which each nation formed of the other, but also by the line of action followed by several Powers and results which flowed from this line of action. Thus more than anything else, the Korean crisis brought a new phase in India-China relations. During the days when India was searching hard for a solution of this crisis, she realised that the war in Korea was a symptom of the general crisis in East Asia. One of the major reasons for this wider crisis was the refusal of some Powers—and mainly the United States—to recognise the new realities of Asia. The United States had decided to be a participant in the Chinese Civil war by giving armed protection to Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa. In this context, Indian sympathy was entirely with China. This, naturally, drew the two closer.

After the termination of the Korean war, India-China relations continued to remain warm and friendly and Nehru visited China late in 1953. On his return he reported that because of historic experience of a struggle for freedom lasting over forty-five years, the first dominant feeling in China was the urge for peace. Then, second only to this, was the sense of nationalism. As to the Chinese political rulers, he knew that they were Communists—"convinced Communists and there was no doubt about that". He did not agree with the Chinese political structure but then he believed that "each people, and specially the big chunks of humanity like India and China, with long records, as soon as they find freedom to function according to their wishes" were influenced by various external factors—"industrial revolution, technological advancement, political ideas and so on". The Chinese had chosen their pattern. India need not agree with it, but, in view of the common problems, she could learn from the Chinese experience. The main thing to appreciate was that a change had overtaken China and without understanding this fact of the change and its implications, it was impossible to understand Asia or to solve the problems of Asia.

III

During this period, India continued her efforts to bring China into the comity of non-Communist nations. That was one way to diminish East Asian tension. This effort partially succeeded when the Geneva Conference on Korea and Indo-China was convened. It was here that India came in closer contacts with the leaders of new China. Krishna Menon had several long conferences with Chou En-lai and these were connected not only with the specific problems of the Geneva

Conference but also with the wider problems of the world and of India-China relations. This led to an invitation to Chou En-lai to visit India during the break in the Geneva Conference and it was during this visit that the famous *Panchsheel* Agreement on Tibet came into existence. The *Panchsheel* were five principles of mutual relations worked out by India and China together. Originally, India sent these proposals to China but China sent back its own draft which was incorporated in the preamble of a treaty which the two countries signed concerning Tibet. The five principles were: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and finally, peaceful co-existence.

The concept of *Panchsheel*, as far as India was concerned, meant that there might be different ways of progress, possibly different outlooks, but that, broadly speaking, the ultimate objective could be the same. Truth, indeed, "was not confined to one country or one people" and it had many aspects and it had far too many aspects for anyone to presume that he knew all. Each country and each people, if they were true to themselves, had to find out their own path themselves, through trial and error, through suffering and experience. That was the only way to grow.

The acceptance of *Panchsheel* was followed by the Bandung Conference where Chou En-lai and Nehru worked closely together. There were several representatives of anti-Communist states at Bandung. Nehru played the role of a bridge between them on the one hand and China on the other. The effort was successful and China was accepted, for the first time, at a major international conference. The more important result of this was the acceptance by Asian and African states of the peace-loving *bona fides* of China. Various Asian countries discussed with Chou the ways and means of releasing the East Asian tension, specially concerning Sino-American relations. The result was so good that Burma, Ceylon, Pakistan, Indonesia, Lebanon and even the British Minister at Hongkong offered their good offices to bring China and the United States in direct negotiations!

China was in a mood for seeking ways and means to start negotiations with the United States. Krishna Menon had already learnt the outlook of the United States from Dulles. Chou invited Krishna Menon to Peking and between May 12 and May 20, 1955, he was busy discussing these matters in five long conferences with Chou in Peking. Dramatic, but less fruitful than expected, results followed this effort. Several American prisoners were released by China and, a little later direct negotiations between China and the United States commenced.

In the meanwhile, relations between India and China continued to be almost exemplary. Both sides spoke in the name of the *Panchsheel*. Scores of delegations, official and non-official, continued to pay reciprocal visits. Powerful friendship organisations, with the patronage of the two governments, were built up. The slogan *Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai* (Indians and Chinese are brothers) became the most popular slogan of international friendship in India. India continued her campaign to open the doors of the United Nations for the true representatives of China.

Then in late 1958, a sudden break came in these relations. The sudden Chinese territorial aggression undermined Indian confidence. This was followed by the Tibetan events.

IV

When the first news of trouble in Tibet reached India, Nehru was asked to express official Indian reaction to it. His reply was that the situation in Tibet was a difficult one and he did not wish to express any view on the matter since, apart from being embarrassing, it might make a difficult situation more difficult. On March 20, 1959, the External Affairs Ministry, Government of India, announced, on the basis of a report from the Indian Consul-General in Lhasa, that fighting had broken out in Tibet. It also added that during the previous week, a large number of Tibetan women had demonstrated in front of the Indian Consulate and demanded that India should prevent the Dalai Lama from going to Peking.

On March 23, Nehru told the Lok Sabha that the outbreak of violence in Lhasa was in addition to fighting in southern part of Tibet. However, he said, in view of the difficult and delicate situation and Indian desire not to interfere in the internal affairs of the friendly country of China, India should avoid anything which would worsen the situation. Speaking about Tibet, he said:

There is a long tradition of cultural and religious ties between India and the Tibet region of China. In this region lie many places of pilgrimage which are considered holy by the Hindus and the Buddhists and large numbers of our people visit them every year. The Dalai Lama, whom we had the honour and pleasure of receiving in our country in 1956-57, is held in high veneration by our people and we hope he is safe. We earnestly trust that the present troubles will be resolved peacefully.

Till March 28, Peking kept silent. In the meanwhile all kinds of rumours and unofficial reports had roused popular feelings in India. Nehru faced a storm of protests at his inactivity in face of the events in Tibet. He stuck to the policy that under the

Panchsheel agreement, he was not entitled to interfere in the internal affairs of China and Tibet was a region of China.

Two days after Peking gave its version of the events in Lhasa, the Dalai Lama reached India. He held a press conference and told the world that he had fled for his safety and that the Chinese were busy "colonising" Tibet. The statement proved stunning because the Chinese continued to insist that the Dalai Lama was abducted by his feudal supporters and that he was a 'prisoner'.

After the press conference and once the fact of India granting the Dalai Lama political asylum was published, China mounted a virulent campaign against Indian "imperialist and aggressive" sections. Within a few days, the line between these "sections" and the Government of India was wiped out. Almost the entire Indian press, owned and controlled by anti-Communist elements, saw in this an opportunity to attack China. Several opponents of the Nehru foreign policy exploited the situation to run down the entire basis of this policy. On the other hand, Chinese attacks offended all standards of decency. In the Peoples' Consultative Committee, the language used about India was similar to the one used about the United States for several years.

The difference between these two campaigns was that in India, Nehru strove hard to control it and those who led the campaign were not answerable to him; while in China, the situation was different. It was obvious that unless the Peking Government consented to it, the bitter anti-Indian campaign could not have reached this intensity.

V

By the autumn of 1959, a serious crisis of confidence had developed between India and China. The entire policy of India in relation to China from the time of the recognition of the Peking Government was under severe fire.

Nehru restated the Indian position. India believed that in recognising the fact of the Chinese Revolution, she had done the right thing. It was a fact of tremendous significance to the world. It was not a question of liking or disliking this fact. He added that there appeared to be a lack of understanding in China of the Indian Revolution and this was due not only to some of the Chinese misunderstandings but also due to many Chinese approaches to India and to the matters connected with it. Warming up to this theme, he avowed that China seemed to forget that India was not a country which could be ignored even though she spoke in a gentler language.

India could understand neither the Chinese reaction about

Tibet nor the surprising claims of territory on the frontier. Of course, the Tibetan issue had many facets. Indo-Tibetan relations were perhaps older than Sino-Tibetan relations. These relations were mainly cultural and commercial in character. All the same, they were very close. In fact, even the Tibetan script had been imported from India and Indian scholars had written the first grammar of the Tibetan language. In the pre-British period, these relations had not taken any political form. The heritage of the British policy was given up no sooner India became independent and India had recognised Tibet as a region of China. Since the relations between the two countries were so friendly, India had requested China that the method of integration of Tibet with China should not be violent.

When the Dalai Lama came to India in March 1959, it was believed that he would return. It was fondly hoped that the matter would be solved peacefully. It appeared that even China thought so since the Dalai Lama's post in Tibet Council was kept vacant. However, whatever his first feelings, the Lama changed his mind soon. He had been granted political asylum but he began to function almost as the head of an exiled government. This was never liked by Nehru and large sections of public opinion. At the same time, anti-Communist elements made common cause with the Lama and it became difficult to prevent his activities. India functioned on democratic basis and there was no way of stopping several persons in Indian political life from actively associating with the Lama. Perhaps, even this could have been done but in the meanwhile Chinese propaganda against India inflamed large sections of public opinion. Before anything could be done, China staked its claims to Indian territory and that was the end of any chances of restricting the Lama and his entourage.

The difficulties in this connection were brought to the notice of the Chinese authorities repeatedly by the Government of India. These were seldom, if ever, understood by Peking. Perhaps, it could not appreciate that in a country like India, the press and some politicians could openly oppose and flout the policy of the Government. Whatever the reason, China began to identify this anti-China attitude of certain Indian elements with that of the mass of the people and the Government of India. The result was that all friendly overtones in Chinese pronouncements in relation to India disappeared.

It was difficult to appreciate this Chinese incapacity to distinguish between confirmed anti-Communists and the others. The immediate reaction was that of hurt. Soon, this changed into unconcealed anger. When China brazenly insisted on massive territorial claims and occupied several thousand miles of

Indian territory, the entire Indian people, including the Indian Communists, denounced them.

VI

This study deals with the grave problem which India faces today as a result of the Chinese policy since 1956. It is often and mistakenly described as the "Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute". There is no boundary dispute between India and China in the accepted sense of the term.

India's northern frontier has been well-defined and was known to China, at least, ever since the People's Republic of China was established. Indian jurisdiction extended to the international frontier till it was disturbed by Chinese armed forces. Further, India has not claimed any territory on the Himalayan frontier which was under Chinese jurisdiction. The strange, sudden and depressing Sino-Indian conflict was initiated by the seizure of 12,000 square miles of the Aksai Chin area on the Western sector of the 2,500 miles long frontier by China. It was accentuated by further Chinese claims amounting to 38,000 square miles of territory south of the international frontier in 1958.

Thus, the dispute concerns Chinese aggression and territorial claims extending to over 50,000 square miles. These claims can hardly be described as a "boundary dispute", for, what China demands is Indian abandonment of these vast areas, several hundred miles in depth, which lie south of the recognised frontier.

This study grew out of three series of articles I wrote in *Blitz Newsmagazine* on *India and Tibet*, at the time of the Dalai Lama's flight to India in March 1959, on *India-China Relations* in 1960 when Peking began to accuse India of expansionism and on *India's Northern Frontier* after the Report of the officials of the Governments of India and China on the 'Boundary Question' was published in early 1961.

It stakes a limited claim to "objectivity". I have striven as hard as possible to understand and reproduce the Chinese data on the basis of which claims have been registered on territory under centuries long Indian jurisdiction. It was comparatively easy, for, I started my work without any pre-conceived notions and prejudices about Chinese imperialism. The main driving force which impelled me to proceed with this study was a keen desire to understand Chinese logic, if there was any, behind what appeared to be fantastic claims and a patently unwise policy followed by military means which suddenly replaced the friendly and warm camaraderie which had existed between

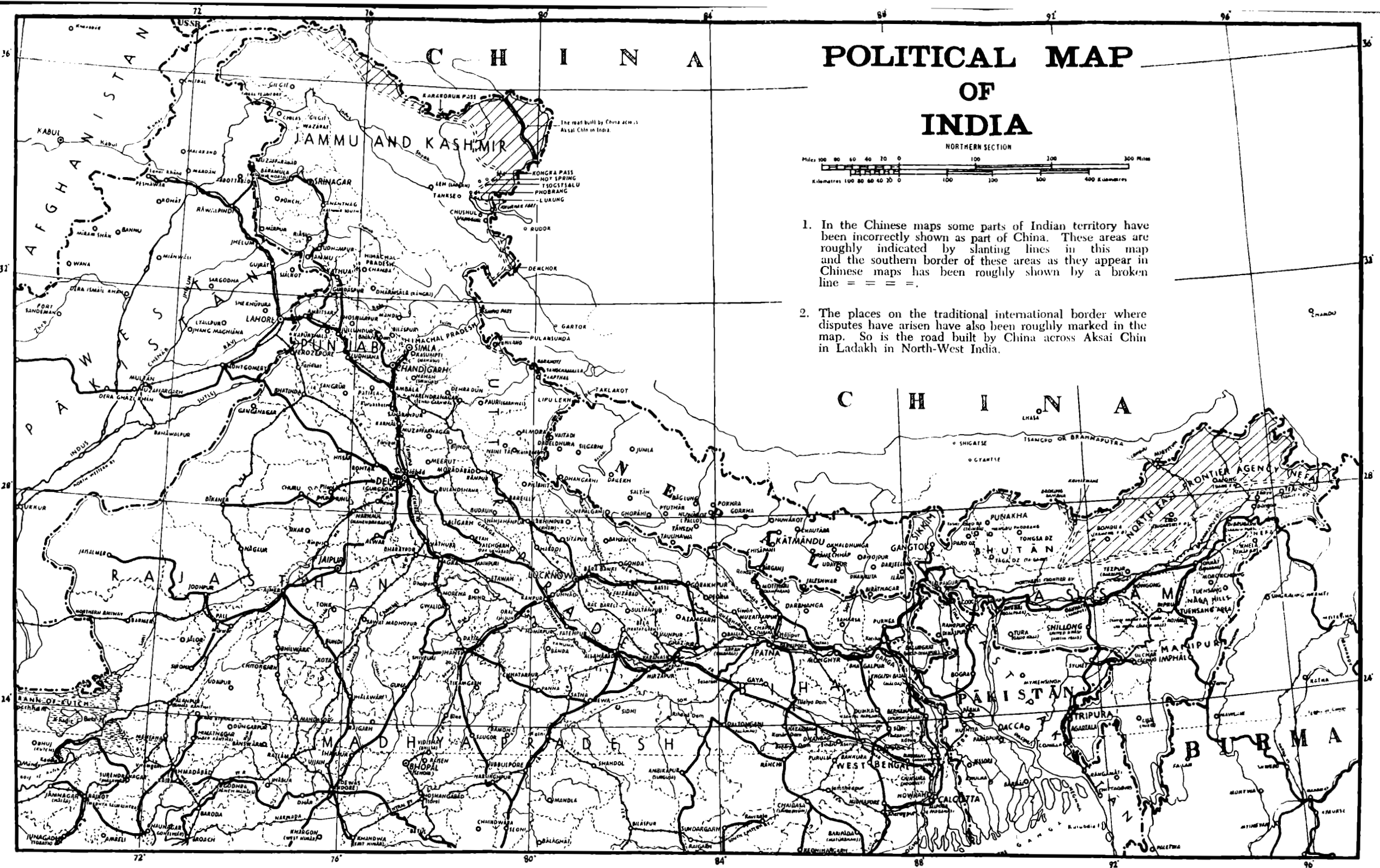
the two for centuries and which found a massive expression after 1949.

I am indebted to many friends, Indian and foreign, for the assistance I received from them in writing this book. Unhappily, I am prevented for various reasons from mentioning their names, acknowledging my deep gratitude to each of them individually. Some of them are members of the civil services of India, the United Nations and, I add with pleasure, of China; others are politicians and diplomats with differing ideological beliefs, including Communists. I hope they will see that I have attempted, to the best of my ability, to utilize their generous assistance in making this study as balanced as possible.

Bombay

December, 1961.

RAMESH SANGHVI



POLITICAL MAP OF INDIA

NORTHERN SECTION



1. In the Chinese maps some parts of Indian territory have been incorrectly shown as part of China. These areas are roughly indicated by slanting lines in this map and the southern border of these areas as they appear in Chinese maps has been roughly shown by a broken line = = = =.
2. The places on the traditional international border where disputes have arisen have also been roughly marked in the map. So is the road built by China across Aksai Chin in Ladakh in North-West India.

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Chapter 1

ANATOMY OF A CLAIM

This is a claim which is quite impossible for India or almost any Indian to admit, whatever the consequences. . . . It involves a fundamental change in the whole geography of it, the Himalayas being handed over as a gift to them. . . . This is a thing, whether India exists or does not exist, cannot be agreed to.

Jawaharlal Nehru

1. Mystery Of The Maps

On the unbearably hot afternoon of August 21, 1958, the Counsellor for China was requested to call on the External Affairs Ministry in New Delhi. On his arrival, a Deputy Secretary to the Government of India handed him a three-paragraphed diplomatic Note.

The Note was provoked by a small scale map which purported to show "the development of railways and trunk roads in China during the period of the First Five Year Plan." It was printed in *China Pictorial*,¹ an official journal published in Peking. Though the rapid growth of railways and trunk roads in China was a matter of interest to the Government of India, the Note dealt with another and much more vital question. It concerned 50,000 square miles and more of Indian territory which had been shown in this map as belonging to China.

The *China Pictorial* map included within "Chinese territory, (i) four of the five Divisions of India's North East Frontier Agency, (ii) some areas in the north of (the State of) Uttar Pradesh and (iii) large areas in Eastern Ladakh." Besides, China, as drawn in that map, spread over "the entire Tashigang area of Eastern Bhutan and a considerable slice of territory in north-west Bhutan."²

It was difficult to assess the exact area of India's border-

lands over which this map showed Chinese sovereignty. But one aspect was clear. All the areas which were shown as Chinese lay south of the Himalayas. The cartographic boundaries of China thus drawn imprisoned the Himalayas within Chinese territory. The Chinese line appeared to sweep across over 14,000 square miles in Ladakh and about 36,000 square miles in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA).

The Government of India were polite but firm. They hoped, stated the Note, that "these clear inaccuracies" would be attended to. The correct international frontiers of India and Bhutan were shown, the Note added, on a scale of one inch to seventy miles on the Political Map of India, 3rd Edition, 1956. Delhi was willing to supply a copy of this correct map to Peking.

Though this was India's first formal diplomatic approach to China on the subject, the mystery of the Chinese maps had baffled India ever since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949. Chinese maps, official and non-official, always swept over 50,000 square miles of Indian borderlands. Undoubtedly, the continuous circulation of these expansionist maps was a strange feature of Sino-Indian relations. And yet, but for occasional questions in Parliament, the people and the Government of India did not take them seriously.

India's northern frontier was ancient and historical, largely sanctified by treaties and in consonance with the geographical principle of watershed. It was inconceivable that China should ever seriously ask for any major alteration across those 2,500 miles of Sino-Indian boundary. There were two reasons for this quiet Indian confidence. First, if the expansionist Chinese maps were to be taken seriously, the Himalayas would be closed behind the Chinese frontier. This was an absurd proposition, since, from time immemorial, the Himalayan peaks provided the dividing line between the Indian and the Chinese worlds. Second, relations between China and India were so close and intimate that it was unthinkable that China could demand the re-writing of Sino-Indian geography. And yet, two efforts were made to probe the mystery of the Chinese maps before August 1958.

In October 1954, Nehru had gone to Peking. In a conversation with Chou En-lai, he had briefly referred to the wrong boundaries shown in Chinese maps and added that "obviously, there was an error involved." In any event, he had concluded, India was not particularly worried because India's northern boundaries were well-defined and "were not a matter of argument."³ Premier Chou did not dispute this statement. On the contrary, he gave an explanation which was more than convincing. It was quoted back to Chou in 1958 by Nehru. "You were good enough to reply to me", reminded Nehru, "that these maps were really reproductions of old pre-liberation maps and that you had not the time to revise them."⁴

The 1954 Nehru-Chou meeting took place in the exhilarating climate of goodwill generated by the Panchsheel Treaty concerning Tibet. Chou's failure to dispute Nehru's assertion that India's northern frontiers "were not a matter of argument" could have had only one meaning. China had no desire to make these frontiers a matter of argument. As to the circulation of the expansionist maps, Chou's explanation was unexceptionable.

The matter of the maps and, more specifically, of the Eastern sector of the Sino-Indian boundary, known as the McMahon Line, was discussed two years later at the next Nehru-Chou meeting which took place in Delhi. Nehru did not raise this question, since so far as India was concerned, there was no need to take any initiative in this behalf. It was Premier Chou En-lai who volunteered his acceptance of this sector of the frontier.

The expansionist Chinese maps extended Chinese boundary over Burmese territory also. In fact, Sino-Burmese frontier was the extension of the McMahon Line. Burma was perturbed about Chinese claims over Burmese territory south of this line. U Nu, the Burmese Prime Minister, had approached Nehru to use his good offices with Chou in this connection.

The Sino-Indian *entente*, which led to the solution of several problems in East Asia, encouraged the Indian Prime Minister to take some action in what admittedly was a Sino-Burmese conflict. Nehru wrote to Chou a friendly and discreet letter. Burma, wrote Nehru, was a small country with the two

giants of Asia, India and China, as neighbours. It was natural, he commented, that Burma should occasionally feel apprehensive of them. Why do any thing carelessly which might increase Burmese apprehension?

So, when Chou En-lai visited India in December, 1956, Nehru invited U Nu to meet him in New Delhi. U Nu came over and had a friendly meeting with Chou En-lai. After their discussion on Sino-Burmese frontier had concluded, Nehru joined them. The three Prime Ministers talked of common problems in a cordial and frank manner. It was during this meeting that Chou En-lai took up the subject of the McMahon Line as it related to Sino-Indian frontier. Chou told Nehru that China was agreeable to give recognition to the Eastern sector of Sino-Indian frontier. Nehru was interested and impressed. He came back to this subject three times so that there should remain no scope for any misunderstanding.⁵

At least part of the mystery of the Chinese maps appeared to be finally resolved. Since the matter was of some importance to Sino-Indian relations, Nehru reduced the conversation to writing. He prepared a minute for the personal and confidential use of the two Prime Ministers, the pertinent paragraph of which read as follows:

“Premier Chou referred to the McMahon Line and again said that he had never heard of this before, though, of course, the then Chinese Government had dealt with this matter and not accepted the Line. He had gone into this matter in connection with the border dispute with Burma. Although he thought that this Line, established by British imperialists, was not fair, nevertheless, because it was an accomplished fact and because of the friendly relations which existed between China and the countries concerned, namely, India and Burma, the Chinese Government was of the opinion that they should give recognition to the McMahon Line. They had, however, not consulted the Tibetan authorities yet. They proposed to do so.”⁶

The McMahon Line ran over 720 miles of the eastern end of the Sino-Indian frontier. It was south of this Line that the expansionist Chinese maps engulfed 36,000 square miles of In-

dian territory. Nehru was content that the major apprehension was removed with Chinese recognition of the Line. The two Prime Ministers then discussed some "minor border problems". At the end, Nehru remarked that there were no other disputes on the Sino-Indian boundary and Chou agreed. It was decided by them that these minor problems should be solved on the basis of established practice, custom and watersheds.

Thus, in December 1956, Premier Chou En-lai dissolved the mystery of the maps and set at rest all doubts about the fantastic territorial claims which could arise on the basis of the border alignment shown by these maps.

India had raised the issue of the Sino-Indian boundary after six years of patient toleration of the circulation of the expansionist Chinese maps in October 1954 and received a satisfactory answer. China, on its own initiative, had given recognition to the McMahon Line in December 1956. And yet, the maps continued to circulate in China. Twenty months after the Nehru-Chou meeting in Delhi, the Government of India came to the conclusion that the time had arrived to raise the question of the maps at the diplomatic level. The Note of August 28, 1958, reminded Peking of the previous understandings in a somewhat hurt tone:

"His Excellency Chou En-lai had at that time replied that current Chinese maps were based on old maps and that the Government of the People's Republic of China had had no time to correct them. Since, however, the present Government of People's Republic of China has now been in office for so many years and new maps are being repeatedly printed and published in China, the Government of India would suggest that necessary corrections in the Chinese maps should not be delayed any further."

Peking replied through a Memorandum dated November 3, 1958. It reiterated its old arguments that the expansionist maps had "been drawn on the basis of maps published in China before liberation". However, this time, unlike previously, it did not plead want of time as an explanation for its failure to introduce the necessary corrections. On the contrary, it outlined a completely new policy on the Sino-Indian boundary.

“The Chinese Government believes that with elapse of time and after consultations with the various neighbouring countries and a survey of the border regions, a new way of drawing the boundary of China will be decided in accordance with the results of the consultations and surveys.”⁸

India was puzzled by this answer. Was Peking going back on previous Chinese recognition of the boundary? Was it, in this indirect and almost casual manner, now throwing open the entire boundary to dispute? How could China take such a stand almost a decade after the establishment of its new government when its Prime Minister had agreed that there was “no major boundary dispute between India and China?”

The seriousness of the situation created by this new Chinese policy demanded a high-level approach and Nehru promptly wrote a letter to Chou En-lai on December 14, 1958. This was the first of several letters to be exchanged between the two Prime Ministers in the next twelve months. After reminding Chou of their previous conversations and understanding, Nehru concluded on a firm note :

“There can be no question of these large parts of India being anything but Indian and there is no dispute about them. I do not know what kind of surveys can affect these well-known and fixed boundaries.”

Chou En-lai's reply, dated January 23, 1959, was sent promptly. The Chinese Government, stated the Chinese Prime Minister, wanted to set forth its views and stand on the Sino-Indian boundary. In the sixth paragraph of his letter, he stated them thus :

“First of all, I wish to point out that the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited. Historically, no treaty or agreement on Sino-Indian boundary has been concluded between the Chinese Central Government and the Indian Government.

“So far as the actual situation is concerned, there are certain differences between the two sides over the border question.”¹⁰

Chou then staked China's claims over 14,000 square miles in Ladakh and 36,000 square miles in NEFA and generally

insisted upon the alignment of the maps which he had disclaimed as authoritative for the previous four years! The tone of the letter, apart from its contents, was challenging. It was obvious that Peking was making massive territorial claims while speaking of the need for the delimitation of Sino-Indian boundary.

2 : Pattern Of Border Incidents

Once Peking announced its desire to redraw the 2,500 miles long Himalayan frontier, several minor border incidents which had disturbed Sino-Indian relations during the previous four years took on a new meaning. What were once considered to be issues of adjustments became focal points of the clash which had begun to develop. The pattern of the border incidents unfolded a sinister significance.

The first Chinese territorial claim had been registered in the summer of 1954. In July, Peking protested against the presence of Indian officials at Bara Hoti, a village on the Hoti Plain situated in the Garhwal district of the state of Uttar Pradesh. The Chinese called Bara Hoti by the name of Wu Je and claimed it to be part of Tibet. Like most villages nestling around the Himalayas, Bara Hoti came to life each year when snow began to melt with the advent of summer. Soon after, Indian civil and military personnel visited it, collected taxes, settled disputes and, as the first snow began to fall sometime in September, returned to the lower heights in Garhwal. This had been the administrative practice for several decades.

In 1954, a number of Chinese soldiers turned up at Bara Hoti and set up a camp on Indian territory. The Chinese appeared at a time when Sino-Indian amity had reached its peak after the 1954 Treaty on Tibet. Their intrusion was treated as a matter of misunderstanding, and by September-October, when the approaches to Bara Hoti closed down, the incident was almost forgotten.

In September 1955, a slightly more serious incident took place at Damzan, situated ten miles south of the Niti pass, recognised as one of the border passes by the 1954 Treaty. Men of the Indian Border Police were met by Chinese soldiers on Indian territory and ordered not to proceed north without Chinese permission. The Indian policemen were, at first, surprised,

since they had been patrolling this area for some years. They informed the Chinese that this was Indian territory and there was some mistake on the latter's part. When the Chinese remained adamant, the Indians ignored Chinese demands with a warning that should force be used to prevent movement of Indian policemen on Indian territory, the Chinese alone would be responsible for its consequences. At that stage the Chinese soldiers withdrew from Indian territory.¹¹

In 1956, border violations by Chinese troops occurred at several places. The incident near Hupsong Khad provoked an angry protest from Delhi. The Chinese appeared twice at Hupsong Khad, south of the Shipki pass, another border pass recognised in the 1954 Treaty. On the second occasion, on being challenged, they threw heavy stones at Indian policemen and threatened to use hand-grenades. On September 20, the Commander of the Chinese troops informed his Indian counterpart that he had orders to patrol right up to Hupsong Khad and he would use force against Indian policemen, should they proceed north of it.

India protested strongly against this encroachment and demanded that the Chinese troops should be withdrawn to positions north of the Shipki pass, which was the border pass. The tone of Indian demand was urgent as Peking was informed that "crossing of this pass by armed personnel" was "aggression" which India would resist. In the hope of Chinese withdrawal, Indian policemen were ordered "not to take any action for the present in repelling aggression and await instructions."¹²

The Shipki La incident was preceded by Chinese encroachment at Nilang, south of the Tsang Chokla pass, another recognised border pass. India had felt a need then to inform China that "failure of immediate withdrawal of the Chinese troops beyond Tsang Chokla may lead to serious incidents which would mar the friendly relations between India and China."¹³

The general belief in India over these frontier violations was that the Chinese were mistaken about the exact limits of their southern frontier. This had led to minor disputes and the best way to settle them was to talk it over with them. The solution would come easily because the Indian frontier was well-defined and the Chinese knew about it.

This policy was pursued in relation to Bara Hoti or Wu Je, as the Chinese called it. The issue of the ownership of Wu Je could be decided easily once its precise geographical locale was ascertained. According to China, it was at one day's march from the Niti pass.¹⁴

This was helpful in as much as the Niti pass was a border pass. If Wu Je could be reached after a day's march from the Niti pass in the northern direction, it was situated in Chinese territory. On the other hand, if it was in the south, it was in India. The Chinese Counsellor in India had placed it at 12 kilometres north of the Tunjun La pass, north-west of the Niti pass in July 1955.¹⁵ Tunjun La, too, was a border pass and if the geographical location given by China was correct, Wu Je could not be situated in India.

This presented a perplexing problem for India. No Indian official, civil or military, had crossed north either of the Tunjun La pass, or the Niti pass. Indian personnel visited the Bara Hoti post during the summer. Therefore, it appeared that there was some basic misunderstanding on China's part. Perhaps, Wu Je was not Bara Hoti. Chinese descriptions of the geographical locations of Wu Je were, to say the least, confusing. In 1954, Wu Je was described as part of Ari Area of Tibet.¹⁶ In 1955, it was stated that Wu Je had "always belonged to Dabatsing of the Tibet region within the Chinese boundary."¹⁷ In 1956, the Chinese Foreign Office stated that the "Wu Je area has always been under the jurisdiction of the Daba Dzong of the Tibet region of China."¹⁸

After prolonged negotiations over this dispute, India proposed in 1956 that the terms of reference for the joint Sino-Indian investigation into the ownership of Wu Je might be based on the Chinese position officially intimated in 1955. China had recognised Tunjun La as the border pass. What remained, stated R. K. Nehru, then Indian Ambassador in Peking, was to find out if Wu Je was north of the Tunjun La, in which case it was Chinese, or south of it and hence in India.¹⁹

Ambassador Nehru received his first shock when China refused to agree to these terms of reference. On both the positions it had accepted earlier, China changed its stand. First, it denied that the Tunjun La was a border pass, a fact it had

recognised in 1955. However, without the least hesitation, Peking performed a *volte face*:

“In his talk on November 5, 1955, with Mr. Fa Hao, Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in India, Mr. S. K. Ray, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, referred to the Tunjun La pass as the border pass. However, according to the historical records of this part of the Tibet region of China, adjacent to Indian territory, Tunjun La is proven to be within Chinese territory. There is no historical record showing Tunjun La as a border pass between India and China.”²⁰

It was not Ray alone who referred to the Tunjan La as a border pass. Fa Hao had agreed to it. In any case, China did not consider it necessary to adduce any evidence of “the historical records.” In the absence of such evidence forthcoming, its bland assertion of ownership of the Tunjun La pass was unusual. But the matter did not end there. China went back on another point:

“When Counsellor Kang Mao-chao.....in 1955 referred to Wu Je as situated 12 kilometres to the north-east of Tunjun La, he was in fact not clear about the geographical position of Wu Je in relation to Tunjun La. His above remark thus gave rise to some misunderstanding but even that cannot change the geographical position of Wu Je i.e. it is within Chinese territory.”²¹

At last the Chinese position was clear. China wanted to claim Bara Hoti, which was south of the Tunjun La pass and in the Garhwal district. The manner of advancing the claim was as circuitous as was the method of its unilateral occupation in 1956. After the summer of 1956, when Indian personnel withdrew, the Chinese moved in and occupied Bara Hoti.

In 1957, normal silence returned once again to the Himalayan frontier except for two incidents in NEFA and the Spiti area in the Punjab. But in 1958, provocations to border incidents became almost a regular habit with the Chinese troops along with the entire international boundary.

In June, the Chinese troops crossed into Indian territory in Ladakh and visited the Khurnak Fort.²² Soon after, they

occupied it. This was a serious matter since Tibet had never even laid a claim to this fort. But the more shocking fact was the Chinese occupation of the Aksai Chin area of north-eastern Ladakh.

On October 18, India lodged a very strong protest with China when she learnt of a motor road which the Chinese had constructed on Indian territory. This road was a part of Yeh-cheng-Gartok road or the Sinkiang-Tibet highway which the Chinese had announced as completed in September 1957. The highway entered Indian territory just east of Sarig Jilgang, ran north-west to Amtogar and striking the western bank of the Amtogar lake ran north-west through Yangpa, Khitai Dawan and Haji Langar. All these places were situated in India.

Even at this stage, Delhi was willing to have a friendly settlement of this dispute. Its "surprise and regret" were due to the fact that "the Chinese Government should have constructed a road through what was indisputably Indian territory without first obtaining the permission of the Government of India and without even informing the Government of India." The general policy was stated thus:

"As the Chinese Government are aware, the Government of India are anxious to settle these petty frontier disputes so that the friendly relations between the two countries may not suffer."²³

The protest Note of October 18 ended with an enquiry. An Indian party, on a routine patrol near Shinglung in Aksai Chin, was missing. India could not trace the personnel. Could Peking give assistance in this matter?

