

## **The Role of Major Henry Burney in Anglo -Myanmar Diplomatic Relations (1830-1838)**

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### **Abstract**

The paper “The role of Major Henry Burney in Anglo-Myanmar Diplomatic Relations (1830-31)” is an attempt to analyze the role of Henry Burney in the relations between Myanmar and English during the (1830-38). Burney was deputed as the first British envoy to be resided at the Court of Inwa on behalf of the honorable East India Company. During his stay in Myanmar, he had to deal with numerous diplomatic questions. The Government of India supported the Manipur claim, but Burney from a study of Myanmar records concluded that the Myanmar claim was well founded and more reasonable. Moreover, Major Henry Burney could fulfill for the payment of war indemnity by Myanmar Court to the British East India Company. Although the relations with Henry Burney and Myanmar Court after his reconciliation of Kabaw Valley to hand over to Myanmar was smooth, the ascendancy of King Thayawaddy to the throne made worsen relations with him as the King tried to ignore to accept the terms in the Yandabo Treaty, which eventually led to the withdraw to his mission from Myanmar. However, he was raised to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1834 because of his faithful service. This paper will be expounded the arrival of Henry Burney to Myanmar and what questions he dealt with Myanmar Court. It will be examined how he dealt with the questions and about the final results will also be discussed.

**Keywords:** Relations, Henry Burney, Kabaw Valley, King Thayawady

### **Introduction**

After the first Anglo-Myanmar war John Crawford was the first envoy to be deputed on principle according to the Yandabo treaty concluded with Myanmar King. He was appointed as an envoy at Inwa on the ground of Article 7 of the treaty of Yandabo. The immediate objective of the mission was to contract a commercial treaty. So that when this was accomplished he left Inwa. For the next three years, no resident was sent to Inwa by British Government.

However, Governor General Lord William Bentinck viewed that it was necessary to continue diplomatic relations with Myanmar. So, his choice fell upon Major Henry Burney of 25<sup>th</sup> Bengal native infantry. Burney was appointed on 31 December 1829 to reside at the Court of Inwa on behalf of the honorable East India Company. He was also instructed by the Supreme Government to look after the interests of the British subjects in Myanmar.

### **Henry Burney**

Henry Burney, who was born on 27 February 1792, was a British commercial traveller and diplomat for the British East India Company. On 30 June 1818 at St. George's Church in George Town, Penang, Malaya, he married Janet Bannerman (1799–1865) She was the niece of John Alexander Bannerman, who was governor of Penang in Malaya. In 1807, Burney, a 25th Bengal native infantry, joined the East India Company. In 1818, the year of his marriage to Janet Bannerman, he was appointed lieutenant and adjutant of the 20th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry, Penang's acting town-major and military secretary to Governor Bannerman. Later he worked as an agent of the East India Company, collecting material about Myanmar and Siam, which he made available to England, while participating in the First Anglo-Myanmar War (1823–1826). After his 1825 appointment as political

emissary to Siam, he met King Rama III. There the following year, Thai and the British East India Company concluded the Burney Treaty and a commercial contract to stimulate development of regional trade between Siam and Europe and having negotiated a mutually agreed border between Siam and British-occupied Myanmar.

### **Arrival of Henry Burney**

Burney arrived at Inwa on 24, April 1830. He was welcomed and on the whole treated with respect, when the time came for his formal reception by the King. When Burney arrived at the capital he was fully aware of the sort of treatment. The Myanmar ministers were prepared to mete out to a British representative. Burney would not be received at Court on a Kadaw day, he would not make a formal obeisance to the palace before entering, nor would he leave his shoes outside the palace enclosure. As a result, weeks were taken up in discussions regarding method of his formal reception by the King.

The Myanmar King and the Court gave him their full trust. On Burney's suggestion, the King sent a mission to the Governor General, though Bagyidaw would have preferred to send a mission directly to the King of England. Burney earned the gratitude of the King for prevailing upon the Governor General to demarcate the Manipuri frontier and restore to the Myanmar territory. Burney's instructions were to deal with all outstanding matters, the indemnity, the frontier troubles, the retrocession suggestion, and trade and to seek to build up good relations between Inwa and Calcutta.

### **Questions on Indemnity**

The question of the payment of indemnity came for discussion soon after Burney's arrival at Inwa. Burney explained quietly to ministers the danger of not paying up the indemnity quickly and that the Indian Government might take possession of Yangon, also that the King's claim to Kabaw valley would be inadmissible while the debt remained unpaid. In October 1830, the ministers informed Burney that they would not be able to complete the payment until the ensuing harvest.

