PREFACE

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the dominant trends of British imperial strategy in India's north-east frontier, manifested through its staggered policy of forward thrust in Arunachal Pradesh, and to map the dynamics of popular responses of the tribes to colonial intervention from 1824-1914. Such a study was felt overdue since historical researches carried out so far on this region have dealt with British policy in general. The policy of laissez faire and its operation in Arunachal Pradesh has been extensively dealt with to describe the process of the extension of loose political control over this hilly state. Colonial constructs like civilizing mission of the tribe, adventure and exploration in the Himalayan wonderland and conflict resolution in a trans-border scale with Burma, China and Tibet have practically dominated most of the works of the British writers and Indian historians as well.

Thus, it appears that in the past historians have overlooked the fact that the crucial issue between the tribes and the state was not direct annexation for territorial and revenue gains, but extension of political control over this inaccessible, revenue-deficit and hostile to human habitation Himalayan zone as the only option to secure the thriving Tea planter's economy in Assam and to explore trans-Himalayan trade routes to Tibet, China and Burma. As this vast Himalayan state in the north-east frontier of India shares border with Bhutan, Tibet and Burma, its strategic importance was very well felt by the protagonist of the Forward School in London. Therefore, after the first Anglo Burmese war (1824-26), annexation of Assam was carried out to gain access to this strategic zone so that
imperial strategy in Burma could be pursued well through the Khamti and Singpho frontier in the first half of 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The onus of drawing boundary line with Bhutan after the Treaty of Sinchula led to the delineation of Inner line and Outer Line for the Arunachal tribes.

Popular response to the interaction of the vigorous forces of economic imperialism with the tribal economic modes, dependent heavily upon Posa, slavery and barter, was basically rebellious from the very beginning. There is absolutely no reason to put the blame on the tribes for harbouring rebellious sentiments against the colonial intervention. Loss of privileges, economic sufferings and the fear of being enslaved under the colonial trap form the very basis of rebellions and revolts in the human society across the world. Contagious effects of rebellion only acts as the immediate trigger but the genesis of rebellion is always embedded in the sufferings of a human group perpetrated by a dominant state structure. In Arunachal Pradesh popular unrest and rebellions, although manifested in a fragmented scale, were the prime movers that shaped the basic contour lines of forward thrust in a time scale that varied from tribe to tribe. The policy of laissez faire, which draws its sustenance from the calculated gains for the empire, thus faced its first acid test in Arunachal frontier due to a sustained protest regime among the tribes against the colonial state in Assam. To ensure security for the prized province of Assam, the policy of laissez faire was compromised and penetration to the hills took place in a staggered manner.

Trading interest beyond the tribal frontier with Tibet, China and Burma always guided the zeal and spirit of imperial strategists, who were obsessed with the potential of the state as the gateway to possible booming trade in future in South-East
Asia. But more than these colonial impulses, it was the security concern of the British Empire to checkmate Russia, and later on China, on the Himalayan snowy ranges which galvanized imperial strategy to line up a zone of buffer states between British India and Russia and China. The British-Afghan policy was guided by this dictum, so also was the dynamics of buffer game played in Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. It was sheer good luck for the imperial strategists that they succeeded in the buffer venture in Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan. But they certainly failed in Tibet because of the resistance from Nationalist in China since 1911-12 to toe the line of imperial diplomacy laid out for them by Henry McMahon in the Simla Conference (1912-14).

However, China’s continued resistance to the division of Tibet and refusal to ratify the Draft Convention, agreed upon at Simla, provided the necessary trigger to sign a bilateral agreement with Tibet which gave Arunachal a defined border line, the McMahon Line. The very fact that this border line has been delineated on the basis of *de facto* position of the tribes as independent entity in the past makes it a very pragmatic borderline. Strategic bending at Tawang, Memba villages and Walong to suit the military needs of the Empire makes McMahon Line a very pragmatic line of defence for independent India, which China has been so far unable to rupture despite diplomatic protests and war. In the process Arunachal has zoomed from a ‘terra incognita’, ‘no-man’s land’, ‘Hidden Land’, etc., of the colonial stereotypes to a vibrant and developing state of Indian Republic today. But in the western sector lack of popular resistance (since Aksai Chin was truly an uninhabited zone) to the forward thrust put the colonial state in India in a state of stagnation for a long time, thus giving ample chance to
China to occupy Aksai Chin and convert it into its *de facto* territory. The Simla Convention failed to yield any tangible result for the Colonial State in India in the western sector, but it did give India complete control over Arunachal Pradesh to the dismay and discomfort of Chinese hegemonistic politics along the Indian border.

The original impulse to undertake this study is a direct result of an interest of many years since the beginning of my service career in Arunachal Pradesh (1986) to unravel the myth of Chinese claim over this hilly state, which they neither have occupied in the past, nor ever ruled over it to substantiate their map boundary that shows Arunachal as a part of China. Even in the year of 2008 Olympic at Beijing, their claim over Tibet has been shaken by unprecedented protest around the world by the Tibetans and their sympathizers demanding beginning of dialogue for Tibetan Independence. Dalai Lama’s monastic influence in the past over Ladakh, Bhutan, Sikkim, Tawang, Mongolian Buriats, Kalmuks and Eastern Marches had been shaken by imperial dynamics of Britain and Russia in the 19th and early 20th century. When nationalist China (1911-12) and later on People’s Republic of China (1949) realized the necessity of stepping into the shoe of Tibet, imperial strategists have already parcellled out Tibetan sphere of influence in the Indian and Russian border into either effective buffer zone or part of their territory. Against this backdrop china’s intransigence over the status of Arunachal Pradesh appears nothing but misconstruction of history.

For the purpose of the present study here, the term ‘North-East Frontier of Assam’ denotes the tribal areas in the Eastern Himalayas, which now corresponds roughly to the areas included within the political boundaries of the erstwhile
North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) or the present Arunachal Pradesh. The name of the tribes used in the present study are those which are being currently used by respective tribes as a mark of self esteem and honourable identity free from the colonial stereotypes or appellation given to the tribes in the Ahom records. However, in the excerpts quoted and wherever it was required to establish with distinction in the contemporary context, the use of old names have been continued with no intention to hurt any one's cultural pride or sentiment. Colonial constructs reflected in the descriptions of the tribes, like, "savage", "belligerent", "uncivilized", "isolated", "turbulent", etc., may be found in the thesis wherever felt necessary to quote excerpts from colonial historiography to authenticate the sources which have been extensively used to write this thesis.

The present research stems from an in-depth study of the history of the region, over a number of decades, the temporal and synchronic developments of attitudes, postures and relations vis-à-vis the almost inaccessible and little known tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and their ill-defined border with Tibet and Burma. The major focus of the work lies on mapping the dynamics of imperial strategy and assessing its fall-outs on this strategically important hill state of north-east India. Through the use of a characteristically historical methodology, the narrative and interpretation in this thesis attempt to put in proper perspective the factors and aspects that have characterized the development of imperial strategy on this so called "terra incognita".