

Genesis of Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute: An Analytical Study

Dr. D. Chandramouli Reddy

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & Public Administration, S.K.

University, Anantapur

Abstract

The Sino-Indian border dispute is a longstanding and complex issue that has historical, geopolitical, and cultural dimensions. It primarily involves territorial disagreements between China and India over areas along their shared border, which stretches over 3,488 kilometers (2,167 miles). The dispute has had a significant historical legacy, shaping the relationship between the two countries and influencing regional dynamics. The roots of the border dispute can be traced back to historical events, including the demarcation of borders during the British colonial era in the Western Sector, Middle Sector and Eastern Sector and the legacy of the McMahon Line. The McMahon Line was proposed by British colonial administrator Henry McMahon as the eastern border of British India with Tibet, which was rejected by China after the fall of the Qing Dynasty. The border dispute escalated in the 1950s, leading to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The war resulted in significant casualties and ended with China's victory. It highlighted the strategic importance of the border region and the need for both countries to establish clear boundaries. The border dispute has been influenced by political and geopolitical considerations. Both countries have domestic political factors that impact their stance on the issue. Geopolitically, the region holds strategic significance due to its proximity to key regions and natural resources. The border dispute also has cultural and ethnic dimensions. The border areas are inhabited by various ethnic groups, and the issue of sovereignty over these areas is linked to their historical connections and cultural identities. Over the years, China and India have engaged in diplomatic efforts to resolve the border dispute. Multiple rounds of talks have taken place to find a peaceful resolution, but a comprehensive solution has not been reached. Both countries have stationed troops along the disputed border, resulting in occasional standoffs and tensions. The military buildup adds to the complexity of the issue and raises concerns about potential military conflicts.

Key Words: Sino-Indian border dispute, Western Sector, Eastern Sector, Middle Sector, Mc Mohan line.

Introduction

Sino-Indian relations have been frosty at best and chilly at worst. Besides a brief period of bonhomie, India and China spent a bulk of their diplomatic history countering each other.

For two neighbouring civilizations as old as China and India, there is remarkably little historical evidence of political interaction between them. These were ample proof of continuous overland trade and exchange of ideas through the centuries, but this appears to have occurred despite political cooperation and confrontation. China is a vast country which has been trying to expand in all directions geographically. It has created many problems in the world by its hostile and belligerent attitude towards its neighbours.

There was very little contact between these two countries during the ancient times. Subsequently, when there was a renewal of contacts under British rule, it had taken place in rather unfortunate circumstances. It was a period when China was exposed to the humiliation of a large number of foreign countries including Britain, USA, Japan and Russia, imposing a regime of extra-territoriality on her. It was also the period when a number of opium wars were fought by the British colonial power, using Indian troops to compel the Chinese people to continue their pernicious addiction to the drug, specially cultivated in India for export to China. This certainly had not endeared India to Chinese minds. This was further compounded by the burning of the Summer Palace in Beijing by British Indian troops and the practice of using Indian Policemen in cities like Shanghai and Hong Kong who in Chinese folklore took on the same role as the bogeyman in the West.³

Similarly, the Chinese image in India during this period was conditional by the imagery of Chinese laundries and shoe shops and cheap restaurants, as well as of itinerant vendors on bicycles, selling silk of doubtful quality at cut rates.⁴

Thus, the weak and insecure foundations on which the relations between these two countries are based were clearly manifest, despite the fact that they had a brief honeymoon in the early fifties of twentieth century calling each other 'Bhai Bhai'.

The rivalry between these two countries though manifested itself in the form of border problem, was actually deep rooted. The political systems in these two countries were divergent. While one was democratic the other was totalitarian. Both were struggling to demonstrate their viability. While one was open, the other was closed. One was widely accepted in the world, the other a suspect. One had won independence through non-violence, the other through bitter and prolonged conflict. Moreover, while one offered refuge to a great religious leader, the other drove him out along with thousands of his countrymen who refused to accept a totalitarian and repressive regime. Hence to suggest, as has often been done that there was much in common between these two giants is to gravely misunderstand the essential difference between them.

The border dispute between the two nations starts in the north-western frontiers of India, where the British rulers in India tried to interpose the Manchu Empire between their own Empire in India and the Russian Empire in the North. The so called Mc Mohan Line in the North-East was the last in the dispute.

