Chapter-11

EPILOGUE

I

Traditional and natural ally

Bhutan’s historical experiences with its expansionist and imperialist neighbours influenced to a great extent its foreign policy options. In 1841 the British in India occupied the Assam Dooars and consequently in the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1865, Bhutan lost all its Dooars and some hill tracts. Hence though “Bhutan was not under colonial rule, but it was a victim of British imperialism”, argued Kapileshwar Labh. In the post-colonial period, like any other third world countries, Bhutan too was committed to eradicate colonialism, imperialism, expansionism, foreign domination and hegemony. Averse to power politics it was reluctant to establish diplomatic relations with big powers, lest it would be driven into international politics. Armed with the good will of both King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928-72) of Bhutan and Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Bhutan perceived no threat to its security from India. The relationship got institutionalised in the 1949 Treaty of Friendship between the two countries. On 6 April 1971 at New Delhi, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck said, “The destiny of Bhutan is intimately bound with that of India and it is our mutual interest to still further strengthen the existing bonds of friendship and understanding between our two countries”. The succeeding King, Jigmie Singye Wangchuck too in an interview to M. J. Akbar of *The Telegraph* informed that after Bhutan cut off its trade routes with Tibet in 1959 it was natural to build facilities to the south since “India becomes a natural ally”. At the same

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time the young King observed, "There is a quiet shift away from overdependence on India which is perfectly legitimate and indeed right - and moves to improve Bhutan’s profile in the international arena".3

II

Thimpu’s independent initiative

The state-to-state relationship between India and Bhutan is based on the 1949 Treaty. But during 1960s and 1970s, controversies erupted regarding Article 2 of the Treaty which grants India the privilege to advise and guide Bhutan in latter’s external relations. The Royal Government claimed that since the Treaty of 1949 did not enjoin on Bhutan “hundred percent independent”4 status, the present King Jigme Singye Wangchuck at the Havana Non-Aligned Summit in 1979 desired an updating of the treaty. At Havana Bhutan agreed to differ from India. According to S. D. Muni, at that time... “without making the revision of the Treaty a major controversial issue... Bhutan has tactfully rendered the restraining Article 2 ineffective by taking foreign policy initiatives without seeking, or abiding by, the ‘advice of the Government of India’.” According to Dhruva Kumar, Nepali political analyst, the more distressful issue for India was the Bhutanese initiative to negotiate with China independently regarding the Sino-Bhutan border problem. India had to concede reluctantly to the Bhutanese decision in view of certain positive developments in the Sino-Indian relations. The Bhutanese Foreign Minister, Dawa Tsering asserted that these initiatives were taken as part of the “process of breaking the political and psychological barriers erected by many countries of the region”. Since 1980s the situation changed. Growing understanding between the two countries led to the evaporation of the misgivings about the 1949 Treaty. In the words of Parmanand, “the relations between Bhutan and India are not only good and friendly, but also mutually beneficial. There appears to be no scope for any doubt or suspicion of any irritant or deterioration therein in the foreseeable future”.

III

Extradition Treaty

Among myriad offshoots of the total satisfaction with the contemporary ties between the two governments, the India-Bhutan Extradition Treaty is a very significant development. It was signed on 28 December 1996 in the presence of the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck at Tashichchhogdзонг at Thimphu by the Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dawa Tsering and Indian Ambassador to Bhutan, Dilip Mehta. The 10-Article Treaty demonstrates its commitment to “safeguarding each others security and stability”. It takes cognizance of the rising “terrorist, secessionist, criminal and other unlawful activities affecting peace and stability in their territories”. The agreement stresses effective cooperation to prevent such activities affecting peace and stability of both the countries. Though to many Indians the treaty seems to be “hasty and unbalanced”, yet it has relevance especially in the post cold war scenario when cross border terrorism, secessionism and anti-national activities have assumed global dimension.

