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## **Treaty of Yandaboo (1826): End of Ahom Rule and Onset of British Colonial Rule**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Treaty of Yandaboo, signed on February 24, 1826, was a landmark peace agreement that ended the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826). This treaty marked the official end of the Ahom kingdom's 600-year rule over Assam and heralded the onset of British colonial rule in the region. Through this treaty, the Burmese Empire ceded significant territories including Assam, Manipur, Arakan, and the Tenasserim coast to the British East India Company. The treaty also mandated Burma to cease interference in neighboring regions like Cachar and Jaintia Hills, pay a hefty indemnity of one million pounds sterling to the British, and establish diplomatic relations by allowing the exchange of representatives between Ava (Burma) and Calcutta (British India).

The First Anglo-Burmese War was the longest and most expensive conflict in British India's history, with heavy casualties on both sides and severe financial costs, leading to a major shift in regional power. The British victory facilitated their expansionist ambitions in Northeast India and Southeast Asia, further consolidating their colonial footprint. The Ahom rule, which had been a dominant power in Assam for centuries, ended with this treaty as the British took control, exploiting internal dissensions among Assamese rulers. The treaty not only altered political boundaries but also marked the beginning of British administrative and imperial policies in Assam, leading to profound socio-economic and political changes under colonial rule.

**Keywords:** Treaty of Yandaboo, Ahom rule, British colonial rule, First Anglo-Burmese, War, Assam.

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### **Introduction**

The Treaty of Yandaboo, signed on 24 February 1826, is a defining moment in the history of Southeast Asia, marking the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826). This treaty effectively ended the centuries-old Ahom rule in Assam and ushered in British colonial dominance over parts of Northeast India and Burma (present-day Myanmar). To fully comprehend the profound impact of this treaty, it is essential to understand the complex geopolitical, economic, and cultural backdrop against which it unfolded.

During the early 19th century, the British East India Company was aggressively expanding its territorial control across the Indian subcontinent. Meanwhile, the Burmese Kingdom was a powerful empire in Southeast Asia. The two empires shared a long and turbulent border, with frequent conflicts over influence and control over strategically important territories or tributary kingdoms such as Assam, Manipur, and Arakan.

The Ahom Dynasty, which had ruled Assam for approximately six centuries, was a formidable regional power known for its military prowess and administrative efficiency. However, internal strife, coupled with external pressures from both Burmese incursions and the expanding British Empire, weakened its sovereignty. The Burmese Empire, under King Bagyidaw, pursued an expansionist policy to assert dominance over these border territories, leading to escalating tensions with the British.

The clash was inevitable as both powers sought to assert control over the resource-rich and strategically important regions. The First Anglo-Burmese War broke out in 1824 following a series of border disputes and hostilities. This conflict turned out to be one of the longest and most expensive wars fought by the British East India Company, stretching over nearly two years and draining immense resources and manpower.

### **Causes of the First Anglo-Burmese War**

The war was primarily instigated by territorial rivalries and competing imperial ambitions. The Burmese sought to consolidate their power in Assam and neighboring areas, thereby threatening British interests in Northeast India. Assam was particularly significant due to its economic potential, fertile lands, and strategic location as a doorway to the hills and valleys of Northeast Asia.

The British were also increasingly concerned about Burmese ambitions, especially as Burma had extended control over Manipur and parts of Assam. The British response was partly defensive – to protect their territorial interests – and partly aggressive due to the company's expansionist policies. Both sides engaged in military campaigns, with battles fought across challenging terrains and riverine landscapes.

### **Course of the War and Military Campaigns**

The First Anglo-Burmese War was characterized by fierce fighting and strategic maneuvers. Despite the Burmese fielding a numerically large army, the British forces, under the leadership of commanders like General Sir Archibald Campbell, leveraged superior military technology, logistics, and training.