Thus, territorial disputes were another albeit, a major irritant in Sino-Indian security relations. China rejects the so-called McMahon Line, drawn by the British in 1914 to separate China and India, as an unjust colonialist, which resulted in a war between these two countries in a border war in 1962 in which these neighbours fought along the eastern and western sectors of their Himalayan border. After pushing back Indian forces, China called for a cease-fire and offered to withdraw its forces twenty kilometers from the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This defeat of Indian troops by the Chinese army left continued tensions and distrust along the border, as each side still claims that territories rightfully belonging to one were occupied by the other.

In the settling of boundaries between India and China, Russian factor played an important role. Great Britain viewed Russia's designs in Central Asia with suspicion. The British were convinced that it was a matter of time before the Russians made it to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Hence, they thought of making China a buffer and an impediment for the Russian expansion towards the South and in the process maintained liberal attitude towards Chinese territorial expansion.

A constant and basic British aim developed to keep the Russians as far as possible from the plains of India and their politically volatile cities, but the tactics varied in accordance with the attitudes of those setting policy in London and in India and with the significance these attached to the role of the third factor in all their calculations – China. There were two principal schools of frontier policy: first, the forward school, which wished to see Britain advance to meet the Russian threat directly and as far away from the plains as possible. Second, the moderate school, which pointed to the cost and risk of trying to establish boundaries in remote and immensely difficult country, suggested that the limits of British power should be set where they could more easily be supported, and proposed that the aim of keeping Russia back could best be served by interposing a third power between the lion and the bear. There were various possible players for that role: Afghanistan was one; sometimes small states such as Hunza looked likely; but throughout it was recognized that China, established in the area a century before British or Russian power reached there, would best be fitted for the part – if the Chinese were capable of it and if they could be persuaded to play. But there, the British were to discover was the rub. Perhaps it was because experience with Russia had taught China that in the hands of her imperial neighbours, boundary treaties were blades with which Chinese territory could pared away but in any event, the Chinese shied away from most British attempts to settle common boundaries with them.⁵

In the north-west, British made consistent efforts for the creation of a linear boundary. The concept of a linear boundary though imperative for modern states was unfamiliar to Asian nations especially India and China.⁶ These two countries even in the mid-twentieth century were separated by no-man's land on both ends of the Himalayas. In the middle of the twentieth century their quarrel arose from the need to translate these no-man's land zones into lines and from the failure to agree on a method.

The entire border between India and China can be broadly classified into three sectors namely western sector, middle sector and the eastern sector. We shall discuss in detail as how the differences over the demarcation of the boundary in these sectors arose.

The Western Sector:

The boundary in the western sector between Jammu and Kashmir and Sinkiang and Tibet is about 1770 kilometers in length. The frontier between Sinkiang and the Pakistan occupied portion of Kashmir is 480 kilometres long and involves a disputed area of about 13,000 to 15,500 square kilometers. The rest of this border is between Ladakh and Tibet. In the western sector the boundary runs along the Mustagh Range and the Aghil Range across the Karakoram pass via the Qara Tagh pass and along the main Kuen Lun Ranges to a point east of longitude 80° E and 40 kilometers north of Hajit Langer. This boundary is an obvious physical boundary between the Gilgit area and Sinkiang following the main Karakoram watershed dividing the streams flowing into the Tarim basin.⁷ Further at south east the boundary runs along the watershed across Lanak La, Kone La and Kepsang La, then follows the Chenesang River across Pangyong lake and the Kailash Range. Here the boundary constitutes the watershed between the Indus system in India and the Khotan system in China. In this area, China claims the Aksaichin district, the Changmo Valley, Pangong Tso and the Spanggar Tso area of north east Ladakh, as well as a strip of about 5000 square kilometers down the entire length of eastern Ladakh.⁸

In order to have a clear understanding of the border problem in the western sector it is highly essential to explore the history of Ladakh. Ladakh lying in the Valley of the upper Indus at an altitude of about twelve thousand feet is a sparsely populated area. The topography is unique consisting of very high mountains with intervening Valleys and scattered plains. Before the Tibetan uprising against their Chinese communist overlords, Ladakh hardly received any mention in the world press and very few people know about it. It was in this place that India and China fought a war over the possession of high alkaline plain known as the Aksai Chin where the frontiers of Tibet, Sinkiang and Ladakh marched together.

Early History:

Ladakh was part of Tibet till the Tenth century AD., when it became an independent principality breaking off from Tibet after the dissolution of Tibetan empire. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Ladakh became feudatory state to the Muslim rulers of Kashmir. However it became free in the last decade of fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century it once again became a tributary state of Mughals. With the decline of the Mughals the Ladakhis again asserted their independence, but being Buddhist and within Lhasa's cultural and political pull, Ladakh tended to gravitate back to Tibetan overlordship in the absence of conquerors strong enough to pull it away.