IV

India-Bhutan-China tangle

China all through has played the Bhutan card vis-à-vis India. Bhutan has passed into the British-Indian sphere of influence since the mid-nineteenth century. Just after independence Bhutan, though an independent country, was not equipped to conduct its foreign relations. India’s dealings with China on the latter’s territorial claims during the 1960s was not conceded by China. It coincided with the time when Sino-Indian relationship was soured with suspicion and hostility. China stepped up its demands for equal treatment with India in Bhutan in the late 60s. It maintained contact with the Prime Minister Dorji’s family in Bhutan. Simultaneously it increased the number of incursions into the Ha valley of Bhutan to such an extent that Thimpu asked for Indian assistance to combat China. The dubious role of China vis-à-vis Bhutan and India was further noticed in 1971. While China advocated Bhutan’s membership in the United Nations recognising its independent status, it was critical of Bhutan’s strong, pro-Indian
policy regarding the recognition of Bangladesh. Direct talks between Bhutan and China on the border demarcation started in the 1980s with India’s approval when the relationship between India and China tilted to normalisation. In 1960s China adversely commented on the internal matters pertaining to the assassination of the Prime Minister of Bhutan (1964) and Royal Coup. It also made India responsible for the murder and accused India of expansionist interference in Bhutan. But her current silence on Bhutan’s ethnic problem in its southern part is not in consonance with her earlier attitude.

With the annexation of Tibet in 1958-59 by China, Sino-Indian relationship deteriorated, culminating in 1962 Sino-Indian conflict. Bhutan declared neutrality in the conflict. In 1966 a crisis erupted near the tri-junction of Bhutan, the Chumbi Valley and Sikkim when the Tibetan graziers and Chinese troops entered the Doklam pastures and refused to pay heed to the order of the Bhutanese officials to quit. Bhutan maintained that the traditional border ran along the watershed Batang La to Sinchel La and asked the Government of India to make representations to China. But China argued that Sino-Bhutan border had never been formally delimited. Though China wanted to consult Bhutan in the border delimitation, but it categorically ruled out any sort of Indian intervention in the matter since it concerns only China and Bhutan. Whatever may be Chinese designs, it is indeed true that Bhutan like Nepal is not playing the strategic game of balancing both its neighbours. Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering argued, “Bhutan accepts the fact that its security and destiny is wrapped up in South Asia. We lie south of the Himalayas and more than 30 years ago we threw our lot in with India”5. According to Surjit Mansingh,

“For the moment, China plays no role in Bhutan and disclaims any aspiration to do more than establish a diplomatic mission and have good relations with an important, though small neighbour. Two courses that India must avoid are, on the one hand giving any impression of building up potential challengers to the King and on the other hand becoming so completely identified with royal authority that any Bhutanese challenge to that system would be an equal challenge to close relations with India.

Fortunately the King himself is broadening the base of government so as to obviate any immediate crisis in the system. The once feared 'communist threat' sponsored by China appears to be a subject of history. The more so because China itself is now so committed to modernity and quick profits that its ideological appeal to the discontented must be low indeed. Finally, large and powerful countries do not always overwhelm smaller but well directed neighbours. It is hard not to respect Bhutan's statecraft as a landlocked country making the best of its limited assets, maintaining its friendship with India and also resolving its problems with China.\textsuperscript{6}

\section*{Perspectives on ethnic anchorage}

According to the opinion of the Bhutanese refugees and human right organizations, Bhutan's crisis is shrouded in issues like democracy, human rights, ethnic cleansing, greater Nepal, cultural invasion, Gorkhaland and racial discrimination. On the contrary the Royal Government firmly belives that the causes of political unrest are covered by the smokescreen of slogans. So the real issues defy identification. Thimpu argues that the Bhutanese problem should be put into proper historical, geographical and political perspective. Most of the issues share the essence of ethnicity and the politics of demography. Bhutan's ethnic problem is nothing but a demographic invasion of the Nepali population. Highlighting the "ratio of one Drukpa to 70 Nepalese in the region, and looking at the migratory habits of the rapidly expanding Nepali population, Bhutan feels its very survival as a distinct nation threatened"\textsuperscript{7}.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, p.177 and pp. 185-186.