Peking replied on November 1. It accepted that the personnel of the Indian patrol party had been "arrested" on September 8 and 12 because they had "clearly intruded into Chinese territory to conduct unlawful surveying activities within Chinese borders."²⁴ The men were to be deported back to India through the Karakoram pass.

The Chinese reply and the news of the secret detention of Indian officers and men came as a shock. For five long weeks, China had imprisoned Indian patrolmen and the Chinese Ambassador had pleaded complete ignorance about this fact as

late as October 18! Now that China had accepted the detention of the Indians, it saw no reason to express any regret about the incident. On the other hand, it came forward with a charge of aggression! Winter had already set in Ladakh and, without any previous intimation, Peking was deporting the arrested Indians across the Karakoram pass!

Apart from this unfriendly behaviour, China had chosen to claim the Aksai Chin area, through which it had built the road, as its own territory. This major territorial claim over several thousand square miles was made incidentally! There was no reply to the Indian protest on the illegal road construction. Chinese assertion of their own sovereignty over this road and the whole of Aksai Chin was made through arrogant justification of the arrest of the Indians! The Indian patrolmen were arrested because they were in Aksai Chin and Aksai Chin was part of China—this is how Peking argued!

Nehru still hoped for a high level solution of the increasingly tense situation. When he addressed his first letter to Chou, he said:

“I am venturing to write to you on this subject because I feel that any possibility of grave misunderstanding between our countries should be removed as soon as possible. I am anxious, as I am sure you are, that the firm basis of our friendship should not only be maintained but should be strengthened.”²⁵

But, events appeared to move faster than the pace of the efforts at maintaining goodwill. His letter was sent on December 24, 1958. But by that time, the Chinese incursions had taken place over the entire frontier. When Chou En-lai replied on January 23, 1959, demanding that the frontier be redrawn, the stage had already been set for a clash. An additional complication arose immediately after, with the arrival of the Dalai Lama in India.

3: Intrusion Of The Dalai Lama

Six weeks after China registered its massive territorial claims, the fourteenth Dalai Lama fled Lhasa on or about March 10, 1959. While in flight, he requested Delhi for political asylum which was granted. He entered India on March 31.

His arrival sparked off the bitterest Sino-Indian controversy of recent times.

It is often argued — and it apparently seems a reasonable argument — that the Chinese *volte face* on Sino-Indian boundary was a consequence of “indirect Indian interference” in Tibetan affairs. However, an objective survey of the facts leads one to a different conclusion. It may be that the Tibetan revolt was a contributing factor in the sudden change of Chinese policy but for the principal motives behind it, one has to look elsewhere.

After the 1954 Treaty on Tibet, India did not raise the question of Tibet’s future. In December 1956, Premier Chou thought it necessary to keep India informed about what Peking intended to do with Tibet. At that time, both the Chinese Prime Minister and the Dalai Lama were in India. Nehru appreciated Chou’s initiative and the two Prime Ministers had a full and frank talk. Chou told Nehru that “while Tibet had long been a part of the Chinese State, they (the Chinese Government) did not consider Tibet as a province of China. The people were different.....Therefore, they considered Tibet an autonomous region which would enjoy autonomy”.

Premier Chou was explicit on the future social structure of Tibet and added that “it was absurd for anyone to imagine that China was going to force communism on Tibet. Communism could not be enforced in this way on a backward country and they had no wish to do so even though they would like reforms to come in progressively. Even those reforms they proposed to postpone for considerable time.”²⁶

As late as February 1959, Wu Chang-chi, a scholar of Tibetan problems in the Chinese Central Commission of Nationalities Affairs, had expressed the same view:

“The manner in which China’s different nationalities make their transition to socialist society and the length of time this takes, varies with the situation of each. Whatever reforms are necessary for this transition must be made by and according to the wishes of the people themselves.

“It is held by the Central People’s Government and the Communist Party that only when the leaders and peo-

ple are united in their demand for reform can this be imposed by another nationality or by a minority of the people concerned.

“In social and economic development, Tibet differs from both the Han and other nationality areas, and her situation is well nigh ripe for democratic reform.

“The Central People’s Government announced in 1957 that the question of altering the existing social system would not come on the agenda before 1962 and of the Second Five Year Plan.

“In the meantime, great efforts are being made to expand the work that is beneficial to the broadest sections of the people, to lift the burden of medievalism from their shoulders and help them chart their path to a broad future. The Chinese Communist Party, its scrupulous consideration for the deep religious beliefs and the national customs of the people, have reached the hearts of men and women of all classes and conditions.”²⁷

India was in sympathy with this approach. But in any event this was an internal matter for China. The Tibetan policy of the Government of India had been governed by three factors: “(1) preservation of the security and integrity of India; (2)..... desire to maintain friendly relations with China; and (3)..... deep sympathy for the people of Tibet.”²⁸ Premier Chou had been told of these aims which guided Indian policy and he seemed to have appreciated them.

In December 1956, Chou had raised one specific matter about difficulties in Tibet. According to his information, some Tibetan *emigres* had set up anti-Chinese organisations and were using Kalimpong as a base for subversive activities in Tibet. Nehru had assured him that India did not wish Indian soil to be used for such activities. However, he had added that under Indian law, he could not take action on the basis of suspicion and if Peking supplied to him adequate information, he would immediately enquire and take action, if necessary.²⁹

China made no move for about thirteen months to provide India with any data. On January 12, 1958, Chou En-lai mentioned this matter again to the Indian Ambassador in Peking.

Ten days later, a photostat copy of an anti-Chinese leaflet was given to the Ambassador. On examination, it was found that the leaflet had been issued in the autumn of 1956. It referred to some Tibetan association. When Delhi made inquiries, it was found that in 1958, no such association existed.

Two communications were addressed by China to India on this subject in 1958, on July 10³⁰ and August 3³¹, respectively. These dealt with the Chinese charge against "Americans, Chiang Kai-shek clique and local special agents and Tibetan reactionaries in Kalimpong". Peking requested "the Government of India to repress the subversive and disruptive activities against China's Tibetan region carried out in Kalimpong" by these elements. India had acted on whatever information was supplied but found that the Chinese Government's Note was "based on misinformation". Delhi further assured Peking that "India does not and will not permit any activities on its territories directed against the People's Republic of China" and that India was "determined to take action under the law of the country against those who indulge in any such illegal activities."³²

Such was the situation in 1958 about Sino-Indian relations as they concerned the question of Tibet. It was against this background that China had moved its troops on the Sino-Indian boundary. The Dalai Lama's revolt took place in February 1959. However Chinese troops had before that established an irritating record of border encroachment: at Bara Hoti, July 1954 onwards; at Damzan in September 1955; at Nilang on the Uttar Pradesh border in April 1956; at the Shipki pass on the Himachal Pradesh border in September 1956; at Kurik in the Spiti area of the Punjab in 1956 and in 1957; at Walong in the Lohit sub-division of the NEFA in September 1957 and in 1958; at Khurnak Fort in eastern Ladakh in July 1958 onward and at Lapthal and Sangcha Malla on the Uttar Pradesh border in October 1958.

In the face of Indian protests, China had already occupied 1,200 square miles in Aksai Chin in eastern Ladakh, built a road across it in 1957 and occupied Bara Hoti, Lapthal, Sangcha Malla and the Khurnak fort !

4: Bloodshed On The Snows

By August 1959, the first Sino-Indian armed clash had already taken place at Longju.

Very few people had heard about Longju. It was a small forward post about 3 or 4 miles south of the Indian border with Tibet in the NEFA. The next nearest and bigger post inside India was Limeking. It was 5 days' march from Limeking to Longju and to reach Limeking from the next place behind it was a 12-days march. Such was the isolated and almost inaccessible position of Longju.

The clash at Longju was preceded by a rather tragic event. The Longju check-post has been established by India several decades earlier. Whether the Chinese knew this or not, they were told about it on July 23, 1959. In the second half of July, Delhi learnt that the officer-in-charge of the post was down with an attack of appendicitis. There was no doctor nearby who could reach him. It was decided to paradrop a doctor.

Delhi thought it wise to take certain precautions. It sent a message to Peking:

“The officer-in-charge of the Indian check-post at Longju near the international border is seriously ill. It is essential to send immediate medical relief.....The Government of India propose to paradrop a doctor. Depending on weather, the paradropping operation may take place on 24th afternoon or on subsequent day. The aircraft has been instructed to take all care not to cross into Chinese territory but the Chinese Government are being informed, should there be any error of judgement. The Government of India will appreciate if immediate warning is issued to neighbouring Chinese posts of this operation.”³³

About a month later, a strong Chinese detachment crossed into the Subansiri Frontier division of the NEFA at a place south of Migyitun on August 25. They met an Indian forward picket and fired on these dozen men of the Assam Rifles. The Chinese numbered about 250. Eight of the Riflemen managed to escape the attack and returned to Longju. Next day, the Chinese approached Longju and opened fire on the post.³⁴ India immediately protested against this aggression.

On September 1, China protested against what it called "Indian intrusion in Tibet region of China" through two Notes. There were two main points in these Notes. The Chinese were attacked by the men of the Assam Rifles and had fired only in self-defence. The second point was more important:

"Although the Chinese troops did not cross for a single step into Longju during the incidents on August 25 and 26, it must, however, be pointed out that Longju is indisputably a part of Chinese territory and that the invasion and occupation of that place by the Indian troops constitute a grave violation of China's territorial integrity."³⁵

Not satisfied with this claim, China reiterated that "the boundary between the two countries is yet to be settled" and, in a broad sweep, rejected the previous recognition of the McMahon Line:

"The Chinese Government has also repeatedly pointed out that the so-called traditional boundary between India and the eastern part of Tibet region of China as referred to by the Indian Government i.e. the so-called McMahon Line, was set forth in the past by the British imperialists unilaterally and has never been accepted by the Chinese Government...."

The McMahon Line having been repudiated so easily, China took the next logical step. It accused India of aggression saying that "the Indian Government.....has been asserting its illegitimate territorial claims by force." Indian policy constituted "a deliberate intimidation against China". As to the bloodshed at Mingytun and Longju, it was, said Peking, due to "unwarranted provocations by Indian troops" which "were by no means fortuitous, but were precisely the inevitable results" of Indian policy.³⁶

5: Claims On 50,000 Square Miles

As the news of the Longju incident spread a wave of horror in India, a letter dated September 8, 1959 from Prime Minister Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru arrived in Delhi. It was a reply to Nehru's letter dated March 22, 1959. Much had happened during the months which Chou had taken to prepare his reply. Its main theme concerned the redrawing of

the Himalayan frontier. The Chinese Prime Minister advanced several reasons for his insistence on this point.³⁷

First of all, according to him, "the historical background of British aggression on China when India was under British rule" had to be taken into account. Britain, he went on to add, had "conducted extensive territorial expansion" in Tibet and Sinkiang. This was the "fundamental reason" for the disputes and non-settlement of Sino-Indian boundary.

India had demanded, according to Chou En-lai, that China should give formal recognition to the situation resulting from British aggression against Tibet. What was worse, India had "applied all sorts of pressure" on China, "not even scrupling the use of force to support this demand". Regarding the sector of the Sino-Indian boundary in the west, between Kashmir on the one hand and Sinkiang and Tibet on the other, the treaty signed by Tibet with Kashmir in 1842 was invalid. The boundary between Ari Area of Tibet and India running along the Punjab, the Himachal Pradesh and the Uttar Pradesh, was never delimited. The McMahon Line, running from the western end of Bhutan to Burma, was illegal and hence unacceptable. China wanted that to be scrapped. It involved 90,000 square kilometres. Chou was very definite about this and asked Nehru:

"Mr. Prime Minister, how could China agree to accept under coercion such illegal line which would have it relinquish its rights and disgrace itself by selling out its territory—and such a large piece of territory at that?"

With this, as Nehru stated, the Chinese claim which was vaguely set down in maps was becoming more precise.

The Indian position was categorical about it:

"This is a claim which it is quite impossible for India or almost any Indian to admit, whatever its consequences. This is quite clear . . . it involves a fundamental change in the whole geography of it, the Himalayas being handed over as a gift to them . . . this is a thing, whether India exists or does not exist, cannot be agreed to."⁽³⁸⁾

As Indian uneasiness at unexpected Chinese claims reached its climax, the Himalayas resounded with gunfire once again

on October 20 and 21 at Hot Springs in the Chang Chenmo valley of Ladakh, about 2,200 miles away from Longju. Nine members of the Indian Tibet Border Force were killed and two remained to be accounted for, after Chinese troops attacked them at Hot Springs. Some of them, including their commander Karam Singh, were taken prisoners. It was clear from the reports received by Delhi that the whole affair was extremely ugly.

Apart from the attack, the treatment given to Karam Singh and his men was such as even prisoners of war would not be given. In a Note dated December 13, 1959, India summarised the post-attack Chinese behaviour as follows:

“It will be seen from Shri Karam Singh’s statement that the Indian prisoners were denied adequate food and shelter. It also appears that Shri Karam Singh was subjected to interrogation on 12 days for a total period of 70 hours. Under threats and prolonged interrogation, he was made to subscribe to certain statements which his captors wanted him to make. He was further made to repeat similar statements on subsequent occasions so that these statements could be tape-recorded.....”³⁹

The year ended with a Chinese Note, dated December 26, 1959, which detailed China’s territorial claims against India.⁴⁰ They covered about 50,000 square miles of Indian territory along the Himalayan frontier.

It was clear by then that China could not hope to acquire these areas by any means short of conquest. This was not likely to happen. Under the circumstance, apart from areas unilaterally occupied by China, it was Sino-Indian friendship which had received a near fatal blow. A crisis of confidence had overtaken India-China relations. The two awakened giants of Asia, separated by the Himalayas, angrily faced each other along the entire frontier.

6: “Five Fingers Of Tibet”

The historical Indian “frontier of peace” with Tibet and Sinkiang extended over 2,500 miles from north-west Kashmir to the tripartite junction of India, Burma and China. Between its two ends were the northern frontiers of Bhutan and Sikkim,

whose defence was the responsibility of India and of Nepal. When the Chinese placed their detailed claims over this frontier, they divided it, for convenience, into three sectors. The boundary of Kashmir with China was called the Western sector; the boundary of the Punjab, the Himachal Pradesh and the Uttar Pradesh with Tibet up to the tripartite junction of India, Nepal and Tibet was termed the Middle sector and the boundary east of Bhutan to the Talu pass was designated the Eastern sector.

It was a well-known frontier which started running east along the Muztag and the Karakoram ranges to a point east 80° longitude. Thereafter, it followed the watershed, ran through the Lanak pass and along the Chang Chenmo range. Cutting across the Pangong Tso (lake) and Spanggur Tso, it then ran through the Chang pass and along the Kailash range. Near Demchok, it plunged south-west and, skirting the Hanle mountains, cut across the Para Chu river south of Chumar. This alignment created the top of the Indian peninsula which was popularly known as "the head of mother India."

After following the watershed of the Spiti and Para Chu rivers, where, with the boundary of the Punjab, the Middle sector began, it followed the watershed between the Ganges and the Sutlej and reached the trijunction of India, Nepal and Tibet. In this sector were situated the main trade and pilgrimage routes, including the Hindustan-Tibet road, which thousands of pilgrims followed to reach the holy lake of the Man-Sarovar and other Hindu shrines in Tibet through the several well-known border passes.

The Eastern sector was the McMahon line, which ran east towards Burma. It began east of the eastern limits of Bhutan to a point near the Talu pass south of which was situated the NEFA. It followed the watershed of the Brahmaputra, excepting where the Lohit, Dihang, Subansiri and Namjang rivers broke through. The boundary of Sikkim with Tibet was also a watershed while the crest of the Himalayas formed the boundary between Bhutan and Tibet.

China registered specific claims, based on the Kuomintang expansionist maps, all along this frontier. The Note of the Chinese Foreign Office dated December 26, 1959, stated:

“According to Indian maps the boundary line in the Western sector cuts deep into the Chinese territory, including an area of 33,000 square kilometres.....⁴¹ This area.....has always belonged to China. This is conclusively borne out by Chinese official documents and records. Except for a very small area of Parigas, which has been occupied by India in recent years, the remaining broad area has always been under the effective control of the Chinese Government.”⁴²

On the Eastern sector, the territorial claim was almost three times that on the Western sector. It was preceded by a charge that India had pushed northward after the 1954 Treaty. China claimed the “return” of “an area of 90,000 square kilometres, which originally belonged to China”⁴³ This area “between the so-called McMahon Line and the boundary line between the southern foot of the Himalayas as shown on Chinese maps has always belonged to China and was until recently under Chinese jurisdiction.”⁴⁴

No massive territorial claims were registered on the Middle sector since the Indian alignment was accepted to be “relatively close to the delineation on the Chinese maps.” However, a number of specific places were claimed. These were: Chuve, Chuje, Shipki pass, Sang, Tsungsha, Puling-Sumdo, Wu Je, Sangcha and Lapthal. “Except Sang and Tsungsha,” stated the Chinese, “which were invaded and occupied by Britain earlier, they were all occupied or intruded by India only after the signing of the 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement.”⁴⁵

The area claimed by China appeared to amount to about 50,000 square miles, 4,000 square miles less than the total area of Nepal. However, there were some frightening dangers inherent in the logic on the basis of which these claims were advanced. These areas belonged to Tibet, the Chinese seemed to argue, before the British annexed them and hence India must return them to China. The basis of the claims was sought in alleged Tibetan sovereignty. Premier Chou had candidly stated this in relation to the claims on the Eastern sector.⁴⁶

He had referred to a telegram sent by the Tibetan authorities to Delhi in 1947 demanding the “return” of large areas

by India. The Tibetan Bureau had asked on October 16, 1947, that India, on the morrow of her independence, should hand over what the Tibetans chose to call their own territories "such as Sayul and Walong and in direction of Pemakoe, Lonag, Lopa, Mon, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and others on this side of the river Ganges and Lowo, Ladakh etc. upto the boundary of Yarkhim."⁴⁷ Though the exact Tibetan claim was not defined by the Tibetan Bureau, if what they stated was to be taken literally, India must make a gift of Ladakh, Bhutan and Sikkim and allow the Tibetan boundary to come down to the line of river Ganges. This was treated by the Government of India as a "fantastic claim."

But by December 1959, it was not possible to treat this odd Tibetan telegram lightly. The Chinese Prime Minister had claimed a right to negotiate the Indian frontier on the basis of this telegram. Though the Chinese, unlike the Tibetans, had not claimed the whole of Ladakh, they had occupied 12,000 square miles and claimed in all 14,000 square miles in Ladakh; they had not asked for the Tibetan boundary to be brought down to the line of the Ganges, and yet it could not be missed that the claim over 36,000 square miles in the NEFA followed the pattern of the Tibetan claims of 1947.

Was it not likely that Peking would expand these claims in the succeeding years? What about Sikkim? Chinese spokesmen seemed to claim that Sikkim was a part of Tibet which Britain had annexed to India. In an official document issued in 1959 called "*Tibet Is an Integral Part of China*", the Chinese Government spoke of the "first armed invasion of Tibet by the British imperialists". This referred to the British war with Tibet over Sikkim in 1886-1888. Glorifying Tibetan attitude, the document reached an amazing conclusion:

"The (Tibetan) resistance went on for two years but was defeated in the end because the enemy was far superior in strength. This resulted in the seizure of Sikkim by the British invaders."⁴⁸

The obvious implication that the British invaders seized Sikkim from Tibet revived the memories of earlier Chinese statements regarding what China considered to be its territo-

rial losses due to imperialist aggression. In a book written in 1939 called the "*Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*," Chairman Mao Tse-tung had made some remarks on this point which could take serious meaning in 1959. He had surmised:

"In defeating China in war, the imperialist States have taken away many Chinese dependent states and a part of her territories. Japan took away Korea, Taiwan and Ryuku islands, the Pescadores, Port Arthur; England seized Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Hong Kong; France occupied Annam and even an insignificant country like Portugal took Macao."*

Mao Tse-tung had spoken in 1939 of China losing Bhutan and Nepal. The Tibetan Bureau in 1947 had claimed Ladakh, Bhutan and Sikkim. The official Chinese documents in 1959 were speaking of Britain having seized Sikkim from Tibet.

In the past, Chinese imperialists described Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and the area which is now called NEFA as the "five fingers of Tibet." Was history about to repeat itself? It was not easy to dismiss this fear as baseless. For, if Chinese insistence on their version of the history of the Himalayan frontier were to be taken seriously, the dangers of Chinese claims over the so-called Five Fingers of Tibet could not be overlooked. It was perhaps this that prompted the Historical Division of the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi to prepare a Note on the historical background of the Himalayan frontier of India to be placed as much before China as the world.⁴⁹

*In the 1954 edition of the same book, references to Burma, Bhutan and Nepal were missing. The paragraph quoted above was changed as follows:

"Having defeated China in war, they not only occupied many States bordering on China that were under her protection, but seized or 'leased' part of her territory. For example, Japan occupied Taiwan and the Pescadores and 'leased' Port Arthur, Britain seized Hong Kong, and France 'leased' Kwangchow Wan."

It is remarkable that the phrase "many Chinese dependent States" was changed into "many States bordering on China," and the reference to France annexing Annam and even to Portugal's seizure of Macao were dropped! See Mao Tse-tung, **The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party**, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1954, p. 17.

Chapter 2

THE HIMALAYAN FRONTIER

“Then drift on, O Cloud, towards Kallash’s
 sublime heights.....
Roam at thy will, O Gracious One, over the
snowy regions, flapping
 thy wide wings over
the sides of the great mountain.....”

Kalidasa : **Meghdoot**

1: The Ancient Boundary

The celebrated Sanskrit classic, the *Vishnu Purana*¹ described the boundries of India thus: “The country south of the Himalayas and north of the ocean is called *Bharat*² and all born in it are called the *Bharatiyas*.” Few nations of the world can pride themselves on such an ancient demarcation of the frontiers of the homeland which have remained unchanged for thirty-five centuries.

The amazing phenomenon of the almost eternal northern international frontier of India can only be understood if the peninsular nature of the land and the presence in the north of the sentinel of the Himalayas are borne in mind. The people of India appreciated the elements of bounty and security which the southern seas and northern mountains bestowed upon them and, like all primitive civilizations, the early Indian civilization placed them on a pedestal along with its gods.

Throughout the long and chequered history of the Indian people, the Himalayas have won an unparalleled adoration.⁵ These mountain ranges, where the Indian world reaches its northern limits, have continued to remain centres of devotion from the days of the *Vedas*. One of the modern Indian savants, Shri Aurobindo, has stated: “For centuries thereafter the striving of the Indian spirit was directed towards the

Himalayan fastness.....The Himalayan shrines are still the goal of every Hindu pilgrim.”⁴

The northern borderlands around the Himalayas played a dominating role through all the epochs of Indian life. During the Vedic period, the *Rig Veda* hailed the Himalayas as a symbol of all mountains.⁵ The *Kena Upanishad* embellished the legend by weaving in it the delicate tale of Uma, the exquisitely beautiful daughter of the Himalayas, who came down to the plains to make a gift of mysticism upon which the *Upanishads* were to be based. She was the consort of Lord Siva, the blue-necked, snow-crowned, cosmic mountain god and the younger sister of Ganga, the life-giving Ganges.⁶

The Vedic period was followed by the epoch of the epics. The *Mahabharata* describes the life and struggle among the early Aryans who were still engaged in the process of settlement. It is one of the outstanding books of the world. It is a colossal work, an encyclopaedia of tradition and legend, and political institutions of ancient India,” besides being a great drama. The principal theme of the *Mahabharata* is the conflict between the Pandavas, on the one hand, and the Kauravas or the Kurus, on the other, which reaches its strangely philosophical climax in the message of *karma*,^{*} delivered by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavat Gita* on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

The principal characters of the epic hail from the Himalayan world. The Pandavas, the palefaced ones, were a non-Aryan tribe from the Himalayan foothills which practised polyandry. Of the Kurus, a larger tribe, a section had its home in the trans-Himalayan area. The Pandava hero, Arjuna, conquered the peoples who lived on the present 2,500-mile Indian northern frontier from Pragyajyotish in modern Assam to Uluka in modern north Punjab. His exploits won him victory in the inner, outer and adjacent regions of the Himalayas, including the area of the holy Manasarovar lake, now in Tibet.⁸ At the end of the battle, the only survivor went to the highest peak of the Himalayas, which was the abode of gods as well as the final destination of all mortals who had lived a pious life.

The *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the epics are part of the treasure-house of Indian heritage. They constitute an important part of Indian consciousness. They indicate distinctly the moun-

tain peaks of the Himalayas as the northern frontier of India. Thus, this is not an acquired frontier. It is the historical and natural boundary of the land from the days when the foundation of Indian civilization was laid.*

During the thousand years which intervened between the end of the era of the epics and the rise of Christ, four Indians left indelible imprints on Indian thought and action. Two of them, Gautama, the Buddha, and Mahavira founded the doctrines of Buddhism and Jainism respectively. Both of them hailed from the Himalayan borderlands and began their initial work there. The other two, Chandragupta Maurya and his grandson, the great Asoka, were the first founders of the Indian state system.

Chandragupta Maurya, whose rise followed the failure of the attempted invasion of India by Alexander of Macedonia, established "for the first time in recorded history a vast centralized state in India."⁹ The northern frontiers of this state ran across trans-Himalayas and included Gandhara—from which the modern name of Kandahar is derived—in the west which today is known as Afghanistan. The record of the reign of Asoka has been left in the rock and pillar edicts which this great Buddhist king erected throughout his vast domains. His state included modern Baluchistan and Nepal as testified by the rock edicts discovered at Kalsi, in north Dehra Dun district of Uttar Pradesh and at Lalitpatan in the Nepal Valley.¹⁰

The beginning of the era of Christ witnessed the founding of the first Indian capital in the west Himalayan area. The Kushan state was principally a Himalayan state and its most renowned ruler, Kanishka, who embraced Buddhism, controlled the entire area which is now included in Chinese Sinkiang, including Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan.

After the Kushans, the Guptas (320 to 647 A.D.) kept up the continuity of the Indian state system. During the reign of Samudragupta, the entire Himalayan range formed part of his kingdom. His coins bear the image of goddess Haimavati, or the goddess of snow. Kamarup, modern Assam, Nepal and Kartripura, modern Kumaon and Garhwal, formed parts of his dominion.

It was during this period that the greatest of Sanskrit poets, Kalidasa, wrote his immortal classics. The poet reiterated the fact, first stated by the *Vishnu Purana* two thousand years earlier, that the northern frontier of India reached the Himalayan peaks, in his *Kumarasambhava* and *Raghuvamsa*.¹¹

Such was the stability and continuity of the northern frontiers of India when Indian intercourse with China and the Asian world reached its inspiring climax.

2: China's Southern Frontier

In 654 A.D., the famous Chinese traveller-monk, Hiuan Tsiang wrote a moving personal letter to his friend the Indian monk, Jnanaprabha:

“The Bhiksu Hiuan Tsiang of the country of the Great Tang rulers humbly writes to the Master of Law, the teacher of Tripitika, Buddhist Jnanaprabha of Magadha in Middle India. I returned ten years ago. The frontiers of the countries are far away from each other. I had no news from you. My anxiety went on increasing.....”¹²

The frontiers of the countries, India and China, in the seventh century, were indeed far away. There was no conjunction of the frontiers of India and China. Those who travelled from one country to another faced an almost impossible journey. The hazards of the mission to India, which he undertook, were described by Hiuan Tsiang in a Memorial to the Tang emperor sent from Tunhuang:

“Accordingly, in the fourth month of the third year of the period of cheng-kuan, braving dangers and obstacles, I secretly found my way to India. I traversed over vast plains of shifting sand, scaled precipitous mountain-craggs with snow, found my way through the scarped passes of the iron gates, passed along the tumultous waves of the hot sea.....Thus, I have accomplished a journey of more than 50,000 li; yet, notwithstanding the thousand differences of customs and manners I have witnessed, the myriads of dangers I have encountered, by the goodness of Heaven, I have returned without accident and now offer my homage with a body unimpaired, and a mind satisfied with the accomplishments of my vow.”¹³

Hiuan Tsiang took one of the three northern overland routes from China to India. He started from his home in Chang-ngan and passing through Leang-chou and Kan-chou, he left China at Tunhuang. He crossed the desert of Tarim and reached Turfan where he was directed to take a new route, just discovered, along the northern foothills of the Tien-shan mountains which cut through the country of the Western Turks. On his journey to India, he passed through Karasahr, Kuchar, Bharuka, Tokmak, Sogdiana, Tokharestan, Kunduz, Balkh, Bamiyan and Kabul.¹⁴

The pilgrimage took the Chinese monk through the lands which are now called Ser-India. The region of Ser-India was protected in the north by the Tien-shan or the Celestial Mountains and was separated from Tibet by the Kuenlum ranges; it was bound on the north by the high table land of the Pamirs, to which the Chinese had given the picturesque name of the "Onion Ranges." Centuries before Hiuan Tsiang trekked along this route, it had been one of the busiest of caravan routes linking China with India and Central Asia.

Early in the first century, during the period of the Kushan rule in north India, Indians had moved north on this route across the Kuenlun and established a number of Indianized kingdoms of which the more powerful were Khotan and Kuchi. Khotan was famous for its Buddhist monastery called the Gomati Vihar, and Hiuan Tsiang, the learned Buddhist as he was, must have known the Buddhist legend that the state was founded by Kunal, a son of the great Asoka, who had been blinded treacherously by his step-mother. Such was the ancient Buddhist legend. He was a historian of no mean distinction and it must have been known to him that rulers of Kuchi, Suvarnapuspa, Haradeva, Suvarnadeva and others, claimed to be Indian *kshatriyas*. In fact, he must have heard the Buddhist monks of Kuchi conversing in Sanskrit.¹⁵

Tunhuang, from where he sent his Memorial to the Tang emperor, was situated a few miles away from the Jade Gate which was the frontier town of China. It was situated on an oasis on the Tarim desert. During the days of close Sino-Indian intercourse along this route, Tunhuang was a mighty centre of Sino-Indian cultures. It was the home of monasteries

where all the year round thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns of various nationalities meditated and worked.

They carved a thousand caves out of the unyielding hills and adorned them with Buddhist art which their co-religionists had developed at Ajanta and Ellora in south India. Though the Jade Gate is no more the frontier of China—since the armies of imperial China extended these frontiers in the 19th century—and though the historic monastery lies in ruins, the Tunhuang caves, with their immaculate Indian art, still bear testimony to the history of Sino-Indian cooperation.

Tunhuang was “the last resting stage of the toilsome journey from India and the Indianized kingdoms of Central Asia to the great Empire of China. It was the last resting place before entering China.....as also the first stage for those undertaking the strenuous journey.....to visit the holy places of Buddhism in India.”¹⁶

A continent of plateaus lay astride between the Indian and the Chinese frontiers from the earliest times to the recent period of Chinese expansion. “To the east lie the Himalayas, with its immense plateau of Tibet. To the north are the only slightly less formidable mountain barriers, the Tienshan and the Altai mountains. The great Gobi lies between the Altai range and the Tienshan, with the Tarim basin at one end. The Kazak steppe separate Tienshan from the Altai. There we have the picture of the formidable geographical barriers between India and China, barriers consisting of high mountain ranges and the vast steppes and deserts extending over thousands of square miles.”¹⁷

While China looked on the Himalayas from a distance of some thousands of miles, the Indian frontier on the Himalayas was an accomplished fact. About a hundred years before the visit of Hiuan Tsiang, King Yashodharman of Malwa in Central India (c. 530 A.D.) inscribed a pillar at Mandosar which described the authority of his kingdom extending upto “the Himalayas in the north, Brahmaputra in the east, the Mahendra mountains in the south and the ocean in the west.”¹⁸ Hiuan Tsiang himself visited Malwa and was present at a banquet given by Yashodharman's successor where he met Bhaskaravarman, King of Kamrupa, the state which contained within

its borders the whole of modern Assam and the NEFA, with whom he made friends.

Hiuan Tsiang (A.D. 600-64) spent sixteen years in India and left an invaluable record of what he saw in India. According to him the Himalayan borderlands of Kashmir, Nepal and Assam were ruled by Indian kings.

Of course, there was no possibility of any Chinese ruler having any territory around the northern, let apart the southern, Himalayas. Tibet was just waking up. It had remained till then a land inhabited by different tribes through which caravan routes went to China. It was "in early seventh century that Songtam Gampo, the Tibetan chief, unified the scattered tribes and organised the first Tibetan state with Lhasa as the capital."¹⁹

King Harsha and Hiuan Tsiang were contemporaries of an unknown Arab, Muhammad, who later became the Prophet of Islam. Within five centuries, the followers of Muhammad had transformed the socio-political history of the land of Harsha and the countries which Hiuan Tsiang travelled through on his pilgrimage from the Jade Gate to India. Islam swept through Central Asia and north India was repeatedly invaded by the Muslims. By the thirteenth century, the Muslim invaders had adopted India as their homeland and established the Sultanate of Delhi.

The coming of the Muslims was a revolutionary event in Indian life. The new rulers changed the socio-political institutions of administration. However, they maintained and safeguarded the Himalayan frontier in the north as well as their predecessors had. Inspired by the conquest of north India, two of them attempted to annex Tibet to India.

Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar swept across the Himalayan ranges from ancient Kamarupa in 1205 A.D. His invading army broke the resistance of the Tibetans till it reached "the open country of Tibbat". Then as winter set in, he had to face the might of Tibet's eternal ally, Father Frost. The Afghan had no weapons which could defeat the unconquerable weather and he retreated to Kamarupa. An ugly fate awaited him as his exhausted legions re-entered the southern Himalayas of Hindus-

tan. The King of Kamarupa was anxiously waiting for him and in the battle that followed, his retreat turned into a rout.

A century and thirty years later, another Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad Tughluk sent his armies into Tibet from Assam. They could not even reach the tableland of Tibet. The invasion was ill-timed and the Sultan's forces perished on the relentless Himalayan passes.

After these two attempts to extend the ancient northern frontier into Tibet, the Muslim rulers contented themselves with maintaining the frontier which they had inherited. There was another reason for the adoption of the policy of freezing the Himalayan frontier. During the entire Muslim period, the Delhi rulers had to keep an anxious watch over the frontier in the north-west with Afghanistan. They themselves had marched into India from the Khyber Pass and once the gates of the Khyber were knocked open, many others were eagerly attempting to conquer India from the Delhi Sultans. Several of the Muslim rulers controlled Gazni and Kabul. The Mughals, who came in 1586 A.D. from the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia, now a part of Soviet Uzbekistan, built up a regular system of communications and transport up to and beyond this frontier.