Ladakh, during this time was probably regarded as part of Tibet like the other petty principalities situated in the Valleys of the Tibetan plateau. All these owed some sort of

allegiance to Lhasa, which was the capital of Tibet. Tibet was at this time unquestionably under the control of China.

The question has been raised concerning the precise nature of Ladakh's relationship with Tibet and China during this time. Nothing in the correspondence between the Chinese Residents at Lhasa and the Kings of Ladakh indicates that Ladakh was politically subordinate. The Chinese communications were haughty in tone, but no more so than those addressed to other 'barbarian tribes' not under the sway of the Middle Kingdom. So far as is known both Chinese and Tibetan policy treated Ladakh as an independent political entity.⁹

Throughout the eighteenth century, Ladakh was able to sustain its precarious status as an autonomous state, owing nominal political allegiance to Kashmir and enjoying commercial and religious relations with Tibet. As a matter of fact internal dissensions were a much greater threat to Ladakh's existence than ambitious foreign powers during most of this period.¹⁰

The favourable external conditions that allowed the Ladakhis to indulge in domestic quarrels with impunity did not last long. The conquest of Kashmir by the Sikh ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh posed a serious threat to Ladakh. The Sikhs described themselves as the heirs of the preceding rulers of Kashmir and demanded tribute from Ladakh as it earlier paid to the Kashmir rulers. Ladakh refused to oblige and terminated all tribute payments. As the Sikhs were busy with their hostilities with the Afghans, they couldn't take any action against Ladakh.

The Jammu feudatories of the Sikhs, namely the Dogras proved to be a greater threat to Ladakh than the Sikhs themselves. The lust for territorial expansion on the part of Gulab Singh, the Dogra ruler of Jammu, made him cast his evil eye on Kashmir and Ladakh.

Ladakh's internal dissensions, combined with its inability to assert authority in many parts of the country provided the opportunity to the Dogra ruler, Gulab Singh to defeat and make it enter into a humiliating treaty. This treaty did not, however, end Dogra's difficulties with Ladakh. They had to spend another five years in suppressing revolts and dissident activity in Ladakh. By 1840, they had firmly established their authority through out Ladakh.

Gulab Singh's chief objective in the conquest of Ladakh had been two-fold to encircle the Kashmir Valley – in anticipation of the day when the dissolution of the Sikh Empire would permit him to claim Kashmir as well as Jammu and to gain access to the lucrative wool trade that normally flowed from the plains of north western Tibet (Chang Tang) through Ladakh to the looms of Kashmir. Control of the wool trade was desirable not only for sound economic reasons, but also because possession of this vital key to Kashmir's prosperity would provide him with a superior position in future negotiations with Kashmir.¹¹

In 1841 and 1842, the Dogra forces crushed the Tibetan forces sent to liberate Ladakh. In October 1842, both the parties signed a treaty which was in fact a non-aggression pact. The Tibetans accepted the Dogras as the legitimate rulers of Ladakh while Gulab Singh surrendered all claims to western Tibet. The treaty however did not specify a boundary between them but only said that boundary was at the old established frontiers.

During the year 1846, Gulab Singh became independent of Sikh control because of the inability of Sikhs to pay the huge indemnity demanded by the British. The Sikhs instead, gave to the British the territories between the Beas and the Indus rivers, including Kashmir and Hazara. The East India Company, in turn transferred these areas to Gulab Singh and collected the indemnity from him. This arrangement was mutually advantageous for the Company and the Dogras. Gulab Singh's ambition of an independent Dogra state was fulfilled. While for the British, they not only gained a huge financial profit but also the security of their territorial possessions was assured because of the fact that Kashmir was placed in the hands of a powerful ally who was capable of defending its frontiers and acting as a buffer for the British from the Central Asian aggressors.

The Eastern boundary of the Kashmir with Tibet was not formally demarcated. It was considered to be established by tradition as per the treaty of 1842 and the formal demarcation was considered unnecessary. The British nevertheless thought it essential to have a formal demarcation. They suspected the designs of the Dogra rulers towards western Tibet which if realised might have involved the company in a dispute with China because Kashmir was a feudatory of the British.