Thimpu claims that Bhutan has been transformed from tradition to modernity on the basis of the principles such as:

1. The individuals in Bhutan have acquired increasingly greater choice over the years;

2. Apart from the progressive and liberatarian outlook and policies of the throne, Bhutanese society has an inherent propensity towards toleration and acceptance of individual freedom.

The Buddhist values deeply nurtured by the Bhutanese highlights the responsibility of the individuals to find the means for perfecting and developing himself. “This tolerance of the individual developing his or her own path is, in some ways, synonymous with individual liberty in a secular sense”.8

Since 1961 motorable roads, electricity, telephone, hospitals, schools, airline services, satellite communication system linking Bhutan with the outside world and network of microwave transmission, all these have led to Bhutan’s rapid leap from medieval to modern era. It is through these principles that the Royal Government defends its integrationist policies. These have created animosity among the immigrant Nepalese.

The much publicised ethnic issue in Bhutan is interpreted by the Bhutan Government in their own way. The Royal Government maintains that the 1958, 1977 and 1985 Citizenship Acts are without any ambiguity. Immigrants cannot claim citizenship unless they are naturalized and lived in Bhutan since 1958. Similarly the 1958 Act is very significant because it was passed by the National Assembly, for the first time to grant Bhutanese citizenship to ethnic Nepalis who had been in Bhutan for the last ten years and owned agricultural lands. Until then, the Nepalese were aliens. The 1958 Act says: “If any foreigner who has reached the age of majority and is otherwise eligible presents a petition to an official appointed by His Majesty and takes an oath of loyalty according to the rules laid down by the official, he may be enroled as a

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Bhutanese national provided that a) the person is a resident of the kingdom of Bhutan for more than 10 years and b) owns agricultural land within the kingdom. The other aspect of the ethnic issue ventilated by the Bhutanese refugees and some Nepali scholars is that Thimpu decided to implement a policy of dumping the unwanted population thus victimising the ‘Bhutanese of Nepali ethnicity’. The Government of Bhutan forcibly evicted these ‘domiciles’ under various pretexts. As per the Bhutanese law, any Bhutanese national abetting anti-national elements shall not be considered as Bhutanese nationals. Moreover such people’s family members living under the same household will be held responsible and forfeit their citizenship too. Dhruva Kumar says that although Bhutan’s domestic law provides the foreign workers citizenship, but classifying a group of citizens as ‘anti-monarchist’, ‘anti-nationals’ and ‘terrorists’, and labelling them non-Bhutanese together with threatening their dependent family members, the denial of rights to citizenship are an international concern.

Bhutan’s concern for independent identity in the community of states shows the concern for the regime’s security and territorial integrity. Its policy of flushing out of the unwanted population has directly affected its relations with Nepal. And these are the basis for the Bhutanese decision-making which necessitated the need of concentrating power and influence in the hands of centrally dominant elites. This has led to the emergence of an idea of exclusivist nationalism grounded on the philosophy of the “land, race and faith”. Dhruba Kumar further points out that Bhutan has succeeded through negotiating several agreements, including the Chukha Hydel project, in neutralising New Delhi’s role on the refugees issue. Kathmandu thinks that “Bhutan has benefitted by the default of India’s failure to manage the long festering ethnic conflicts, particularly in the north-east”.