Once the Mughal rule was firmly established, Akbar the Great, consolidated the Himalayan frontier in 1576. Ten years later, he annexed Kashmir. Soon after, his armies marched into Tibet, to safeguard the north-eastern frontier, and acquired the whole of the Ngari Khorsum, the present Ari district of Western Tibet, including Mount Kailash and the Mansarovar. According to Abul Fazal's *Ain-i-Akbari*, he established *foujdari*-military posts along the entire frontier to keep the turbulent hill-chiefs under control and to collect tribute from them. The system he established prevailed in 1666 as described by Thavenot, a French traveller. Thavenot referred to Ayoud or Haoud as the district which contained "the most northern countries that belong to the Great Mogul." Ayoud or Haoud was a corrupt form of Himavat (the Himalayas) which the classical Greeks called Emudos and Imaus.²⁸

On the Ser-India (Sinkiang) sector of the frontier, caravans

still travelled to China from Aksai Chin, the extreme northern point on the Indian frontier. During the reign of the last of the great Mughals, Aurangzeb (d. 1707), the French traveller Francois Bernier learnt of this fact. In his ninth letter to the King of France, written after a three-months stay in Kashmir, he gave a fairly detailed description of these routes. The first stop of the journey from Kashmir was Kashgar. "The distance from the town of Kachequer", he wrote, "to Katay (China) is not more than two months' voyage."²¹ The caravans reached the Jade Gate which still was the first frontier post of the Chinese Empire.

It is a strange coincidence of history that the first victory of nascent British imperialism in India was scored in 1757 at Plassey near Calcutta and the first defeat of the independent people of Sinkiang, the ancient Ser-India, at the hands of the imperial Chinese armies was registered in 1758. Both India and Ser-India faced the crisis of their civilizations. It took Britain a century after Plassey to subjugate India. China took a little longer. It was only in 1883 that Sinkiang could be annexed as a part of the Manchu empire.

With the conquest of Sinkiang, the Chinese south-western frontier was extended to the Kuenlun mountains and came closer to India.*

3: Arrival Of The Union Jack

The domains of the East India Company did not reach India's traditional frontier till the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1813-1816. After the fall of the Mughal Empire, independent Indian states flourished all along the southern Himalayas. In the east, Ladakh's fortunes as a sovereign state fluctuated with the increase and decrease of power of Kashmir, with its dominions spread up to Spiti and Lahaul. On the border between Ladakh and Nepal, a number of small hill states, of which Garhwal, Kumaon and Bashahar were more well-known, were in existence. Their territories extended up to the traditional frontier. In the east, the Ahom Rajas held sway over the plains of Assam. After continuous wars against the tribes which had their homes right up to the Tibetan frontier, they established their rule over the territory up to the traditional frontier.

*For history of Chinese annexation of Sinkiang, see Chapter III.

British conquest of these areas took place between 1801 when Wellesley's first intervention in the affairs of Oudh took place and 1849 when the Punjab was annexed. Ladakh had been conquered by Gulab Singh of Jammu in 1842. Four years later, he accepted British suzerainty and ceded Spiti and Lahaul, which the Company later added to the Kulu district of the Punjab. With the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, the western sector of the Sino-Indian frontier came under British control.

Earlier, the Anglo-Nepalese clash had brought the influence of the East India Company to the hill states west of Nepal and Bhutan and Sikkim. Kumaon was overrun by British forces in 1815 and by the time peace was signed, Garhwal and most of the Terai became British dominions. A British resident was accepted in Katmandu. By the 1817 Treaty of Titalia, Sikkim agreed to British protection which gave the Company an easy access to Tibet. Bhutan had been defeated as early as 1773. When Assam was annexed in 1838, all the major centres of power on the Himalayan boundary were under British influence. "By 1850, the British occupied most of the immense triangle of Northern India. To the north-east of this wedge of territory lay the Himalayas. Behind these were Tibet and China."²²

The Himalayan policy of the East India Company was primarily dominated by a desire to find ways and means of securing the commerce of the Celestial Empire. It was natural, because till 1833, the Company possessed a monopoly of all British trade with China. The Company attempted to fulfil this aim between 1772 and 1816 by trying to reach China through Lhasa. During this entire period, the Bengal Government made ceaseless efforts to persuade the Tibetans to establish commercial relations with them. It was in this effort to seek a road to Lhasa that the East India Company came in contact with Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal.

As early as February 16, 1768, this aim was clearly defined. The Company's servants were instructed from London by a special mandate: "We desire you will obtain the best intelligence you can whether trade can be opened with Nepaul, and whether cloth and other European commodities may not find their way to Thibet, Lhasa and the Western parts of China."²³

The journey to Tibet which George Bogle undertook aimed specifically at opening "a mutual and equal communication of trade" between Tibet and the Company. His instructions were to survey trade possibilities, Tibetan politics and relations with China.

The war with Nepal in 1813 was also primarily motivated by desire to protect the trade route to Lhasa from Patan which went through the territory of the Raja of Patan who sought British help against Nepal. Hastings' decision to help Cooch-Bihar against Bhutan and British war with Sikkim were also largely guided by a desire to discover a profitable road to Lhasa. All these efforts and several "missions" to Lhasa failed to open up Tibet and by 1816, the Company gave up this policy.

During the second phase of British policy towards the Himalayan frontier, from 1816 to 1900, the Anglo-Indian state played a subservient role to London's efforts to convince the Chinese Emperors of the benefits of Anglo-Chinese commerce. There were occasions, and specially after the end of the Company's monopoly of China trade, when London and Calcutta, which was the capital of the Company's empire, clashed. However, on each occasion, London's insistence on a policy which would not displease China prevailed over local considerations. As a result, almost a reverential attitude was adopted *vis a vis* Tibet by the English in this period. One example of this policy was the Company's attitude towards Gulab Singh's war with Tibet.

In fact, Gulab Singh, the founder of the Dogra dynasty of Kashmir, had approached the East India Company to make common cause with him in the annexation of Western Tibet. This was firmly rejected by the British. The British were unhappy when Zorawar Singh, Gulab Singh's commander-in-chief, occupied Tibetan territory after the conquest of Ladakh. The reason was the displeasure which the Chinese Emperor would show at this, specially because Gulab Singh was a protege of the Company.

In 1840, the British were busy trying to overcome the ban on opium trade imposed by Manchu Government in the previous year. It was because of this that Clerk, Agent to the North-

West Frontier, opposed Gulab Singh's policies. He warned that the hostile position towards "tributories of Chinese Governmentmight prove embarrassing under such circumstances as an approaching pacification at Peking, for, that Government will, of course, in the present state of affairs there, impute the invasion of its territories by the Sikhs, to the instigation of the British Government."²⁴

This attitude largely dominated the British thinking in India throughout the nineteenth century. As a consequence, the British extended their power only up to the traditional northern boundaries of India.

4 : Panchsheel Treaty Of 1954

When India became independent in 1947, China was in the throes of civil war. But when India adopted her republican constitution in 1950, the People's Republic was already established in Peking.

The first Article of the Constitution defined India's territories which were detailed in the First Schedule. In relation to Assam, the First Schedule stated: "The territory of the State of Assam shall comprise the territories which immediately before the commencement of this Constitution were comprised in the Province of Assam, the Khasi State and the Assam Tribal Areas." By Article 244 (2), the provisions of the Sixth Schedule were made to apply to the administration of the tribal areas in the State of Assam. Part B of the Table attached to the Sixth Schedule described the areas on Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese boundaries. The North East Frontier Tract included Belipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract and Misimi Hills Districts. With the Naga Tribal Area, these areas of north-eastern borderlands demarcated the extent and jurisdiction of the northern frontiers of India, adjacent to eastern Tibet.

In December 1949, India recognised the new Government in Peking and expressed the desire "to stabilize the Chinese-Indian border."²⁵ Soon after, the Indian Constitution was adopted which clearly defined the territorial limits of India. Eight months after Indian recognition, the Chinese Government expressed its gratitude to India for the desire to stabilize the Sino-

Indian frontier. Delhi replied that "the recognized boundary between India and Tibet should remain inviolate."

The matter of the Indo-Tibetan boundary was taken up by Premier Chou in an informal discussion with the Indian Ambassador in Peking on September 27, 1951. Premier Chou expressed his anxiety to safeguard in every way Indian interests in Tibet. He categorically stated: "There was no territorial dispute or controversy between India and China." He expanded his theme thus: "The question of stabilization of the Tibetan frontier was a matter of common interest to India, Nepal and China and it is necessary to settle the matter as early as possible."

On October 4, 1951 under instructions from Delhi, the Indian Ambassador informed Premier Chou that India would welcome discussion on Indian interests in Tibet, the stabilization of Indo-Tibetan border and allied matters referred to by the Chinese Premier.

The first stage of the talks commenced in February 1952, when the Indian Ambassador made a statement on existing Indian rights in Tibet and expressed Indian desire for a mutually satisfactory settlement. Chou En-lai replied that there was "no difficulty in safeguarding the economic and cultural relations of India in Tibet." He did not specifically refer to the border. This strengthened Indian belief that since there was "no territorial dispute or controversy between India and China", as Chou himself had stated, it was unnecessary to refer to it. Since the Indian frontier was undisputed and demarcated in the Indian Constitution, Delhi believed there was no question of raising this issue by India.

When the negotiations for an agreement started, Peking gave a list of seven subjects: Indian Mission at Lhasa; Indian trade agencies at Gyantse and Yatung; a trade agency at Gartok; the right to carry on trade other than at trade marts; postal and telegraphic installation; military escorts to Gyantse and the right of pilgrimage. In the course of the negotiations, the question of boundary was not specifically raised. India saw no need to do it and China did not do so.

At the first meeting, one sentence in Chou En-lai's speech seemed a little ambiguous. He said that relations between

India and China were becoming closer every day and that from among the outstanding questions, the two sides could settle questions which were "ripe for settlement." The Indian Ambassador did not desire any ambiguity to remain and, in his reply, pointed out that there were only small questions pending between India and China but he wished to see nothing, big or small, remaining outstanding between the two countries.

Both sides accepted five principles, which were later incorporated in the Treaty as its preamble and came to be known as Panchsheel, in accordance with which the agreement was to be arrived at. The first of these five principles enjoined the parties to "mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty." The Treaty was signed on April 29, 1954 and, at the concluding session, the leader of the Indian delegation stated: "We have gone through fully questions that existed between our two countries in this (Tibet) region."²⁶

The question of the boundary came up during the detailed negotiations of Article 4 of the Treaty.²⁷ The Article dealt with the routes which traders and pilgrims were to take while traveling to and from Tibet. The Chinese delegation brought forward a draft which stated that the Chinese Government "agrees to open" a number of mountain passes. The Indian delegate, Kaul, immediately objected to this indirect way of claiming ownership of passes which were, in fact, Indian. The Chinese withdrew their draft, calling it the "fifth concession" they had given. In the final draft it was stated:

"Traders and pilgrims of both countries may travel by the following passes and routes :

"(1) Shipki La pass, (2) Mana pass, (3) Niti pass, (4) Kungri Bingri pass, (5) Darma pass and (6) Lipu Lekh pass.

"Also, the customary route leading to Tashigong along the valley of the Shangatsangpu (Indus) River may continue to be traversed in accordance with custom."

The Treaty was hailed as a great achievement by both sides. It settled the Indo-Tibetan boundary question for good, so Delhi thought. It had reasons to come to this conclusion. These were later outlined in a Note by the Government of

India sent to the Chinese Government on February 12, 1960: thus:

“The Government of China then (in 1954) were fully aware of the alignment of the international boundary as shown on official Indian maps. They must also have been aware of the authoritative declaration made in 1950 by the Prime Minister of India on the subject of India’s frontiers. Besides the Government of China were aware that the Constitution of India.....made specific mention in the Sixth Schedule of the Tribal areas of Assam and the North-East Frontier Agency, which the Chinese Government now seek to claim as Chinese territory.”²⁸

After the 1954 Treaty, Sino-Indian relations became closer. Informal talks and exchange of letters, mutual visits of leaders of Government and popular delegations continued year after year. During this period the Sino-Indian border became a subject of praise in both countries. It was glorified as a frontier of peace and friendship. It had then appeared that India’s historic northern frontier was willingly accepted by China.

5: In Search Of Agreement

In 1958, the Chinese claims on Indian territory south of the frontier were based on three principal grounds. First, the alignment shown on Indian maps was the result of British imperialist aggression against “China and Tibet region of China”. Chou En-lai analysed this British aggression on China “when India was under British rule” into two phases. Having harboured aggressive ambitions towards Tibet from the early days, Britain continuously instigated Tibet in the first phase “to separate from China” with a view to controlling a nominally independent Tibet. When this failed, the British applied all sorts of pressure on China, in the second phase, with intentions to bring Tibet under the British sphere of influence while “allowing China to maintain so-called suzerainty over Tibet”. In the meanwhile, added Chou, “extensive territorial expansion was conducted into Tibet and even Sinkiang”. The frontier as claimed by India was “a situation created by the application of the British policy of aggression against Tibet.”²⁹

Second, the Sino-Indian frontier was never formally de-

limited. "The reason for the present existence of certain disputes" stated the Chinese Note of December 26, 1959, "over the Sino-Indian boundary is that the two countries have never formally delimited this boundary."³⁰ Later in 1960 the same view was much more forcefully detailed by the Chinese officials:

"The Chinese side has pointed out more than once that the entire Sino-Indian boundary.....has never been formally delimited. Up to now, no boundary treaty or agreement delimiting the entire boundary has ever been concluded between China and India, nor has there been any treaty or agreement delimiting a certain sector of the boundary concluded between them; and none of the treaties between the two countries in the past contain terms relating to the defining of the Sino-Indian boundary. This is a well-known fact. Nobody on earth can cite a treaty containing delimitation of the Sino-Indian boundary."³¹

Finally, the traditional and customary line as drawn by the Chinese maps was claimed to be correct. The existence of a customary and traditional boundary was accepted but it was argued that "the two sides hold very different conceptions of the position of the traditional customary line." India, in drawing its line in Western and Eastern sectors, "had gone far beyond the extent of its original actual jurisdiction" and the Indian alignment was "not based on tradition and custom."³³ In support of this, China claimed to possess historical, cartographic and administrative data.

India could not agree with any of the three propositions. She shared a common understanding with China on the anti-Chinese role of British imperialism but the allegation that the Indian alignment was the result of British territorial aggression against China and Tibet could not be accepted in the light of historical facts. The charge that India was trying to take advantage of Britain's aggressive gains was deeply resented. The question of formal delimitation raised two points. In case the boundary was not formally marked out, what were the implications of such a situation? On the other hand, India insisted that the disputed parts of the boundary, which lay in the Western and Eastern sectors, were delimited by treaties. The Indian stand was summarised by Nehru on September 26, 1959:

“.....the entire length of the border has been either defined by treaty or recognised by custom or by both and until now the Chinese Government have not protested against the exercise of jurisdiction by the Government of India up to the customary line.....All Chinese Governments have respected the Indian border.....Not even a protest was registered in accordance with established state practice in this regard, as was done in the case of Burma between 1906 and 1937.”³³

Under these circumstances, there was little chance of solving the problem by correspondence. As the positions taken by the two Governments became known, Sino-Indian tension intensified. Chou En-lai suggested to Nehru on December 17, 1959 “the speedy holding of talks between the two Prime Ministers”. Nehru agreed and invited Chou to Delhi as “our honoured guest” in the second half of March 1960. The meeting between the two Prime Ministers was held from April 19, 1960 and talks continued till April 25, 1960.

The “Delhi Summit”, as the meeting came to be known, could not solve the problem of Chinese claims. Neither side really expected such a miracle to take place. While extending the invitation to Chou to come to Delhi, Nehru outlined the Indian position. India was deeply pained that “relations between India and China, which have in the past been so friendly and which we (Nehru and Chou—R.S.) had endeavoured so much to strengthen, should have deteriorated rapidly and led to bitterness and resentment.” That was “a tragedy for both our countries as well as for larger issues in the world.” He had pledged on India’s part continuous effort “to find a peaceful settlement and for restoration of friendly relations”. On the solution of the “boundary dispute,” Nehru was frank :

“I do not see any common ground between our respective viewpoints. Nevertheless, I think that we should make every effort to explore avenues which might lead to a peaceful settlement.”³⁴

The exploratory nature of the talks was emphasised in the joint communique of the two Prime Ministers issued on April 25 at the end of the talks: “The two Prime Ministers had several

long, frank and friendly talks between themselves.....The two Prime Ministers explained fully their respective stands on the problems affecting the border areas. This led to a greater understanding.....but the talks did not result in resolving the differences that had arisen."

However, a constructive result of the Delhi summit was an agreement between China and India "that further examination should take place by officials of the two sides of the factual material in possession of both the Governments." The officials were to "meet and examine, check and study" all historical documents, records, accounts, maps and other material relevant to the boundary question, on which each side relied. Thus, a decision to lay all cards on the table by both the sides was taken.

Though this was not a particularly dazzling achievement, it was an important and inevitable step if the problem was to be settled peacefully. The officials, after the data were studied, were to submit "a report to the two Prime Minister listing the points on which there was agreement and the points on which there was disagreement or points which should be examined more fully and clarified."³⁵

The officials of the two Governments had prolonged meetings in Peking, Delhi and Rangoon. It was a laborious task which had been assigned to them. From June 15 to July 25, 1960, 18 formal meetings were held in Peking. They had been instructed to submit their report by September, 1960 but that proved to be an impossibility. They had run into stormy weather in Peking itself when they could agree on the agenda only with considerable difficulty. By September 1960, they had managed to complete their work on the first item of the agenda alone, dealing with "location and natural features of the boundary". During the Delhi session, which lasted from August 19 to October 5, they requested the two Governments for extension of time, which was granted. In 19 formal meetings, they discussed the second and the third items of their agenda concerning "treaties, agreements, tradition and custom," and "administration and jurisdiction." The final Rangoon session consisted of 10 formal meetings and on December 12, 1960, they completed their work.

Except for the agenda of their work, the officials could not

agree on any point. As a consequence, they submitted two reports. Each side drafted its own report and explained its own understanding of the factual material furnished and the discussions held during the meetings. The hope expressed in the Delhi Summit *communique* that there would be points of agreement proved futile. However, an important advantage of the officials' talks was that both China and India had submitted to each other complete evidence in their possessions. When the two reports were published, this evidence became available to all who were interested or concerned in the dispute.

The reports revealed that, apart from the factual data, there was a grave divergence of views on certain points concerning the interpretation of the political history of Indo-Tibetan, Sino-Tibetan and Anglo-Tibetan relations; the real meaning of delimitation of boundary in international law and its impact on the Sino-Indian boundary and the importance and validity of the geographical principle of watershed in the determination of natural and traditional frontiers. These points, though apparently outside the terms of instructions given to the officials, had to be dealt with, for they went to the very root of the problem.

For example, without assessing the past political status of Tibet, there could be no agreement on the validity of several treaties regarding Indo-Tibetan boundary entered into by the Tibetan Government with and without the concurrence of the Chinese Government. This was a very important issue. Indo-Tibetan treaties of 1684 and 1842 delimited the Ladakh-Tibet frontier on the Western sector and the Anglo-Tibetan Agreement arrived at the Simla Convention of 1914 delimited the Indo-Tibet boundary east of Bhutan known as the McMahon Line.

The questions of the meaning of delimitation and the impact of the geographical principle of watershed concerned not only legal issues. They also affected the validity of certain data on the customary and traditional boundary and the exercise of administrative jurisdiction. On all these three points, Indian and Chinese views differed. However, the divergence of views was nowhere so decisively important as it was on the question of the past status of Tibet created by the complex nature of Sino-Tibetan, Anglo-Chinese and Anglo-Tibetan relations.

Chapter 3

THE BORDER AND BRITISH IMPERIALISM

“The history of this frontier.....was very much influenced by the wider considerations of British policy in Asia and in Europe. British relations with Sinkiang and.....with Tibet were to a great extent conditioned by the demands of the ‘great Game’ the rivalry between Britain and Russia.....”

Alastair Lamb : **Britain and Chinese
Central Asia.**

1 : Pre-British Indo-Tibetan Ties

The starting point of recorded Indo-Tibetan relations is also the period when the first official Sino-Tibetan contacts were established. In the 7th century, when Srong Tsang Gampo unified Tibetan tribes and established the Tibetan state, both Indian and Chinese powers took immediate notice of his emergence. Srong Tsang Gampo (d. 650 A.D.) was a great military leader and an alliance with him was sought by the King of Nepal and the Emperor of China.

According to then prevalent custom, both of them offered their daughters in marriage to the Tibetan King. The Nepalese princess, Bhrukuti, went to Lhasa by a route which was earlier covered by the Chinese pilgrim Li I-piao. This was also the main caravan route between India and Tibet. She was accompanied by a large Indian retinue among whom were her own political advisers. The Chinese Emperor, Tai Tsung of the Tang dynasty, sent a Chinese retinue with his daughter, princess Wen Cheng.

The arrival in Lhasa of the Indian and Chinese queens set in motion a process which was to last for succeeding six hundred years. It was natural that Indian and Chinese influences should vie with each other for supremacy at the Tibetan Court.

This dual impact on the nascent Tibetan state was to bring about a qualitative transformation of Tibetan society.

It is fashionable in the post-1958 Chinese literature to completely black out facts which would show the intensity of earlier Indo-Tibetan contacts. In fact, the new history of Tibet, as written in China after the "border dispute," makes no mention of India at all.¹ However, this practice is of recent origin. Peking publications till 1957 recorded the broad facts of Indo-Tibetan relations.

Srong Tsang Gampo, under Indian influence, embraced the Buddhist faith. His contacts with his Nepalese Queen's advisers convinced him that he must turn south for cultural advance of his own people. He sent a mission of sixteen officials, headed by his minister, Tumesambazha, known in Indian contemporary chronicles by the name of Thummi Sambodha, to India. The Tibetan mission's mandate was to study Indian society and specially those features of the Indian way of life which could be engrafted on Tibetan society. The mission stayed in India for several years and travelled widely in the states of the Gangetic plains. The Chinese scholar Chao Pu-chu summarised the result of their labours thus: "On their return, they created the Tibetan alphabet and translated some Buddhist scriptures in Tibetan."² The new alphabet and the script were inspired by the Sanskrit language and the Devnagari script used in north India. In the task of reforming Tibetan grammar, assistance was sought from Panini's *Chandra Gomin*, the classic work on Sanskrit grammar of that period.

Against this background, it was natural that the next king, Srong Ide Btsen (740-786), should invite Indian scholars to Lhasa. Of these, Padmasambhava and his disciple, Virochan, played very important roles in Tibetan cultural life. Padmasambhava "subdued the 'bon' religion which was then prevalent in Tibet, and propagated Buddhism."³ The fortunes of Indian cultural influence during this period swung with the power of Buddhism in Tibet. In the 9th century, Buddhism suffered a reverse and in the 10th century, an Indian monk, Atisha, went to Tibet to re-establish the supremacy of the *Dharma*. Atisha completed the work which Padmasambhava had begun. Padmasambhava had built the first large monas-

tery in Tibet on the basis of the Udantpuri monastery in Bengal. Atisha established many more such monasteries.

The contacts intensified, strange as it might seem, in the period when India was invaded by the Afghans. This was due to the fact that in those times of Islamic fanaticism, Indian scholars found the need to seek shelter in Tibet. Indo-Tibetan exchange had already developed to a great degree and the Tibetan monks, Rinchen-zanbo and others, had visited India. Tibetan students were enrolled at the famous Nalanda and Vikramashil universities. A number of Indian classics had been translated into Tibetan. On the events of this period and their lasting impact, Chao Pu-chu has written :

“After that, many Indian scholars, especially the scholars of Nalanda, came to Tibet during troublous times in India; thus translation work flourished greatly. Most of the books of the Tibetan Tripitaka, more than 4,500 in number, were directly translated from Sanskrit, while a few of them were retranslated from the Han language. Therefore, a very big proportion of Indian Buddhist works of the later period have been preserved in the Tibetan Tripitaka. Up to the present time, the five courses of *Tetuvīdyā*, *Abhidharma-kosa*, *Vinaya*, *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara* are the principal curricula taught in the chief monasteries of Tibet. According to the records of Hsiuan-tsang and Yi-ching, we may see that the tradition and style of study of the ancient Nalanda Monastery are still observed in Tibet.”⁴

The 13th century was a difficult period for Tibet, China and India. The Tibetan kingdom was broken up in a civil war. China fell under the sway of the Mongol tribes who founded the Yuan dynasty in 1278. North India faced a complete break-down of its pre-Muslim polity with the successful invasion of the Afghans. The first invasion of Tibet from the north took place during this period. The Mongol invaders came and established, for some time, a reign of terror in Tibet, similar to the one they had established over the whole of China. The ruthless policy of Mongol rulers was applied to China and Tibet equally. This policy has been described by a Marxist Chinese historian thus :

“Han and southerners.....were forbidden to keep or forge weapons, breed horses, hunt or practise fighting arts. They could not form an assembly or even buy and sell in bazaar. They could not even go out at night.”⁵

It is important to bear this background in mind because it was against such a state of oppression and tyranny that the Tibetans were obliged to build political relations with the Mongol overlords of China which led to the steady decrease in the volume of Indo-Tibetan contacts. It is also interesting because the post-1958 Chinese documents consistently white-wash this epoch of the Sino-Tibetan relations. For example, this is how Peking’s official interpretation of this Sino-Tibetan crisis ran in 1958:

“The chaos in Tibet was brought to an end and unity was achieved when Mongko, Emperor Hsien Tsung of the Yuan dynasty, sent an armed force to Tibet in 1253. Tibet was then incorporated into the Yuan Empire, and it has been a part of the territory of China ever since.”⁶

Mongko, Emperor Hsien Tsung of the Yuan dynasty, was none else than the ferocious Chengiz Khan who had invaded China in 1211 and founded a “mighty empire stretching over Asia and Europe.”⁷

The story of the establishment of the Mongol overlordship over Tibet and the founding of the Tibetan theocratic state is interesting and yet irrelevant for the purpose of the present study. The Buddhist monk, Phags-pa, after converting Kublai Khan to Buddhism in 1258, became the virtual ruler of Tibet when he accepted the overlordship of the Mongols in 1260. With this, the ancient thread of Indo-Tibetan political relations snapped.

Cultural and commercial relations, nevertheless, continued. Caravans of traders from India reached Tibetan territory across the Himalayas. Scholars, even after the defeat of Buddhism in India, continued their journeys to Tibetan monasteries. There was another point of Indo-Tibetan contacts which had nothing to do with Buddhism. Several places of Hindu pilgrimage like the Kailash, the abode of Gods according to Hindu mythology, and the Mansarovar, the lake where a bath

absolved a Hindu of all his worldly sins, were situated in Tibet. Pilgrims from all parts of India continued to visit them and Gangotri, the source of the Ganges. In fact, right up to 1958 this contact flourished.

The basic character of Indo-Tibetan relations was non-military and non-political, though occasional wars were fought between Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim on the one hand and Tibet on the other. Despite these wars, no Central Government of India thought seriously in terms of annexation of Tibet to India. Indian interest in Tibet was, in the main, cultural and commercial. India did not dispute at any stage the nature of varying political relations that were established between Tibet and China from the times of the Mongols.

2: China, Tibet And Suzerainty

The history of Sino-Tibetan relations was a matter of academic importance till China asserted that Tibet had always been a part of Chinese territory. From this mis-statement of a chequered history of Chinese conquest, Sino-Tibetan agreements, Tibetan revolts and final settlement of Tibet in 1959, very serious consequences followed as far as the Sino-Indian boundary was concerned. All the major boundary treaties, on which India relied, had been entered into with Tibet. China, knowing this position, declared them to be null and void in a broad sweep. The basis for this unqualified denial of historical realities was sought in a juridical stand. During the officials' talks, China put it this way:

“Tibet is a part of Chinese territory and China enjoys full sovereignty over Tibet. This premise itself denied Tibet the right to conclude treaties with foreign countries independently of the Chinese Government.”⁸

India did not dispute that in 1960, when this statement was made, Tibet was a part of China. However, to infer from the political realities of 1960 that such was the situation over the centuries was more than denying the truth. It was to ignore the dynamics of the growth of the multi-national Chinese State. Referring to this fundamental aspect of Chinese history, Nehru pointed out the main process of the growth of feudal states:

“How do countries grow? The Chinese State today is

a great, very big, colossal state. Was this Chinese State born as such from the head of Brahma?* How did it grow so big and great? Surely, in the past ages by the ability of its people and the conquest of its warriors, in other words, by Chinese imperialism.....the point is that Chinese State grew in that way, where it came to Tibet.....Now where do you draw the line in history? History is full of changes, full of ups and downs.....and full of mixtures of peoples and countries. And if one goes back that way, there is no country in the wide world which may not be shaken to its foundations and split and certainly the Chinese State will not survive if the argument is applied.”

For reasons best known to themselves, the Chinese were unwilling to accept this concept of the territorial growth of their state. They appeared to deny even the fact that the strength of ties between China and Tibet varied with the power and capacity of the Chinese Central Government. This was a new development. They seemed to argue that from the days of Kublai Khan, Tibet had become a part of China. This was a reversal of official Chinese stand which was taken as late as 1955. The official Peking history of China then stated: “Kublai Khan made Basba, the Grand Lama of Sakya, tributary king of Tibet, who was vested with the administration of political and religious affairs of Tibet.”¹⁰

No Chinese historian or constitutional expert had ever adduced any evidence to show that this relationship between China and Tibet, in which the Tibetan king was a “tributary king,” was altered till 1950 by any Sino-Tibetan agreement or treaty. In the absence of such a development, one had to rely on the evidence emerging from the general political history of Sino-Tibetan relations. One dominant and unenviable fact emerged from this evidence. Despite notional claims by various Chinese Central Governments from the 13th century downwards, no Chinese central authority could exercise more powers than those of a suzerain over Tibet till 1958. There were, in addition, long periods when Tibet functioned as an independent state when the central authority in China had disintegrated.

* The reference is to the Hindu mythological belief that the world was originally created by Lord Brahma, the creator, a member of the Hindu Trinity.

As far as India was concerned, the importance of this matter was limited to the validity of Indo-Tibetan relations expressed in Tibetan treaties, agreements, protests, negotiations, etc., concerning the Himalayan frontier. After the founding of the first centralised government in China in modern times, independent India did not dispute the reality of Peking's jurisdiction over Tibet. Then, prior to 1959, India had believed that China never intended to strike a blow at the historical relationship of Tibet with India and deny the binding force of Tibetan diplomatic engagements. The belief was based on two principal reasons. Firstly, the new Chinese Government had agreed to follow the normal principles and practice of international law, and secondly, it had in fact adopted a policy consistent with them, specially in relation to Nepal in 1956.

The Chinese knew that the relationship between a "tributary king" and his overlord was termed in international law as suzerainty. The limited question was: did the vassal state possess powers to contract obligations independently of the suzerain? The State practice in the world established that it could.¹¹ Bulgaria, while a vassal of Turkey, entered into various treaties with Italy, France, Austria, Great Britain and Germany.¹²

The nature of the Sino-Tibetan relations was not a peculiar Chinese phenomenon. It was a part of a historical hangover of the growth of feudal and semi-feudal states in the pre-national state era, before the advent of the capitalist form of production-relations. In the 19th century, it was an anachronism in the European world which had been transformed by the formation of the comity of nation states. In large parts of Asia, and more so in China, the situation had not changed. Under the circumstances, Tibet continued to enter into diplomatic obligations not only throughout the 19th century, but almost till the "anti-feudal, anti-imperialist revolution" succeeded in China in 1949. It was not possible to deny unilaterally the binding force and the juridical validity of these obligations if China accepted the normal standards of international behaviour.

Apart from Chinese announcements that Peking intended to observe these principles and practice of international law, there was enough evidence of Chinese state practice to strengthen

Indian faith that one fine morning Peking would not repudiate all Indo-Tibetan agreements.

In 1956, China accepted the validity of the 1856 Treaty between Nepal and Tibet to which the Chinese Central Government was not a party. It was of some importance to note that except the 1856 Treaty, no binding treaty existed between Nepal and Tibet in 1956, an earlier treaty of 1792 having been abrogated by the 1856 Treaty. Article III of the 1956 Treaty stated:

“All treaties and documents which existed in the past between China and Nepal including those between the Tibet region of China and Nepal are hereby abrogated.”¹³

If, according to Peking, the 1856 Treaty had been invalid, there was no need to have it abrogated in 1956. And since the 1856 Treaty was the only valid engagement between Tibet and Nepal, it alone could be the subject matter of this abrogation clause. In fact, this interpretation was fully established in relation to the status of the citizens of Nepal in Tibet. The 1856 Treaty had been signed after Nepalese armies had defeated the Tibetans. As a consequence, Article 7 of that treaty laid down that “Tibet will not try and determine suits and cases among Gorkha subjects.....residing within the jurisdiction of Lhasa.”¹⁴ This Article was changed to “Nepalese nationals in Tibet region of China and Chinese nationals in Nepal shall be subjected to the jurisdiction of the Government of the country or of the residence.....”¹⁵ by Notes exchanged between Katmandu and Peking after the 1956 Treaty.

China's policy in relation to Nepal could not be assumed to be based on a principle which China would or could refuse to accept in relation to India. Unless one assumed that Peking had adopted double-standards, its attitude in 1959 was inexplicable. And yet the Chinese stand on treaties signed by Tibet with India was unequivocal. China was unwilling to recognise any treaty obligations entered into by Tibet with India.

3: Britain, China And Tibet

The irritating charge that the Government of India, headed by Nehru, whose record of active anti-imperialism, even after the independence of India, was second to none, was attempting to behave in an imperialist manner towards China exposed, more

than anything else, the poverty of the Chinese case. It also revealed an incapacity to understand the nature of Anglo-Tibetan relations. Indeed, this aspect of the Chinese behaviour was as insulting as it was distressing.

