CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE

During the national movement the nationalist leaders in India and particularly Jawaharlal Nehru reflected on the major ingredient of India’s foreign policy. They had a clear conviction that India’s neighbourhood really meant Asia in the larger sense taking on from Arab west, including South East Asia and in an extended sense China and former Soviet Union. A. K. Damodaran has pointed out, “Proximity was seen as a positive fact as well as an opportunity, an interesting variation from the more conventional threat perception about adversary neighbours. This was unintended but in retrospect, natural result of India’s experience of domination by a remote power across the high seas”1 Our main concern has been the exploration of relations since 1947 between India and Bhutan at government to government level, that is to say, the Government of India and the Royal Government of Bhutan.

It is rather disturbing to note that in the colonial period the Royal Government of Bhutan was not at all sympathetic towards freedom movement in India. They were very much pro-British in words and deeds.

A. C. Sinha has rightly commented,

Not for nothing the Maharaja behaved as a model prince to the British. Bhutan inspite of her meagre financial resources, contributed to the War Fund during the two World Wars like other princely states in India. The first two Kings were decorated by the British with the Royal insignia. They paid visits to the Viceroy and were visited by the British dignitaries. The Indian independence movement began to gain momentum.

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in 1930s and the worried Maharaja advised the Political Officer not to permit M. K. Gandhi to take part in the Round Table Conference in London and rather send him to jail. It appears that the Wangchuck rulers felt comfortable in close proximity with the British colonial bureaucrats and maintained a distance from the Indian freedom fighters. On their part, the British appeared to have abandoned their early policy to develop Bhutan as an Indian princely state and made suggestions that Bhutan was (unlike a Hindu or a Muslim) a Buddhist state, away from India. In this way, by the end of second world war, Bhutan had emerged as a model British dependent princely state and like other princely states it also had her own worries of uncertain future in independent India”

The geographical configuration of Bhutan has made it what may be termed as “mini yam between two rocks”. This description implies that Bhutan is strategically placed between two powerful neighbours, China and India. In the colonial period the first major step in the making of India-Bhutan relations starts with the Anglo-Bhutanese treaty of April 1774. This treaty “initiated the policy of wooing Bhutan in the interest of Trans-Himalayan trade...” The commercial relations between the two countries was enunciated in the treaty which Bogle concluded with the Deb Raja in May 1775. The operative part of this treaty contained the following provisions,

“That the Bhutanese shall enjoy the privilege of trading to Rangpur as formerly, and shall also be allowed to proceed, either themselves or by their gunamshas, to all places in Bengal, for the purpose of trading and selling their horses, free from duty or hindrance.

That the duty hitherto exacted at Rangpur from the Bhutan caravan be henceforward abolished.


That the Deb Rajah shall allow all Hindu and Mussulman merchants freely to pass and repass through his country between Bengal and Tibet.

That no English or European merchants shall enter the Deb Rajah’s dominions.

That the exclusive trade in sandal, indigo, red skins, tobacco, betel nut and pan, shall remain with Bhutanese, and that the merchants be prohibited from importing the same into the Deb Rajah’s dominions; and that the Governor shall confirm this in regard to indigo by an order to Rangpur.\footnote{Clements R. Markham, \textit{Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa}, Ed. (1876 rpt., New Delhi, Manjusri Publishing House, 1971), pp. 184-185.}

In her unpublished dissertation entitled “Indo-Bhutan Trade Relations c 1774-1907”, Suparna Sen has argued that Indo-Bhutan trade during 1774 to 1907 had unsteady progress.\footnote{For detailed analysis see Suparna Sen, “Indo-Bhutan Trade Relation c 1774 - 1907”, an unpublished dissertation, Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University, 1991. pp. 264-274.} The principle of free trade was followed more in breaches than in observance. The trade relations between the two countries during 1907 to 1947 have not yet been analysed on the basis of primary sources. In my dissertation I have attempted to investigate comprehensively the trade relation between the two countries since 1947.

In the context of external threat both Bhutan and Nepal have been considered, from the point of view of India’s strategic interest, inseparable parts of the subcontinental geography. They form the natural barrier to the hostile advances from the north. The intimate and close contacts between the Tibetans across the Himalayas and the Nepalese and the Bhutiya\footnote{S. D. Muni has pointed out that the strategic importance of the geopolitics of the Himalayan kingdoms as indentified by the colonial British power are as follows :}

1. The kingdoms constitute inseparable parts of the Indian and the subcontinental security systems;
2. They could be used as forward security posts for the protection of British trade and strategic interests across the Himalayas;

3. They could be used as windows over the trans-himalayan espionage and intelligence activities of the foreign powers, particularly the Soviet and Chinese activities in Tibet.\(^7\)

Muni is of opinion that Indian policy makers had adopted the British policy package in their approach towards the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan at least to begin with. The Indo-Bhutan treaty of 1910 and Indo-Nepal treaty of 1923 respectively were renewed with minor changes in August 1949 and July 1950.