Meanwhile the British informed the Chinese Government about the proposed boundary demarcation and invited it to participate, writing both the Lhasa and to the viceroy in Canton, of the Chinese Central Government.¹²

The Chinese official replied that the borders of Tibet and Ladakh have been distinctly fixed and it would be best to adhere to that arrangement. However, he said that his Government would send a delegation to join in the marking of the boundary. When the British boundary commissioners reached the frontier, they failed to find any Chinese awaiting them but only active hostility of Tibetans. Since neither the Chinese nor the Tibetans co-operated, there could not be demarcation of the Tibet-Ladakh boundary in 1846 and the Britishers decided to demarcate the boundary unilaterally, in order to curtail the expansion of Dogra territory into the western Tibet. Protecting China's position with a policy of evasion and procrastination – to which succeeding governments in China, down to the present have adhered with considerable success – the Chinese and Tibetans thwarted British objectives.¹³

The British in 1846 and 1847 drew a boundary from a little north of the Pangong Lake to the Spiti River; but they stopped there and the terrain to the north between the Pangong Lake and the Karakoram pass was viewed as terra incognita and in the direction of the north-east the boundaries of the Tibet were not defined as they believed the area to be uninhabited and

the necessity of border was not there. This parting of the Sino-Indian boundary led to the dispute just a hundred years later.

A boundary alignment that was absent between the Pangong Lake and the Karakoram pass was given by W.H.Johnson in 1865, who was an officer of the Survey of India. As per the Johnson's version, Aksai Chin Plateau along with a broad slice of territory to the north of the Karakoram pass was shown as within Kashmir. This Aksai Chin Plateau was to become the bone of contention between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China in the middle of the twentieth century.

Aksai Chin, which literally means a desert of white stones, is a high and desolate Plateau which is a square area of approximately ten thousand miles¹⁴ and 17,000 ft. above the sea level. It lies between the Karakoram and Kuenleun Ranges.¹⁵ Aksai Chin is one of the bleakest places. Nehru described it as a land where no people live and no blade of grass grows. Though this place is desolate and inhospitable for human habitation it was not without importance. An ancient trade route lay across it and in its brief summer when for a few hours around noon the ice melted in the streams to give water for beasts, caravans of yaks crossed it from what is now Sinkiang of Tibet, carrying Silk, jade, hemp, salt or wool.¹⁶ The importance of this route was once again recognized in the present century when it became essential for China to use this route to quell the revolt and ascertain control in Tibet.

In 1866, an independent state, Kashgaria came into existence under Yaqub Beg. British hoped of this state becoming a buffer between British India and Russia were dommed when China occupied it in 1877 and renamed it as Sinkiang.

For some years after their conquest of Kashgaria, the Chinese like the earlier ruler of Kashgaria, Yaqub Beg treated Kuenlun mountains as the southern limit of their territory and infact erected a pillar in support of its claim that the Kuenlun Range was the frontier.

By the mid 1890's the Chinese acquired knowledge of the border from the Karakoram pass to the Chang Chemno river and they claimed Aksai Chin as their territory. They objected to the Johnson's version of the boundary which gave Aksai Chin to Kashmir. Meanwhile in London an influential strategist of the forward school, Ardagh advocated the inclusion in Kashmir of not only Aksai Chin but all the territory as has been envisaged by Johnson in order to curtail the Russian movement towards India. Russia, he predicted would annex the eastern areas of Sinkiang and would try to push their boundary as far south as possible. He reminded the fact that Karakoram range was always accepted as a natural frontier because aggression through the mountains was difficult and hence the boundary should be fixed there.

In 1899, the British Government proposed a new boundary alignment between Kashmir and China. The main intention of the British was to secure for Hunza, an ally of British which was a tiny principality lying north-west of Kashmir, claims over Raskam valley and

the Taghdumbash which were lying north of Hunza and were bone of contention between China and Hunza. Britain suspected Russian designs over these territories which were like a doorway to India and were essential for its defence. With the intention of making these territories secure, Britain proposed this border agreement. As per this proposal Aksai Chin and Qara Qash basin were to be conceded to China for its recognition of Hunza's claims over Raskam valley and Taghdumbash.

This proposed border agreement would have entailed major territorial concessions by the British, since the Government of India had demonstrated both on maps and through the exercise of authority in the Aksai Chin that they considered the Kuenlun range to be the defacto boundary between Sinkiang and Kashmir. Indeed, most of the territory currently in dispute between New Delhi and Peking would have been conceded in China.¹⁷ The Chinese missed an excellent opportunity by not replying to this boundary proposal because the British never repeated this offer and subsequent British maps continued to depict the boundary along the Kuenlun range.