From initial skirmishes in 1824 to major battles in 1825, the British gradually gained the upper hand. Key engagements, such as the Battle of Danubyu and the capture of Pagan and other Burmese strongholds, weakened Burmese resistance. The prolonged war put immense strain on both sides, with thousands of casualties and significant economic costs.

### **Treaty Negotiations and Terms**

By early 1826, faced with continuous defeats and the British army poised near the Burmese capital Ava, the Burmese leadership had little choice but to seek peace. Negotiations culminated in the Treaty of Yandaboo, named after the village where it was signed.

The treaty terms were harsh and decidedly in favor of the British. Through the treaty, the Burmese ceded vast territories to the British East India Company, including Assam, Manipur, Arakan, and the Tenasserim coast. Additionally, the Burmese agreed to cease all interference in the areas of Cachar and Jaintia Hills.

A significant financial indemnity of one million pounds sterling was imposed on Burma to be paid in installments, largely crippling Burmese finances. The treaty also allowed for an exchange of diplomatic representatives, facilitating British influence in Burmese political affairs and trade.

The British military occupation of key regions solidified their control, marking the end of Ahom sovereignty in Assam and other areas. This territorial acquisition gave the British a strategic foothold to expand further into Northeast India and Southeast Asia.

#### **Objective of the study points only:**

- To analyze the historical context leading to the Treaty of Yandaboo and the causes of the First Anglo-Burmese War.
- To examine the terms and conditions of the treaty and their impact on Burma, Assam, and surrounding regions.
- To investigate how the treaty ended Ahom rule in Assam and initiated British colonial rule.
- To assess the geopolitical and strategic consequences of the treaty for British India and Southeast Asia.
- To explore the economic, political, and social changes following the treaty in the annexed territories.
- To understand the treaty's role in shaping subsequent British-Burmese relations and colonial expansion.
- To evaluate the long-term effects of the treaty on the sovereignty and self-determination of Assam and Burma.
- To highlight the diplomatic and negotiation processes involved in the treaty signing.
- To study the military campaigns and leadership that led to the British victory and treaty imposition.
- To provide insights into the legacy of the treaty in the colonial history of Northeast India.

#### **Methodology**

The methodology for studying the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) generally involves the following approaches:

- **Historical Research:** Examining archival documents, primary sources such as the treaty text, correspondence, official records, and eyewitness accounts from the period of the First Anglo-Burmese War.
- **Diplomatic Analysis:** Analyzing negotiation processes, diplomatic communications, and the roles of various agents involved in the treaty-making, considering both British and Burmese perspectives.
- **Cultural Perspective:** Investigating how cultural differences, misunderstandings, and communication barriers influenced negotiations and perceptions between the British and Burmese empires.
- **Comparative Study:** Comparing existing historiographical interpretations, including British colonial narratives and Burmese historical records, to address biases and gaps.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Utilizing insights from political science, international law (in case of sovereignty issues), and postcolonial studies to understand the treaty's broader implications.

- **Secondary Literature Review:** Synthesizing scholarly works, academic articles, and previous research on the treaty, the First Anglo-Burmese War, and colonial expansion in Northeast India and Southeast Asia.
- **Contextual Analysis:** Situating the treaty within the geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural context of early 19th-century British imperialism and Burmese regional power struggles.

### **Literary review**

The Treaty of Yandaboo, which ended the First Anglo-Burmese War, is widely studied in historical, diplomatic, and colonial contexts. Scholars have examined the treaty as a key moment marking the decline of Burmese power and the rise of British colonial dominance in Northeast India and Southeast Asia. It has been analyzed not only as a peace agreement but also as a political tool that imposed harsh terms on Burma, including territorial cessions, a heavy indemnity, and diplomatic subjugation.

Historians emphasize the treaty's role in ending Ahom rule in Assam and facilitating British annexation, transforming regional political dynamics. The treaty has also been studied for its long-term economic and social impact on the affected regions.