India’s relations with its neighbour has infinite points of contact with varying impact. The ambit of relationship has been characterised by Surjit Mansingh in terms of some models. In the Kautilya model there are a number of states on the subcontinent of roughly equal strength. Each is vulnerable to manipulation and conquest. But this model is not applicable to South Asia. Some aspects of India’s relations with the Himalayan kingdoms illustrate the relevance of the Raj model. The treaties that the British Raj concluded with Sikkim (1861 and 1918), Bhutan (1910) and Nepal (1923) were re-negotiated by Indian Government in December 1950, August 1949 and 1950 and 1951 respectively. The relevance of American model of expansion is in the existence of tendencies and not in the evolution of policies. The Indian pattern of Monroe Doctrine has not functioned in South Asia. The model of bilateralism attaches due weight to the unique features of each individual relationship in the region. In its relations with Bhutan, India has properly utilized the model of bilateralism which has been characterised as beneficial bilateralism in the Janata period. Bilateral bonds between India and Bhutan are strong in the fields of communication, education and the initial stages of economic development. “Bilateralism may continue to be mutually beneficial in the future”, Mansingh hopes, “and may develop slowly into regional cooperation provided neither side demands too much of the other”.\(^8\)

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This dissertation mainly deals with the important aspects of bilateral relations between the two countries. It is divided into eleven chapters. Chapter 1 deals with, that is to say, the present chapter deals with some preliminary observations regarding the nature and scope of this work. Chapter 2 starts with a description of Bhutan’s geopolitical environment. It takes a brief notice of its early history and focuses on different stages of political relations with India and makes a comparative study of its political status.

Chapter 3, which deals with India-Bhutan Treaty of 1949, is a continuation of the earlier chapter. This chapter demonstrates that despite controversy on the interpretation of Article 2, this treaty does not stand against the spirit of beneficial bilateralism which is the be-all and end-all of the relation between the two countries.

The ethnic problem of Bhutan forms the subject matter of Chapter 4. It deals comprehensively with the ramifications of the problem. The materials of historical background have been culled from unpublished Apa B. Pant papers preserved in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, India. This primary source material is indeed invaluable in reconstructing the history of Nepali settlement in Bhutan. I have utilized the official records of the Royal Government of Bhutan including the proceedings of the Tsongdu to explain the standpoint of the Bhutan Government. The arguments of the human right organizations against the autocratic character of the Bhutan Government are entirely based on huge mass of documents published by these organizations. In the context of India-Bhutan relations the attitude of the Nepali press deserves special mention. I have discussed the problems in this chapter with the help of materials that appeared in Nepali press from time to time.

Both Chapters 5 and 6 deal with commercial relations between the two countries. The former is confined to the period 1949-1990 and the latter contains a discussion on the same during the period since 1990. The materials of Chapter 5 explain the structure of the trade treaties of 1949 and 1990 and trade agreements of 1972 and 1983 signed between the two countries. The other issues of trade relations have been adequately discussed in Chapter 6. Surprisingly, materials on commercial relations have not been adequately preserved in the records of the Government of India. On the other hand, documents relating to Foreign Trade Statistics published by Central Statistical Organization, Royal Government of Bhutan are plenty. I have tried to make best use of these documents. India’s role in the development of Bhutan has been analysed in
Chapter 7. The main focus of this chapter is on infrastructural development in Bhutan with special reference to roads, airport, five year plans and industries. The Parliamentary Debates in Lok Sabha, India, have stood me in good stead in the preparation of this chapter. The data contained in Plan Reports, published by the Ministry of Planning, the Royal Government of Bhutan, and miscellaneous documents issued by different industrial authorities in Bhutan have been of immense value in evaluating India’s role in Bhutan.

South Asia has some unique problems and unique advantages. How to harness rivers for the optimal economic benefits of the people and make it available for agriculture or consumptive uses constitute major problems that confront the diplomatic relations among South Asian countries. The hydel projects that constitute the subject matter of Chapter 8 such as Chukha, Tala, Sankosh Multipurpose project, Bunakha, Jaldhaka, Basochu and Kurichu projects are examples of benefits which can flow from agreements through diplomacy to both the countries. The source materials of the chapter have been collected from charts displayed in the exhibition at Thimpu on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s enthronement.

Terrorism, national and international, is a feature of the modern world. It is a consequence of new technological sophistication. Terrorism caused essentially for interdependence of nations have resulted in formation of new kinds of international organizations and conferences. It has become imperative to determine the code of conduct of nations in relation to space technology, telecommunication, satellite system, narcotics or drug traffic. This kind of international entanglements is stronger than the political organizations of the nation-states. The content of Chapter 9 entitled India-Bhutan and ULFA-Bodo Problem, no doubt expose problems of terrorism confronting the two nations states - India and Bhutan. But the ramifications of the problem involve not only the two nation states, but also international community. This is exactly what makes the facts in this chapter highly significant. The source materials of this chapter are mainly based on proceedings of Tsongdu and newspaper clippings.

India does not have the propensity for ideological or territorial expansion. Indian economy provides a strong self-reliant base. There is a demand in the international community for India’s manpower and managerial capability. The combination of all these diversified capacities gives India the promise for cooperation with the world at different
international organizations and movements. Both India and Bhutan have been able to demonstrate that. By non-alignment they mean that both the countries are in a position to move with all nations towards cooperation and trust. The ability for this adjustment is what is meant by the movement known as non-alignment. The SAARC has also become an example of interdependence. Chapter 10 entitled *India and Bhutan in International and Regional Organizations* contains illuminating materials illustrating the observations stated above.

The Epilogue, that is to say, Chapter 11 of the dissertation reiterates with added emphasis on some of the problems discussed in other chapters, such as Bhutan's position as a traditional ally of India, India-Bhutan-China tangle, bilateralism, ethnic anchorage. India firmly believes in the inevitability of global interdependence. The ecological dimension of India-Bhutan relations highlighted in this chapter upholds the principle of global interdependence and good neighbourliness. Indeed the Himalayas are not a barrier but a bridge between the two countries.

In search of evidence, documents and testimonies, I have extensively consulted materials preserved in archives and government repositories. The construction of events, presented in this dissertation, is supported by a variety of documents, available both in India and Bhutan. (See Select Sources and Bibliography). I have tried to be objective as far as possible in constructing different categories of evidence. The evidence that I have collected from interviews with the officials who matter (both Indian and Bhutanese), is highly authentic. The communication they made and the opinion they expressed were close to the events they recounted in their narrations.