According to Lok Raj Baral, former Nepal’s Ambassador to India, the Gujral Doctrine enunciated by Indra Kumar Gujral, the Minister of External Affairs, the Government of India in August 1996, was favourable to Bhutan since it was in perfect harmony with the Indo-Bhutanese Treaty of 1949. Explicitly avoiding interference in

each other's internal affairs, the main elements of the doctrine are 1) non-reciprocity with India's neighbours 2) no South Asian countries to be used against other neighbours; 3) non-interference in the internal affairs of another country; 4) respect for each other's territorial integrity by all South Asian countries, 5) the settlement of disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations. "The Bhutan Government has therefore found an anchor to its policy", Baral argues, "reminding India that any mediation between Bhutan and Nepal would not be acceptable to Bhutan".11

Baral is of the view that when the King of Bhutan started focussing on the "Greater Nepal" concept to get the support of individuals and groups in Nepal and India, Bhutan's campaign against the alleged threat to her territorial integrity was intensified. In a similar manner the Nepali political analyst, Dhruba Kumar has commented, that taking advantage of the Gorkhaland movement in India and by raising the bogey of 'Greater Nepal', Bhutan has calculatively decided on ethnic cleansing. She also took "India into confidence on their project of state-building".12 The Nepal Government however was against the linking of the refugee problem with these sort of issues. In fact the Nepal Government claims that it does not have any border problem with Bhutan. However, Nepal preached that irredentist trend in the context of Bhutan, Nepal, and other highly Nepali populated Indian cities would not be feasible. Another threat for the Royal regime is the formation of a five-party coalition called as United Front for Democracy (UFD). The UFD was formed with two main objectives in view: 1) establishment of democracy and 2) repatriation of refugees. According to Baral, "Bhutanese domestic development would dominate its foreign policy agenda in the future, because the more vulnerable a regime becomes, the more repressive measures, it may take which inevitably would draw greater attention of the international community."13 Bhutan's development and modernization have their concomitant impact


on improving the living conditions of the Bhutanese. The consequent socio-economic changes have given birth to the demands for democracy, human rights and other issues of dissidence. Baral advocates the emergence of "modernizing monarchy". Simultaneously he suggests, "Change has to be coterminous with the absorptive capacity of the system - democratic or otherwise - and in a country like Bhutan both modern democracy and the country's inherent culture and pace of development should be properly balanced".14

India's aversion to inclination of militancy has buttressed the Bhutanese resolve to suppress domestic dissidence. The Indian Foreign Secretary, J. N. Dixit has endorsed Thimpu's measures of dealing with domestic problems. But in case of militancy among the Bhutanese refugees, Dixit said, "India would take firm and decisive action. Rather than ask the Bhutanese to take back the refugees, it would be more likely that we would suppress militancy. India's interest would be to quash it. We will not allow something that has a bearing on internal security to be resolved by resorting to diplomacy".15

The Bhutan Foreign Minister, Dawa Tsering commented, "For a small landlocked country like Bhutan, a close relationship with India is vital for its survival as a nation for the well being of its people". Kathmandu is critical of this affirmative statement. India's relations with all its neighbouring states in the 1980s were embedded in controversies and disputes. But India substantially improved her dealings with Bhutan. In comparison to Nepal and Bangladesh, the top aid receivers from India, "Bhutan is fairing well in Indian foreign policy drive".16 Nepal is highly suspicious of this aspect of India-Bhutan relationship.

The former Indian Foreign Secretary J. N. Dixit, has explained India's stand in this respect: "India has a responsibility to ensure that socio-political changes in Bhutan occur in an orderly and gradual manner. We must be supportive of the King and his government. Any abrupt destabilization of Bhutan or disruption of its institutions

(meaning primarily the absolute monarchy) would constitute a serious strategic threat to India’s security”.17

In consonance with this policy statement, Muchkund Dubey also assured Bhutan that India would not allow any activities directed against Bhutan from the Indian soil. “In more specific terms, we would extend all possible assistance that Royal government might seek in dealing with this problem, and that we would prevent any group which wants to enter Bhutan illegally and disturb law and order”.18