The Anglo-Indian policy towards Tibet could hardly be divorced from the British policy towards China, which was as fiercely imperialist as was the general policy followed by Britain towards all countries of Asia, including India. However, the forms of imperialist domination which Britain sought to establish in these countries differed greatly. It was in this that the British policy of territorial annexation in India needed to be distinguished from the British policy towards China.

Generally speaking, the difference could be described thus: while the exploitation of India was sought to be conducted by the establishment of territorial power, annexing the entire territory of India, the exploitation of China, on the other hand, was planned to be carried on by making the Manchu rulers subservient to British aims and without major territorial annexation of Chinese territory. In Marxist terminology this could be described as a difference between a colony, which India became, and a semi-colony, which was the status of China *vis a vis* Britain. There were several historical reasons which prompted Britain to pursue these different policies, not the least important among them was inter-imperialist rivalry with the United States, Japan and Czarist Russia.

Though this policy found its full expression in the second half of the 19th century, even earlier, Britain's grand design was to monopolise the China trade and not to annex Chinese territory. In reality, till the First Opium War, London was extremely careful not to annoy the Celestial Empire and was fully conscious that nothing could endanger its plan "to open up China" for exclusive British trade with the consent of the Manchus than any danger to the territorial integrity of the Chinese Empire.

This policy was widely commented upon by Karl Marx, who then lived London, in several despatches he sent to the *New York Daily Tribune* in 1853-1854.¹⁶ The aim to monopolise the Chinese trade failed, primarily, due to unashamed British

attempt at robbery through the enforced opium trade and gross miscalculations regarding the potential of the Chinese market. Marx, "after a careful survey of the Chinese commerce" wrote that "the consuming and paying powers of the Celestials" had "been greatly over-estimated". The result was an unfavourable British balance of trade with China. The use of force against China during the two Opium Wars was not prompted by a desire for territorial annexations. The real reason was summed up by Marx in his inimitable style thus :

"John Bull, however, used to plume himself in his high standard of morality, prefers to bring up his adverse balance of trade by periodical war tributes, extorted from China on piratical pretexts."¹⁷

Between 1864 and 1894, after the imperialist powers had helped the Manchus to survive against the tide of popular Taipings, London followed the policy of imperialist alliance with the Manchus. Hu Sheng, whose standard Marxist work "*Imperialism And Chinese Politics*"¹⁸ underlies this feature of the Chinese situation and approvingly quotes the American "bourgeois" writer K. S. Latourette and Owen and Eleanor Lattimore. Latourette dealing with China's foreign relations in 1860-1893 wrote :

"The life of the Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty was prolonged not only by the opportune suppression of the internal rebellion, but also by the absence of crisis in the Empire's relations with Occidental powers so grave as those of 1839-1842 and 1856-1860.....for several years after 1860. Western Powers, and especially Great Britain and the United States, conducted their relations with China on the basis of the belief that their interests would be best served by supporting the dignity and authority of the (Chinese) Imperial government to strengthen it in the suppression of internal disorder."¹⁹

The Lattimores pointed out that "the foreigners themselveshad an interest in maintaining the dynasty in order to dictate, through the Manchu Court, the kind of government that suited their own interests."²⁰ The Marxist American author, Israel Epstein, underlines the same fact in these words: "On

the reactionary side, the Chinese ruling class, which had been saved by the skin of its teeth, became the junior partner of the foreign invaders, a combination that governed China until 1949.....”²¹

Who can doubt that the Manchu policy of subservience to the Western Powers was against the interest of China? There can hardly be any dispute between India and China on this point. However, who could overlook the basic character and form of imperialist exploitation of China, flowing from this anti-popular alliance? If the imperialist did not annex the territories of China in this period, it was because they found it not only unnecessary but against their interests. Yet, the fact, relevant for the Chinese charge, could hardly be overlooked that there were no major territorial annexations of the Chinese territories by Britain during this period.

The policy of the East India Company could not run counter to this basic British pattern. Till 1833, when the Company's monopoly of the China trade terminated, it was identical with the policy pursued by British ambassadors at Canton. The two principal motives which guided Calcutta were: first, to chart a trade route to Lhasa, with a view to reaching the interior of China and approaching the Celestial Emperor, and second, not to take any steps which would annoy the Lhasa Court or the Emperor because such conduct would defeat the first aim.

The first opportunity for territorial penetration came the way of the Company during the Nepal-Tibet War of 1788-1792. Both the belligerents sought the Company's support. Cornwallis, then the Company's Governor-General, refused to get entangled in this war, though the temptation to throw the Company's power on the side of Nepal was great. The Tibetans were helped by the Chinese in 1791. This Chinese participation was a matter of some concern to the Company. Colonel Kirkpatrick, who was the English officer most closely connected with the war and the subsequent peace efforts, realised that if “the Chinese were to establish themselves permanently in our neighbourhood, the border incidents always incidental to such a situation, would be liable to disturb, more or less, the commercial relations subsisting between them and the East India Company in another part

of Asia.”²² But Cornwallis was unwilling to do anything more than offer the Company’s “mediation”.

At this time, Earl of Macartney, the British Ambassador to China, was striving hard at Canton to convince the Chinese Emperor of the need to open China to English commerce. Cornwallis did not want to do anything which might harm Macartney’s efforts. And yet, the Chinese Emperor informed Macartney that he was angry at the way the English had behaved during the Tibet-Nepal war in fighting against the combined Chinese-Tibetan force. Macartney, forthwith, denied any British support to Nepal as related in the entry of his diary on August 6, 1793: “I was very much startled by this intelligence, but instantly told them that the thing was impossible and that I could take it upon me to contradict it in the most decisive manner.”²³

“The thing was impossible”, Macartney had felt in 1793. Lord Moira held on to the same view during the 1815-1816 Anglo-Nepalese war. All through this war, the Company was careful not to displease or alarm the Chinese Emperor. The Nepalese King had requested China to help him in his fight against the foreigners. It was likely that China might respond. Yet, the Company was determined at almost any cost, not to entangle itself in a war against China. It issued order to its troops that they should not fire on the Chinese troops, should they meet them, unless it was absolutely certain that they (the Chinese troops) were hostile.²⁴

Moira took an extraordinary step, inconsistent with the haughty and arrogant behaviour of the Company in India, and, on behalf of the Company, presented to the Chinese a statement of the English charges against Nepal, so that there should be no “misunderstanding” about British action in the Chinese mind. Moira, of course, acted under instructions from London. An interesting and eventful consequence of the need felt during the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1815-1816 to allay Chinese fears regarding Tibet was the birth of an active policy towards Sikkim. The Company turned towards Sikkim with a view to converting it into a bridge between India and the Celestial Empire. Sixty years later, this policy led to the first Anglo-Tibetan clash, in face of Chinese opposition to Tibetan determination to fight, as we shall see below. The touch-

Tibet-not attitude of the Company at the time of Gulab Singh's bid to annex Western Tibet during the Kashmir-Tibet war of 1842 has already been dealt with.

Almost till the Company bowed out of the Asian stage, it followed a consistent policy towards Tibet. There were no altruistic aims which guided its otherwise annexationist and aggressive policy in India. Britain, then, was playing a bigger game, with larger stakes, in China. It did not consider it a worthwhile step to nibble at the forbidding and barren territory across India's northern border and spoil its major game in China. The Company's own hands in India were more than loaded.

The Anglo-Tibetan clash took place in 1887 when a combination of factors was to bring about a change in the Anglo-Indian policy towards Tibet. The immediate cause was provided by Tibetan anger at the proposed visit of a British Mission, led by Macaulay, to their country, which significantly, had the approval of the Chinese Emperor. The Tibetans equated this Mission with an invasion of their country and, ignoring the restraining and rebuking orders of the Chinese Emperor prepared for battle. After they occupied Sikkimese territory, the war broke out in which they were defeated.

Even at this stage, Britain was careful not to disturb Sino-Tibetan relations. Since Peking insisted that it had authority over Tibet, which the war had proved to be non-existent, and since Britain wanted to strengthen the Manchus to have them stand up against Britain's main rival in Central Asia, Russia, the Convention, signed on March 27, 1887, at Calcutta²⁵ after the war, was entered into with China. China undertook to be responsible for Tibetan behaviour and accepted the *fait accompli* of British protectorate over Sikkim. Against this background of major political considerations, which had little to do with the frontier, and were mainly concerned with the inter-imperialist rivalries, it was natural that no question of any territorial annexation of Tibet or any part thereof could arise.

4: Failure Of Curzon's Policy

Two major developments in the last decade of the 19th century brought about a change in the Anglo-Indian policy

towards China which, by the turn of the century, was clearly demonstrated in Lord Curzon's policies on the Himalayan frontier.

At the end of 1887, when the Anglo-Tibetan war was in the offing, the British Legation in Peking had taken the matter up with the Chinese Government. Edward Goschen discussed the need of Peking ordering the Tibetans to withdraw from the Sikkimese territory with Chinese representative Li Hung-chang, who had earlier negotiated the Chefoo Convention on behalf of the Manchus. Li had then stated :

“The Yamen may promise what they like, but it is quite impossible in the present state of relations between China and Tibet for them to carry out their promise. People talk of Chinese influence in Tibet, but it is only nominal, as the Lamas are all powerful there, and the Yamen would only be able to carry out their promise by sending a large and costly expedition there, which it would not suit them at all to do.”²⁶

Such was the situation of Sino-Tibetan relations in 1887 which in the next decade worsened with Peking losing whatever little control it had over Tibetan affairs. The 13th Dalai Lama, from the beginning, was talking in terms of “independence” of Tibet.

Between 1856 to 1860, a new power had appeared in Central and East Asia. Czarist Russia had suddenly made its impact and acquired 400,000 square miles of Asian territory. By 1863, Russia had penetrated into Sinkiang and the Anglo-Russian rivalry had begun to play an important role in British policy towards China. In 1879, by the Sino-Russian Treaty of Livadia, Russia acquired an influential position in China. While Peking desired the help of St. Petersburg to halt Japan, the Russians were motivated by a desire to halt and destroy British power in China. Not unnaturally, Japan and Britain made common cause soon after. On July 3, 1896, a Sino-Russian treaty of mutual assistance against Japan was signed. The Czar's unconcealed ambitions were about to be fulfilled. Russian imperial vision was outlined by Prince Esper Ukhtomsky, head of the Russo-Chinese Bank, in these words :

“Of all the powers capable of exerting a telling influence on the Far East, Russia occupies the first place. It is enough for her to decide—and tomorrow Kashgaria and Mongolia will fly our colours. We could annex regions which for a long time have sought to join us and have begged to be made our subjects.”²⁷

Ukhtomsky had earlier announced: “Essentially there are not and there cannot be any frontiers for us in Asia.”

Against the background of these two developments, London began to worry about reported moves of the Czarist Court to build a link with Lhasa. In January 1899, Lord Curzon became the Viceroy of India. Even before he came to Delhi, the Anglo-Indian Government had planned strengthening the north-western frontier against Russia. Reports about Russian moves in Lhasa were being anxiously studied. The situation was ripe for a new policy on Tibet.

Within five months of his arrival, Curzon had privately written to Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India in London, that “the Lamas.....have found out the weakness of China. At the same time, they are being approached by Russia.” He had impressed upon Hamilton the need to make a British approach to the Lamas and put on paper a formula :

“In as much as we have no hostile designs against Tibet; as we are in a position to give them something on the frontier to which they attach great importance and we none; and as the relations we desire to establish with them are almost exclusively those of trade, I do not think it ought to be impossible, if I could get into communication with the Tibetan Government, to come to terms.”²⁸

Curzon's formula of dealing directly with the Tibetan authorities was approved by Lord Salisbury, who was then Foreign Secretary, and Curzon's active policy towards Tibet immediately took shape. Thus, the fear of Russian penetration in Tibet, Chinese incapacity to influence the Lamas and the desire for “independence” of the 13th Dalai Lama led to a complete reversal of British policy.

From 1774 to 1890, Britain had thought it fit to subordinate Tibetan affairs to the main objectives in China. Now

Lord Curzon was not only to deal directly with the Dalai Lama but to seek to bring him within British sphere of influence in return for some frontier concessions. To use modern Marxist terminology, British imperialism was about to launch "political aggression against the Tibet region of China". Of course, there was no question of "territorial aggression and annexation" involved in this new policy. In fact, Britain was willing to part with Indian territory on the Himalayan frontier to bribe the Lamas!

Curzon's imperial over-confidence that he could bring the Dalai Lama under British influence was soon exploded. Though he made a number of efforts to establish communication with Lhasa, all his efforts failed. This infuriated the Anglo-Indian Government and as news of Sino-Russian and Russo-Tibetan treaties of 1902 reached London, a decision was taken to use force to bring Lhasa to its knees. The method adopted for compelling Lhasa was somewhat ingenious. It was decided to send a "mission" to Tibet. Colonel Younghusband was to be its political head, to be escorted by an army of 8000, commanded by Brigadier-General MacDonald.

The second Anglo-Tibetan war, known as the Younghusband Mission, was a cruel and ruthless affair on the part of the British. The Tibetans resisted British advance with valour but were defeated. The Dalai Lama had fled, after appointing the Ti Rimpoche as his regent. The Ti Rimpoche was dismissed by the Chinese Amban, on Younghusband's demand. The British then signed the Lhasa Convention of September 7, 1904, with those Tibetan authorities who remained in power.

The Convention, consisting of nine Articles, was an effort to implement Curzon's policy towards Tibet which aimed at exclusion of Russian influence and monopolization of Tibetan external trade. Younghusband's military victory inspired the Anglo-Indian Government to follow the aggressive and occupational policy with which they were so familiar in India.²⁹

The Convention ratified the Sikkim-Tibet frontier drawn in 1890 and accepted by China; it made provision for two new trade marts at Gyantse and Gartok with a British trade agent stationed at each mart; the Tibetans were to keep open the

roads to these trade marts and transmit letters of the British trade agents to the Tibetan and Chinese authorities. The Tibetans were to raze all fortifications between the Anglo-Indian frontier and Gyantse and were to have no dealings of any kind with any foreign power without British consent. Finally, the Tibetans were to pay an indemnity of Rs. 75,00,000 payable in 75 annual instalments. For the security of this payment and the proper administration of the new trade marts, the Anglo-Indian Government was to occupy the Chumbi Valley area of Tibet for 75 years. By what was called the Separate Article, Tibet agreed to allow the British trade agent to visit Lhasa whenever he liked.

The British Government in London felt extremely annoyed at the provision regarding the occupation of the Chumbi Valley. This had little to do with any notions of non-interference in Tibetan affairs or a desire to guard Tibet's territorial integrity. The main reason for objecting to the terms of the Convention was a violent Russian protest.

Russia roundly condemned the Convention as a means to establish a British protectorate in Tibet and it was not far wrong. The Separate Article practically established a permanent British representation at the Lhasa Court. The prohibition on Tibet against dealing with foreign powers was very sweeping and, of course, the military occupation of the Chumbi Valley could hardly be interpreted as a "friendly" act! The Chinese were not at all happy because they felt that their historical right of suzerainty was ignored. They did not sign the Convention.

The British Foreign Office, despite Younghusband's protests, refused to accept the Curzonian policy on Tibet. London renounced the Separate Article; reduced the indemnity to Rs. 25,00,000 and made it payable in three annual instalments and declared that the occupation of the Chumbi Valley must end before 1908! Younghusband fought fruitlessly against the London policy. While he expected to be hailed as an empire-builder, he was rebuked and instead of the much-honoured title of K.C.S.I., which he had hoped for, he was given a mere K.C.I.E.! Curzon was unhappy and poured out his anger at the British Cabinet in a number of letters.

By 1904, London was keen on a rapprochement with St. Petersburg and three years later, the Anglo-Russian Agreement of August 1907 was signed.³⁰ This Agreement, in effect, neutralised Tibet in the Anglo-Russian rivalry. Both the signatories agreed not to send a representative to Tibet; not to seek any mineral, rail or telegraph concession and not to interfere with Tibetan finances. Russia accepted the modified terms of the Lhasa Convention of 1904 and the Anglo-Chinese Adhesion Agreement of 1906 by which Peking had accepted the 1904 Convention after it was modified to recognise Chinese suzerainty over Tibet.³¹

A British scholar has summed up this failure of Curzon's policy towards Tibet in these words :

“Thus, the main result, diplomatically, of the Younghusband Mission, which was designed to bring Tibet and the Indian Government closer together, was to make it even more difficult than it had been before for the British to make their influence felt at Lhasa.”³²

Not unnaturally, the Anglo-Indian Government was forced to abandon the Curzon-Younghusband line towards Tibet in the succeeding years. At that time, a long period of Chinese history was steadily drawing to its end. In 1899 the Boxer Rising gave a warning of the coming storm. Sun Yat-sen founded the Tung Meng Hui in 1905. A national revolution against the Manchus continued to gather strength till 1911 when the hated 270-year-old Ming dynasty of the Mongols, the Manchus, was overthrown and a republic was proclaimed in China.

From the time of the Bogle Mission and Warren Hastings in 1773 to the era of the Younghusband Mission and Curzon, the policy of the Anglo-Indian Government towards Tibet was guided by standard colonial motives. But the comparative weakness of the East India Company in the 18th century, and the desire of its masters to chart out a road to China through Lhasa till 1815-1816, the British aim of subverting China to its own purposes while keeping the fiction of the Celestial Empire from 1816 to 1890 and inter-imperialist rivalry and specially the Anglo-Russian cold war till 1907 had collectively conspired to create circumstances which prevented British territorial

expansion in Tibet. Britain could not extend its territorial power beyond the natural and historical northern frontier of India. When the Chinese Revolution of 1911 finally overtook the Manchus and, with them, their imperialist supporters, India's northern frontier continued to remain what it had been down the centuries.*

5: Abdication Of Extra-Territoriality

When independent India took the initiative to negotiate the 1954 Treaty, she was determined that all considerations of an "imperial policy" towards Tibet must be given up. When the Treaty was signed, the Government of India was severely criticized by certain sections of the Indian press and the Parliament—not to mention Western sources—for what was called the "abandonment of Tibet". Nehru replied to this criticism in the Lok Sabha :

"Several Hon. Members have referred to 'the melancholy chapter of Tibet'. I really do not understand. I have given the most earnest thought to this matter.....I would beg every Hon. Member who has doubts about this question just to find out the background, the early history and the late history of Tibet and India and China, and the history of the British in Tibet."³³

On the basis of these historical realities, India had decided to abdicate rights of extra-territoriality in Tibet and give up all establishments, installations and buildings which were designed by the British to sustain what they called their "sphere of influence" in Tibet. India desired to "live in terms of peace and friendliness" with China and wanted that the two countries "should respect each other's sovereignty and integrity". The Treaty, which closed a chapter in Indo-Tibetan history, was signed by India because, as Nehru stated, it ensured "peace to a very large extent in a certain area of Asia."³⁴

The text of the 1954 Treaty itself was short, consisting of 6 Articles. An exchange of Notes followed. By the Indian Note, sent on April 29, 1954, the day on which the Treaty was signed, India wiped clean the Anglo-Indian imperial slate. By

* For the analysis of the post-1911 Anglo-Indian policy see Chapter VII.

one stroke, she agreed to abjure all extra-territorial rights acquired by the previous Government of India by virtue of earlier Anglo-Tibetan and Anglo-Chinese agreements.

India agreed to withdraw military escorts stationed at Yatung and Gyantse; to return the postal, telegraph and public telephone services together with the equipment; twelve rest houses; and to return all lands used earlier by India except for those situated within the Indian Trade Agency compound walls at Yatung. Even the right to lease lands situated within the compound walls was retained after granting a new right to China to secure land on lease at Kalimpong and Calcutta.³⁵

The rights abjured by India were those acquired by the Anglo-Indian Government to maintain its "sphere of influence" in Tibet. Delhi was not interested in following the British policy. This was natural because such extra-territorial rights violated the spirit of the Indian national tradition upon which Indian foreign policy was based.

When Chou En-lai, ignoring these facts, charged India with trying to exploit to her advantage the "situation created by application of the British policy of aggression" against Tibet, India reacted with a great amount of indignation. Nehru gave expression to it thus :

"Nowhere indeed has Indian dislike of imperialist policies been more clearly shown than in the attitude towards Tibet. The Government of India voluntarily renounced all the extra-territorial rights enjoyed by Britain in Tibet before 1947 and recognised by Treaty that Tibet is a region of China....."³⁶

It may be of some importance to note that in 1954 India was the second country in modern Chinese history to renounce "special rights" on Chinese territory. Shortly after the victory of the Bolsheviki, the Soviet Union had unilaterally given up such privileges in Inner Mongolia and Manchuria. India followed suit in 1954 in accordance with the principles of her foreign policy and in the hope of building friendly and intimate relations with her ancient and regenerated neighbour, China.

Chapter 4

THE WIDENING GULF

“But one thing I know absolutely and definitely : to accept the deadlock for ever or to suggest something which confirms that deadlock and leaves no doors open except war is, from any point of view, a bad step, a dangerous step, and an utterly wrong step.”

Jawaharlal Nehru : in the **Lok Sabha**,
November 27, 1959.

1 : Interference In India

The decision of the Prime Ministers of India and China that the officials of India and China should “meet and examine, check and study all historical documents, records, accounts, maps and other material relevant to the boundary question” was based on the confidence that the Sino-Indian friendship had survived the bitter feud which followed Chinese territorial claims and the Tibetan revolt, and it was still possible to find, to use Chou En-lai’s phrase, “points of proximity”. No sooner the officials started their talks, it became clear that, apart from the differences on the border-alignment, China had adopted a new political attitude towards India.

The most depressing aspect of the new Chinese attitude towards India was Peking’s refusal to include Sino-Indian frontier “west of Karakoram” within the scope of the officials’ talks. This concerned a 300-mile-long stretch of the north-western frontier of Kashmir. To the great surprise of the Indian officials, the Chinese representatives refused to budge from their position. The reason for this extraordinary attitude was summarized by them thus :

“As for the boundary west of the Karakoram pass, there was no discussion about it between the two governments... and the Western sector of the Sino-Indian boundary as

mutually understood by the two sides starts from the Karakoram pass eastward.”¹

The Indian side protested that there was no evidence whatsoever even to suggest that India did not include the boundary west of the Karakoram pass in the Western sector. At that stage, Peking’s officials came out with their main reason :

“At the same time, in view of the present actual situation in Kashmir, it was also inappropriate for the two sides—China and India—to discuss the boundary west of the Karakoram pass.”²

What China conveyed in this cold and involved language was not difficult to understand. The boundary west of the Karakoram pass was under the illegal occupation of Pakistan since the invasion of Kashmir in 1947-48. However, at no stage, had any one, including the Pakistani invaders, suggested that it was not a part of the Kashmir-Sinkiang frontier.

If China were unwilling to discuss this stretch of the boundary, it only meant that Peking was denying India’s right to determine the data on its alignment. Such a stand could flow only from a refusal to fully recognise the accession of the former state of Jammu and Kashmir to India which took place as early as 1947. This was a matter of the greatest importance to India.

The new Chinese attitude differed from the policy of the Soviet Union. Ever since 1952, Moscow had recognised Kashmir as part of India. Premier Nikita Khrushchev had made a special point of announcing this when he visited Srinagar in 1955. This policy was followed by all the countries allied to the Soviet Union. Till 1960, there was no indication from Peking that it had differences with the Soviet Union, on the one hand and India, on the other, on this matter.

The implications of this new policy were grave. The accession of Kashmir to India was legally valid, supported by the people of Kashmir and an accomplished fact. All political parties in India—including the Communists—considered Kashmir an inalienable part of India. China, by its rejection of this reality, voluntarily cut itself adrift from the main stream of the democratic movement in India and from its own socialist allies.

What could China gain from such a policy? The only powers which took a line similar to the Chinese on Kashmir were Pakistan's allies in the SEATO, the CENTO and the NATO. Peking could not have been unaware of the company which it was choosing for itself. To have adopted this policy after India recognised Tibet and Taiwan as parts of China,³ though Taiwan was under Chiang Kai-shek's occupation, was to express an opportunistic and unprincipled antagonism towards not only the Government but also the democratic movement of India. In any event, this was the dominant Indian reaction.

The Chinese officials, further, refused to discuss the Sino-Sikkimese and Sino-Bhutanese sectors of the Sino-Indian boundary. They stated: ".....the Chinese Government has always declared that they do not fall within the scope of the Sino-Indian boundary question."⁴

This was the position which Chou En-lai had taken in his letter of September 8, 1949, even though he had assured India that "China is willing to live together in friendship with Sikkim and Bhutan, without committing aggression against each other and has always respected the proper relations between them and India."⁵

Nehru, in reply, did not leave any ambiguity on the question. He wrote on September 26, 1959 :

'It is not clear to us what exactly is the implication of your statement that boundaries of Sikkim and Bhutan do not fall within the scope of the present discussion. In fact, Chinese maps show sizeable areas of Bhutan as part of Tibet. Under treaty relationship with Bhutan, the Government of India are the only competent authority to take up with other Governments matters concerning Bhutan's external relations, and in fact, we have taken up with your Government a number of matters on behalf of the Bhutan Government. The rectification of errors in Chinese maps regarding the boundary of Bhutan with Tibet is therefore a matter which has to be discussed along with the boundary of India with the Tibet region of China in the same sector."⁶

He also reminded Chou of the 1890 Sino-Indian Convention on Sikkim and the recognition by China that the Government of

India "has direct and exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of that State."

The Chinese Government, after Nehru's letter, referred to the Sino-Bhutanese sector of the frontier in its Note of December 26, 1959: "Concerning the boundary between China and Bhutan, there is only a certain discrepancy between the delineation on the maps of the two sides." Since Bhutan did not publish any maps, the reference to two sides could only mean India and China. However, when the "discrepancy" became a subject matter of the officials' discussion, Peking refused to agree to India's right to speak on behalf of Bhutan.

The use of the words "proper relations" between India on the one hand and Bhutan and Sikkim on the other gave rise to a controversy. What were "proper" relations? Did China reserve a right to decide whether "proper" relations between India and Sikkim, and India and Bhutan existed or not? Did it mean that whatever relations were established between India and these two States by treaty-rights were subject to Chinese approval?

Peking did not reply to these disturbing questions. On the other hand, its insistence that the boundary question as it concerned Bhutan and Sikkim could not be discussed with India led to a grave inference. It appeared that Peking wanted to deal directly with Bhutan and Sikkim. This could only mean that in an oblique manner China was going back on its previous treaty obligations and practice.*

China's new orientation of policy on the accession of Kashmir on the one hand and Indo-Bhutanese and Indo-Sikkimese special relations on the other was frankly unfriendly. Further, it created the basis for the charge of Chinese interference in the Indian sub-continent. The problem thus created was as serious as the problem of the territorial claims itself.

Chou En-lai had stated in December 1959 after the Delhi Summit:

"The Chinese Government holds that Sino-Indian friendship is of extremely great significance to the 1,000 million people of the two countries and to Asian and world

* For Sino-Bhutanese and Sino-Sikkimese boundary see Appendix.

peace. This friendship should not be, nor can it be, jeopardized because of the temporary lack of settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question.”⁸

It was obvious that China had moved a long distance away from this position in the course of a mere few months!

2. Expanding Claims

India had hoped that after the very affirmative and assertive claims made by China, one question would certainly be resolved during the officials' meetings : what was the exact border alignment which China claimed? Once that was precisely known, the rest could be tackled. She was encouraged by a Chinese statement that the pre-revolution Chinese maps showed precise and clear alignment. However, despite all this, in 1960-61, China appeared unwilling either to give the precise alignment of the Chinese border or necessary information about it.

At the start of the officials' meetings, India offered to exchange maps drawn on the standard international scale of 1" : 1 million. Due to some inexplicable reasons, China refused the offer. On its own part, China was unwilling to give any Chinese map on a scale larger than 1" : 5 million. The map showing the Chinese alignment being on smaller scale, it became necessary for India to ask certain questions to clarify geographical locations of the Chinese boundary. China, too, found it essential to adopt a similar measure. The Chinese officials asked 57 detailed questions which were fully answered.

When it came to India's turn to get precise location of the Chinese alignment, Chinese reticence to give answers developed into a blunt refusal. Since the Chinese map was drawn on a sub-standard scale, India desired to have clarification on several points. In all, 120 questions had to be asked. China chose to ignore exactly half of them! The explanation for the refusal to give information was as annoying as the failure to supply earlier a map drawn on an internationally recognised scale. Peking rejected Indian queries as "extremely minute and trifling". The alignment was customary, argued the Chinese, and hence "cannot be very precise at every point." Further, in the interest of avoiding Sino-Indian clashes, the Chinese had "purposefully refrained from conducting surveys in places too close to the boundary."⁹

The "customary boundary" of all the three sectors had remained under Chinese administration, prior to British and Indian "imperialist aggression", if one accepted Peking's case.¹⁰ It was strange why, if Chinese administration had prevailed over the centuries up to the entire alignment, Peking could not give even the co-ordinates of few important places it claimed to be under its jurisdiction for so long. China had claimed that it had made surveys in Aksai Chin. But when it came to questions regarding the exact location of frontier in this part of Ladakh, the Chinese kept silent.

There could be no more than two explanations for this attitude. First, China was unwilling to give certain geographical locations for military reasons. This appeared to be the case in relation to several places in the Western and Eastern sectors. Though China had moved troops and occupied the northern parts of Chang Chenmo valley, a large area near the Spanggur lake, Demchok and the Khurnak fort, Chinese officials refused to give precise locations of points in this area. Similarly, they kept silent when requested to supply co-ordinates of several places in the Eastern sector, where, they admitted, their troops had been posted. Second, the Chinese were perhaps not certain as to the precise alignment they claimed. Their attitude was either a result of their ignorance or a desire to extend still further the claims. Their lack of knowledge belied their claim that this alignment was historical, customary and traditional. On the other hand, if further claims on Indian territory were forthcoming, the matter was much more serious. It could completely destroy all chances of finding even a narrow area of agreement.

It was hoped that on the Middle sector, India and China could discover certain "points of proximity." China had all along stated that the two alignments did not differ much in the Himalayan watershed between the southern end of Ladakh and the western edge of Nepal. However, China frustrated this hope by extending its claims on the Middle sector not only since 1954 but also during the officials' talks!

From 1954 to 1959, Chinese claims in this area kept expanding and on the eve of the officials' talks, they were limited to eight isolated pockets south of the Indian alignment. On July 19, 1960, at the 15th meeting of the officials in Peking,

China claimed a composite area in this sector. In other words, China staked claim to an area of 300 square miles south of the border which it had never previously mentioned and which replaced the original claim of 10 to 15 square miles.¹¹

3: Denouncement Of "Watershed"

China had agreed with India that the Sino-Indian boundary was a natural boundary. It had further conceded that in determination of the extent of this boundary, the geographical principle of watershed must be treated as an important factor. This, indeed, was an acceptance of an international practice which had been recognised even by Greek and Roman writers.¹² The concept was an integral part of the law of nations. In Europe, mountain boundaries had been recognised as superior boundaries to river boundaries because they were much more numerous and "they persisted for the greatest periods of time."¹³ The application of the principle became universal because of the convenience which it offered in delimiting frontiers when the nature of the terrain itself offered such a well marked and uninterrupted line.

When a mountain range formed the boundary, the watershed constituted the frontier, failing special treaty arrangements. Simply stated, the watershed principle meant that the boundary should follow the main watershed in mountainous areas rather than any other natural feature. It flowed from general development of human geography. Its basis was the fact that people on both sides of the mountain ranges tend to settle up to the sources of rivers but not beyond.¹⁴ Thus, the main watershed marked the limits of societies and nations. The watershed principle had found recognition in several boundary settlements, such as in the Island of Timor Arbitration by the International Court at the Hague,¹⁵ of the Colombia-Costa Rica dispute, Argentine-Chile dispute and Guatemala-Honduras dispute and by the Alaskan Boundary Tribunal.

Apart from practice of other states, there was enough evidence of Chinese state practice itself to substantiate the validity of the principle. China had recognised it in the Sino-Russian Treaty of Ninchu, signed on August 27, 1689. Article I of the treaty stated that "the boundary from the source of that river

(Colidza) to the sea will run along the top of the mountain chain in which the river rises. The jurisdiction of the two empires will be divided in such a way that the valleys of all the rivers and streams flowing from the southern slope of these mountains to join the Amur shall belong to the empire of China, while the valleys of all the rivers flowing down from the other or the northern side of these mountains shall be similarly under the rule of His Majesty the Czar of the Russian Empire.”¹⁶

By the Sino-British Convention of 1890 with regard to Sikkimese-Tibetan frontier, the Sino-French Convention of 1895 concerning the boundary between Tonkin and China and the Sino-British Conventions of 1894 and 1897 delimiting the frontiers of Burma, China had recognised the same principle, which was the basis of the Treaty of Ninchu.

Peking could not argue that the principle was foisted upon China by imperialist powers because the 1689 Sino-Russian treaty was signed before the advent of Western imperialism on the Chinese scene. What was more, the People’s Republic of China had given full recognition to the principle in at least two more treaties.

In the Sino-Burmese Agreement, the principle was propounded with unambiguity by Article II which stated that “the entire undelimited boundary from the High Conical Peak to the western extremity of the Sino-Burmese boundary shall be delimited along the traditional customary line, that is to say, from the High Conical Peak northwards the watershed between the Taiping, the Shweli, the Nu (Salween) and the Tulung (Taron) rivers on the one hand and the Nmai Hka river on the other up to the place where it crosses the Tulung (Taron) river between Chingdam and Nhkumkang and then along the watershed between the Tulung (Taron) and Tsayuhl (Zayul) rivers on the one hand and all the upper tributaries of the Irrawady river..... on the other, up to the western extremity of the Sino-Burmese boundary.”¹⁷

In the Agreement with Nepal, the reference to the watershed principle was less specific. By Article III, the two governments instructed the Sino-Nepalese survey teams to determine

the boundary "in accordance with concrete terrain features (watersheds, valley, pass, etc.)."¹⁸

An additional factor which encouraged hopes for agreement was that Sino-Burmese boundary from the Talu pass eastward was the last 120 mile stretch of the McMahon Line which China had accepted on the basis of the watershed principle. Since the rest of the McMahon Line was also based on the same principle, how could China reject it? Further, Indian territory claimed by China in the Western sector was situated south of the main watershed. If the watershed principle were accepted, these claims could not be sustained. The crux of the dispute along the entire boundary was the southward swing of the Chinese alignment from the main watersheds. It was through this southward thrust from the main watersheds that China claimed 14,000 square miles of Ladakh and 36,000 square miles of NEFA to be parts of its territory. Even in the Middle sector, where the area of dispute was limited and both sides had agreed that the alignment was really the watershed boundary, the only points of departure by the Chinese alignment were south and west of the main watershed.