Thus, we can see that Ladakh which was under the rule of different rulers in different periods in history ultimately became subservient to the Dogras of Kashmir in 1840s. Ladakh, subsequently came under the influence of British rulers when Kashmir itself became an ally of the British. British Government in India was afraid that without a proper demarcation of boundary in the north-west, between Kashmir and China there were bound to be disputes. As a result, they initiated efforts to create a boundary between Kashmir and China. However all their efforts proved to be futile. When India became independent, it inherited this undemarcated border in the western sector.

Middle Sector:

The boundary between the Aksai Chin region and Nepal is known as the middle sector in the terminology of the Sino-Indian dispute. The boundary in the middle sector runs along watershed from Ladakh to Nepal. It is 625 Kms. long and adjoins the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The traditional frontier of Himachal Pradesh follows the water parting between the Spiti and the Parachu rivers and then continues along the watershed between the eastern and western tributaries of the Sutlej. The Uttar Pradesh boundary lies on the water parting between the Sutje and the Kali, the Alakananda and the Bhagirathi. The boundary crosses the Sutlej near the Shipki La (pass) on the Himachal Pradesh – Tibet border. From there it runs along the watershed passes of Mana, Niti, Kungri-Bingri, Dharma and Lipu Lekh, finally jointing the triple point junction of China, Nepal and India.¹⁸ In this sector the Chinese claim nearly 2000 sq.kms.

The British frontier policy in the middle sector in the 19th century was clear. Here a number of small hill states existed. The British after the Gorkha war (1814-16) annexed Kumaon, one of the states and later tried to bring the remaining states also under its influence. They however found these states to be under the defacto control of Tibetans and hence found it difficult to annex them. This continued unresolved throughout the British rule.

After the attainment of Independence in 1947, the Indian Government consolidated its authority over these territories by excluding the Tibetan authority, China and Tibet protested against this act.

Between the middle sector and the eastern sector, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan form a kind of zonal frontier between India and China. During the nineteenth century, these states were all in varying degrees in dependence or allegiance to China. Britain perceived Chinese influence over these states as a challenge and a potential threat to their own position. The endeavour of the British policy throughout the nineteenth century was to make these Himalayan states owe allegiance to the British and they succeeded to a great extent.

Britain considered annexing Nepal after they defeated it in the Gorkha war (1814-16). However, they desisted from the move lest it would incur Chinese reaction. They were content thereafter with a situation in which Nepal continued in form under China's suzerainty, but in fact accepted British control of her internal and external affairs. In 1890 China signed with Britain a convention recognizing Sikkim as a British protectorate and delimiting the Sikkim-Tibet boundary. In 1910 over the protests of China, the British signed a treaty with Bhutan in which that Kingdom bound herself to be guided by Britain in her foreign relations.¹⁹ British also tried to bring Tibet under its influence as it suspected the evil designs of Russia over Tibet. However, it failed in its endeavour.

The Eastern Section:

The boundary in the eastern sector is 140 kms. long and runs from the eastern limit of Bhutan to a point near the Talu pass at the trijunction of India, Tibet and Burma. This line is called the Mc Mohan Line after Henry Mc Mohan, a British representative, who signed the 1913-14 Simla convention. The boundary was established along the Himalayan crest of the northern watershed of the Brahmaputra, except where Lohit, Dihang, Subansiri and Kameng rivers break through that watershed. The only variance from the watershed principle is near Miayetun and the two Tibetan pilgrim places of Tstokaro and Tsarisarpa.²⁰

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian frontier in this sector lay below the foot hills. In this sector India and China were separated by a sixty-mile broad belt of mountains with dense jungles. This no-man's land was acceptable as a frontier to the British government as long as no other strong power approached it from north because the occupation of this territory by a power hostile to British would pose a serious threat to their Indian possessions.

Assam, which was annexed to the Indian Empire in the beginning in 1826, consisted mainly of the Brahmaputra Valley. The hills which were on its north and south were beyond the jurisdiction of the British and were occupied by aborigines²¹ who were hostile to the British. Hence the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 described an "inner line" running eastward along the foothills from the Bhutan boundary. North of this line travel and residence were strictly prohibited.²² This however was not the international boundary. The

international boundary was the “outer line”, which was co-extensive with the southern border of Bhutan and running along the foot of the hills where they rise abruptly from the plains for their steep climb to the Tibetan table land.

In the early years of the twentieth century there was a revival of British perception of danger to its territorial possessions in India from the Russian who were menacingly advancing towards Tibet. The British viceroy, Curzon believed that Tibet had also become a board for the ‘Great Game’²³ like the north-west frontier. The British started staking claims in Tibet to thwart its occupation by Russians. The Lhasa convention which was signed in 1904 between Tibetans and British bound the Tibetans to refuse entry to the representatives or agents of any foreign powers other than Britain. The British in 1907, to keep Tibet free from the occupation by foreign powers especially Russia, signed the Anglo-Russia treaty. The treaty ensured that, both the contending parties namely Russia and British India were to keep out of Tibet and not to enter into negotiations with the Tibetans directly except through the intermediary of China. Thus, Tibet was setup, like Afghanistan, as a buffer state mutually accepted by Russia and Britain.