It is worth while to mention here that certain actions of the Government of Bhutan have evoked resentment among some Indian scholars. In June 1990 a six member delegation from the World Buddhist Cultural Foundation of which two members including V. H. Dalmia (Working President) and Acharya Giriraj Kishore (Joint General Secretary) were from Visva Hindu Parishad (VHP), was received in audience by the King of Bhutan in the kingdom. As a token of religious brotherhood, His Holiness the Je Khenpo sanctified a brick as a contribution towards the construction of the Ram Janma Bhoomi temple at Ayodhya, India. The King had also requested the VHP delegates for a sanctified brick from India for the construction of a Hindu temple in southern Bhutan19. A few days before the visit of the VHP delegation to Bhutan, Jyoti-Basu, the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, visited Bhutan and had a fruitful discussion with the King. Thimpu’s attempt to forge close relations with hardliners like VHP and a leftist leader like Jyoti Basu simultaneously was a “strategic move on the part of the Government of Bhutan to help diffuse the ethnic tension in South Bhutan”, argues B. P. Misra, Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University. Secondly according to Misra, Bhutan’s obsession with cultural identity has rendered “the foreign relations of Bhutan murky”.20

Before the Seventh round of Nepal-Bhutan refugee talks in an interview with the *Indian Express*, 7 March 1996, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck said that ninety nine percent of the refugees are not of Bhutanese origin. In an interview with the BBC, as reported in the *Nepali Patra*, (22 April 1993), the King accused Nepali Congress of instigating the Bhutanese of Nepali origin to leave Bhutan and come to Nepal. Nepal has offered arms training to these people for terroristic activities in Bhutan. “Nepal is engaged in a conspiracy to divide Bhutan and set up an independent state. Nepal is providing shelter and encouragement to the terrorists,” complained the King of Bhutan.

VI

Ecological dimension

A thin cloud of misunderstanding has developed between Bhutan and the Indian state of Assam regarding the ULFA-Bodo issue. Bhutan affirms that it cannot resort to militarism because Bhutan and Assam shares a common border constituting of 230-250 km. The Assamese and the Bhutanese maintained very close relations since the hoary past. The border is continuous. Vast areas of both the countries have high biodiversity and high endamicity. Both the parts constitute a section of the Biodiversity Hotspot in Global context. The sociological consequences of the ecological set up of Bhutan and Assam provided scope and means through adjustments for the basic survival of economically down-trodden people. The people from the higher land come down for collecting the basic materials, medicines and established economic ties between the two groups of people. The Kurma system established has basically originated out of the specific requirement of the community of people where the marriage relations does not exist. This system has been established primarily between the two different religious groups of Bhutan and Assam. Prof. Parimal Bhattacharya in his paper “Ecological Relations and Interdependence between Assam and Bhutan”,21 suggests 1) when political boundary is rigidly guarded, the area gets degraded. But the good neighbours

should ensure ecological continuity and keep room for improvements. 2) Since the ecological benefits of the altitudinal gradients is being comparatively higher in lower lands of the valley, it should be efficiently assessed and used for the benefits in appropriate scientific manner. 3) More eco-friendly activities should be formed. The most ecologically viable but vulnerable sites might be converted into an ecological slum. Undermining the ecological set up, other activities pertaining to administrative decisions seem to be disastrous (see in this connection Appendix 8 which highlights Bhutan’s concern for environment and sustainable development).

VII

India upholds bilateralism

Though population wise India is bigger than Bhutan by 518 times and much superior in all other potentials, yet through SAARC the two countries are enjoined in bilateralism. Modernization process in Bhutan came into existence partly in response to cumulated exogenous developments and partly due to ‘trade-needs-based-technological-use’. Although Bhutan has enclaved growth centres and peripheral underdevelopment, yet the former has catalysed modernization and development in Bhutan as a whole.