The Peking officials, without the slightest hesitation, renounced the decisive importance of the watershed principle. "Geographical features are related to the formation of traditional customary line", they asserted, "but they are not the decisive factors." What then were the "decisive" factors? They replied: "As a matter of fact, in the course of a long history, the administrative jurisdiction of a boundary and the activities of its peoples are bound to undergo changes."²⁰

The summary rejection of the decisive importance of the watershed principle destroyed hopes of finding any points of proximity. But it also revealed that China was determined to adopt different standards in relation to India, on the one hand, and Burma and Nepal, on the other. It was another depressing symptom of unfriendly discrimination against India.

4: Right By Occupation

The gulf which separated India and China due to this anti-Indian political attitude, newly adopted by Peking, over Kashmir and expressed in the refusal to accept India's special relations with

Sikkim and Bhutan was widened by Chinese reticence to give precise information of the alignment claimed and the periodic extension of the territorial claims. The abrupt and summary rejection of the watershed principle by China damaged chances of bridging that gulf. However, the hopes of any kind of agreement on the boundary through the officials' meetings were finally destroyed by Chinese assertion that the fact of their unilateral occupation of Indian territory should be, by itself, treated as conclusive proof of their own sovereignty over such territory!

The Chinese argument in support of their claim on Aksai Chin was based on occupation. Peking's officials stated:

“Back in July 1951, Chinese People's Liberation Army units started patrolling the Kongka Pass area and other places. From 1954 to 1955, Chinese frontier guard units carried out military investigations.....At the same time, the administrative department of China's Sinkiang region also set up a special survey team, charged with surveying of the course to be taken by the Sinkiang-Tibet highway.”

The fact that India did not prevent Chinese troop movements in this deserted highland was advanced as a proof of Chinese sovereignty over it. China appeared to glorify its own trespass of Indian territory as it added:

“The footsteps of the members of this survey team covered every place in Aksai Chin and Linghithang. And, after the surveys for a period of about two years they put forward more than ten routes to be chosen and decided upon, among which some are even to the west of the present Sinkiang-Tibet road. Finally, the Chinese Government completed the construction of the present Sinkiang-Tibet highway through the Aksai Chin area from March 1956 to October 1957.”²¹

The arrogance of this assertion did not help the cause of bridging the gulf of Sino-Indian differences. The construction of the road was the starting point of the entire dispute. Further, the assertion ran counter to what Peking itself had laid down as a principle. On April 3, 1960, it had stated that the “violation of the traditional customary line and expansion of the extent of occupation by unilateral occupation cannot constitute the legal

basis of acquiring territory".²² This, Peking had then asserted, was a "recognised international practice". In order to determine the customary boundary, China had previously argued, it was necessary to ascertain the "long existing state of the boundary."

Peking could not produce any evidence to establish that Aksai Chin was part of China before the Chinese troops moved in. After disturbing the long existing state of the boundary, and after committing the violation of the traditional customary line by unilateral occupation, China, rather brazenly, advanced this unilateral occupation as proof of its own administrative jurisdiction over the occupied territory.

The argument had a mocking *motif*. If this was Indian territory, why did India not prevent the Chinese from occupying it? If India claimed sovereignty over it, why did she not exercise it? The answer was very simple. India did not expect Chinese trespass and had made no provision to prevent it. The occupied area was, "sterile" and "a barren, uninhabited region with a vestige of grass and 17,000 ft. high".²³ India believed that in disputes over areas like Aksai Chin "decision can only be made by conferences, by agreement. Countries do not, should not go to war without proceeding in these other ways over such matters."²⁴ Even the Chinese could not claim to have administered this area before their occupation. All they could say was that they had "continued to control (it) effectively" since "the peaceful liberation of Sinkiang and Tibet"²⁵, which took place a few years before their trespass.

On the question of exercise of sovereignty, Peking seemed to have ignored another recognised principle of international law, sanctified by state practice. Sovereignty over national territory did not demand continuous presence of the agents of the State in all its territory. The type and continuity of control necessarily differed with the nature of terrain and special circumstances of the territories concerned. In 1950, Indian active control over this area was weak enough to permit Chinese trespass. However, the fact of the trespass cannot wipe out Indian sovereignty fully and actively exercised prior to 1950.

Chinese officials were unwilling to listen to these facts. Their irrational insistence that their occupation of Aksai Chin gave

them a historical title over this territory cast serious doubts on their *bona fides*.

And yet, there was no other way but to keep showing and examining the data in support of the alignment claimed by each side. There were occasions when the officials' meetings could have been terminated. At the very outset of the talks when China refused to accept the whole of Kashmir as Indian territory, the Indian team could have made an issue of it. It is of some importance to consider what the Chinese attitude would have been had the Indian team refused to accept Sinkiang, Tibet or even Taiwan as parts of China. The refusal to discuss Sino-Bhutanese and Sino-Sikkimese frontiers by Peking created the next crisis. There were instances of expansion of claims and, what could be mildly termed, lack of good faith. But there was only one alternative if the talks broke down. It was to adopt force in assertion of Indian rights. The "idea of settling things by.....compulsion and force" was rejected by India from the beginning.

As a consequence the examination of evidence continued at the end of which the old picture of the silent, sleeping and almost forgotten northern frontier of India was transformed into a live, pulsating and dynamic reality.

Chapter 5

LAND OF THE LADAKHIS

“.....the traditional and customary boundary line between Sinkiang and Ladakh has always followed the Karakoram mountain and is the same as shown on current Chinese maps. It has reliable and incontrovertible basis in history and tradition.....The places disputed by the Indian side east of the boundary between the Ari district of Tibet and Ladakh.....have always belonged to China.”

—Claim of the Government of China

1: East And West Of Karakoram

The “forgotten frontier” of India with China begins at a point near longitude 74° 34' east and latitude 37° 3' north at the meeting point of Afghanistan, Sinkiang and India. It runs eastward along a forbidding mountain chain. From the crest of the Hindu Kush two rivers rise—the Hunza which flows south to the Indus system and the Qara Chukar which rushes down the northern slopes and joins the Yarkand system in Sinkiang. Along the watershed between the Hunza and the Qara Chukar, the frontier runs east through five passes,—the Kilik, the Mintaka, the Khachanai, the Paprik and the Khunjerab.

This is the northern extreme of the Indian world which joins the ancient world of Ser-India or the New Land—Sinkiang as the Chinese call it. People from India have recognised it as such and limited their land up to the source of the Hunza.

Between the Khunjerab pass and the Karakoram pass are situated the Aghil mountains from the crest of which the river Aghil rises. The Indian land stretches up to the source of the Aghil and along the Aghil watershed across the Marpo and Shaksgam passes. From the junction of the Afghan, Chinese and Indian frontier to the Karakoram pass, the entire frontier

is part of the land of the *Dard* people of Hunza and Nagar. The *Dards* moved north up the Indus Valley from the plains of the Punjab in ancient times and these Aryan people were known to even Pliny and Ptolemy.¹ When the tide of Islam swept over Afghanistan and north India, they were converted to the new religion but even as Muslims they would not give up their ancient customs and castes. Today, they lead a life of primitive agriculture and sheep-grazing, grouped into a pyramid of castes, the apex of which is represented by the aristocratic *Ronus* and the base supplied by the down-trodden, hard-working and numerous *Dums*.

Like all other peoples of the northern borderlands, the *Dards* have had a long and chequered history. They were subjected to the rule of all powerful states of north India and after the fall of the Mughal Empire, they were brought under the sway of the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab by Ranjit Singh. After Gulab Singh carved out, with the assistance of the East India Company, the kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir from the Sikh state, the *Dards* became his subjects in 1850.² Their land came under stricter British control after the Hunza-Nagar Expedition of 1891 when this part of the frontier was fortified in view of the Czarist expansion in Central Asia.

The *Dards* have spread over east of the Karakoram pass up to Baltistan, which geographically forms a part of Ladakh. They exercise agricultural and pasturage rights up to the frontier alignment both in the upper valley of the Khunjerab river and the upper valley of Shaksgam.³ In the long history of the *Dards*, no power from Sinkiang ever claimed even an inch of their territory.*

The frontier east of the Karakoram pass runs north of the main axis of the Himalayas, running on the line of Zoji La. Centuries ago, the people of India moved north from the Karakoram pass up to the Kuenlun mountains. It is in the Karakoram, or the High Tartary, as the Europeans call it, that "the navel of the earth", Mount Meru, is situated according to Hindu mythology. East of the Kuenlun mountains, the frontier skirts

* This part of the frontier has been under Pakistan occupation since 1948.

round the north-western edge of the Himalayan range and the valley of upper Indus. This is Ladakh.

Ladakh is the highest habitable land of India. It has an average altitude of 15,000 ft. above sea level. It is also the most sparsely populated part of the country. Though it covers 46,000 square miles, inclusive of Baltistan, it has a population of only two hundred thousand. The northern parts of the Ladakhi district of Aksai Chin and the Chang Chenmo valley are situated at an average height of 17,000 ft. and are almost uninhabited.

History has a strange and striking habit of suddenly forcing to the fore ancient lands and their people who have been relegated to backseats for centuries. When the Chinese troops marched into Aksai Chin, Ladakh had already acquired such a seclusive character that even Delhi did not immediately come to know of the incursion. When the Chinese began to construct roads across this traditional Indian borderland and mowed down Indian patrolmen with machine-gun fire at Hot Springs, south of the Kongka pass, a new phase in the history of Ladakh began. Immediately after, the almost forgotten ancient borderland became a subject of an international clash as the Chinese advanced claims over 14,000 square miles of Indian territory in Ladakh. With a jolt, the forgotten frontiers of Ladakh came to life. Both the mainland and the borderland woke up from a deep slumber.

It has always been that way down the ages in Indian history. Only when the marching steps of alien invading troops echoed in the high valleys and mountain gorges of Ladakh, did mainland India wake up to the actual existence of Ladakh and the security of her northern border. Once the danger receded, Ladakh went back to its snowy grove and the people of India appeared to forget it.

One can reach Ladakh from south via the Kangra Valley of the Punjab and from the west through Kashmir. Northern Ladakh is divided from Sinkiang by the Kuenlun mountains and in the east, Ladakhi frontier meets the Tibetan frontier. It is not an easy journey from the mainland to Ladakh and except for military and commercial purposes, people of the plains did not undertake it.

Over a century ago, Alexander Cunningham described Ladakh thus :

“The general aspect of Ladakh is extreme barrenness. Seen from the above it would appear a mere succession of yellow plains and barren mountains, capped with snow, and the lakes of Pangkong and Tshomoreri would seem like bright oases in the vast desert of rock and sand. No trace of man or of human habitation would meet the eye, and even the large spots of cultivated land would be but small specks on the mighty waste of a deserted world. But a close view would show many fertile tracts covered with luxuriant crops and picturesque monasteries, from which the chant of human voices ascends high in daily prayer and praise.”⁴

Cunningham was a servant of the East India Company and had been specially deputed by the Company to Ladakh with a mission to assure Lhasa and the Chinese Emperor that Gulab Singh of Kashmir would not encroach upon Tibetan territory. Cunningham, apart from being the Company's agent, fancied for himself the role of a historian. Like many foreigners of that period, he too wrote about what he saw and on the basis of materials gathered from the common people through interpreters. From Cunningham's time, an English mythology of the history of the Ladakhi people and their civilization was popularised. Many an Indian historian, too much in a hurry to devote time to study non-English sources, adopted this mythology as history. One of the more learned among them wrote in 1930 :

“The pleateau of Ladakh does not belong geographically to India. It forms part of the Himalayan table-land and has for a very long time been ruled by a dynasty which was Tibetan in origin. The population of Ladakh is predominantly Mongolian in type. Buddhism in its Lamaistic form is the prevailing religion.”⁵

Since Ladakh was a forgotten land, such absurd inaccuracies were seldom challenged!

2: Ladakh And The Mainland

Though a detailed history of Ladakh, its people and their civilization still awaits a historian, enough material is available

now to demolish the myth that Ladakh was from the beginning a part of Tibet. It has now been established with the aid of painstaking research in iconography, numismatics and the study of ancient Ladakhi and Tibetan inscriptions and manuscripts that the history of Ladakh falls into three broad phases.

The first people to brave settlement in the Ladakhi highlands were the *Dards*. One finds reference to them and Ladakh in the Kharaoshti inscriptions of the Kushan period. The Kushans, with their capital at modern Peshawar, extended their empire in the east up to the Ladakhi frontier with Tibet. Tibet, itself, continued to remain outside their empire.⁶ Emperor Kanishka, who is believed to have ruled between B.C. 120 and 162, accepted the Mahayana Buddhist faith after a spectacular conference held in Kashmir in which representatives of various religions participated. There are reasons to believe that the doctrines of Gautama, the Buddha, spread to Ladakh during and immediately after this period. In any event, Tibet was still to rise as a state and Tibetan society till the 7th century was devoted to demon-worship. It is well established that Buddhism travelled to Ladakh via Kashmir and not Tibet, as was mistakenly held by Englishmen in the 19th century.⁷ Buddhism receded in Ladakh with the revival of Hinduism in the mainland and as late as the 8th century, the ruling dynasties of Skardo and Baltistan, which had combined, and Ladakh bore Hindu names. Vijayavarman ruled at Skardo in A.D. 732 and Lalitaditya Mukhtadip was the King of Ladakh in A.D.733.

Though no details of Ladakhi history of these seven centuries are available, some incontrovertible facts do emerge from whatever is known. The Ladakhis of this period were an Aryan tribe and had no relation with the Mongloid people who had made their home in Tibet. Hinduism was the principal religion of the people in the earlier part of this period and later Buddhist influence marched in from Kashmir.

The second phase of Ladakhi history began when the first Tibetan intervention in Ladakh took place in the 8th century. It could not take place earlier because it was only in the 7th century that Tibetan tribes were organised into a single force for the first time. Soon after the first Tibetan state was founded, its armies moved north into China proper

and annexed the neighbouring districts. In the 8th century, the Tibetans moved westwards and came down on Ladakh.

This Tibetan rule lasted upto the 10th century when on a family partition of the ruling house, Ladakh broke away from Tibet. For reasons of geography, history and culture, Ladakh never became integrated with Tibet.⁸ Even its political relations with Lhasa were those of a vassal state to the suzerain.⁹

However, certain sociological changes overtook Ladakhi society in the eastern parts. The new rulers settled their own people in Ladakh as was customary in those days. They inter-married with the Ladakhis of the *Dardi* stock. Thus, a Tibetan strain was introduced among the people.¹⁰ But the more important impact of the Tibetan interlude of Ladakhi history was felt in the field of religion.

The Ladakhis, as part of the Indian people, had known and accepted Buddhism at a period when the Tibetans still believed in tribal ritualism. But with the establishment of the political rule of the Tibetans and their domination of the life of the people, the Ladakhis were led to accept the Tibetan form of Lamaistic Buddhism. They recognised Lhasa as the Rome of the Buddhist world. A relationship, akin to that which existed between the Vatican and the Catholic faithful in the Middle Ages, was built up between the Lama in Lhasa and the Ladakhis. Even after the writ of the Tibetans stopped running across Ladakhi territory, the spiritual bond survived. In fact, it was severed only in 1958.

During the third phase of Ladakhi history, which covers the last thousand years, Ladakh was gradually integrated with Kashmir. The process began some time in the 12th century when the rulers of Kashmir not only annexed Ladakh but began sending troops across to eastern Tibet. That was the period when Islam moved in from Arabia. Kashmir came under Muslim domination and areas of northern Ladakh followed suit.

The power of the Mughal rulers of India reached out to Ladakh in the 17th century. Mughal troops reached Leh in 1637-38.¹¹ The last of the Great Mughals, Aurangzeb personally went to Kashmir in 1665 and called the Gyalpo or the King of Ladakh to discuss the affairs of the borderland. Au-

rangzeb ordered that the *khutba* be struck in his name in Ladakh and Mughal coins be made common currency. He was a fanatical Muslim and demanded that the Gyalpo embrace Islam which the latter did. A mosque was built in Leh.¹²

With the fall of the Mughal empire, a Sikh confederacy rose in north India. One of its soldiers, a Dogra called Gulab Singh, founded his own state in Jammu. Later, he acquired the valley of Kashmir. In 1842, his general, Zoravar Singh, finally annexed Ladakh as a province of the State of Jammu and Kashmir¹³ and so it remains till today.

Such is the story of Ladakh through the ages. What conclusion can one draw from it? Petech, after a detailed study of the history of Ladakh and Tibet, stated:

“Thus the historical development of Ladakh was indissolubly connected with the destiny of the neighbouring Indian regions while, on the contrary, political contacts with central Tibet were always rare inspite of the identity of language and religion.”¹⁴

The Gyalpos of Ladakh retained a symbolic title which illustrated this patent truth. Even during the last three centuries, they insisted on using the prefix “sakya” to their names, emphasising the Indian or Hindu origin of their house.

3: Life In The Chang Chenmo Valley

Till the mid-nineteenth century, when India was tied to Britain by imperial bonds, Ladakh silently served the role of an artery of trade between India and the countries on the other side of the Kuenlun mountains. Across its snow-covered peaks and barren northern valleys Indian caravans moved, without hurry and much danger, towards Sinkiang during the short summer months. There are two historical trade routes across northern Ladakh which ended at Shahidullah, the last Indian outpost.

Leh, at the height of 11,000 ft. was the main centre of eastern Ladakh. It was from here that the caravans commenced their northern journeys. They moved up to Tankse and rested at Pamzal on the Chang Chenmo river which gave its name to the valley through which it flowed. From Pam-

zal they could choose either of the two routes which led them north beyond the Kuenlun to a height of about 17,000 ft.

One of them skirted the eastern boundary of the Chang Chenmo Valley and took them to Nischu, Lingzi Tang, Lake Tsung, Thaldat, Khitai Pass, Haji Langar and along the Qara Qash Valley to Shahidullah. The other route, along the western limits of the Chang Chenmo Valley, reached Shahidullah from Pamzal via Shamal Lungpa, Samsung Ling, Dehra Gomba and thence to Quila Jilga, Chung Tash, crossing the Tagh pass and the Chibra Valley and Malikshah.

The routes were as famous as the names of the resting places along them for centuries. It was the responsibility of the rulers of Ladakh to maintain and protect these life-lines of trade with Central Asia. The last ruler, the Maharaja of Kashmir, instructed the *wazir* or the Governor of the Ladakh districts to submit regular reports to Srinagar on the condition of the routes. The *wazirs*, in turn, had issued orders that trading parties must send them detailed reports of their caravans' progress.

One such report was sent to the *wazir* in 1868 which described the conditions in the Chang Chenmo Valley thus:

“The nomads from Pangong (Phobrang) visit this place with their flocks of sheep and goats and camp at Pamzal. Fuel and grass are plentiful in this place. After crossing the Chang Chenmo river and after traversing a distance of six miles, one reaches Gogra which is also on the bank of the river Pamzal. Fuel, wood and grass are in plenty. Kiam is situated at a distance of eight miles from Gogra. Big personalities visit this area of hunting wild horses.”¹⁵

Apart from wild horses, Lingzi Tang and Aksai Chin had another and more important attraction for the people of the Chang Chenmo Valley. There were salt lakes in this area and for the simple people of the Valley, whose life nature ordained should be nomadic, salt was as important as life itself. They went up to these higher lands to collect salt. Their hamlets emptied out in the summer months as the people from Phobrang Man, Kaksek, Marak, Spangmik and others took the road to the lakes of Amtogor and Tso tang.

The Chang Chenmo Valley was also their grazing ground as grass, fuel and wood were aplenty along the river banks. The people of Tankse *ilaqa* of the Ladakh district annually visited Kyam or Hot Springs, the Kongka pass and the entire northern valley right up to the point where the frontiers of India met China at the Lanak pass. The Kyoul people went to the area of the Spanggur Lake and those from the Hanle and Rushpur *ilaqas* took their flocks on both sides of the Pare river.

In all directions, the pasture lands reached the traditional frontiers of India. Life was normal and easy. There were no disputes. On the other side of the frontier in the east, the Tibetans came to graze their cattle. An employee of the Kashmir Government went to the frontier in 1870-71 and noted that the boundary line "divides pasture lands frequented in summer by the Maharaja's subjects from those occupied by the subjects of Lhasa."¹⁶ These facts were so well-known that the official *Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh* noted in 1890:

"The Chang Chenmo Valley is the great autumn grazing grounds for the flocks from Lukung, Phobrang and Tankse districts; occasionally, great loss is sustained by an unusually early fall of snow, for, the grass, which, though nourisheing, is at all times scanty, becomes quickly covered up and the animals die of starvation before they can be brought over to Marsemik into the milder regions."¹⁷

Ever since the establishment of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the areas up to the frontiers were regularly administered. The check-posts on the trade routes were marked on maps from 1865.¹⁸ Till 1901, the State authorities included the territory, claimed by China today, in the *wazarat* of the Frontier District. It was later divided into the *wazarats* of Gilgit and Ladakh. The *tehsils* of Skardu, Kargil and Ladakh formed the *wazarat* of Ladakh and Aksai Chin and the Chang Chenmo Valley were part of the *ilaqa* of Tankse in the Ladakh *tehsil*.

Mehta Mangal, *wazir* of Ladakh during 1860-1865, organised the revenue settlement of the whole area. His successors, including Johnson (1870-1881) and Radha Kishen Kaul (1882), made the necessary revisions. In the regular Revenue Assessment Reports, the names of the areas and villages, claimed by China as having been under its administrative jurisdiction for

centuries and the amount of revenue collected from each of them, were included. The Report for 1908 mentioned 108 villages including Tankse, Demchok and Minsar and spoke of Aksai Chin, Lingzi Tang, where rights of pastures and salt collection were exercised, as parts of the Tankse *ilaqa*. The Preliminary Report of Ladakh Settlement outlined a revenue and political history of these areas.

The boundary question found direct and indirect mention in these reports. The Assessment Report of Ladakh *tehsil* in 1909 stated:

“There have been no boundary disputes on the Lhasa frontier, and the existing boundary seems to be well-understood by the subjects of both the State and the Lhasa Government.”¹⁹

In 1865, Mehta Mangal had prepared an original sketch map showing the routes and stages up to Shahidulla in the north and Minsar in east in which Demchok was shown as the eastern boundary post. Faqir Chand, *wazir* of Ladakh toured these routes forty years later in 1904-5 and wrote:

“I visited Demchok on the boundary with Lhasa..... this place.....is situated just on the bank of the river Indus. A *nullah* falls into the Indus river from the south-west and it (Demchok) is situated at the junction of the river. Across is the boundary of Lhasa, where there are eight to nine huts of the Lhasa zamindars. On this side, there are only two zamindars. The one is the agent of the Gopa and the other is the agent of the previous Kardar of Rokshu.....In between at the mouth of the *nullah* stands a big minarette of stone. On it is fixed a wood which looks like a flag. This is the boundary line.”²⁰

Faqir Chand's tour report also mentioned Minsar and stated that a sum of Rs. 297 was being collected annually from the village.

The question of revenue in relation to the Chang Chenmo Valley was of no importance as the land was very sparsely populated. The significance of the northern Chang Chenmo valley up to Shahidullah concerned the trade route across Aksai Chin. The East India Company, and, later, the Anglo-Indian Government were very much interested in these trade

routes. In 1866, the Anglo-Indian Government entered into talks with the Government of Kashmir for developing a new route from Chushal along the Pangong lake and across Lingzi Tang and Aksai Chin to Shahidulla and for establishing facilities and security for trade caravans. In 1870, the two governments entered into an Agreement. Article I of this Agreement stated :

With the consent of the Maharaja, officers of the British Government will be appointed to survey the trade routes through the Maharaja's territories from the British frontier of Lahore to the territories of the Ruler of Yarkand, including the route via the Chang Chenmo Valley."²¹

The Chang Chenmo-Shahidulla route went through Aksai Chin, Lingzi Tang and the Chang Chenmo Valley. The Agreement of 1870 further provided that the Maharaja would abolish all duties on commerce between British India and Chinese Turkestan and agree to the appointment of Joint Commissioners of the two governments who were authorized to supervise and maintain the routes and settle disputes between travellers.

There was considerable correspondence between the two governments before and after the signing of this Agreement. In 1868, the Maharaja proposed the construction of the new route along the Chang Chenmo Valley, Lingzi Tang and the Qara Qash Valley and promised to get store-houses constructed on the road. Soon after, Syed Akbar Ali Shah, *wazir* of Ladakh, gave details of various routes and stages from Leh to Shahidullah. In 1869, a Kashmir officer, Karam Singh, submitted a report on the construction and repairs of the rest houses along the route to Shahidulla. In 1870, Dr. Cayley, one of the Joint Commissioners, reported the completion of the route and again in 1871 reported that he had examined the route. One Major Montgomerie, deputed to examine this and other routes, reported the same year :

“Every endeavour has been made to improve the Chang Chenmo route. *Sarais* have been built at some places and depots of grains established as far as Gogra at the head of the Chang Chenmo Valley, and the road generally has been put into fair order and is now said to be excellent.”²²

The trade routes were important and during the second half of the 19th century, several survey teams travelled from Leh to Shahidulla in the north and Demchok in the east. Dr. F. Stoliczka of the Geological Survey of India preceded his report in 1875 by the following remarks:

“The following brief notes on the general geological structure of the hill ranges alluded to are based upon observations made by myself on a tour from Leh via Chang Chenmo, the high plains of Lingzithang, Katarag, Aktagh to Shahidulla.”²³

Dr. Stoliczka's work was improved upon by Richard Lydekker between 1875 and 1882. His published survey contained reports on the geological conditions of the upper reaches of the Shyok river, the Spanggur vicinity, Western Chang Chenmo and Lingzi Tang.

The border areas were visited, apart from administrative personnel, by those for whom love of big game was irresistible. The Kashmir authorities realized the danger to the survival of some of the animals of these parts and introduced several regulations to control hunting expeditions. These legal enactments detailed certain areas as Game Sanctuaries, Game Reserves and Reserve Areas.

The Jammu and Kashmir Game Preservation Act of 1941 notified certain areas of Ladakh as Game Reserves. These included:

- “1. The tributaries of Indus from Demchok to Kayul.....
12. The Kharnak *nullah*;
13. The triangular area lying between Chooshal (Chushul) on the north, the frontier on the east.....
15. The Chang Chenmo area.....”²⁴

The *Dardis* and the Ladakhis watched the hunters chasing wild horses as well as officials and armed personnel on tour. In 1951, an expedition went from Lhasa to Lingzi Tang and Aksai Chin. In 1952, several army reconnaissance parties reached Lanak pass via Tankse, Hot Springs and the Kongka pass. In 1954, they went to the Lanak pass and planted the Indian tricolour. In 1956, when they visited the Lanak pass, the flag was still there. In 1957, another party went up to the Qara

Tagh pass across the Aksai Chin area. In 1958, the flag was planted at a point 80°12' East, 35°03' North.

Life in the Chang Chenmo Valley appeared to be peaceful even though in the northern extreme part of Aksai Chin, Chinese troop movements were rife. Only in 1959, when the Chinese appeared at Hot Springs and shot down the Indians, the first controversy over its possession broke out.

4 : Thousand-Years Old Demarcation

The frontiers of Ladakh, recognised and ratified by various governments of Tibet and India, were first defined a thousand year ago. In the 10th century, King Skyid-lda-ngeema-gon decided to partition his trans-Himalayan kingdom, which included Ladakh, among his three sons. A chronicle of Ladakhi Kings, written intermittently in the 17th century called *La dvags rgyal rabs*, or the Royal Chronicle of the Kings of Ladakh, recorded the details of the partition and gave the extent of the partition as it concerned Ladakh thus:

“He gave to each of his three sons separate kingdoms, viz., to the eldest Dpal-gyi-ngon, Maryul of Mnah-ris, the inhabitants using black bows; Ru-thongs of the east and the Gold-mine of Hgog; nearer this way Lde-mchog-dkar-po; at the frontier Ra-ba-dmar-po; Wam-le, to the top of the pass of Yi-mig rock.”²⁵

The King was careful to demarcate the boundaries of the kingdom of Maryul or Ladakh. He delimited them at Lde-mchog-dkar-po or Demchok; at the top of the Yi-mig rock or Imis pass and at Wamle or Hanle. Ruthong is now part of the Ari district of Tibet.

Little must the old King have thought that the boundaries of Ladakh, except the Ru-thong area, which he fixed would remain the same for ten centuries! The Indian alignment in eastern Ladakh today runs past Demchok and through the Imis pass to include Hanle in India. During the ten centuries since Ladakh's ties were severed with Tibet, some wars were fought between Ladakh and Tibet, but at the end of these wars, both sides agreed to maintain the sanctity of the frontiers decided upon by King Skyid-lda-ngeema-gon.

The Indo-Tibetan war of 1681-84 was started with a mixed

Tibetan-Mongol invasion of Ladakh which was than a part of the Mughal empire. The Mughal Governor of Kashmir rushed troops to Ladakh. After bitter fighting, the invaders were thrown out and a peace treaty was concluded in 1684. Both parties agreed that "the boundaries (of Ladakh and Tibet), fixed in the beginning.....shall still be maintained."²⁶ Since the boundaries were well known from the day of the separation of Maryul, there was no difficulty about ascertaining the exact alignment.

An interesting legacy of this war, fought almost three hundred years ago, survived the strain and stress of the succeeding tumultuous times. Ladakh and Tibet had rival claims on the Ngari Khorsum area. The Ladakhis claimed it as part of Ladakh and since the name of the area was derived from Sanskrit, they argued that it had never been a part of Tibet. At the time of the 1684 treaty, Ngari Khorsum was under Ladakhi occupation. As a gesture of goodwill, Ladakh gave up its claim over the area and later it became the Ari district of Tibet. However, there was one village which Ladakh was unwilling to give up. The Ladakhi Royal Chronicle recorded this exception :

"But the King of Ladakh reserves to himself the village of Monthser in Ngarees-Khorsum, that he may be independent there and he sets aside the revenue for the purpose of meeting the expense involved in keeping up the sacrificial lights at Kang-ree and the holy lakes of Mansarwar and Rakas Tal."²⁷

The village of Monthsar thus became an Indian enclave in the Tibetan territory and later came to be known as Minsar. It continued to be a part of Ladakh upto 1958 and the Government of Kashmir continued to collect revenue from its inhabitants!

Just as the 1684 treaty respected and recognised the frontiers of Ladakh demarcated in the 10th century, so did the 1842 Indo-Tibetan treaty. The treaty was entered into after a war which began in 1841 between India and Tibet with the invasion of Tibet by General Zoravar Singh in the name of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir. The Tibetans were aided by the Emperor of China. The war was a grim affair. Both sides suffered heavy casualties and a treaty was entered into

by the belligerents in 1842. The parties to the treaty were Shri Khalsaji and Shri Sahu Bahadur Raja Gulab Singh on the one hand and the Emperor of China and the Lama Guru of Lhasa on the other.

The 1842 treaty defined the boundary "in accordance with the old custom."²⁸ There were several versions of the treaty written in different languages. However, all were agreed on the customary and traditional boundary of Ladakh and Tibet.

Ten years later in 1852, this point of the treaty was reaffirmed in an agreement between the representatives of the Maharaja of Kashmir and the Dalai Lama, which provided that the "boundary between Ladakh and Tibet will remain the same as before."²⁹ Thanedar Bastiram, who represented Kashmir, and Kalon Rinzin of Rudok or Ru-thong, speaking for the Dalai Lama, had no doubt on this point. The frontier between Ladakh and Tibet was ancient and well-known.

China had approved of the 1852 Agreement. Before it was arrived at, the Chinese Imperial Commissioner had written to the Government of India on January 20, 1847:

"Respecting the frontiers I beg to remark that the borders of these territories have been sufficiently and distinctly fixed so that it will be best to adhere to these ancient arrangements and it will prove far more convenient to abstain from any additional measures for fixing them."³⁰

This was the situation of the frontiers of Ladakh with Tibet till 1959 and nobody ever seriously thought that this historical and ancient frontier would ever be questioned by China.

On September 26, 1959, Prime Minister Nehru referred the 1684 treaty to Prime Minister Chou. He quoted an extract from the treaty which said that "the boundaries fixed in the beginning, when Skyid-Ida-ngeema-gon gave a kingdom to each of his three sons, shall still be maintained." Chou En-lai replied to Nehru on 26 December, 1959. He did not refute Nehru's stand on the 1684 treaty. Then, as late as on July 22, 1960, China raised the issue of this treaty for the first time and summarily condemned it as non-existent. The Chinese based their rejection on the ground that they could not find this treaty mentioned in "contemporary Tibetan books."

It was strange that Peking should have argued on these lines because even the *Biography of Pohla*, written in 1783, referred to the peace that had been concluded in 1684. The full translation of this 1684 treaty had been published in 1890 and no Chinese scholar or government representative had ever doubted its authenticity.³¹ The Ladakhi Royal Chronicle,³² which spoke of the original partition of the 10th century, mentioned the 1684 treaty also. How, then could China, deny that the boundaries fixed in the 10th century were well-known in the 17th century and those who conducted the negotiations in 1684 did not deem it necessary to define them by mentioning the names of the places where the Ladakh-Tibet frontier met, but spoke only of maintaining what had been fixed from the beginning?