Britain always viewed China as a passive element in the struggle for power and territorial acquisitions, that was carried on by Britain and Russia along the northern frontiers of India. It infact wished that China should be a buffer between these belligerent powers. As a result, China’s claim for suzerainty over Tibet was no cause for alarm for the British.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the situation changed sharply. China changed her earlier policy on Tibet and embarked on her own kind of forward policy towards her Central Asian marches making to turn them from loosely controlled protectorates into full provinces of the Empire.²⁴

The Chinese intention to assert control over Tibet led to their march against Tibet. The capture of Lhasa by the Chinese army in February 1910 and the subsequent plans of enlarging the Sankiang province to incorporate eastern Tibet along with Peking’s intentions to press old claims to Nepal, Bhutan and Assam Himalayas alarmed the British. Their main fear was that these attempts of Chinese would not only deny a buffer between China and India but also would expose British possessions for aggression. The advocates of forward school argued for the advance of British administration in the north-east to anticipate further Chinese moves. The Government of India under viceroy Lord Hardings rejected it.

In 1911, a punitive expedition was sent across the outer line for punishing tribesmen who were responsible for killing Noel Williamson, an English official. The objectives of the expedition were not purely punitive. It was also asked to survey the country and to acquire knowledge required for a suitable border between India and China.

In 1911, there was a revolution in China which swept off the Manchu dynasty from power and brought a republican government in its place. The effect of the revolution was

immediately felt in Tibet. The Tibetans drove out the Chinese facilitating the return and reassertion of power by Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama declared Tibet's independence, by publicly refusing to acknowledge that he drew his authority from Chinese recognition of him.

The sudden collapse of Chinese power in Tibet was a good opportunity to the British in India, because it provided them a chance to take steps to avert future threats along the North-Eastern border. They were of the opinion that their interests would be best served if Chinese presence and power were effectively excluded from Tibet. They wanted Tibet to be a buffer between China and India as it was between Russia and India as per the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention.²⁵ With this in mind the Simla conference was convened in 1913 which was attended by Tibetans with alacrity but only under constraint by the Chinese.

The British presented the Simla conference as an attempt to mend relations between China and Tibet between whom fighting was going on at that time. However the main thrust was to make China accept the division of Tibet into two, namely inner and outer Tibet such as had been recently agreed between China and Russia in the case of Mongolia.²⁶

The main point of contention during the six months of negotiations was the boundary between China and Tibet. McMahon the British representative to the conference proposed that an Outer and an Inner Tibet be created. Outer Tibet – or that area traditionally under Lhasa's control – would be master of its own internal affairs and could thus serve as a buffer between India and China. Inner Tibet – an integral part of China would serve as a buffer between Lhasa's Tibet and Russian – dominated outer Mongolia. From British Indian's point of view this formula offered protection from both Russia and China and recognized at the same time that the farthest reaches of ethnic Tibet could not practically be controlled from Lhasa.²⁷ The Chinese saw through the game of dividing Tibet to take a great part of it or separate it from China. However, their opposition to the proposal was not over the question of division but as to where the division should run. This was the issue upon which the conference finally broke down.

On July 3, 1914 the Simla convention was signed by British and Tibet. The Chinese Government refused to be a party to it even though Chen, the Chinese representative to the conference had initiated the draft agreement, an act which usually meant informal acceptance. Subsequently, Britain made unsuccessful efforts to gain Peking's adherence to convention.

The India-Tibet boundary line as per the proposal at the Simla conference runs along the crest of the Himalayan watershed in India's North Eastern Frontier area.

China did not raise any objection to Mc Mohan's formula at Simla or in the subsequent years after the conference during which Britain still hoped for Peking's acceptance of the convention. It was only in the late 50's and early 60's of the present century, when the differences became acute that China started questioning about the validity of the line while India consistently argued it to be the border.

Though the relations between these two countries started on a friendly note order, the new Governments in the second half of the twentieth century, the relations were bound to be strained, due to China's refusal to accept the existing boundaries by claiming them as handiwork of Britain Imperialists.