Burney soon discovered to his dismay, that the ministers construed his conduct into an admission that their own statements and accounts were correct and so stopped collecting money from the inhabitants. Burney made a vigorous protest, but to no effect. On the other hand, on 20, June 1831 they informed him in writing that the indemnity of one crore of rupees had been fully paid and that the Supreme Government in Calcutta might be informed accordingly. Burney scolded the ministers for their conduct. On 6, August 1831, he warned them at the Hluttaw that unless they resumed their collections he would most certainly quit Inwa. This declaration, however, made no impression upon them.

On 6 January 1832 the ministers gave to Burney a written agreement attested with the royal seal, that they would pay Rs 654,232 in Dain Silver 4994 viss within 300 days from 4, January 1832. The Government of India did not appreciate the further delay of nearly ten months entailed by that agreement, but Burney issued a serious warning to the ministers that if they failed to honour the new terms. So, the ministers made serious effort to pay up the balance. According to the agreement, the entire balance should have been paid up in 1832. But the payment was completed in February 1833.

### **Boundary Questions on Tanintharyi**

In October 1831, the Myanmar ministers raised an important question in connection with the boundary of the province of Tanintharyi. Article 4 of the treaty of Yandabo also recognized of Thanlwin as the boundary between British and Myanmar territory. But the same article appeared to modify this provision by permitting the British to take only the

districts of Tanintharyi, Dawei, Myeik and Ye. The British had, however, taken possession of Mawlamyaing and some other places east of Thanlwin. The Myanmar ministers demanded that as the British had no right to Mottama district, they should return those places.

When Burney refused the ministers argued that the matter should be decided by a joint boundary commission in accordance with article 3 and 4 of the treaty of Yandabo. Burney replied that he was prohibited by his instructions from discussing this point. When the Myanmar ministers began to press their claim, he sent them a written reply in which he clearly stated that during the negotiations culminating in the treaty of Yandabo the Thanlwin had definitely been fixed as the boundary irrespective of limits of the Mottama district.

Myanmar could not pay the last installment of the indemnity for some time and Burney in effect threatened and cajoled them with Tanintharyi until in fear that the province would be given to Thailand and in hope that it would be given back to them, Myanmar paid the balance of the indemnity at great sacrifice in 1832.

Between June 1830 and April 1832, Burney was continuously in Inwa discharging his duties as resident. During these two years he carried out negotiations with the Myanmar Government on the questions of Kabaw Valley, the payment of the indemnity, Rakhine and Mawlamyaing frontiers, the retrocession of Tanintharyi and the protection of British subjects and their trade in Myanmar. Besides, he took every opportunity to study the true state of affairs in Myanmar, such the temper to the King and his ministers, the military strength of Monarch, the possibilities of trade and general social conditions in the land.

### **Questions on Kabaw Valley**

Towards the close of the first Anglo Myanmar war, Gambhir Singh had succeeded in occupying not only the Manipur Valley but also the Kabaw Valley lying to the east of the boundary of the Manipur state and inhabited by Shan. The Myanmar Government refused to agree to the inclusion of the Kabaw Valley in Gambhir Singh's dominions, claiming that it was an integral part of the Myanmar Empire.

King Bagyidaw was particularly anxious to recover the Kabaw Valley and if possible also Tanintharyi and Rakhine. The presence of the resident, therefore, was taken advantage of and much consideration was shown to him. The Kabaw Valley was ultimately recovered through Burney. King Bagyidaw continued to believe that both Rakhine and Tanintharyi would be returned to him. Although the cost of administration of Tanintharyi and Rakhine proved a heavy charge on the resources of the East India Company, the British would never permit these coastal regions to go back to Myanmar control.

Burney recommended to the Supreme Government that it should hand back Kabaw valley to Myanmar and to the great satisfaction of Myanmar that was agreed upon in March 1833. On the subject of the payment of the full amount of indemnity, however, the Government of India was adamant. And when all attempts to evade payment failed, the final installment was handed over on 27, October 1833. Discussion about the big questions at issue such as the Kabaw Valley, and the payment of the indemnity and retrocession began long before the date of the royal audience.

Burney persuaded the ministers to allow him to invite Lieutenant Pemberton to the capital to state his case. Pemberton was received by the King and presented him with a handsome gun. Ultimately, the King consented to submit the Myanmar claim to the Kabaw Valley to the Governor General. Inwa had uninterrupted passion of Kabaw for many years, and lastly Captain Grant and Gumbhir Singh did certainly expelled Myanmar from the whole of Kabaw Valley before the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo.