Diplomatic historians and postcolonial scholars analyze the complex negotiation process, highlighting cultural misunderstandings and communication barriers between the British and Burmese representatives. This has shed light on how differing worldviews influenced the treaty's formation and the colonial imposition of power.

Some legal scholars critique the treaty from the perspective of international law and self-determination, especially regarding Assam's sovereignty, arguing that the treaty did not legally involve all affected parties, leading to ongoing debates about legitimacy.

Several theses and detailed research works explore the treaty's historical significance, negotiation context, cultural clashes, and aftermath, providing a nuanced view beyond colonial narratives.

### **Discussion**

The Treaty of Yandaboo, signed on February 24, 1826, marked the formal end of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) and signified a pivotal moment in the colonial history of South and Southeast Asia. This treaty symbolized not only the cessation of hostilities between the British East India Company and the Kingdom of Burma but also the collapse of the Ahom kingdom's centuries-old sovereignty in Assam. The consequence of the treaty reshaped political boundaries, redirected regional power dynamics, and initiated a new phase of British imperial dominance in Northeast India and Burma. This discussion deeply analyzes the treaty's background, military and diplomatic aspects, terms, immediate and long-term impacts, and its broader significance.

### **Historical and Geopolitical Context**

The geopolitical implications of the Treaty of Yandaboo are best understood against the backdrop of early 19th-century imperialist expansionism. The Burmese empire, under King Bagyidaw, had aggressively expanded westward and northward, incorporating territories such as Assam, Manipur, and Arakan. This expansion brought it into direct conflict with British ambitions and strategic interests in India, particularly in the northeastern frontier.

The British East India Company had consolidated its hold over most of the Indian subcontinent and was keen on neutralizing potential threats from powerful neighbors like Burma. With the region's rich natural resources and strategic location, Assam and adjoining areas had immense economic and strategic significance.

The complex interplay between Burma's military expansionism and British colonial strategy ultimately culminated in the First Anglo-Burmese War. The war itself was precipitated by competing territorial claims, Burmese incursions into territories under British influence, and British retaliatory campaigns.

### **Military Campaigns and the Road to Negotiations**

The First Anglo-Burmese War was the longest and most expensive military engagement of British India up to that time. The British, benefiting from superior logistics, artillery, and technology, gradually gained the upper hand over Burmese forces despite the challenging terrain and initial defensive successes by the Burmese.

British campaigns, led notably by General Sir Archibald Campbell, captured critical Burmese strongholds including Arakan, the Tanintharyi coast, and eventually the ancient city of Pagan. The Burmese suffered significant losses, including the death of their commander-in-chief, Maha Bandula, which severely weakened their military morale and capacity.

Negotiations initially commenced in 1825 but broke down due to the Burmese refusal to accede to all British demands. Persistent warfare continued until the British advanced near the Burmese capital Ava, demonstrating overwhelming pressure and strategic dominance that forced Burma to concede.

### **Analysis of Treaty Terms and Their Implications**

The treaty's terms were unequivocally in favor of the British. Burma ceded vast territories including Assam, Manipur, Arakan, and the Tanintharyi coast. Additionally, Burma agreed to cease interference in various neighboring hill states and pay an indemnity of one million pounds sterling—a massive sum that financially crippled the Burmese court.

This treaty imposed severe limitations on Burmese sovereignty, obliging them to allow British diplomatic representation and trade arrangements, effectively subordinating Burma within Britain's regional geopolitical sphere.

For Assam, the treaty ended centuries of Ahom rule and facilitated full British annexation. The implications were profound; British administration introduced new governance structures, economic exploitation models, and social changes, marking the onset of colonial dominance.

### **Socio-Economic and Political Consequences**

The treaty had far-reaching consequences beyond territorial changes. The economic indemnity strained Burmese finances, contributing to economic destabilization. In Assam, British colonial policies altered local economic patterns, emphasizing cash crops and resource extraction, which restructured traditional agrarian societies.