The Government of India strongly opposed a move by the World Bank to organize a separate aid consortia for Nepal and Bhutan by maintaining that India would prefer to adhere to the existing procedure of bilateral assistance in view of its special relationship with them. The Indian position probably is that, being the main aid donor with a special political relationship with Bhutan, India would continue to deal with Bhutan bilaterally. It would provide a broad framework into which the offers of other countries could be dovetailed to accommodate into the development plans of the kingdom. Perhaps to stop the ill words around the world, of India’s big brother attitude over a small neighbouring country, India shows good concern for Bhutan. The Indian concern is that Bhutan does not have the necessary and adequate political and administrative experience to be able to absorb multilateral aid on an increased scale without proper checks and balances; especially in regard to foreign involvement in the
internal affairs of the kingdom. The entry of foreign aid officials and Delhi-based diplomats into Bhutan is regulated by the inner line permit system. Nevertheless when the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other economic agencies of the UN like the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Economic and Social Council for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) have invited India along with several other countries to participate in the round table meet in Geneva in May 1983, to organize aid on large scale for five least developed countries (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Laos, Maldives and Western Samoa) chosen from the UN list of twenty four least developed countries, the government of India agreed to send an economic and political expert to participate in the round table, without any commitment to join in any collective approach that might be suggested as an alternative to a consortia pattern.22

However as a sovereign state which is a member of the UN, Bhutan itself has been striving for increased contact with other powers retaining the already existing special relationship with India primarily due to geopolitical compulsions. India too has not tried to oppose this move of Bhutan since according to India the Bhutanese policy of gradualism takes into account the necessity for maintaining the continuous special relationship with India.

VIII

Conclusion

Traditional Bhutan clung to a policy of isolation from her neighbours. She had no doubt contact at her extreme southern boundary with India. Communications were still maintained on foot or on horseback. The King was theoretically an absolute ruler. But the clergy had a powerful influence. A major part of country’s revenue realised in kind was spent for the maintenance and administration of the monasteries. The expenditure in other branches of administration was negligible.

George Bogle visited Bhutan in 1774. Nearly two hundred years later in 1955 Nari Rustomji visited Bhutan. Rustomji found no appreciable difference in the way of life of the people, their houses, dress or food habits. At different stages of Indo-Bhutan relations Bhutan was exposed to the complexities of the modern world. But the King

of Bhutan was a shrewd statesman. He must have been aware that India exercised increasing control over Sikkim through the appointment of an Indian civil servant as Dewan. He did not allow a similar situation to arise in Bhutan. He strongly felt that developmental programmes should be implemented through Bhutanese bureaucracy. Rustomji is more than ever convinced that Bhutan's progress "has been due mainly to her reliance on her own resource of personnel rather than super abundance of experts from outside".23

If the pace of development is pushed beyond a limit the Government of Bhutan will have no option but to increase the dependence on outsiders for finance and expertise. Nari Rustomji has uttered a note of caution,

"Such dependence undermines self-reliance and what is more serious, undermines respect for one's own culture and values. It is as long as people continue to have faith in their own culture and do not chase values that are alien to their traditions that stability will be maintained and the dangers of ecological imbalance will be averted. Enough damage has been caused through needless interference and imposition of alien ideas. There is need for humility at last in accepting that there is often greater advantage in discouraging simple folk from discarding too recklessly the deeper and finer values of their own culture and traditions, than in hustling them into waters that are beyond their depth and in which they may be only too perilously engulfed."24

The Himalayas has often been described in the language of both barrier and bridge. The central theme that emerges in this dissertation is that in the different stages in India-Bhutan relations the barriers have been overcome and bridges have been built. Both the countries should bear in mind that bridges can collapse through want of care. The eternal principles of Mahayan Buddhism bind the two countries together. The essential tenet of Mahayan Buddhism is that there can be no liberation unless it is for all. This is also the orbit of universal history in which Man is both the subject and the object. Any future study on Himalayan environment should embrace the dimensions of living which include all possible human activities.