Peking's answer to the 1842 treaty was that it too did not concern the fixing of boundaries but was merely "an agreement of mutual non-aggression."³³ This was a novel interpretation. At least, the Tibetans had never advanced such an argument. In fact, in a letter dated November 22, 1921, the Tibetan Government cited the text of this treaty and assured India, which was then represented by Kashmir, that Tibet would abide by it. The text cited stated :

"We shall neither at present nor in future have anything to do or interfere at all with the boundaries of Ladakh and its surroundings as fixed from ancient times and will allow the annual export of wool, shawls and tea by way of Ladakh according to the old, established customs."³⁴

There was no doubt in the mind of the Kashmiri authorities as to what was meant by boundaries of Ladakh and its surroundings as fixed from ancient times. The Tibetans supplied a Persian translation of the treaty to India in 1921 as authoritative. This text, like the others, was unambiguous on the question of the boundaries :

"We shall remain in possession of the limits of the boundaries of Ladakh and the surrounding dependencies in accordance with the old custom, and there shall be no transgression and no interference beyond the old, established frontiers. We shall remain within our own boundaries."³⁵

In 1960, Peking brushed aside this evidence and argued that the 1842 treaty did not bind China because firstly, China had not sent representatives to participate in the negotiations leading to its conclusion, nor had it ratified the treaty; and secondly, Sinkiang's consent to this treaty was not obtained. It was China's case that large parts of the territories which it claimed on the Ladakhi frontiers did not belong to Tibet but belonged to Sinkiang.

This was a legalistic argument. However, it was merely a facile one. Assuming that Sinkiang's territory was involved, as the Chinese claimed, three questions arose: Could Sinkiang have been a party to the 1842 treaty? Certainly not, if the logic of the Chinese argument was to be consistent. According to China, Sinkiang in 1842 was a part of China. Peking had laboriously argued that no feudatory state of the Chinese Empire had any right to enter into treaty relations. This was the basis of the Chinese denouncement of Tibetan commitments. According to Peking, only the Chinese Emperor was the competent authority to enter into international agreements. Therefore, China could not very well argue, in relation to the 1842 treaty, that Sinkiang was not a party to it.

Secondly, Sinkiang became a province of China only in 1883, according to Chinese evidence itself. In any event, China did not exercise *de facto* or *de jure* control over Sinkiang at the time of the 1842 treaty. Was it, then, open to China to speak on behalf of Sinkiang on matters of an earlier period? According to international law and practice, China had no *locus standi* at the time of the 1842 treaty so far as Sinkiang was concerned.

Finally, the 1842 treaty was signed by a representative of the Chinese Emperor. It was not possible for China to doubt its validity after 118 years! It was estopped from advancing any objections to it in 1960.

This was the position in international law. But Peking brushed aside all the three arguments and dubbed them as imperialistic".

5: Sinkiang's Southern Limits

The Chinese claim on Ladakhi territory, arbitrary as it was, became patently absurd as Peking introduced the myth of Sin-

kiang's jurisdiction over Aksai Chin, Lingzi Tang and the Chang Chenmo Valley lying north of the Karakoram and south of the Kuenlun. The claim was based on extremely flimsy grounds. One of them was the alleged movement of the Kirgiz and Uighur people in this area which was outlined thus :

“The Uighurs came from the north to what is now southern Sinkiang over a thousand years ago, while the Kirgiz, who are very similar to the Uighurs in language, religion and habits and customs, moved to the area south of the Kuenlun mountains at the latest in the beginning of the 18th century.”³⁶

It was on this basis that China claimed these areas as belonging to the “Hotien of Sinkiang” and that, too, “for centuries.”³⁷

The “Hotien of Sinkiang” was none other than the historic Khotan with which India had much closer contacts than China. The Uighurs were an ancient nomadic people. According to the Marxist Chinese historians, the Uighur Khan Huaijen “occupied the land north of the (Gobi) desert, reaching as far east as the Heilunkiang River and west as far as the Altai Mountains and made his the most powerful state north of the Tang empire” in the 8th century.³⁸ In the 11th century, they gave up their earlier nomadic life and “took up farming and stock-raising in the area south of the Tianshan Mountains.”³⁹ In 1757, the Manchus demanded tribute from the Uighurs. On the refusal of the Uighurs to bow down, the Manchus attacked them and after two years of fighting defeated them. Around 1759, China took possession of the area south of the Tianshan mountains.

For the next hundred years, the Manchus tried to establish their domination over the Uighurs. In 1864, the whole of Sinkiang rose in revolt “against Manchu exploitation and oppression”⁴⁰ with the Uighurs as leaders. This was the official version of the history of Sinkiang till 1955 but in 1960, Peking claimed that “Sinkiang was formally made a component part of the Ching Empire in 1759” and added that since then “this region has been even more conclusively a part of China's territory.” Even then it had to accept that only “in 1883 Sinkiang was formally made a province and the Chinese Government set up Hotien Chi-Li-Chou (the Hotien Special Division)”⁴¹ Thus, the

Uighurs came under direct Chinese domination as late as 1883.

Peking had to produce some tangible evidence to show that the southern limits of Sinkiang lay beyond the Kuenlun mountains and that either China or the Uighur Khan before 1883 had exercised jurisdiction up to the Karakoram range. China failed to establish its case by any documentary evidence except for a petition sent by the then Governor of Sinkiang on August 30, 1927 for establishing an administrative unit at Shahidulla.

On the other hand, all the evidence went against the Chinese claim. The most formidable of these was derived from the Uighur-Kirgiz sources. The fact of the matter was that the rulers of Khotan claimed the southern border of their states exactly where the Indian alignment showed them. It was customary, at least for a century, for Indian officials to travel up to the crest of the Kuenlun mountains which was the traditional frontier of Kashmir.

In 1866, two officers of the Trigonometrical Survey of India, Johnson and Low, were deputed "to complete the Geographical survey of the portion of the Ladakh district between Pangong Lake and the Kuenlun range." Johnson went up to the crest of the Kuenlun and was invited by Khan Badsha of Khotan, the ruler, to visit Ilchi, the capital of his state. The incident was reported in an official report thus :

"He (Johnson) had not obtained permission of the Government of India to pass beyond the frontier of Ladakh.....urged by a spirit of adventure and a desire to collect valuable information of the *terra incognita* at whose borders he had arrived, he accepted the invitation and was escorted from the first encamping ground beyond the boundary into Ilchi, by the Khan's Wazir."⁴²

Johnson, himself, had stated that the Khan "had despatched his *wazir*, Saifulla Khoja, to meet me at Brinjga, the first encampment beyond the Ladakh boundary for the purposes of escorting me thence to Ilchi."⁴³

Since Brinjga, the southern limit of Ilchi of Sinkiang, was situated a few miles south-east of Karangutagh, there could be no doubt that the Kirgiz ruler, Badsha Khan, did not believe that the southern limits of his kingdom were beyond the crest of the Kuenlun mountains

Further west, the boundary of Ladakh at Shahidulla was recognised by all concerned. Johnson visited Shahidulla and commented: "The guard of 25 men which the Maharaja (of Kashmir) provided at Shadula last season was proved insufficient for the protection of the *kafilas* (caravans of traders), as some of them were plundered by the robbers."⁴⁴ In 1873, another official, Forsyth visited Shahidulla and reported:

"At Shahidulla we were met by Yuzbashi Mohamad Sareef Khan.....who had been deputed with some soldiers to await our arrival and who gave us a hearty welcomethe Kirgiz who had met us at Shahidulla, their farthest point, rendered great assistance in roughing the ice with pick axes, laying down felts and dragging the animals up."⁴⁵

Such were the facts about Sinkiang's southern frontier. It was only natural that the Chinese Government should fail to produce a single document to show that the limits of the "Hotien of Sinkiang" or Khotan travelled south of the Kuenlun mountains! The Chinese claims on other parts of Ladakh were equally unsubstantiated. In eastern Ladakh, China had occupied and claimed Pangong and Demchok areas. However, when it came to evidence, they could produce "no evidence of administration at all."⁴⁶ In fact, this pattern of claims on Indian territory without substantiation was to be met with again and again as the border from Ladakh to the Kedar Khshetra and thence to the NEFA became the subject of long and arduous discussions.

Chapter 6

THE HOLY KEDAR KHSHETRA

“This Kedar Khshetra is as ancient as God Himself; it surpasses all the **tirthas** and is a land where Nature stands personified. It is the sum total of all the **tirthas** on the earth. There is no place on this fair earth which can compare with this holy land.”

Skanda Purana: **Kedar Khanda**

1: Buddhist Land In The Punjab

Once the southern limits of Ladakh are left behind, the “forgotten” frontier reaches lands which are holy and hallowed in Indo-Aryan history. It runs from the snow-bound Spiti Valley in the beautiful Kangra district of the Punjab and reaches the Shipki pass, the ancient sentinel of the historic Bashahar state in the Himachal Pradesh. From Shipki to Lipu Lekh pass, on the trijunction of Nepal, Tibet and India, the frontier travels through the passes of Tsangchok la, Mana, Niti and Tunjun la on the northern borders of Uttarkashi (formerly the state of Tehri-Garhwal), Garhwal and the Almora districts of the Uttar Pradesh.

Along its entire length, the boundary follows recognised geographical principles. From Spiti to the Shipki pass, it lies along the watershed of the Spiti and Pare Chu rivers. Further east, it runs between the tributaries of the Sutlej and between the Sutlej and the Ganges basins.

Here the mainland reaches over to the borderlands. The bonds between the peoples on the Himalayan frontier and the hinterland are a thousandfold, principal among them being religion. It is to the east of the Shipki pass that the Gangotri region, under the Satopanth peaks, and the Kedar Khshetra are situated. These are the holiest of the holy places of pil-

grimage for the Hindus, visited by thousands of them each year. Across the pass on this frontier lie the Mansarovar and Mount Kailash.

The border has been historically important for another reason too. This sector gives the easiest access to Tibet. Indo-Tibetan trade in wool and other commodities prospered here for centuries. The six passes of the Shipki, the Mana, the Niti, the Kungri-Bingri, the Darma and the Lipu Lekh have remained gateways to Tibet for pilgrims and traders and were recognised as such by Article IV of the 1954 Sino-Indian Treaty on Tibet. The Hindustan-Tibet Road up to the Shipki pass, and even beyond, was built by the British on this sector of the frontier along the more ancient caravan route from India to Tibet.

The Spiti Valley, a former adjunct of the land of the Ladakhis, lying on the western extreme of this sector, became part of the possessions of the East India Company by the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, when the Maharaja of Kashmir ceded the Spiti and Lahaul areas to the Company. The Company made it into a *waziri* of Chuzi and part of the Kulu *Tehsil* of the Kangra District of the Punjab. Explaining why the Company took over this area, its Governor-General wrote to his masters in London on March 14, 1846:

“It is highly expedient that the trans-Beas portion of Kulu and Mandi, with the more fertile district and strong position of Nurpur and the celebrated Fort Kangra—the key of the Himalayas in native estimation—with its district and dependencies, should be in our possession.”¹

The English, in a hurry as usual to extract revenue from the people, ran into difficulties when they began organising the revenue settlement of the Spiti area. The Spiti people, to a large extent, were of Buddhist faith. Their history and customs were akin to those of the Ladakhis. They paid a dual tax in kind. One of the two, the *na'thal*, was spent for public purposes while the other called the *pun* was handed over to the monasteries for defraying the cost of their upkeep. In fact, the officers of the Company had committed a natural mistake in calling the area *Chuje Kothi*. As one of them remarked in 1872, Chuzi or Chuje implied “endowment or assignment to religious

uses".² Obviously, Chuzi and *pun* had similar meaning in the Spiti language.

The Spiti society in mid-nineteenth century carried within itself the heritage of its previous history. In early times, it was ruled by a Hindu dynasty of the Senas. The temples built by the Sena Rajas provide strong evidence of their long rule. From the Parsuram temple at Nirmand, a copper-plate deed executed by Raja Samudra Sena was discovered which established that the Spiti area was a part of the Hindu kingdom of the Kulu Valley.³ This was attested by the *vanshavali* or the geneological table of the Kulu Rajas. The northern limits of Kulu not only included the Spiti area but went right up to the customary alignment towards Tibet. When the Ladakhi Rajas conquered Spiti, they extended their domain to the traditional frontier.

The Ladakhi conquest brought the Tibetan form of Buddhism and with it the domination of life of the Spiti people by the Lamas. A religious link was established with Lhasa and yet the Spiti area never became a part of Tibet. Only once, in the 17th Century, Tibetan armies reached the Spiti area, but returned home after the defeated Spiti Raja, Delegs Namgyal, married the daughter of the Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan invaders.

When the Englishmen came to the Spiti valley, it was a Buddhist land where strangely enough, many Hindu temples abounded. Its limits were ascertained for revenue purposes by the Company's servants, who reported:

"Spiti is in shape a triangle, the side which separates it from the west being formed by the Kunzam ridge and the mid-Himalaya; the opposite side which separates it from Ladakh and Chinese Tibet by the Western Himalaya, and the base which separates it from Kanawar, by the part of mid-Himalaya which runs along the north side of the Sutlej.....The Spiti river rises in the apex of the triangle and runs down its centre till it nears the base, where it inclines to the left and goes out at the north-east corner."⁴

The northern limits of the Spiti area reached up to the Kaurik village in the Pare Valley. This village and the villages of Tabo and Lathi, lying west of it, were made part of the Chuje Kothi by the Company and so they have remained ever since.

In 1952, the Spiti Valley and Lahaul, then parts of the State of East Punjab, became a matter of concern for the Government and the people of India. However, it had nothing to do with the strategic aspect of their geographical situation. The problem that worried Delhi was how to weave these areas into the massive democratic pattern which was introduced by the nation's republican constitution. The first elections, based on adult franchise, were held in March 1952. The people of these areas were to be represented not only in the Union Parliament but also in the *Vidhan Sabha* (Legislative Assembly) of the Punjab State. This was not an easy matter because Spiti and Lahaul became inaccessible in that month due to heavy snows and therefore it was impossible to hold any elections. Thus, nature prevented the direct representation of the Spiti and Lahaul people in the legislative bodies. Naturally, something had to be done. The Government constituted the Punjab Tribes Advisory Council for them.

In March 1957, once again, the same problem arose. The late Himalayan snows had sealed the passes and the routes leading to Spiti as 190 million Indians exercised their right to choose their representatives. The seats allotted to the people of the Spiti Valley remained vacant. This was a matter of intense concern both for the Government and the people. The situation was highlighted when the election of the President of the Republic, Rajendra Prasad, was challenged in the Supreme Court. It was contended that the President was not elected by the entire people of the country. The people of Spiti had had no say in his election.

Till May 1957, all the three traditional routes to Spiti were snowbound. Yet the Government of India was determined to hold elections in the Valley. It decided to send its election officers by the longest route. The election party left Simla and went up to Rampur Bashahr, a distance of 88 miles, by bus. From Rampur, it marched on foot along the Hindustan-Tibet Road up to Namgiah and the Shipki pass. This was a distance of 135 miles along the narrow Sutlej gorge. From Namgiah, it turned north-west along a difficult, unmarked track over the Thasi Cong, Chango and Sumra passes. This meant trekking for 44 miles. Sumra village, the last village of Himachal Pradesh, is

separated from Lari, the first village of the Spiti, by the turbulent Spiti river. Only a rope-bridge exists to transport the travellers. The party went over it and held the elections in the Valley.

About 5,000 people have their homes in the Spiti Valley. The Spitian society is composed of the *Rajputs*, the *Lohars* (artisans) and *Hessis*. The Rajputs are the landholders and follow Buddhism. They are governed by the law of primogeniture and theirs is the patriarchal way of life. All the younger sons enter the *gompa* or the monasteries as Lamas and remain unmarried. The same rule applies to the daughters. Only the eldest daughter marries; others become "chomo" or nuns. Though the Rajputs of Spiti are Buddhists, their society is radically different that of from the Tibetans'. They are monogamous; and polyandry, unlike as in Tibet, is strictly prohibited. Divorce is recognised.*

Never in the long history of the people of Spiti and Lahaul, had anyone suggested that they were anything but Indians!

2 : The Hindustan-Tibet Road

From the Spiti Valley to the Shipki pass on the western border of the ancient Bashahar State is a journey over the Zanskar range along the well-defined watershed. On the other side of the pass lies Guge, annexed by Tibet in 1720.

On the Zanskar range above Nako, in the upper Kunawar Valley, rests the village of Namgia which is a part of the *Shuwa paragana* of the *Chini tehsil* of Himachal Pradesh. Namgia is the historic frontier village which owned the Shipki pass prior to the British period. Over the centuries, the Namgia villagers in India and the Tibetans on the other side of the Shipki pass conducted their business peacefully.

The pass, known as Pimala in Tibetan, became interwoven in the folk-lore of Tibet. "Pimala yanchhod Bod Gialbo," was the Tibetan saying, meaning that the territory above the Shipki pass belongs to the Raja of Tibet and "Pimala ranchhod Khunno Gialbo," meaning that the territory below the Shipki belongs to the Raja of Bashahar.

Ancient caravan routes from the mainland wound up over high ranges of the Zanskar up to the Shipki pass. When the

* For further details see, Parmanand Sharma, *Men and Mules On Mission of Democracy*, Bombay 1960.

British took over this area, they decided to build the famous Hindustan-Tibet Road along this route. The history of this road is an interesting chapter in the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia.

In the years following the Afghan War (1839), the East India Company was worried at the thought of Russia monopolizing the famous *shawl* trade of Western Tibet. In order to encourage the merchants from Amritsar and Delhi to compete with the Russian Kalmuks trading in Tibet, J. D. Cunningham suggested in 1841 the construction of a road from the Simla plains, to be extended by stages through the Chini *tehsil*, up to the Tibetan border beyond the Shipki pass. Dalhousie, the Company's Governor-General between 1848-1856, looked "with interest to the political and commercial advantage likely to result from the opening of a line of communication with Tibet by way of Chini *tehsil*."⁵

The Company took immediate action after this. In 1847, transit dues by the Bashahar State on the caravan routes were abolished. In 1850, Dalhousie authorized the construction of the road. However, in 1858, the affairs of the Company were in doldrums and the project was almost abandoned when the Company's rule was abolished. It was only in 1917-18 that the road was fully constructed. Ever since, the Indian Public Works Department has taken care of its maintenance and repairs.

The importance of the pass and the road for trade was recognised by the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904.⁶ Several proposals were made to extend the road beyond the Shipki pass in the Tibetan territory. During this period, the area had to be repeatedly surveyed in 1882, 1897, 1904-05, 1917 and 1920-21.

In 1954, this fact of the Shipki pass being the border pass was sanctified by the Governments of India and China, when along with the five other passes in this area, it was recognised by Article IV of the 1954 Treaty as a border pass.

3: The Kedar Bhoomi

From the Shipki pass to the Lipu Lekh pass near the Nepalese northern frontier is the land of *Kedar Khshetra* of the kingdoms of Brahmapura or Garhwal and Kumaon. This Kedar Khshetra" said the *Skanda Purana*, "is as ancient as God Him-

self; it surpasses all the *tirthas* (places of pilgrimage) and it is a land where Nature stands personified. It is the sum total of all *tirthas* on earth. There is no place on this fair earth which can compare with this holy land.”

From the earliest times of Aryan settlement in the Gangetic plains, Kedar Khshetra was recognised as a borderland of India. The Jadha-Ganga, the river on whose banks the ancient villages of Nilang, Jadhanga and Pulamsumda are situated, is a *puranic* river. The name Jadha-Ganga is derived from Jahnu with whose name is linked a fascinating legend.

Jahnu was performing sacrifice in this area, it is said, when the whole place was flooded by the waters of the Ganges. Jahnu became angry and drank up the waters of the river. At this, the gods, whose home was in the Himalayas, became worried and interceded with him. Jahnu relented and restored the waters to the Ganges. Since that time, the river came to be known as his daughter, and was given the name of Jahnavi.⁹ Obviously, the Ganges referred to in the legend was one of the tributaries of the main river. The legend from the *Puranas* establishes that even in those early days, the sources and the tributaries of the Ganges lay in India. Since those days the watershed of the holy river marked the northern limits of the Indian world.

Hiun Tsiang visited the Kedar Khshetra in 634 A.D. travelling from Hardwar in the south. His memoirs relate the conditions of the kingdom of Brahmapura “surrounded on all sides by mountains. The capital is small but the inhabitants are numerous and prosperous.”⁹ On the other side of Brahmapura was the “kingdom of the Queens” or *Ngari Khorsum*, which derived its name from the Sanskrit *nari*, meaning woman. Ngari Khorsum is today called the Ari district of Tibet. Brahmapura later came to be known as Garhwal.

Garhwal, Kumaon and Tehri-Garhwal have a long Hindu history. From the 8th to the 10th century, Garhwal and Kumaon were ruled by the Katyuri dynasty whose original capital at Joshimath in Garhwal was later shifted to the Katyuri valley in Kumaon. From the Padukeshwar temple near Badrinath,¹⁰ three copper-plate inscriptions of this period were discovered which described the northern boundary of the Katyuri State which

corresponds to the traditional alignment up to the Himalayan watershed.

The Katyuris were succeeded by the Chands in Kumaon and the Palas in Garhwal. King Anek of the Pala Halla dynasty of Nepal conquered the Kedar Bhoomi in the 12th century according to an inscription on strident found at Gopeshwar in Garhwal. But the Nepali rule was overthrown soon after and the Chands re-established themselves in Kumaon and the Palas in Garhwal, which had regained its prosperity in the 16th century. The Mughal historian, Ferishta, stated that the Raja of Garhwal "possesses an extensive dominion and a considerable quantity of gold is procured by washing the earth mounds in his country which also contains copper mines." As to the boundary of Garhwal, Ferishta added :

"His territory stretches to the north as far as Tibet and on the south reaches to the Sambhai.....He retains in pay an army of 80,000 men both in cavalry and infantry and commands great respect from the emperors of Delhithe source of the Jumna and the Ganges are both to be found within his territory."¹¹

Baz Bahadur Chand, a brave warrior who invaded Tibet and captured the fort of Taklakot, was the ruler of Kumaon from 1640 to 1678. There are records to show that he controlled all the passes leading to Tibet lying on the Sutlej-Ganges watershed. Being a pious Hindu, he reserved the revenues of five villages nearer the passes for providing clothing and lodging to the pilgrims on their way to Mansarovar and Mount Kailash.

The relations between the ruling dynasties of Garhwal and Kumaon were close and intimate. This is testified by a copper-plate inscription issued from Siri Nagar dated the 28th of Phagun, Samvat 1723 (1167 A.D.) which recites to the Raja of Garhwal "the cession to him by Raja Uday Singh of Bashahar, out of love and so long as good relation existed, the territory up to the Gartang *nala* and the retention by Uday Singh, for himself, of the territories above the Gartang *nala* on both sides of the Jadh-Ganga and above Gangotri from Nilang Peak to Jallokhaga."¹²

This copper plate inscription spoke of the Tsangchok La pass as Jallokhaga and of both the banks of the river Jadh-ganga. This was a piece of incontrovertible evidence to prove

that as early as 1667 A.D. the Sutlej-Ganges watershed and the areas south of it, called the Nilang-Jadhang, were parts of Indian territory. In the 18th century, this fact was confirmed by two lamas who had been ordered by Emperor Lang-Li to prepare a map of the country from Sinkiang to the source of the Ganges.

The lamas had studied arithmetic and geometry in a Chinese college and were considered competent cartographers. The Emperor, having heard of the holy character of the waters of the Ganges, had ordered the lama cartographers to bring home some water from the river. The lamas "reached the chain of mountains which forms the south-western boundary of Tibet; and halting at the foot of the range learned from the enquiries which they made that the Ganges took its rise on the opposite side of that chain of mountains."¹³ Thus, the Chinese knew that the source of the Ganges lay in Indian territory.

With the rise of Nepal as the most powerful Indian frontier state, Kumaon and Garhwal passed under Nepalese subjection. After the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-15, they were annexed to the dominions of the East India Company. In 1815, G. W. Traill, Assistant to the Company's Commissioner for Kumaon and Garhwal, just appointed, reported: "The northern boundary (of Garhwal and Kumaon) as recognised by the Tibetan Government extends to the commencement of the tableland."¹⁴

He was saying nothing new. That had been the position from the earliest times.

4: A Fantasy Of Claims

Though Peking did not register claims on large parts of India south of the frontier of the Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and the Kedar Khshetra, it argued that the "areas of Chuva, Chuje, west of the Shipki pass, Sang, Tsungsha, Puling-Sumdo, Wu je, Sangcha and Lapthal.....have always belonged to China."¹⁵ It added: "Except for Sang and Tsungsha which were invaded and occupied by Britain earlier, these parts were all occupied or intruded into by India only after the signing of the 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement."¹⁶ These were fantastic claims. If the Chinese claims were accepted, China would rule parts of the

Kangra district of the Punjab at Spiti, areas of the Himachal Pradesh south of the Shipki pass and over the Uttar Pradesh districts of Uttar-Kashi at Nilang-Jadhang, of Garhwal at Bara Hoti and of Almora at Sangchamalla and Lapthal.

The claims on the key strategic posts of this holy Kedar Khshetra were serious enough. However, their striking feature was the systematic and planned expansion of the area which Peking claimed as Chinese territory. Early in 1954, the claim concerned only Bara Hoti, which the Chinese called Wu Je and which, according to their Counsellor, Kang Mao-chao, was situated 12 kilometers north-east to the Tunjun la pass. On June 8, 1956, the Chinese advanced their claims from Wu Je to Tunjun la pass itself. About six weeks later, on July 26, 1956, the Chinese went back on earlier geographical location of Wu Je given by them. On April 24, 1958, they stated that "Wu Je was from south to north about 15 kilometres approximately and from east to west may be a few kilometres less." This was strange because they themselves had earlier described it as a mere check-post. By the winter of 1958, they occupied Sangchamalla and Lapthal in Garhwal district. Only after occupation in 1959, they claimed them to be parts of Tibet. On September 8, 1959, Premier Chou wrote to Prime Minister Nehru that the Chinese claimed Bara Hoti, Sangchamalla and Lapthal as separate posts. By July 18, 1960, all this was changed. During the officials' meeting, the Chinese claimed that Bara Hoti, Sangchamalla and Lapthal formed a composite area which China must have.

Between 1954 and 1960, Wu Je, a mere check-post had become inflated into an area of about 300 square miles. Still more striking a feature of these claims was that Bara Hoti was occupied and the ownership of Sangchamalla and Lapthal was claimed after Chinese troops had already established themselves there!

In 1956, a Chinese survey party turned up in the Spiti area, and attempted to place boundary stones on Indian territory. In 1957, again a Chinese patrol party was seen moving there. Delhi protested against this violation of Indian territory. Peking kept quiet; it neither denied the incursion nor claimed any part of the area.¹⁷ India, at that time, believed these incursions to have

taken place due to a lack of knowledge of the terrain on the part of the Chinese. And yet this was less than convincing. The Chinese must have known that they were on Indian territory. Even according to their own wall map of the People's Republic of China, published in November 1953, this was Indian territory.

In September 1958, Chou En-lai laid claims to this area saying that India had "invaded it". He called it by the name of Chuje. More than two years later, by a Note dated December 26, 1959, Peking registered several other claims on the Middle sector of the boundary. Among them were the claims on "Chuva" and "Chuje". But no data was given as to how this was Chinese territory except an unsubstantiated charge that the area was "occupied or intruded" by India after 1954.¹⁸

During the officials' talks in 1960, China claimed the Spiti area on the basis of a solitary document issued in the name of the 5th Dalai Lama in 1665 which was renewed, it was argued, by the 7th Dalai Lama in 1737.¹⁹ It referred to a number of villages on both sides of the frontier, including Chuje, and stated: "Being bases for raising funds for religious expenses" these villages "need not pay taxes or render corvees other than those to Tsatsang."²⁰ On this basis, Peking claimed ownership of Chuva and Chuje in 1960.

The fallacy inherent in this argument was easily exposed. During the 17th and the 18th centuries, the Tibetans possessed estates in the Spiti area. The document quoted by China expressly stated that these manorial estates were bases for raising funds for the Tashigong monastery. It dealt with religious endowments. There was no doubt that the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Dalai Lama spilled over political boundaries of his state; but that could never be accepted as political sovereignty. The proposition was really untenable. If the Chinese desired to prove temporal loyalty of these areas to Lhasa, they had to produce some proof of "secular" tax as opposed to the religious dues. This they could not.

On the other hand, the political sovereignty of India in this area was ancient and there was a mass of evidence to support it. During the days when Spiti was a part of Ladakh, an official was sent from Leh as *Garpon* or Governor. However,

considerable local autonomy prevailed. The administration was controlled by a kind of a parliament of *gatpos* or *lambardars*. The village *lambardar* collected the revenue for his village and handed it over to the *Nono* or *Wazir*, whose post was hereditary. After Ladakh became part of the Sikh kingdom in 1839, the Sikh *thanedar* at Ladakh collected the land revenue of Spiti. The English took over from the Maharaja of Kashmir and there were two revenue settlements in 1851-52 and 1871.

The Chinese could show no other evidence of their dominion over the Spiti area though they claimed to rule over it till 1954. In the light of the various topographical surveys by the Anglo-Indian Government and several Indian maps, the Chinese claim could not survive. However, the fatal blow to it was given by the *Map of the Administrative Areas of the Chinese Republic*, issued by the Chinese Ministry of Interior in December 1947 during the Kuomintang rule and the *Wall Map of People's Republic of China* issued in January 1951, both of which showed that the areas claimed by China in 1959-60 belonged to India.

Peking's claim to the Shipki pass was as feeble as it could be. It was based on the assertion that the "pastures between the Hupsang Khud and the pass have always belonged to China's Shipki village and had been places where the villagers of Shipki village had constantly pastured and mowed grass before being occupied by India in 1957."²¹ Hupsang Khud was the same place as Hupsong Khad which China strove to occupy on September 1, 1956 and against which India had protested.²² Between the 10th and 20th September 1956, two incidents between Indian Border Security Force and the Chinese troops had taken place. India had lodged a strong protest against the Chinese troops moving south of the Shipki pass. The reason for the incident was that the Chinese had then moved two furlongs south from Hupsong Khad.²³ The Chinese had chosen not to reply to Indian protests and never claimed these areas as part of China. It was odd that they should in 1960 charge India with the "occupation" of Hupsong Khad which was Indian territory.

The Chinese case appeared to suggest that the Shipki pass belonged to the villagers of Shipki. However, they could bring no evidence for such a suggestion. On the other hand, they

could not deny that as late as 1954, they had accepted the ancient reality of Shipki being the border pass.

Next to the claim on the Shipki pass, the demand that India should hand over the Nilang-Jadhang area, which the Chinese called Sang, Tsungsha and Puling-Sumdo, was too amazing to be taken seriously. Jadhang, a hamlet of the village of Nilang, became a subject of dispute between the Raja of Bashahar (or Kumaon) and Garhwal in the 17th century. The Tibetans had nothing to do with it for the simple reason that these were Garhwali villages. The villagers came up here in the summer, retiring to Gangotri and Dhunda, 50 miles down the Bhagirathi river, in the winter. This area formed part of the Thaknore Patti of what was earlier Tehri-Garhwal and is now the Uttar-Kashi district of Uttar Pradesh.

The Chinese claim rested on what they called British aggression :

“The British began encroachment upon the Sang and Tsungsha area in 1919 in an attempt to change the location of the boundary and carried out various kinds of coercion against the local people. Even under such circumstances, the local inhabitants still considered themselves Chinese nationals. . .”²⁴

The inference that the Hindu Garhwalis of the Nilang-Jadhang area of the Kedar Khshetra, “considered themselves Chinese nationals” was too ludicrous for any serious consideration. Instead of considering themselves Chinese nationals, the Garhwalis paid revenue to their rulers and documents in this behalf from the 17th century onwards were available. Of the period of 1919-1920, a remarkable document, the *Hukumnama* or *Gaon Halat* (Descriptive Record of Settlement) of the village of Nilang stated :

“From Sambat 1851 to 1858 village Nelang including Jadung was within the *Malguzari* jurisdiction of the great-grand-father of Shri Shiv Singh of Dharali and Nain Singh's grand-father Azmatoo and these persons after collecting the land revenues from the Jadhhs used to deposit the same to the *Durbar* through the *Kardar* (Administrator) Mohan Singh of the time. After a short period, when the Goorkha administration was established, Azamtoo alone collected

the land revenue from them according to the *Sanad* issued to him in *Sambat* 1866 and 1873 (1809 and 1816 A.D.). After the Goorkha administration was over, these people are depositing the land revenue with the Durbar as usual."²⁵

The Durbar was the Raja of Tehri-Garhwal. In 1919-20, the Durbar organised a new revenue settlement of the area. The boundaries of the villages of Nilang and Jadhong were ascertained and described in the *Sarhad Bandi* (Record of Village Limits) and the northern boundary was recorded as "Jule ridge (Tsang Chok La) and Lawuchi at the Tibetan boundary."²⁶

Bara Hoti, Sangchamalla and Lapthal, parts of three Indian villages, at the northernmost limits of Uttar Pradesh, are situated on the Indian side of the Indo-Tibetan boundary. Bara Hoti is a camping ground, one and a half square miles in area, and is a part of Kurkuti village in Patti Malla Painkhanda of Pargana Painkhanda in the Garhwal district. Sangchamalla and Lapthal are grazing grounds forming part of the village of Milam in Patti Malla Johar of Pargana Johar in the Almora district. At present, all the three places have been illegally occupied by China.

All the three places are adjacent to Indian villages and are uninhabitable during the winter. During the summer months, Indian villagers go there for sheep-grazing. According to Peking, they "had always been under the jurisdiction of Daba Dzong of China's Tibet region. The historical documents filed for centuries and well preserved up to now by local authorities of the Tibet region, stipulate clearly that these places are within the territorial limits of Daba."²⁷ Peking produced two land deeds of 1729 and 1737 to substantiate its claim that it had "consecutive documents of several centuries" to prove indisputably that the areas were Tibetan. The documents, unfortunately for Peking, made no mention of Wu Je, Sangchamalla and Lapthal but stated that dues would be collected from "the people of the southern regions who come"²⁸ as in the past. There could be no doubt that the reference was to transit dues paid by Indian traders, mainly Bhotias, of this area, after they entered the Tibetan territory.