By 1950, the centre of interest in the Himalayas had once again shifted to Tibet. China had never relinquished claim to ultimate suzerainty over Tibet, even though it had bowed to the expulsion of the Chinese mission in 1912.²⁸ With the intention of recapturing Tibet, China launched an invasion on October 7, 1950. The using of the forgotten route through the Aksai Chin in Ladakh facilitated the easy conquest of Tibet.

The Chinese occupation of Tibet created anxiety in India on a number of counts. Primarily, there were disparities in Chinese and Indian maps particularly with respect to the border between Tibet and India's North East Frontier province. Another was that the Indian mission at Lhasa was without treaty foundation. Earlier Chinese and British missions had for years existed at Lhasa on Tibetan toleration and the goodwill of Dalai Lama. With the conquest of Tibet, the situation had changed. It became imperative for India to enter into an agreement with Chinese for converting the Indian Mission at Lhasa into a Consulate General. In return the Indian Government agreed to the opening of a Chinese Consulate General in Bombay. This agreement gave implicit recognition to China's suzerain rights and gave no written guarantee of Tibetan autonomy.

For the decade following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Sino-Indian relationship was relatively stable. India and China, to settle issues regarding their interests in Tibet signed the Sino-Indian treaty on April 29, 1954. The treaty concerned mainly economic relations between India and Tibet and particularly the improvement of facilities for merchants and pilgrims in both countries.²⁹ The Panch Sheela or 'Five Principles' of peaceful co-existence, were declared to form the basis of Sino-Indian relations.

The treaty though appreciated in the beginning in India, began to draw heavy criticism later due to the subsequent developments in the Sino-Indian relations. Many people criticized Nehru bitterly for failing to include the boundary provision in the 1954 Agreement.

Nehru's contention was that, primarily the boundaries of the two nations were clear and explicit and secondly, as the Prime Minister, Chou-En-Lai had himself assured that no territorial dispute existed, there was no point in raising a issue that did not exist. In the course of negotiating the 1954 Agreement, however the issue of the Indo-Tibetan boundary did arise indirectly in connection with pass areas in the middle sector of the boundary, east of Ladakh and west of Nepal. When the Chinese represented the passes in the region as there's, India refused to accept Chinese position. Subsequently both the powers accepted these to be boundary passes lying at their borders.

The first border disagreement between India and China occurred in the middle sector. Though the Chinese accepted the passes like Shipki pass, Mana pass, Niti pass, Kungribingri pass, Dharma pass and Lipu Lekh pass during the signing of the Sino-Indian Agreement of 1954, it however protested later on July 17, the same year to New Delhi against the stationing the Indian troops at Wu-Je (known to the Indians as Barajhoti) an area south-east of the Niti pass, which actually was an Indian territory. It was the first instance in which People's Republic of China specifically laid claim to Indian territory lying south of the great Himalayan barrier. Talks on this question began in 1955 but no agreement was ever reached.³⁰

Another disagreement between India and China centred on the border of Ladakh with Tibet and Sinkiang. In 1957 Peking laid a Sinkiang-Tibet road running across Aksai Chin, which was an Indian territory. India was ignorant of its construction till Peking announced its completion, which was later substantiated by a Chinese newspaper publishing a small scale map giving a rough approximation of the road. When India came to know through one of its reconnaissance parties that the road was running through Aksai Chin, an Indian territory, it sent a strong protest to Peking. In a reply dated November 3, 1958, the Chinese for the first time positively and publicly asserted their claim to Aksai Chin.

The Sino-Indian border disputes were further aggravated due to the Tibetan revolt of 1959 and the subsequent flight of Dalai Lama to India. With guerrilla fighting widespread in eastern Tibet, the road through the Aksai Chin became the only land route to Tibet available to the Chinese Communists, and possession of the Aksai Chin a matter of desperate urgency. With the Dalai Lama safe in India, the hopes of the Tibetan people for eventual freedom were being kept alive and a major propaganda defeat had been inflicted on the Chinese.³¹

Ever since 1959, relations between Peking and New Delhi deteriorated rapidly. The Chinese no longer gave evasive replies to the border question but started an open and bitter challenge to the validity of the entire Sino-Indian boundary as was conceived by India. They questioned the very legitimacy of the Sino-Indian boundaries and called the entire boundary as a product of former British aggression against China.

Although relations between China and India were severely strained by border episodes, the flow of official communications between the two Governments continued. It was felt that the meeting of the Prime Ministers of China and India was essential to diffuse the situation and thus resulted in the meeting of the two in April 1960 at Delhi.