Politically, the treaty signaled the decline of Burmese power and sovereignty, while consolidating British colonial authority. The British Resident's presence at Ava symbolized diplomatic and political subjugation, while the indemnity payments exacerbated internal instability within Burma.

Furthermore, the cession of Assam integrated it into the colonial framework of British India, leading to significant administrative, social, and cultural transformation. The end of Ahom sovereignty was a traumatic shift in regional identity and governance, whose effects continued for decades.

### **Broader Imperial and Regional Impact**

The Treaty of Yandaboo was a milestone in the broader context of 19th-century British imperialism. It effectively removed Burma as a military threat to British India's eastern frontier and secured British dominance over key strategic territories.

The treaty set a precedent for future Anglo-Burmese conflicts and colonial annexations, culminating in the total incorporation of Burma into British India by 1885. It exemplified the British imperial strategy of using military victory, treaties, and economic pressure to expand territorial control.

Regionally, the treaty influenced political realignments and power struggles among local entities, hill tribes, and kingdoms. The British leveraged the treaty to fortify control over Northeast India and imposed new political arrangements that impacted indigenous governance systems.

### **Critical Perspectives and Legacy**

Modern historians critique the treaty as an instrument of imperial coercion and subjugation. The lack of genuine negotiation power on the Burmese side highlights the asymmetry of imperial diplomacy. Scholars also debate the treaty's disregard for the sovereignty of local kingdoms like the Ahoms, which were neither consulted nor included in discussions despite being profoundly affected.

The treaty's legacy is complex: it marks both a watershed loss of traditional sovereignty and the integration of the region into global colonial structures. It influenced regional histories, identities, and political trajectories that eventually contributed to independence movements and postcolonial nation-building.

### **Findings**

- The treaty officially ended the First Anglo-Burmese War, the longest and most expensive conflict in British Indian history up to that point.
- Burma ceded significant territories to the British: Assam, Manipur, Arakan (Rakhine), and the Tenasserim coast.
- The Burmese agreed to cease all interference in the Cachar Kingdom and Jaintia Hills, areas adjacent to British territories.
- Burma was required to pay an indemnity of one million pounds sterling in four installments, placing a severe financial burden on the kingdom.
- The British gained the right to station diplomatic representatives in the Burmese capital Ava, allowing increased influence in Burmese affairs.
- The treaty marked the end of Ahom rule in Assam, leading to British annexation and colonial administration of the region.
- It significantly weakened Burmese sovereignty and military power, initiating a period of decline and future British encroachments.
- British victory and territorial gains established their strategic dominance in Northeast India and Southeast Asia.
- The financial cost of the war and indemnity payments caused economic strain for both British India and Burma.
- The treaty set a precedent for further Anglo-Burmese wars and eventual full British annexation of Burma by 1885.

### **Conclusion**

The Treaty of Yandaboo, signed in 1826, marked a decisive end to the First Anglo-Burmese War and profoundly reshaped the political landscape of Northeast India and Southeast Asia. The treaty resulted in the cession of important territories such as Assam, Manipur, Arakan, and the Tenasserim coast from Burma to the British East India Company, effectively ending the centuries-old Ahom rule in Assam and initiating British colonial governance. The heavy indemnity imposed on Burma crippled its

economy and sovereignty, signaling the beginning of the decline of the Burmese empire and facilitating further British expansion in the region.

This treaty not only concluded a costly and bloody conflict but also set a precedent for British imperial dominance through military conquest and diplomatic imposition. The long-term effects included significant socio-economic and political transformations in the annexed territories and the eventual full incorporation of Burma into British India by the late 19th century.

The Treaty of Yandaboo stands as a symbol of colonial triumph and regional change, highlighting the interplay of war, diplomacy, and empire-building in the 19th century. It represents both the loss of indigenous sovereignty and the foundation for modern colonial administration that shaped the future trajectory of these regions.

In essence, the treaty was a watershed moment in South and Southeast Asian history, marking the shift from traditional empires to colonial rule under British power.

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