On the other hand, the position relating to land revenue of Bara Hoti was in no doubt. There was a mass of document-

ary evidence dating from the time when Garhwal passed under the East India Company. Even the Chinese did not dispute that Bara Hoti was a camping ground. As early as 1842 the English Settlement Officer had recorded:

“Large portions of waste land including whole ranges and their vast forests have been included from olden times in the boundaries of the adjacent villages.”²⁹

The traditional boundaries were recorded in 1880 on the basis of the statements of the local population. *The Report of the Tenth Settlement of the Garhwal District* published from Allahabad clearly stated that Bara Hoti was part of Malla Painkhanda. It was not difficult to determine this. Apart from the local tradition and custom, the geographical principle left no doubt about its position. The mountain system of Garhwal could best be regarded as a series of spurs from the Tibetan watershed, which at that place separated the Ganges basin in its larger sense from that of the Sutlej.³⁰ The same principle applied in the case of the frontier north of Sangchamalla and Lapthal. The principle line of water parting along the Tibetan frontier there follows a ridge of great altitude and the watershed throughout a greater part of its length is a simple longitudinal range.³¹

5: The Home Of The Bhotias

The frontier around the Gangotri region is nearer to the Indian heart than any other sector of the Sino-Indian boundary for emotional reasons. It is from here that the ancient passes lead pilgrims to the holy lake of Mansarovar and Mount Kailash. Across the famous six passes, Indian caravans have passed through to western Tibet from the earliest times. Nilang-Jadhang, Bara Hoti, Sangchamalla and Lapthal lie at points where the Indian frontier comes to an end and where the remarkable Bhotias have made their home.

For centuries, the Bhotias have been trading in wool with western Tibet across the frontier. Their population is about 25,000. The Jadhs of the Nilang-Jadhang region, a Bhotia tribe, are the only section who have taken to sheep-breeding whereas the Marchhas, Tolchas, Darmas and Johars are chiefly interested in carrier animals. Between them and the Khampas of Tibet

there has existed a very ancient tradition of wool trade. The Tibetan authorities levied some kind of tax on them for the privilege of trading with the Khampas when they entered Tibetan territory.

When the East India Company annexed Garhwal, it found difficult to collect moneys from the Bhotias of the Bara Hoti area. In 1842 J. H. Batten reported that "there being no surplus produce from which rent or revenue could be derived, a land tax appeared to be absurd. I thought that the form of lease should be a settlement per village according to its present trading prosperity.....remembering the duties levied on the Bhotias by the Tibetan Government for the privilege of trading....."³³

Twenty four years later, this assessment was increased and its results were observed by another official in 1866 who opposed any proposal to tax the Bhotias' trade with Tibet in these words:

"On the general grounds that the tax on trade was undesirable, and particularly so in the case of Tibetan trade, which affords employment to the thousands in the most sterile part of Garhwal, and provides a market for produce in the same region, thus encouraging agriculture, which without this stimulus would inevitably languish; and that with the enhancement of land revenue of the whole district at the present settlement limited to fifty per cent, there was no necessity for taxing the trade of the Bhotias."³⁴

The taxation of the Bhotias was one of the principal considerations with the British in the Sangchamalla-Lapathal area of the Johar Malla right from 1815. After a lot of controversy, the principle laid down by Batten were accepted and, in justification, it was stated :

"It is quite fair that they (Bhotias) should pay because they occupy an immense tract of country to the exclusion of all others. For six months they graze their sheep and cattle all over the country. They have the benefit of the roads and ridges made at a great expense, and with these advantages they make great profits."³⁵

The officers of the Anglo-Indian Government occasionally travelled beyond their immediate concern of raising more money

from the people of the border areas. They recorded sociological facts about the Bhotia people. The *Hukum Nama* for Jadhang is an instance:

“There are.....houses of mud roofing, one with planks roof and one with slate roof. Besides, sixteen grain stores (Kuthar) have slate roofs. The houses are crowded together and are simple structures with verandahs. There are two families of Rawat, six of Rawa, three of Risatu, three of Guriyata and two of Dhiral. Some Nilang families have settled here. Three Malguzars appointed for village Nilang look after this village also. Malguzar Panch Ram has also a permanent house in the village. Rights regarding grazing of cattle and collection of land revenue etc. already decided for village Nilang would be considered the same for this village which is a hamlet of the village of Nilang. There are three unassessed water mills in river Thang Theng. There is a temple of a Goddess on the left bank of river Thang Theng. The Goddess is worshipped with Soor (a kind of illicit distilled liquor) and wine on the eighth ninth and third days of *Sukla Paksh* each month.....the Brahmins of the village of Mukhaba are the Pandas of the inhabitants of Jadung. Between three and ten Kuri (local weight) of *fabra*, *maisha* and salt etc. are given annually by every family to its panda as Dadwar, a local tax for Puja.”³⁶

Official documents refer also to the dresses of men and women and refer to the strange custom of partition of property which “is carried out on the basis of number of wives” and not on the basis of number of children. They also give names of tenants and sub-tenants of the cultivated portions of the village. In fact, the 1951 census recorded that the area of Nilang was 46 acres.

Such is the land of the Bhotias which the Chinese claimed as their territory and insisted that the inhabitants were “Chinese nationals”!

6: Dominating The Gangetic Plain

The mystery of the claims on the Middle sector was partly resolved during the officials' talks. First, the small checkpost of Wu Je was converted by the Chinese into a compact area of three hundred square miles. When fifty-one questions were

asked about the exact locations of the Chinese alignment of the boundary, twenty-seven were not answered. The Chinese themselves were not willing to put any questions on this sector to the Indian officials. This was odd. However, a little later, the Peking officials allowed their real intention to be revealed, of course, in an indirect manner:

“First of all, since the Wu Je area is a key place for border defence and the communication pass in China’s Tibet region, the Daba Dzong Government never failed to send guards to be stationed there every year.....besides standing guard over the border they were also charged with the tasks of.....maintaining public security:.....”³⁷

The Chinese asserted that “these facts are well known to everybody.” The facts that were known to everybody were those which concerned the strategic importance of the Indian border post and the rest is known obviously only to the Chinese and that too from 1954 onwards!

The frontier of the Kedar Khshetra was not particularly treated by India as of immediate strategic importance. The Anglo-Indian Government was more interested in raising revenue from the Bhotia traders in this borderland than in anything else. Even the Tibetans, down the centuries, never bothered about it. Then, why did the Chinese intrude south of the Ganges watershed and occupy this area unilaterally after 1954?

Were these claims motivated by strategic reasons? Any military base built in this area could dominate the entire Gangetic plain. Similar considerations applied to the claims in the Spiti Valley and the Shipki pass. With the Valley under their domination and their troops south of the Shipki pass, they could command the Hindustan Tibet Road. The militarised Chinese frontier would then come south of the Himalayas and right up to the edge of the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. No antagonistic power in the long history of India had a more advantageous strategic position for dominating the Gangetic Valley, the heartland of northern India.

chapter 7

THE NORTHERN LIMITS OF KAMARUPA

“Upon the forest tribes in his dominions His Majesty has compassion.....For His Majesty desires for all animate beings security, control over the passions, peace of mind and joyousness.”

Asoka Rock Edict XIII

I: From Ramayana To The Ahoms

From the eastern end of Bhutan to the trijunction of India, Burma and Tibet, the forgotten frontier runs over 600 miles of the northern limits of the upper parts of ancient Kamarupa, re-named the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954. Four of the five divisions of NEFA, Kameng, Subansiri, Siang and Lohit, are situated here. The NEFA is a hilly land “bounded by Bhutan to the west, the Tibetan and Sikiang regions of China to the north and east, and Burma to south-east, it is so mountainous, so cut about, chopped up and divided by countless streams, that on a month’s tour you may well climb a total height exceeding that of the Everest.”⁷

About half a million tribals have made their home here. They belong to what the anthropologists call the Indo-Mongloid group of the Indian population.² They are divided into several tribes, six of which are more numerous, renowned and powerful: the Monbas, the Akas, the Daflas, the Miris, the Abors and the Mishmis.

The history of this hilly north-eastern borderland has preserved an amazing continuity. Both the ancient epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* refer to it. Arjuna, the Pandava hero, according to *Mahabharata*, defeated Bhagadatta, the son of Narkasur, the king of the Kirat people of this area and brought them to their knees.³ Bhagadatta, smarting under this defeat,

joined the Kauravas, Pandava's rivals, at the final battle of Kurushetra.⁴ *Ramayana* mentions the founding of Pragjyotisha by King Amrutraja and refers to the penance by the King's grandson, Vishamitra, upon the banks of the Kausiki river, rising in the Himalayas and flowing in the northwest part of the Pragjyotisha region.

Pragjyotisha is referred to by the *puranas*, Sanskrit classics, and foreign travellers up to the 8th century. The *puranas* are revealing documents of early Indian history. In each of them, the first half is devoted to geography and the second half to history. The *Bhagwat Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana* relate the story of Lord Krishna's victory over King Bana, a contemporary of Narkasur of the Kirat, at Tezpur. According to the *puranas*, Bhaluka, a grandson of the defeated Bana, re-established his kingdom later and founded his capital at Bhalukpur at the foot of the Aka hills near the modern village of Balipara. A strange remnant of this past is still observed in the old fortification on this spot. The Akas never forgot this fact and even today claim Bhaluka as the progenitor of their race!

Kalidasa, in his epic *Raghuvansa*, speaks of another defeat of the King of Pragjyotisha by Raghu, the founder of the dynasty whose most illustrious member was Lord Rama. According to him, Pragjyotisha extended north of the Himalayas, from Mount Kailash (referred to by its ancient name of Hemkuta) to Assam, and was known throughout early Indian history as Kamarupa. The *Raghuvansa* mentions Sonitpur, modern Tezpur, which was the capital of another Indian kingdom situated west of Pragjyotisha.

The kingdom of Kamarupa was created after Pragjyotisha, Sonitpur and other areas were united; and its extent is given by the *Vishnu purana* as 450 miles (100 *yojanas*) spreading out in all directions from the Kamakhya temple near Gauhati, visited even today by pilgrims. The temple, says the *Kalika purana* was the centre of Kamarupa. Hiung Tsang's record shows that the area of Kamarupa had increased to 10,000 li or to a circumference of 1667 miles by the 7th century and the *Yogini purana*, of the 8th century, states that its northern boundaries lie up to the Kanja hills of the Himalayan range.⁵ Till this

period, Kamarupa, which then included what is now the NEFA, was ruled by the Hindu dynasties of the Varmans, Salasthamhas and the Palas.

Centuries have passed by since the times of these dynasties and yet local tradition has kept up this part of the heritage of the NEFA people alive. Of this, a scholar of tribal India has written :

“Local tradition regards the country round Sadiya as ancient Vidharbha.....and the archeological relics at Bhishmaknagar in Lohit as marking the capital of King Bhishmuk, whose daughter Rukmini was carried away on the eve of her marriage by Lord Krishna himself. The ruins of the fort at Bulakpung, on the right bank of the Bhareli River in Kameng, are claimed by the Akas as the original home of their ancestor Bhalukad..... A Kalika King, Ramchandra, driven from his kingdom in the plains, fled to Daffa foothills and established there his capital of Mayapore, which is probably to be identified with the ruins on the Ita hill, not far from Doimukh in Subansiri. In the Lohit Division are the ruins of the copper temple, Tameshwari, which at one time must have attracted many worshippers, and a place of great sanctity in the beautiful lower reaches of the Lohit River, the Brahma Kunda, where Parasuram opened a passage through the hills with a single blow of his axe, which is visited every year by thousands of Hindu pilgrims.”⁶

Such is the history of the northern part of the Hindu land of Kamarupa preserved by the epics, *puranas*, classics and tradition up to the 8th century when from north-east descended the Ahoms, a sub-tribe of the Shans of Burma.

The Ahom migration from north-east corner of the frontier was in many ways different from the migrations which came across the north-west frontier. Unlike the other migratory waves, the Ahoms took three centuries before they could secure a foothold in India. It was only in about 1228 A.D. that they could defeat the rulers of Kamarupa. Once the Ahom kingdom was established, the land was given a name after them, which in later centuries was phonetically softened into Assam.

From the 13th to the 19th centuries, the Ahom kingdom

prevailed over the ancient land of Kamarupa. The Ahom kings were absorbed in the prevalent Hindu fold. Their main seat of power was in the plains. They had to fight bitterly to bring northern Kamarupa under their sway. In fact, due to the stubborn resistance of the Kirat tribes, the rulers of the Assam plains could not assimilate the hilly territories of the north in their kingdom for a long time. When the Ahoms finally managed to bring this area under their rule, they were forced to evolve a new system of administration. The Ahom Government appointed frontier wardens and Governors to rule over the different tribes of the Sadiya country, just as the Barphukan Darrang Rajas were appointed to deal with the Bhotias. The men appointed were expected to know the language, customs, traditions and social habits of the tribals with whom they were connected.

The system proved to be very efficient. Though the means of communications with the tribes were very difficult, the Ahoms maintained continuous contacts with them. Of the physical difficulties of contact and the geographical obstacles, Mulla Darvish of Herat, who accompanied the Mughal historian Shahbuddin in 1662-63 to these parts, has written: "It is another world. Its roads are frightful like the path leading to the nook of death; fatal to life is its expanse like the unpeopled city of Destruction."⁷

Shahbuddin himself was more than admirably surprised at the Ahom sovereignty in this part of Kamarupa in view of the difficulties which the Mughal expedition of 1662-63 met with. The Mughal historian 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."⁸ When the Mughal armies reached Assam, they found that the Raja's armies included tribal legions. The Mughal Commander, Raja Ram Singh, thought it wise to have an interview with the Ahom representative, Madhavcharan Kataki before risking a battle. The Ahom ambassador warned the Mughals in these words:

"Numerous chieftains of the mountainous regions have become our willing allies in the campaign. They consist of a total strength of three lakhs soldiers."⁹

The Ahom sovereignty over the tribes was recorded in a remarkable book, the *Political Geography of Assam*,¹⁰ which was written in the 17th century. The book listed the tribes which accepted this sovereignty and paid tributes to the Ahom Rajas. Their names, the amount of tribute and the names of the passes by which they descended on the plains were given. Part of the hill territory such as the areas of the Mikkir and Miri tribes were directly ruled by the Rajas while the Daflas, the Akas and the Bhotias were autonomous in their internal rule.

The Ahoms lost their kingdom due to a civil war which brought about Burmese intervention and led to the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824. When the East India Company took over, it sent its officers to survey the new possession and discovered that the Ahoms' control over the tribes still survived. The Company's officer, Michell, reported:

"In 1820, before we took possession of Assam, the Mishmis were obedient to the orders of the Assam Government and paid tribute to the Sadiya Khaw Gohains."

Writing about the Abors, he stated that in 1825, "Captain Newsville reported to the Quarter-Master-General that the Abors were giving assistance to the Gohain of Sadiya against the Singphos" who had risen in revolt. When the Mavmarias followed the Singphos, "a larger body of them (Abors) about 20,000 or 30,000," reported Mitchell, "came down to assist the Bura Gohain in repelling the Mavmarias, who were devastating all the country east of Jorhat."¹³

British rule was established in Kamarupa by stages. During the period of the first war against Burma, the plains of Assam were taken over. In fact, the war against Burma was provoked by Burmese efforts to annex the plains and southern parts of Assam up to Manipur.¹⁴ Having succeeded in defeating the Burmese, the British attempted to evolve a system of relations with the northern tribes of Assam on the pattern already established by the Ahoms.

Several Political Agents and Deputy Commissioners were appointed with jurisdiction over separate tribal areas. These officers were to regulate inter-tribal relations and the relations between the tribes and the people from the plains but not to interfere in the internal affairs of individual tribes. For this

purpose, first the Company and then the Anglo-Indian Government passed several laws. Most of them dealt with administrative boundaries of the plain districts and the tribal areas.

In 1873, the Anglo-Indian Government adopted a new policy. By the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation I of 1873, the provincial government of Bengal was empowered to prescribe an *inner line* in northern Assam beyond which people were prohibited from travelling without passes. This was a move to segregate the tribal people of Kamarupa. There were several reasons for this new and abrupt measure, two of which were easily understood.

The Anglo-Indian state looked forward to revenue from the tribal areas. These areas produced rubber, wax, ivory and other jungle products. The government knew that people from the plains procured these goods from the tribals at a very low price. It was losing all revenue on it. The 1873 Regulation blocked this loophole. The second reason was political. By the 1873 Regulation and another passed in 1880, the people of the sub-montane Himalayan regions of Assam were placed behind an iron curtain. These areas were marked "excluded" and "partially excluded areas" and contacts between them and the people of the plains were prohibited.

Both the British aims succeeded, though there were other consequences of this policy which had not been anticipated. In the 1870s, the Anglo-Indian government organised a number of "fairs" for trading purposes. The tribals first refused to cooperate. By 1876, some success was achieved. Two fairs were held in that year. At the Udalguri fair 3,600 tribesmen came while the Sadiya fair was visited by 3,600 Miris, Mishmis, Khamptis and Singphos. The Administration crept from the plains northward. In 1882, an Assistant Political Officer was appointed at Sadiya. By 1919, the whole area was divided into Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract. In 1942, the Titrap Frontier Tract was created out of the southern part of the Sadiya Frontier Tract.

During the British period, the tribal peoples were separated from the Assamese. As a result, "the revolution" which the British brought about in India did not affect them. They continued to live a life which had seen little change.

2 : Tribal Demography Of NEFA.

A striking feature of the tribal society of the northern people of ancient Kamarupa today is their refusal to be converted to Buddhism. Though the great theocratic Buddhist state of Tibet, with its powerful missionary zeal, was across the frontier, of the six major tribes of the NEFA, only the Monbas accepted Buddhism and that, too, to a degree. The others continued to follow their ancient tribal religion and rituals, strongly influenced by Hinduism. During British rule, some of them were brought under the impact of Christian missionaries.

The Monbas lived in the Kameng division, next door to the Bhutanese, on a plateau where the average altitude is 10,000 ft. above sea level. Their cultural pattern is similar to that of the Bhutanese. The Buddhist influence permeates from the Tawang Lamasery. Though Tawang has kept contact with Lhasa in some form or the other for the last four centuries, the Monbas have Indianised the Yellow sect Buddhism to an astonishing extent, preserving at the same time their non-Tibetan and Indian character. Elwin, who visited them in the early fifties of this century, described them thus :

“Quiet, gentle, friendly, industrious, good to animals, good to children, you see in the Monpas the influence of the compassionate Lord Buddha on the ordinary man. They may have little theology; they have a great deal of religion. They are artistic too.....They have a real dignity; they are people who like to do things properly. Precedence, a certain gravity and order, manners, ceremonial of daily life mean a lot to them.”¹⁵

Soon after the British annexation of Assam, Deb Raja, the Chief of Tawang Monbas, undertook to submit to British jurisdiction in 1844. Since the British had replaced the Ahoms and the Monbas had been dependents of the Ahoms, Deb Raja did not feel that he was taking any revolutionary step. He willingly signed an undertaking for good behaviour and was assigned an annuity of Rs. 5,000. The terms of the undertaking were put down in a proper document.¹⁶

Almost forty years later, the Annual Report for 1885-1886 of the Deputy Commissioner, Darrang, stated that the Tawang Raja attended the *Darbar* held by the Deputy Commissioner.

At this *Darbar*, a dispute between the Tawang traders and the Kuriapara people over the exchange of salt for rice was settled and the Tawang Raja drew his annual pension of Rs. 5,000. The Raja reported to the Deputy Commissioner on the economic conditions of the Monbas area at that time.¹⁷

Life continued on a settled pitch and the Annual Reports of the British Deputy Commissioners spoke of the Monbas as well-behaved subjects. The contact with Lhasa was limited only to spiritual matters and even this was becoming out of vogue. In 1914, before the McMahon Line was drawn, one Captain Neville, Political Officer of the Western section of the North East Frontier Tract, expressed his view that the Tawang monastery should not remit any part of the grant it received from the Anglo-Indian government to Lhasa whose religious domination it accepted.¹⁸

The Akas, who live next door to the Monbas, have refused to accept Buddhism as their religion. In fact, theirs is a society which has refused to leave its slavery stage. They treat the Buguns, a tribe living in the same area, as their slaves. Their villages are dominated by the aristocratic houses and their methods of intercourse with other tribes and the peoples of the plain can hardly be described as peace-loving. The hero of this tribal society, which in some manner follows the old Roman pattern, is Raja Tegi, who was a great and fearless warrior.

When the Deb Raja of the Tawang Monbas signed the undertaking in 1844, the Akas, too, saw no objection to giving a pledge "never to join any parties that may hereafter be enemies to the British Government" and "to oppose them in every way in our power."¹⁹ They accepted the political sovereignty of the successors of the Ahoms. They were granted pensions. Except for a period in 1883-1884, there was no trouble in the smooth development of this relationship.

The Daflas live in the eastern part of Kemeng and in parts of the neighbouring Subansiri division. They are believed to number 80,000. They live in very long houses occupied by a number of families related to each other. Their slaves, too, live with them.

They are among the more "primitive" of the tribes and the

clan concept dominates their outlook. Their social habits do not permit the growth of village communities. Not long ago, their houses were involved in wars with each other. At this stage of social development, the Daflas are poor and neither weaving nor use of metals is developed among them. "In temper aggressive, reserved and suspicious, they have quarrelled among themselves for generations; there are still old blood feuds taking their toll of human life and cattle-theft has long been common."²⁰

The entire Monbas and Aka region from the eastern boundary of Bhutan upto the Dafla territory in the Kameng River Valley, covering 4,000 square miles, was surveyed for the Survey of India by Indian officials in 1913-14.²¹

In the Subansiri division, apart from the Daflas, the Miris are the dominant tribe. The "Hill Miris", as they are often called, lived for centuries in the most inaccessible parts of the division, which are formidable to penetrate and almost desolate. It is the grim struggle to survive which has stunted the physical as well as the intellectual growth of the Miris.

The Ahoms kept that minimum amount of contact with the Miris which was essential to establish their sovereignty. The first full report on the Miri way of life was given by the Miri Mission in 1912. Between November 1911 and March 1912, the members of the Mission surveyed the valleys of the Subansiri, Kamla and Khru rivers. They accurately mapped nearly 1.40 square miles of territory on a scale of 1" to 4 miles.²²

Elwin spoke of them in 1960 thus :

"The Hill Miris are a handsome people and they not only look nice; they are nice. They are of a milder and more co-operative temperament than the Daflas or Tagins, and overwhelm a visitor with friendliness."²³

The Abors of the Siang division are now called the Adis. Their name has been changed because the word "Abor" meant "unruly" or "disobedient". The Adis, numbering about 300,000, are perhaps the most remarkable tribal people of the north-eastern Himalayan frontier.

Their society has a stamp of democratic way of life which is unique among the Indo-Mongloid tribes. Every Adi village

is a unit; the units together constitute a federation or super-village, and the confederating villages work in co-operation. This co-operative spirit guides the Adis in all matters concerning the community. Each village is a republic but all together constitute a kind of a commonwealth.

Within the village, the judicial and legislative powers are delegated to an assembly called the *Kebang* which meets in a special house known as the *Morang*. All the subscriptions given by the villagers, generally in kind, are deposited in the *Morang*. The institution of *Kebang-Morang* has many facets. The *Morang* is used as a dormitory for the village bachelors. The *Kebang* looks after the aged and the sick who are treated as perpetual guests of the community.²⁴

A Christian missionary, Father N. M. Krick, visited the Adis in 1853. He attended a *Kebang* meeting and later described the Adi democratic life in some details:

“Every male, reaching the age of reason, is by right active member of (any) assembly. Each commune is ruled by five or six Chiefs elected for life by the people; they control all affairs of greater importance.....

“Laws are framed by the people, sanctioned by the council, and promulgated by the president. Every decision is supposed to come from the people; the Chiefs have no right but to approve and enforce it.....”²⁵

The last major tribe of the NEFA are the Mishmis of the Lohit division, whose 60,000 people are divided into three main groups. They are pastoral in their way of life, though trade plays an important role. The Chuika Mishmi group, with its home on the banks of river Dibong, is India's north-eastern link with Tibet. The Mishmi Hills, or the Lohit division, is the most inaccessible area in India and yet in modern days, it had the largest number of foreign explorers visiting it. In 1827 the surveyor Wilcox and in 1826 and 1824 the botanists Griffith and Rowlatt trekked to the Mishmi area. The Mishmis did not take kindly to these strange intruders and the first victim of their wrath was Sadhu Parmanand followed by Father Krick and another French missionary who were killed in 1854. This led to a British punitive expedition in 1855. The first detailed survey of the area was undertaken by two parties between 1911 and

1913. The survey parties also constructed roads and bridges in the difficult terrain of the hills.²⁶

The Akas, the Daflas, the Miris, the Adis and the Mishmis, along with other minor tribes, have maintained their tribal structure almost intact. They had little in common with the Tibetans either in their tribal life or religious beliefs. Not only in the ancient times, but also throughout the modern era, they have been considered and treated as part of the Indian people. In 1881, the Assam Census Report opened with the reiteration of this fact: "Assam occupied the north-east corner of the Indian Empire and is bounded on the north by the eastern section of the Himalayan mountain which is inhabited by the Bhutias, Daflas, Akas and other hill tribes". Twenty years later, the Census Report stated: "Living in the Hills on the north of the Brahmaputra, we find the Mishmis, the Abors, the Miris, the Daflas and the Akas." The Report for 1921 contained a full appendix on the tribes, giving their territory, customs and practices, traditions and religion.²⁷

The Anglo-Indian administration moved slowly across the tribal areas. In 1880, the first major step was taken with the publication of the *Frontier Tract Regulation*. Under this Regulation, political officers were appointed to look after the tribal areas and were stationed at Lakhimpur, Darrang and Dibrugarh adjacent to them. In 1914, a new division of the areas was made and three main units were established. The Central and Eastern section, North-East Frontier Tract covered the hills areas of the Ahors, the Miris, the Mishmis and others; the western section, North East Frontier Tract covered the hills of the Monbas, Akas, Daflas and parts of the Miri and Abor Hills. The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract comprised the rest of the present area of NEFA.

In 1919, the first two divisions were renamed Sadiya Frontier Tract and the Balipara Frontier Tract. In 1921, they were declared "backward tracts". The Government of India Act of 1935 divided them into "excluded" areas over which the Governor of Assam had exclusive control. This was the position till 1947 when the British quit India.

3: The Story Of The Simla Convention

The Tibetans never claimed that the hill peoples of nor-

thern Assam were their kith and kin though some of the NEFA tribes were of the Indo-Mongloid stock and one of them, the Monbas of Kameng, were Buddhists. They treated them with contempt and called them "Loya" or lower class of people.

In 1792, a Chinese work called the *Wei Ts'ang Tu chih* (Topographical Description of Tibet), written by Ma Shao-Yun and Meo-Hei-Sheng, was published. Referring to the Indian tribals of the NEFA contemptuously, the authors stated: "Loyu wild people's country is to the south of the Tibetan territory."²⁸ Huang Pei-Chio, the author of the Chinese work *Hsi tsang Tu Kao*, said nearly a century later:

"From Lhoyul to Kashmir and Pulute the wild tribes that are seen are of four categories. They and the areas such as India all belong to the British....."²⁹

He made a special reference to Loyuls thus:

"Lhoyul wild people: old name is Lokhe Pu Chan country. It is to the south of Tibetan territory.....several thousand li. The people there are wild and stupid. They do not know Buddhism.....The Tibetans call them Lao Khas."³⁰

The fact that these tribal areas lay outside Tibet was affirmed by the *Ching Shih Kao* or the Dynastic History of the Ching period which described Tibetan borders. It stated that "the border in the south reaches the tribal area and British Assam....."³¹

Even after the various Chinese Central Governments began claiming parts of the NEFA area in one manner or another after 1920, the Tibetans were clear as to India's historic and natural frontiers. Their demands concerned only small pockets south of the historic line. As late as October 31, 1944, the Tibetan Foreign Office was reiterating that the Tibetans "did not wish in any way to dispute the validity of the McMahon Line as determining the limits of the territory (subject to such minor adjustments as were contemplated in 1914) in which India and Tibet respectively are entitled to exercise authority."³² The McMahon Line was the name given to the traditional and customary frontier between India and Burma on the one hand and Tibet on the other by the Indo-Tibetan Boundary Agree-

ment of March 24-25, 1914 and the Simla Convention which was concluded on July 3, 1914.

The story of the Simla Convention had seldom been told fully before the 1959 Chinese claims on the NEFA. It was one of the several boundary agreements entered into by the Anglo-Indian Government and since it only ratified what was *de facto* and *de jure* northern boundary of India, it did not arouse particular excitement among Indian historians.

The initiative to call a tripartite conference between India, China and Tibet was taken by the Anglo-Indian Government on August 17, 1912. The immediate provocation for this initiative was the situation prevailing at that time in China and Tibet. On October 10, 1911, the Manchu dynasty was overthrown by the Chinese and Dr. Sun Yat-sen was proclaimed the provisional President of the Republic of China in Nanking on February 1, 1912. Simultaneously, in Tibet an anti-Chinese revolt gathered strength. The 13th Dalai Lama and his men drove Chinese representatives out of Lhasa and proclaimed Tibet "independent". Even prior to the Revolution, the Chinese position was very weak at the Lhasa Court. After the Manchus' refusal to help the Tibetans during the Anglo-Tibetan war of 1904, the Chinese had practically no say in Tibetan affairs. In fact, soon after the Chinese Revolution, the Tibetans began conducting their foreign affairs. In 1912, a treaty between Tibet and Mongolia was concluded.³³

The British policy towards Tibet on the morrow of the birth of the Chinese Republic was cautious. The failure of Curzon's policy was not forgotten. In 1908, British troops from the Chumbi valley had been withdrawn. In 1910, when the 13th Dalai Lama fled to India in the face of a Manchu invasion, Delhi was cool towards him. The 1911 Revolution in Nanking was accepted by London as an inevitability. The foreigners in China had seen the futility of any attempt to save the Manchus. The Consular body, representing all the European powers, had issued a declaration of neutrality from Hankow on October 18, 1911, equating the Revolution with a civil war³⁴ and announcing their resolve not to intervene against the revolutionary forces.

The British Memorandum of August 17, 1912 to the new

Government of the Republic of China was prompted by a policy which aimed at continued peace between China and Tibet on the one hand and Tibet and India on the other. It was explicit on the Indo-Tibetan relations. It pointed out that China had failed to discharge its obligations to Tibet in the past. Lhasa had opposed the Anglo-Chinese Convention on Tibet of 1890 and the Anglo-Chinese Trade Regulations regarding Tibet signed in 1904. The impotency of the Chinese Central Government was so patent that these facts were recognised by the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906. Thereafter, the Memorandum pointed out, Indo-Tibetan affairs had been settled directly by the two parties concerned. It was proposed to pursue this policy.³⁵ The Chinese Republican Government replied on January 30, 1913, stating that it accepted the Memorandum as the basis for negotiations.³⁶

On May 26, 1913, the British Government proposed a joint conference with a view to settlement of the Tibetan question in which Britain, Tibet and China were to participate. China accepted the proposal for this tripartite conference on June 4, 1913. At the same time, it raised some questions concerning the status of Tibet at the proposed conference. The Chinese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs took up the matter with the British Minister on July 14, 1913, and again with the British *Charge d' Affairs* on July 28, 1913. The British position was uncompromising. The British insisted that since the Tibetan Government alone could deliver the goods, its representatives would have an equal status with the representatives of India and China.

On August 7, 1913, the Chinese Foreign Office sent the following Note to the British representative :

“A Presidential Order was received on 2nd August appointing Ivan Chen as Special Plenipotentiary of Chinese Government for the conduct of negotiations relating to Tibet. It therefore devolves upon our Government to order Ivan Chen to proceed to India as speedily as possible there to open negotiations for treaty jointly with the Tibetan Plenipotentiary and the Plenipotentiary appointed by the British Government and to sign articles which may be

agreed upon for the purpose of removing all difficulties which have existed hitherto in regard to Tibet.”³⁷

Thus, by August 1913, the ground was prepared for the Simla Conference. The Chinese Government had decided to send its Plenipotentiary, accepted the Tibetan Plenipotentiary on an equal footing and agreed to enter into a treaty with the British and the Tibetan Governments.

The importance of settling all difficulties concerning Tibet was emphasized when the three Plenipotentiaries submitted their credentials. The credentials of the British Plenipotentiary stated that the conference was being held “for the conclusion of a Convention to remove all such causes of difference and to regulate relations between the several governments” and the British Plenipotentiary was appointed by the British Crown “to sign for Us and in Our name everything so agreed upon and concluded and to do and transact all such matters as may appertain thereto.....”³⁸ The Dalai Lama’s Plenipotentiary was appointed in these words: “I hereby authorize Srid Dzin (Ruler) Sha-tra Paljor Doji to decide all matters beneficial to Tibet and I authorize him to seal all such documents.”³⁹ The President of China, having made Chinese position clear earlier, stated: “Ch’en I-fen (Ivan Chen) is hereby appointed Special Plenipotentiary for Tibetan negotiations.”⁴⁰

As the conference began its work, a sharp difference of opinion between Shatra Paljor Doji (Lochen Shatra) and Ivan Chen became obvious. While Lochen Shatra submitted detailed statements defining the limits of Tibetan territories, Ivan Chen wanted first of all to discuss the question of the political status of Tibet. The British representative intervened and according to the official record of the second meeting of the conference, held on November 18, 1913, this is what he said:

“Sir Henry McMahon (the British Representative) pointed out that this left him face to face with the initial difficulty and he did not see how political status of Tibet could be discussed until the limits of the country were defined. In the circumstances, he considered that, in order to save time, he must first go into the question with Lochen Shatra, but he would have preferred to have been able to discuss it with Monsieur Ivan Chen simultaneously. He

would have to defer doing so until his Chinese colleague was authorized to join in the discussion.”⁴¹

So, the position was simplified. McMahon discussed the territorial limits of Tibet with Lochen Shatra. Ivan Chen could not object to it after China had recognised an equal status for Tibet. Further, Ivan Chen could not join these discussions, for, on his own statement, he was not authorized to do so. He raised no objection to McMahon’s proposals, thus giving it his approval.

The discussions between Tibet and India on Tibetan territorial limits took place in Delhi between January 15 to 31, 1914. On February 17, 1914, McMahon submitted a statement on Tibetan limits to the full conference with Ivan Chen present. Attached to the statement was a map on which the “historic frontiers of Tibet” were drawn for acceptance by all the parties concerned. On this map, the southern limits of Tibet were drawn clearly by a line which later came to be known as the McMahon Line.

