

Review of *1962 and the McMahon Line Saga*, by Claude Arpi

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1. INTRODUCTION:

The author of the book, Claude Arpi was born in Angoulime, French and graduated from Bordeaux University in 1974. He is an enthusiastic scholar of the history of Tibet, China and the Indian sub continent for the past 42 years. He is an author of many other books written in French. The present book *1962 and the McMahon Line Saga*, is an erudite work on the bilateral relation between India and China from 1914 to 1962.

The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 has remained a deep scar on the psyche of India especially in the people of Himalayan states. The author's quest for two nation's relation since the 19th century culminates in the present volume, *1962 and the McMahon Line Saga*. In this volume, the author thrives to bring out the historical trajectories of tripartite relations between China, then Tibet and British-India. However, the author sees the political development as bilateral issues after India got independence and Chinese conquest of Tibet yet the Tibet political policy towards India and China underneath in the author's focus.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

There are lots of books which deal with Sino-India relation. Alastair Lamb has two volumes, '*The China-India Border*' and '*The McMahon Line (1904-1914) Volume II*'. G.S. Bhargava wrote '*Battle of NEFA the Undeclared War*' and G. Julie Marshall also wrote '*Britain and Tibet (1765-1947): The Background to the India-China Border*'. Nari Rustomji has also two books; '*Imperilled Frontiers*' and '*Enchanted Frontier: Sikkim, Bhutan and India's North-Eastern Borderlands*'. While writing this book review author has consulted all these books as reference.

3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS :

The first chapter deals with the prelude account of British successful establishment of trade agreement with Lhasa. Thereafter, second and third chapters illustrate the British attention towards the eastern Himalayas for possible trade routes to Tibet by conducting promenades, explorations and expeditions mainly in Tawang, Siang valley and Lohit valley in present Arunachal Pradesh. Author hails that it gives the ideas the concept of ethnic buffer state, due to geographical knowledge of the British by virtue of intensive surveys. Later on the British shrewdly applied it for protecting their empire by demarcating the boundary of Tibet and British-India.

The fourth chapter pays heed in critically evaluating British policy of boundary demarcation in context of three nation's convention of 1914 at Shimla. The author has presented the opinion that the demarcation of boundary was a farsighted policy of British India to safeguard it from China in eastern Himalaya though it was not agreed by the Chinese representatives.

After reviewing McMahon Line, in fifth and sixth chapters, the author highlights the safeguard policy of it by British-India and Independent India. The book deals with the political and economic activities of Tibet in both Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract of present Arunachal Pradesh which directly dealt with the Tibetan counterparts on several occasions.

The chapter sixth reveals that though Tawang fell under the British Empire according to McMahon Line, it was under the influence of Tibet till mid 20th century. It was after India's independence that Major Bob Khathing liberated Tawang just before China stormed into Lhasa. According to the author, if this was not done at that time the fate of Tawang might have been different.

The author highlights the Tibetans and the tribal relations specifically in lower Tsari (Upper Subansiri) in Seventh Chapter. It deals with the dynamic of Tibetans and tribal during the pilgrims in tribal area. Their relations were not smooth and a kind of political bribe, *Lodzong* was instituted by Tibetan to pacify tribe. Tibetan pilgrims had to

accept the authority of local tribe of upper Subansiri (lower Tsari) of present Arunachal Pradesh by paying tax to get permission for passage which shows traditional autonomy of the local tribe.

In chapter Eight and Nine, the author also throws light on British rule that had become a blessing in disguise in both Siang and Lohit valleys. It is because Tibetan political and economic activities were below the McMahon line in the 1940s. However, Tibetan political and economic activity was restricted by the British and henceforth the Tibetan representatives abided and revered the McMahon Line in true sense.

The author questions the Kashag's (Tibetan Cabinet) inexperience in dealing with China and free India. In Chapter Ten the author argues that if the Tibetan government ratified the Shimla convention after India got independent and accepted the border defined in 1914, India and Tibet would have been bound by a formal Treaty which may change the stakes. The author further presents his argument that the British had made several attempts in the 1940s to discuss further on boundary ratification deputing her representatives to Tibet but the Tibetan counterparts did not respond seriously. He slams the Tibetan for not having concrete stands on her foreign policy to restrain China's evil eyes of territorial aggrandizement.

In Chapter Eleven and Twelve, the author has shown the British lackadaisical attitude towards the Tibet future political and sovereignty issue. The main reason addressed by the author is that the British has only paid attention to save her empire during the Second World War. Thus, the future of Tibet's sovereignty has left to her own destiny.

In chapter thirteen and fourteen, the author questions why India did not have a comprehensive policy towards Tibet after independence. He also openly slams Nehru for his utopist beliefs in Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai policy despite knowing the Chinese aggressive policy towards Tibet. The author primarily argues that the British Indian adopted a definite policy towards Tibet to maintain her strong hold and balance of power in eastern Himalayas. However, independent India did not adopt such a proper policy for which she had to face Chinese aggression in 1962. However, the author has forgotten that India was not in a strong position at international level, as being in the infant stage of her independence, that too, weakened by bloodshed of partition.

The author displays China's aggressive attitude under Mao regime, in bulldozing the theocratic government Tibet in Chapter Fifteen. At the same time, the author also digs on China for betraying India by disrespecting the Panchsheel agreement, in which the clause of 'mutual respect of each other's territorial integrity' was broken. The chapter also throws light on 1962 Sino-India war whereby the versions of the Chinese and Indian government regarding the outbreak of war are uniformly presented.

One of the strength of the book is the author continuously argues on blaming Nehru government in Sixteenth Chapter by showing that there are still secret reports of Henderson-Brooks and Himmatsinghji committees on Sino-India relation, which are deliberately not declassified by the Indian government after so many decades. He has a conjectural doubt that these reports may reveal the lackadaisical attitude of the Indian government towards the frontier policy if it is brought to public domain.

In the end, after having presented his arguments on China-India's respective stand on Tibet, in the last Chapter the author presents his Post-scriptum by urging to maintain a status quo between the two giant countries of Asia since history cannot be unfortunately rewritten.

4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

The book is found lacking in proper detail of reference sources of 'citation' as a 'history book' though the author follows the endnote method. In the collection of sources the author could have added oral narratives by carrying out field study in border areas to bring out the local versions of McMahon Line ground issues and horrors and impacts of Chinese aggression on the locals.

'1962 and the McMahon Line Saga' has relevance in view of India's military strategy and foreign bilateral ties at national level on one hand. On the other hand it throws insight on the role of British India and the independent India in shaping the territory of border tribes. Lastly, for research scholars the book is resourceful to study the history of preliterate border communities of Arunachal Pradesh.