On 23, November 1833, two Myanmar Ministers, Wundauk Maung Khan Ye and Saye Daw Gyee Nemyo Thu accompanied by Lieutenant. McLeod, Burney's assistant, left for the Manipur frontier to receive the Kabaw Valley from the British assistant, left for the Manipur frontier to receive the Kabaw Valley from the British Commissioners in the service of Gumbhir Singh. They arrived at Tamu and on 1 January 1834, the British Commissioners Grant and Pemberton joined them. The Myanmar ministers then agreed to receive the valley but recorded their protest and expressed a desire to appeal to Calcutta again. The valley was handed over on 9 January 1834.

Under Burney's influence, however, the Myanmar ministers dropped the dispute, and wrote two letters to the Government of India acknowledging in a most friendly manner the return of the Kabaw valley and good treatment received by Myanmar envoys during their sojourn in India. The Long drawn out Kabaw question was thus finally and fully settled.

### **Relations between Henry Burney and King Thayawaddy**

King Bagyidaw was deposed by Prince Thayawaddy through a bloodless revolution on 30, April 1837. In this revolution, Burney maintained an attitude of neutrality. He tried in vain to bring about reconciliation between Bagyidaw and Tharyawady. However, his efforts to mitigate were altogether unsuccessful. The change of regime in Myanmar, however, caused deterioration in Anglo-Myanmar relation.

In an interview with Burney over the Yandabo treaty, King Thayawaddy declared, "Do not refer to any act of the late government. I have nothing to say to any treaties which they may have entered into". It was not Myanmar practice to necessarily honour the treaties of previous monarchs. King Thayawaddy mocked the King of England and the Governor-General who were subservient to parliament of five hundred men. He proclaimed "I am a King and have nothing but the god above me and not responsible like the King of England."

On 16 May 1837, the King personally advised Burney to remove the residency to Yangon and to return to the capital after the country had settled down to normal conditions again. He also desired the resident to correspond with him from Yangon meanwhile. On 17 May the King in open court declared that he had nothing to say to the treaties which had been concluded with the English in the reign of his brother. On 22 May, Burney while discussing the question of custom duties of Yangon, happened to make a reference to the treaty of Yandabo and to the commercial treaty. The King observed that he would have nothing to say to these treaties and desired no reference should ever be made to them. So, Burney founded that it was very difficult to transact business with Thayawaddy.

King Thayawaddy was interested in the procurement of modern arms, especially, cannons and shells, and he proceeded to order them from the foreign merchants, mostly English, who thronged the port of Yangon. These English Captains delivered shiploads of arm and ammunition at exorbitant prices and then calmly reported to Burney that Thayawaddy was preparing for war against the British. King Thayawaddy needed those arms to restore law and order in the Kingdom and also to meet the advances that the Siamese armies were making into Myanmar territory. Burney was angry and asked the King to stop buying cannons, the King was angry and asked Burney to stop his allies, Siamese from raiding Kentung.

Calcutta was still anxious to repair the loss and continued the diplomatic representation. But Burney warned the Government of India that it would be unwise to appoint a successor to reside at Amarapura, since there was considerable risk of an agree with Burney. Burney had faithfully carried out the desires of the Governor General Lord Auckland, under the instructions from the desires of the Governor General Lord Auckland,

under the instructions from the Home Government in Britain. Britain was at this time, planning to interfere in the Affairs of Afghanistan, and this was one reason why he did not wish to be embroiled in any trouble or war with Myanmar.

In October 1837 Burney left Myanmar for Calcutta withdrawing the residency without orders from Government of India. Bayfield was left at Yangon to look after British interest in Myanmar. But the Government of India cancelled this arrangement. The Government officially declared that Burney had mismanaged the affairs of the residency. He resigned the residency in March, 1838.

### Conclusion

Burney acted as the first British resident in Myanmar from 1830 to 1838 after the First Anglo-Myanmar War. During this long period he had to deal with numerous diplomatic questions some of which were settled satisfactorily from the British point of view. Burney's greatest success was in the matter of Manipur boundary dispute. Both Manipur and Myanmar claimed the Kabaw Valley between the Manipur Mountains and the river Chindwin. The Government of India supported the Maipur Mountains and the river Chindwin. The Government of India supported the Manipur claim, but Burney from a study of Myanmar records concluded that the Myanmar claim was well founded and more reasonable.

Moreover, Major Henry Burney could fulfill for the payment of war indemnity by Myanmar Court to the British East India Company. Although the relations with Henry Burney and Myanmar Court after his reconciliation of Kabaw Valley to hand over to Myanmar was smooth, the ascendancy of King Thayawady to the throne made worsen relations with him as the king tried to ignore to accept the terms in the Yandabo Treaty, which eventually led to the withdraw of his mission from Myanmar. However, he was raised to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1834 because of his faithful service. While he was serving for the company, Henry Burney died at sea in 1845 and was buried in Mission Burial Ground on Park Street in Calcutta.

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