Lochen Shatra was in communication with Lhasa on the boundary question. After he received approval from the Lhasa Court, there was an exchange of letters between McMahon and him on March 24 and 25, 1914. The exact alignment of the boundary from east of Bhutan to the trijunction of India, Tibet and Burma was delineated on a 1”-8 miles map in two sheets. Accepting this alignment, Lochen Shatra wrote on March 25, 1914:

“I have now received orders from Lhasa, and I accordingly agree to the boundary marked in red in the two copies of the maps signed by you, subject to the conditions mentioned in your letter dated the 24th March, sent to me through Mr. Bell. I have signed and sealed the two copies of the maps. I have kept one copy here and return herewith the other.”⁴²

The Tibetan acceptance was subject to the condition that the “Tibetan ownership of private estates on the British side of the frontier would not be disturbed” and that if the sacred places of “Tso Karpo and Tsari Sarpa fell within a day’s march of the British side of the frontier, they would be included in the Tibetan territory and the frontier modified accordingly.”⁴³ The

second condition became ineffective because it was found that Tso Karpo and Tsari Sarpa were within the Tibetan territory as agreed to by both the parties.

On April 27, 1914, the maps showing the historic frontiers of Tibet were placed before the full conference. The Indo-Tibetan frontier, east of Bhutan, marked in red was shown on these maps. The three plenipotentiaries initialled the maps and confirmed the frontier. On July 3, 1914, the Convention was signed. Article 9 of the Convention stated:

“For the purpose of the present Convention, the borders of Tibet and the boundary between Inner and Outer Tibet shall be as shown in red and blue respectively on the map attached thereto.”⁴⁴

The blue line became unacceptable to Ivan Chen. His government was unwilling to recognise the boundaries between Inner and Outer Tibet. The boundaries between India and Tibet were already accepted by him and the maps showing them by a red line initialled by him. But, since he would not agree to the blue line, he did not sign the Convention.

This is the real story of the Simla Convention of 1913-1914.

4: The Blue And The Red Lines

Chinese claims on the NEFA could be sustained only if the McMahon Line were denounced by Peking. This was difficult to do, specially in view of the recognition given to it by Chou En-lai personally to Nehru. However, this did not seem to deter Peking in 1959-60 from an unqualified rejection of the Simla Convention and the Indo-Tibetan Boundary Agreement of 1914. Coupled with charges that India was defending “to the utmost the policy of aggression of British imperialism”, it was made the basis for claiming four out of the five divisions of the NEFA.

The premise of the Chinese case was that “the Simla Convention and the Simla Conference which produced the Convention were an important step taken by Britain in its plot to invade Tibet and carve out Tibet from Chinese territory.”⁴⁵ Most of the other arguments followed from this premise.

According to what the Chinese would call “British im-

perialist" sources themselves, the British policy of aggression against Tibet, personified by Curzon, had failed in 1907. Soon after Younghusband's Lhasa Convention, the new Secretary of State for India, Morley, preferred an overall agreement with Russia through the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 to the territorial and other gains of Younghusband's aggression against Tibet. Curzon, who was then a member of the British House of Lords, attacked the Anglo-Russian Convention on February 6, 1908.⁴⁶ After four years, the initiative for the Simla Conference was taken. During this intervening period, no basic change had taken place in the British policy towards Tibet, which was, at that stage, really a part of the British policy towards Russia and not China. In 1912, China did not count much in Tibet.

In fact, after the Younghusband invasion, London helped the Manchus in China and Tibet. Complaining of this, Lovat Frazer, an ardent and self-proclaimed imperialist, wrote in 1911 :

"China is the one Power which has reaped solid advantages from the Tibet Mission.....Having agreed to recognise the validity of Chinese claims, we have no alternative but to leave the unfortunate Tibetans to their not-too-tender mercies. We have not extended our trade as we had hoped, and we have raised up for ourselves a new and disturbing situation on the north-eastern frontier of India."⁴⁷

The Revolution against the Manchus and the 13th Dalai Lama's declaration of Tibetan independence were two new factors since the time the above was written. Immediately after the overthrow of the Manchus, Britain adopted a neutral policy towards the struggle between Dr. Sun Yat-Sen and the Manchu remnants. Dr. Sun was replaced by Yuan Shih-kai as the provisional President of the Republic on March 10, 1912. According to Marxist Chinese historians, the "imperialists..... found Yuan Shih-kai and helped him become the new ruler of China."⁴⁸ Therefore, in 1912, there was no basic contradiction between Britain and the Chinese Central Government. The events in Tibet clearly showed that the Republicans had no influence left in Lhasa. And yet, British policy towards "independent" Tibet was to view the attempts of the 13th Dalai Lama

sympathetically and, at the same time, not to antagonise Nanking. This dual policy was motivated by self-interest.

Britain, for obvious reasons, wanted to create a zone in southern Tibet from where Russian influence would be excluded. When the Dalai Lama entered into a treaty with Mongolia through the intervention of the Russian political agent Dorjief, London decided that, in spite of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, it was time to wipe out all Russian influence from Lhasa. However, London desired to accomplish this through the cooperation of Nanking. At the same time, Nanking was to understand clearly that London was unwilling to accept Tibet as a province of China; Chinese "sovereignty" over Tibet had ended in 1912, if it ever existed earlier. There was no secret about all this. Britain realised that parts of northern Tibet would still remain under Chinese rule.

The Memorandum of August 17, 1912, made this position clear. Britain was seeking a sort of Tibetan autonomy and was unwilling to assist China in a military reconquest of Tibet. The Memorandum informed the Chinese Government that unless an agreement on Tibetan authority to govern its own affairs was arrived at, Indian routes of communication to Tibet would not be placed at the disposal of Nanking.⁴⁹

The blue line which McMahan drew on the map of Tibet was a reflection of this policy. It divided Tibet into Inner Tibet, being the region adjacent to Yunnan, Szechuan and Kansu provinces of China and Outer Tibet, from near Batang to the traditional Indo-Tibetan frontier. Inner Tibet was to be considered, for all practical purposes, part of China while Outer Tibet was to be the kingdom of the Dalai Lama. The division of Tibet thus envisaged was not a result of original thinking in London. The Chinese Government had agreed to a similar division of Mongolia by the Sino-Russian Agreement of 1913. The Simla Conference was making a similar experiment in Tibet.⁵⁰

Though in 1960, Chinese spokesmen declared the Simla Convention to be "invalid" and one which had been repudiated by Nanking, only five years earlier, Chinese historians had accepted the fact that the Republican Government had accepted the Mongolian division as well as the Tibetan one. For exam-

ple, the Marxist historian, Hu Sheng wrote in 1955: "In 1912-1913, the Yuan (Shih-kai) Government guaranteed in explicit terms the spheres of influence.....of Tzarist Russia in Mongolia, and of Britain in Tibet."⁵¹

The red line, later known as the McMahon Line was to demarcate the southern boundary of Outer Tibet or the Dalai Lama's Tibet and India. Ivan Chen found no difficulty in accepting it and willingly initialled the maps showing this red line because it only confirmed the traditional line. Since Tibet had an equal status with China and India at the Simla Conference, the Indo-Tibetan agreement on the red line became binding on both sides.

It is true that Ivan Chen refused to sign the Simla Convention. He did not agree with the location of the blue line dividing Inner Tibet from Outer Tibet. However, he took no objection to the red line at any stage during the long months when the Conference continued. By all canons of international law, the red—McMahon—Line is as binding on the Luo Shao-chi Government as it was on the Yuan Shih-kai Government.

5. Mandates Of The Dalai Lamas

In 1960, the Chinese claims on the NEFA were clothed in strange arguments. China claimed this area under the names of "Mongyul, Loyul and Lower Tsayul".⁵² The assertion of sovereignty was sweeping: "The area north of the eastern sector of the customary line pointed out by the Chinese side has long been a part of China."⁵³

Where were these Monyul, Layul and Lower Zayul situated? Chinese answer to this crucial question was ambiguous. They must be taken, China seemed to argue, to cover four of the five divisions of the NEFA. India asked for some data substantiating the claim of Chinese rule over these areas in the hope that it might give a clearer picture of the extent of areas claimed by Peking.

The NEFA area begins at Tawang in the extreme west in the Kameng division and spreads eastwards through the Subansiri and Siang divisions. Its north-eastern point of contact with Tibet is Walong in the Lohit division. The fifth and southern

division, Tirap, has no territorial contact with Tibet. Where were the Monyul, Layul and Lower Zayul areas to be taken as existing in these thousands of square miles?

On the basis of the data furnished by China, Monyul, Loyul and Lower Zayul appeared to be "only three small pockets of the large area claimed....." In relation to the boundary, they seemed to affect one sixth of its length. The evidence supplied by China covered about 60 miles. It mainly related to a few miles of the Dihang Valley in the Lohit division.⁵⁴

The claim on the Monyul area was sought to be substantiated by a document which China called "the mandate issued by the Fifth Dalai to Mera Lama in 1680". It was further stated that Mera Lama expanded the Tawang monastery which at the time of the Seventh Dalai Lama in 1725 was made "responsible for guarding our frontier".⁵⁵ The mandate of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the work of the Mera Lama at Tawang and the mandate of the seventh Dalai Lama were the crucial points in understanding the Chinese claims.

The mandate of the Fifth Dalai Lama to Mera Lama⁵⁶ was a pompous document:

"Hark 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 Mon area in the south, Kagar, Kanga, Kakra of Lopa, and so on, and all monasteries, villages, Dzongpens, officers, civilian and military chiefs, herdsmen and common subjects bathing in the sun."

Then it went on to say that "the eastern part of the Mon area was exclusively inhabited by the followers of the Yellow sect" from "the days of Dalai Lama Getanjatso". The rest of the mandate conveyed instructions to one Namka Drukda and Mera Lama.

The instructions pertained to "patron's estates of the monasteries and sub-monasteries of Mera Lama" and to more monasteries to be built and for exacting "monk services" around the Mon area. The Monk services were detailed thus :

".....offering grain about 10 Dzes each in summer and autumn, to be paid by each household in view of faith where

the order reaches, shall be collected; the contribution (shall be) given to the local monks as a reward for the service they do for the living and the dead and shall be acquired and transportation Ula be exacted in view of faith in the area below Tsona.”

The document then instructed the Mera Lama that “when pledge has thus been obtained, peaceful means has been faithfully applied to carry through the order with the local monks so that” certain areas named thereunder “have all been brought into the territory of the Debra of Tiba”—a “great meritorious service has been made”. Finally, it referred to “all monks and laymen, including the local monks, (who) not caring for their personal security.....maintained the religious cause for about 25 years, thus bringing under our rule the remaining parts of the Mon areas”. It concludes by giving certain names of places which were parts of the Mon area and “Loyuls etc.”

Though Peking would not say so, the areas mentioned in the document could not be other than those near Tawang where the Monbas, the only major Buddhist tribe of the NEFA had their home. The Monbas came under Buddhist influence perhaps during the period of the Fifth Dalai Lama. It needed little argument to understand that with a view to strengthening the influence of Buddhism in the Monbas areas, the Fifth Dalai Lama had issued this mandate to Mera Lama.

The mandate had a strong flavour of the Papal Bulls. The document clearly related to the spiritual affairs of the peoples of the territories mentioned in it. Like all religious documents, it was addressed to lands where the Buddhist faith had any following including Tibet and India.

Its first proposition related to assertion of the fact that the area in question “was exclusively inhabited by the followers of the yellow sect” as opposed to the followers of the Red sect or any other group of Buddhists or any other religion. Since the inhabitants referred to in the document were followers of the Dalai Lama “from the days of Dalai Lama Getanjatso”, it was natural that there were a number of monasteries in this area over which the Dalai Lama ruled. Since the faithful must support the upkeep of the monasteries and the monks, they must make contributions. These dues were de-

tailed in the mandate. The collections being of a religious nature, "peaceful means" had to be "faithfully applied".

The instructions to renovate the Tawang monastery was also a natural order from the head of the Buddhist Rome and there was nothing surprising in the Seventh Dalai Lama describing the upkeep of these southern limits of his church as "guarding our frontiers".

The mandate to Mera Lama had no secular character. It did not reveal any territorial sovereignty over the area east of the Mon area or any other area. But in 1961, China was unwilling to accept this cogent internal evidence. With vehemence the Chinese argued: "As is well-known, for centuries, China's Tibet region maintained the system of combining political and religious authority which was recognised by the Chinese Central Government."⁵⁷ The inference was that if there was any document relating to the spiritual sovereignty of the Dalai Lama concerning people living in any territory, that territory must be accepted as part of Tibet.

This argument did not seem preposterous to Peking. The absurdity of it could be easily seen if one realised that the Mongols accepted the Tibetan school of Buddhism but the religious injunctions of the Dalai Lama to his Mongol followers never extended Tibetan territorial jurisdiction over the land of the Mongols! In fact, Kublai Khan accepted the Tibetan school of Buddhism but it was Tibet that became a part of the Mongol Empire, according to the Chinese themselves, and not the Mongol kingdom a part of Tibet! The Yellow sect of the Tibetan system of Buddhism, of which the Dalai and the Panchen, were the principal leaders, was founded by Tson-Kha-pa as early as the 15th century. According to Chao Pu-chu "this is the most prevalent sect at present in the Tibetan and Mongolian regions in China."⁵⁸ At no stage, between the 15th and the 20th centuries, the Tibetans ever claimed to be the temporal lords of the Mongol regions!

The claim on another part of the NEFA which Peking advanced was equally sweeping: "The Loyul area was long ago a part of Tibet. It was originally under the administration of

the Pome area, and then put under the administration of the Pemake under the Sela Monastery.”⁵⁹

Where was Loyul? What was the documentary evidence to support that it was either a part of Tibet long ago or that it was under the administration of the Pome area or under the Sera Monastery? Peking had no reply to these questions!⁶⁰ China could furnish no documentary evidence of Tibetan rule over the centuries in the area which it called Loyul. Its only “document”, which could be analysed, was dated 1914. It stated that one Buddha Kuru had inspected the Loyul area. But the fatal weakness of this document was that it made no mention as to where the Loyul area was situated.

In an effort to understand the basis of the Chinese claim, India made researches in her own archives. Since the NEFA area had been under Indian administrative jurisdiction for a long time, some information could be gathered about Pome and the Sera Monastery.

Pome or Po-me was the term applied only to the valley of Nugong Chu, also called Po-Tsangpo in its lower reaches in Tibet. The term Pe-ma-Koe applied to the valley of the Tsangpo below the gorge and up to about the Indian boundary. Thus, these areas were north of the McMahon line.⁶¹ These were part of Tibet. If Loyul was ever part of these Tibetan areas, China must possess some evidence to prove it. The Chinese could not produce any evidence for the simple reason that the Tibetans never considered the Loyul country as part of their kingdom. On the contrary, they considered it a part of India.⁶²

The third part of the NEFA, “Lower Tsayul” area, according to Peking “originally” belonged to the Sangngachos Dzong of China’s Chamdo Area. In the mandate given by the Dalai Lama to the Sangngachos Dzong in 1896, it was clearly stated that there were places of Upper and Lower Tsayul in the area under the administration of Sangngachos Dzong.”⁶³

The basic difficulty regarding this claim, as with the others, was the Chinese inability to identify the Lower Zayul area. Even Upper Zayul area, referred to in the mandate of the Dalai Lama, could not be identified. And of course, there was no evidence of Tibetan rule over any part of this “Lower Zayul”

which could substantiate claims on any part of Tibet either on the customary or administrative basis.

However, all these did not prevent Peking from persisting in its claims over the Kameng, the Subansiri, the Siang and the Lohit sub-divisions of the NEFA!

6 : Portrait Of The Frontier :

The Officials' talks unveiled for the first time the real face of the frontier. In the days before the rise and fulfilment of the British rule in India, it had never been necessary to delineate the entire frontier. Peoples on both sides of the customary and traditional frontier knew where their worlds were divided. The East India Company and later the Anglo-Indian Government, never found the necessity to go into details on this question. In fact, during the British imperialist period of Indian history, the Himalayan frontier was only one factor in the larger context of British policy. A British scholar on this subject has stated :

“From the onset, British policy in the Himalayas was closely connected with local politics in that region, though its objectives were determined, as often as not, by wider considerations of British policy in Asia.”⁶⁴

And so, the frontier remained as it was down the ages. The majestic arc of the Kuenlun and the Great Himalayan ranges form the most impressive natural boundary in the world, and custom and tradition sanctified it. During the last 300 years, its different sectors became the subject matter of international agreements. These international agreements only affirmed what was defined by nature and confirmed by history.

Nobody in India ever thought that the well-known frontier would ever be challenged by China. When Peking failed during the Officials' talks to adduce evidence in support of its own claims, it finally, and rather miserably, clung to the argument that the international boundary had never been delimited. Indeed, much was made of the need for delimitation of India's northern frontier by various Chinese diplomatic notes, official pronouncements and arguments advanced during the Officials' talks.

Delimitation of the boundaries is not a particularly new or confusing concept. Delimitation is a general term which signi-

fies the formation of the precise alignment dividing the administrative jurisdiction and political sovereignty of two states. There is no one method of this delimitation. The history of the rise of nation-states and the rules and practice of international law recognise several methods of delimitation. They vary according to historical circumstances. There are cases where delimitation has taken place by delineation on maps or demarcation on the ground. There are some other methods also. However, there is primarily an ancient and well-recognised method of historical delimitation which alone is relevant to a traditional boundary.

The Chinese themselves knew, or at least ought to have known, that a traditional boundary could take shape on the basis of natural features of an area. All the other forms of recognition such as formal agreements, delineation, demarcation and definition could follow, if necessary. Unlike in the case of boundaries which are not natural, and which are called artificial, the main instrument of delimitation in traditional boundaries are impersonal factors without deliberate human intervention and their principal sanction lies in the recognition over the centuries by the peoples and the governments concerned. The Chinese themselves had earlier stated: "The boundary is formed through hundreds of thousands of years of history. Naturally in the formation of a boundary line through these years, geographical features are related to it."⁶⁵

They had added that such a boundary line is "formed through history by administrative jurisdiction and tradition and custom". They must have, indeed, wondered at the end of the Officials' talks that India's northern frontier conforms exactly to the above standards.

India's northern frontier lies along an impressive and clearly marked natural alignment—along the Mustagh range and the Aghil range, across the Karakoram Pass, along the main Kuenlun range, across Lanak La, Kone La and Kepsang La, along the Chumesang river, between the two halves of the Pangong Lake, along the Kailash range and the Zanskar range, across the Shipki Pass, the Mana Pass, the Niti Pass, the Kungri Bingri Pass, the Darma Pass, and the Lipu Lekh Pass, and along the Great Himalayan Range north of Sikkim, Bhutan and

the North East Frontier. It runs along features which form the most striking geographical definition of the boundary between India and China.

Whatever confusion there might have been on the question of the alignment of India's northern frontier certainly exists no more. The facts are now before the parties concerned and before the world. With the facts placed in proper perspective, even the Chinese can hardly deny that somewhere, at some place, in some manner, they have miscalculated and bungled. The sooner they know, the better for all concerned.

As Nehru stated on April 1, 1961, India had tried to avoid, in so far as she could, taking any steps which might create unbridgeable chasms between the two countries:

'We have to look, at this moment of history, not only to the present but to the future, and the future of India and China who are neighbours to each other, with vast populations, is of the highest importance to themselves and to the world. So we have tried to steer a middle course between our strong resentment and the steps we actually take in this context. We try not to allow ourselves merely in anger to do something which may create further problems and difficulties. Broadly, our attitude has been to strengthen ourselves to prepare for any contingency and not in the slightest to give in on any matter which we consider important.'⁶⁶

He hoped that the strength and correctness of the Indian position might dawn in the Chinese Government's mind and concluded: "If so, I am going to try my best and see that it is appreciated by them and they realize that they have done a wrong thing from which they should withdraw."

Such, indeed, is the policy of India which evolved the approach of Panchsheel.

Appendix

FRONTIERS OF SIKKIM AND BHUTAN

By the Treaty of 1774, between the Dev Raja of Bhutan and the East India Company, Bhutan agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Company. After the conquest of mainland India, British influence spread to this border State in the 19th century. For strategic reasons, the Company and, later, the British Government considered it unwise to integrate Bhutan with India and allowed it a life of protectorate. This arrangement was formalised in 1910, when by a treaty, Bhutan agreed to hand over its external relations to the Anglo-Indian Government. After Indian Independence, a new treaty was signed in 1949 by which India recognised Bhutanese autonomy and undertook the responsibility for Bhutan's defence and external relations. China, at no stage, protested against this arrangement. On the other hand, it gave a *de facto* recognition to these special Indo-Bhutanese relations whenever the occasion arose. After the founding of the People's Republic, India took up with Peking various matters on behalf of Bhutan, including the delineation of Bhutan's northern frontier.

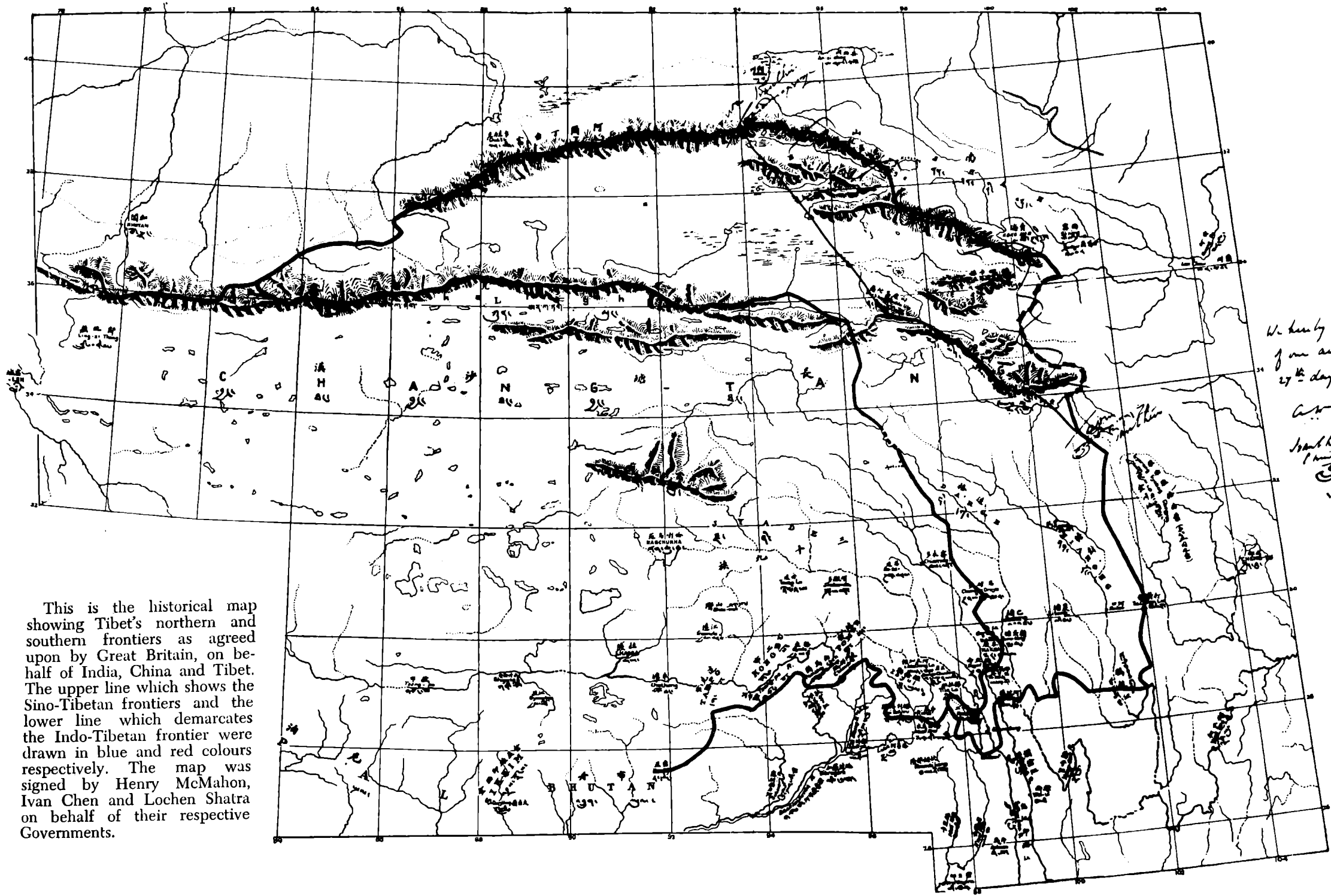
The traditional Bhutanese frontier has been under Bhutanese administrative jurisdiction for centuries. Bhutanese check-posts have been maintained all along and Bhutanese officials have conducted official tours and collected taxes from the land extendings up to the frontier. Since the traditional boundary of India and Tibet lies along the Himalayan watershed, Bhutan's eastern boundary is contiguous only with Indian territory.

Chinese claims on Bhutanese territory were publicised after China occupied eight villages, situated in Western Tibet, over which Bhutan had been exercising jurisdiction for 300 years. These villages constituted a Bhutanese enclave in Tibet. India, on behalf of Bhutan, protested against this Chinese action by two diplomatic Notes dated 19th and 20th August 1959 respectively.

Kuomintang Chinese maps showed the whole of Tashigang area in eastern Bhutan and some area of north-west Bhutan as Chinese territory. Now these maps have been owned up by the People's Republic of China and the above-referred territories have been claimed by China.

Sikkim was granted a status of a protectorate by Britain, instead of being integrated in the mainland by the Treaty of 1890 between Britain and China. China undertook to respect the Tibetan-Sikkimese boundary, which had been well-established and formally marked. Tibet affirmed these provisions of the Sino-British Treaty of 1890 by the Treaty of 1904. By the Indo-Sikkimese Agreement of 1950, Sikkim was granted internal autonomy and agreed, in return, to hand over its external relations and defence to India.

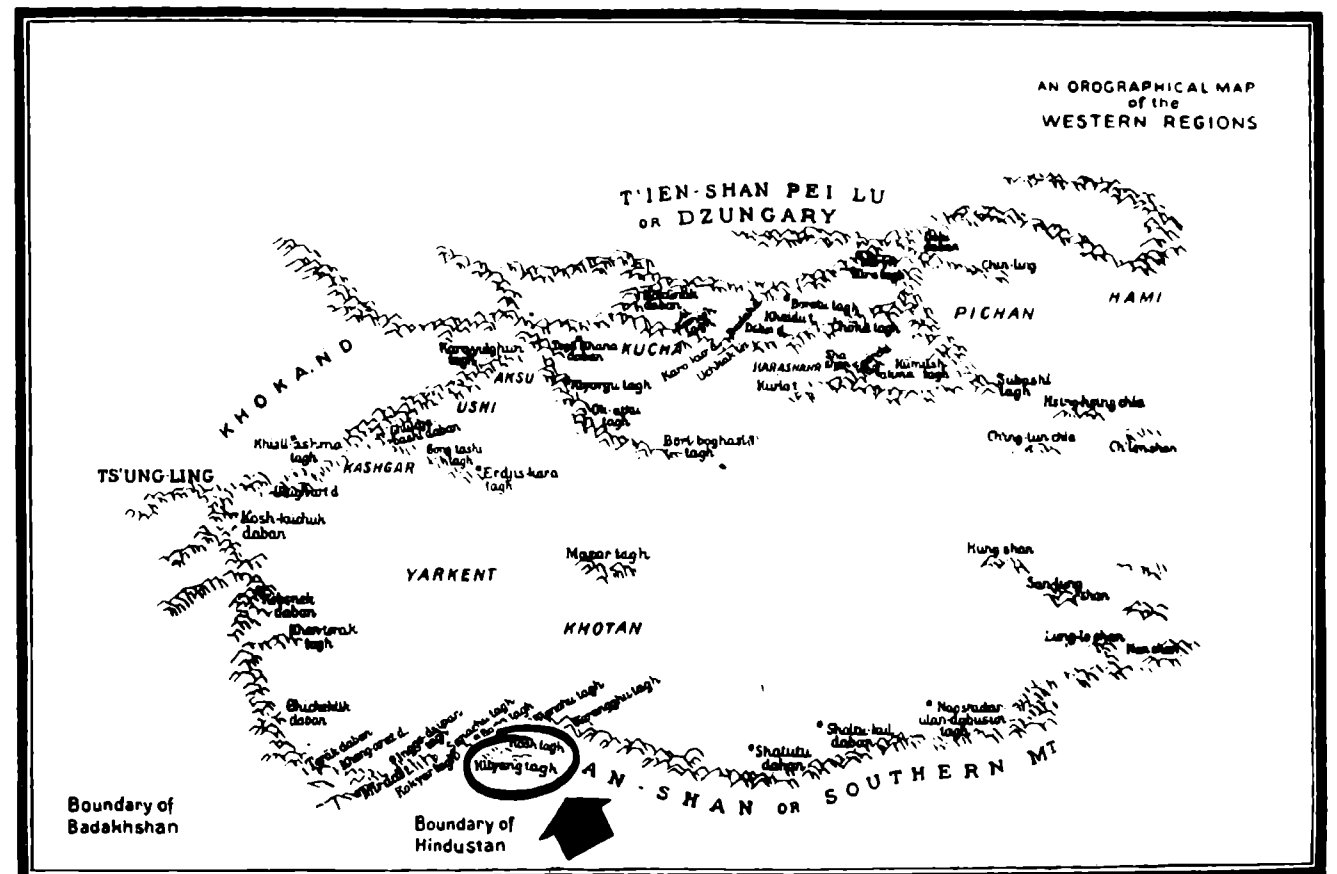
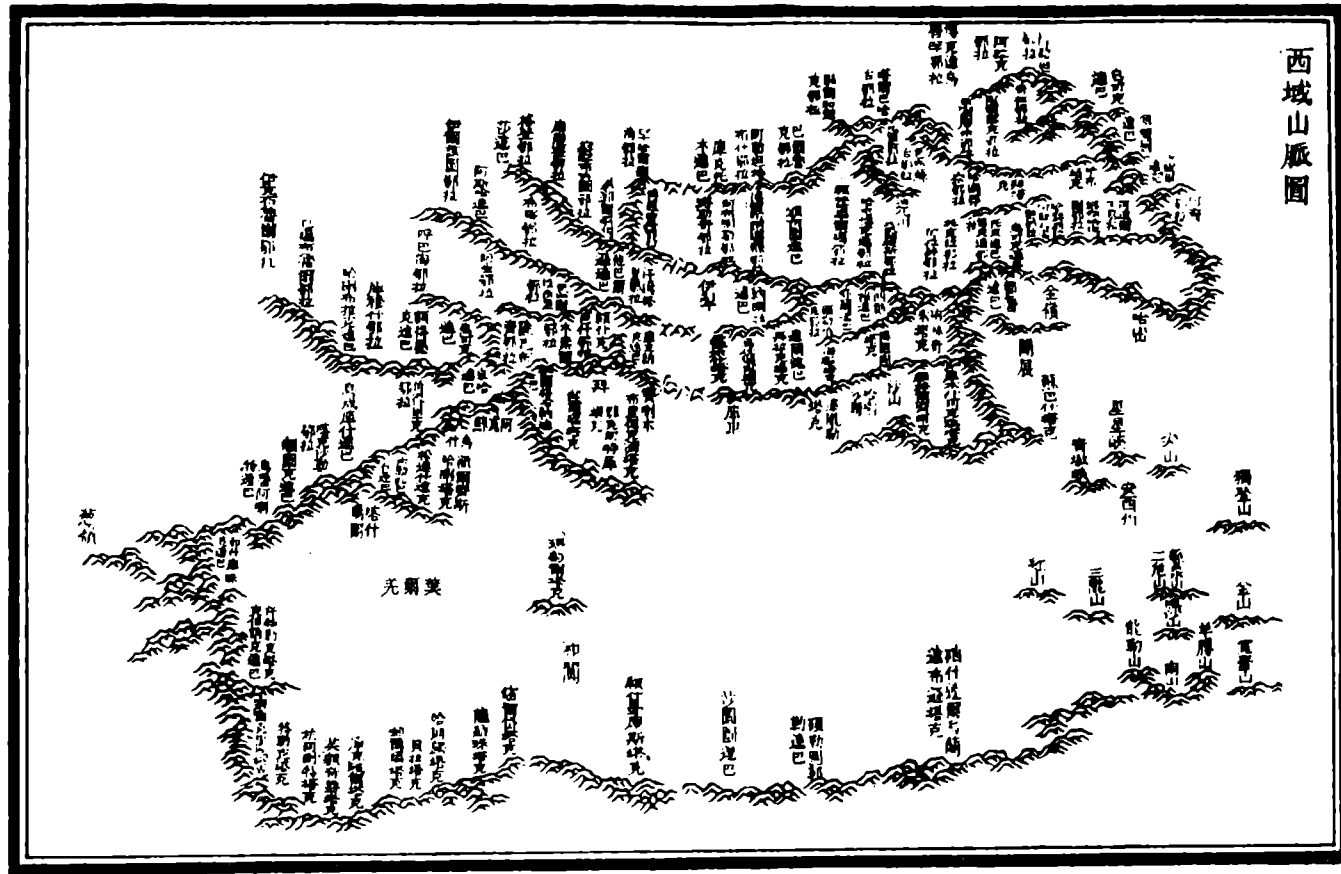
There are no territorial claims by China on Sikkimese territory till today.



This is the historical map showing Tibet's northern and southern frontiers as agreed upon by Great Britain, on behalf of India, China and Tibet. The upper line which shows the Sino-Tibetan frontiers and the lower line which demarcates the Indo-Tibetan frontier were drawn in blue and red colours respectively. The map was signed by Henry McMahon, Ivan Chen and Lochen Shatra on behalf of their respective Governments.

*We hereby certify in token
of our acceptance, this
27th day of April 1914*

*Arthur
British Plenipotentiary
Ivan Chen
Chinese Plenipotentiary
Lochen Shatra
Tibetan Plenipotentiary*



Map of the Western Regions (of China) appended to *Hsi-yu-tu-chih*, compiled on the orders of Emperor Chien-lung in 1762. An English version of the map is also given. The map makes clear that Sinkiang extended in the south only upto the Kuen Lun Range.

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