The outcome of the meeting was not encouraging because the two parties' contradictory stands. Chou En-Lai's stand was that though Mc Mohan Line was absolutely unacceptable to China, it was willing to accommodate the Indian point of view in the eastern sector, if India accommodated to the Chinese claims to the western sector by giving away Aksai Chin to China. Nehru refused for this barter, for he was under a firm opinion that Aksai Chin belonged to India and Mc Mohan Line was the boundary line in the eastern sector.

It was, however, accepted by the two Prime Ministers that officials of the two governments should meet and discuss the evidence available to each, underlying their respective claims, beginning in Peking in June 1960.

The teams of officials from both the governments had three-series of talks at Peking, Delhi and Rangoon. The talks however did not yield any substantial results because both the parties took hardened stand. China contended that the Sino-Indian boundary had never been formally delimited and that there were certain differences between the two sides over the issue. The Government of China had not raised the issue in 1954, because conditions were not ripe them for settlement. It also added that the Mc Mohan Line had never been recognized by the Government of India. China also laid its claim to Aksai Chin plateau in western sector, Barahoti village in middle sector, Longju village in eastern sector. India refuted these claims of China and reiterated those territories to be Indian. As the two parties could not settle the border issues sitting across the table, they resorted to the ultimate argument-the war in 1962.

An Overview:

Both India and China are ancient countries. Rich cultural traditions have been the precious heritage of both countries. The most immediate threat to any nation arises in its neighbourhood, and therefore maintenance of peace, stability and friendship with proximate states is a major concern of foreign policy. India and China, the border countries in South Asian continent had many competing interests with historical reasons which took the form of sharp differences over the border. They were most acute in the Western and Eastern extremities of the Himalayas, separated by over thousand miles. The Sino-Indian question is a question left over by history. This is true, but only upto a point. It was as much a problem created by events which took place after the signing the Agreement of 1954 on Tibet, and more particularly after the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959. In otherwords, the main actors of the time were living with as well as creating Sino-Indian problem as it evolved. The immediate cause of 1962 war was the border dispute which made them to jump into war the reasons of which are discussed in the succeeding chapter.

References:

1. Ashley J.Tellis., *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, present and future*; Canada: Rand, 2000, P.31.
2. Ibid.
3. Venkateswaran, A.P., *Appointment in Beijing* Indian Express, Madras: December 4, 1988.
4. Ibid.
5. Maxwell, Neville, *India's China War*, Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1970, p.20.
6. Ibid., pp.20-21.

7. Sukhwai, B.L., Modern Political Geography of India, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985, p.256.
8. Bains J.S., India's International Disputes, A Legal Study, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1962, P.139.
9. Fisher, W. Margaret, Rose, E. Leo, Huttenback, A. Robert, Himalayam Battleground, New York: Frederick A. Praegar, 1963, P.44.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Maxwell, Neville, Op.cit., No.5, p.25.
13. Fisher, W.Margaret, Rose E.Leo, Huttenback A. Robert, No.9, Op.cit., p.62.
14. Lall, John., Aksai Chin and the Sino-Indian Conflict, Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1989, p.111.
15. Ibid., p.147.
16. Maxwell, Neville, No.5, Op.cit., p.27.
17. Fisher W. Margaret, Rose E.Leo, Huttenback A. Robert, No.9, Op.cit., p.69.
18. Sukhwai, B.L., No.7, Op.cit., p.260.
19. Maxwell, Neville, No.5, Op.cit., p.37.
20. Sukhwai, B.L., No.7, Op.cit., p.263.
21. Aborigines like the Akas, Daflas, Apo, Manis, Miris, Abhors and Mislunis, occupied the hills of Assam.
22. Rowland, John, A History of Sino-Indian Relations: Hostile Co-existence, Princeton: D.Van Nostrad Company, 1967, p.63.
23. 'Great Game' was the name given by Indian Army Officer Captain Arthur Conolly to describe British-Russian political fencing in Central Asia.
24. Maxwell Neville, Op.cit., No.5, p.41.
25. The British and the Russians in 1907 came to an agreement that both would keep out of Tibet and would not enter into negotiations with the Tibetans except through the intermediary of China. This came to be known as Anglo-Russian convention of 1907.
26. Mongolia was divided into outer and inner Mongolia. Outer Mongolia later became free from Chinese hold and was recognized even by China as Mongolian People's Republic.
27. Rowland, John, Op.cit., No.20, p.48.
28. Fisher, W. Margaret, Rose E.Leo, Huttenback A.Robert, Op.cit., No.9, p.81.
29. Ibid., p.83.
30. Ibid., p.85.
31. Ibid., p.86.