

LOCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BHUTAN IN RELATION TO INDIA

Bhutan is a landlocked country in south Asia. Located in the eastern Himalayas, it is bordered by Tibet of China in the west, Arunachal Pradesh state of India in the east and the Assam state of India in the south. Bhutan is landlocked between China and India measures 46,500 square kilometres and has a population of about 813,581. In spite of these limitations, Bhutan has earned the reputation of being a peaceful country where the development of threats from militancy, terrorism and economic disparity within itself has virtually been absent. In this sense, Bhutan has thus far been more fortunate than many of its neighbours in the South Asian region. This has been in part owing to its self-isolationist policy up until the second half of the 20th century and the preservation and promotion of a strong sense of individuality that has ensured social adherence and unity. The locational significance of Bhutan is discussed as follows:-

1. Buffer State: The Himalayan nations of Nepal, **Bhutan** and Sikkim were **buffer-states** between the British Empire and China, later between China and India, which in 1962 fought the Sino-Indian War in places where the two regional powers bordered each other. Bhutan is important to India as a buffer state as it acts as a defence against China by protecting the chicken neck. It is so important for India to protect the North Eastern states that it has done things which no other nation does.

2. Bilateral relationship with India: The bilateral relations between the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan and the Republic of India have been traditionally close and both countries share a 'special relationship', making Bhutan a protected state, but not a protectorate, of India. India remains influential over Bhutan's foreign policy, defence and commerce. In 2012–13 fiscal, India's budgetary support to the Kingdom country stood at US\$600 million (around INR 30 billion). It steadily rose over the years to reach US\$985 million (INR 61.60 billion) in 2015–16 making Bhutan the largest beneficiary of India's foreign aid. Bhutan's Prime minister, Tshering Tobgay, secured an additional aid package from India worth INR 54 billion (US\$819 million, as per the exchange rates at the time of signing the deal) for his nation during his visit to New Delhi in August 2013. Five-sixth of this amount (INR 45 billion) has been earmarked for Bhutan's 11th Five-Year plan. INR 4 billion was for the pending projects of the previous plan period. The remaining INR 5 billion was part of India's "Economic stimulus package" for Bhutan's slowing economy. India

operates 3 hydro power projects, of 1,416 MW in Bhutan and 3 more of 2,129 MW are under construction.

3. Diplomatic Relationship with India: Diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968 with the appointment of a resident representative of India in Thimphu. Before this India's relations with Bhutan were looked after by India's political Officer in Sikkim. The basic framework of India-Bhutan bilateral relations was the treaty of friendship and cooperation signed in 1949 between the two countries, which was revised in February 2007. The India-Bhutan friendship Treaty not only reflects the contemporary nature of their relationship but also lays the foundation for their future development in the 21st century. The traditionally unique bilateral relations, characterized by trust and understanding have matured over the years. The special relationship has been sustained by the tradition of regular visit and high level dialogues between the two countries. There are a number of institutional mechanisms between India and Bhutan in areas such as security, border management, trade transit, economic, hydro-power, development cooperation, water resources. There have been regular exchanges at the Ministerial and official's level, exchanges of parliamentarian delegations to strengthen partnership in diverse areas of cooperation.

4. Bhutan is the Largest beneficiary of India: All the roads connecting each major towns of Bhutan is being constructed by DANTAK. The place which is nearest to the Chinese militia is Ha. This Dzong (District) is flooded with Indian Army for the first line of defence. Although the most nearest place to China is Ghasa town. Subsidy is given to all things imported from India. Like in Bhutan people pay Rs 15 less for petrol than what people pay in India. The five year plan of Bhutan is being mostly funded by India. The money is being given through DoNER. Their telecom B-Mobile uses Indian Satellites for their communication. Bank of Bhutan, Bhutan's Government bank is actually being looked after by State Bank of India. Bhutan's colleges under Royal University of Bhutan rely on Indian Government for funds pertaining to Infrastructure and Scholarship. In fact the first college of Bhutan, Sherabtshe College, began under Delhi University. All this was done just to appease a country for protection of India's North Eastern States. That's why the friendship of India with Bhutan is so important. It's not only limit to that. In several Government Exams in India, people of Bhutan can also appear. Their militia is being also trained at NDA.

5. Bhutan-China border Issues: Bhutan shares 605 km out of 1,075 km border of its border with India and the rests 470 km is adheres to China. Bhutan has traditional ties with Tibet; it was once the connecting bridge between Tibet and the east part of South Asia. The strong socio-economic ties could be apparent with the cross movement of Tibetan people along the Manas Chhu in east Bhutan and Paro valley in west Bhutan to Assam, Bangladesh, and Bihar for religious, cultural and trade activities. The fair in Bumthang, east Bhutan was a huge attraction for many Tibetan people. The Tibetan caravans offered wool, brick tea, edible salt and musk in exchange for Bhutan's rice, paper and dried pepper. Local governments of Tibet used to deploy officials in areas near Bhutan to purchase rice. It used to be a ritual for Tibetans to travel a long distance along the Manas chhu to embark on pilgrimage at monasteries near Guwahati, Assam. After the China's penetration in Tibet, Bhutan had to close its border area due to the heavy influx of Tibetans in the country, leading to shutting down all cross-border trade activities. No formal trade or commercial relations has been established between Bhutan and China since then. Border issues between Bhutan and china incorporated into China-India border discussions.

6. India-Bhutan-China Strategic Triangle: India, Bhutan and China are part of a strategic triangle in the Eastern Himalayas with the inverted apex jutting in the form of all important Chumbi valleys in yadong (yatung) county of Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Given proximity of the Chumbi Valley to India's jugular to the North East the 20 kms wide Siliguri corridor, the two arms of the triangle resting on Indian state of Sikkim in the West and Bhutan in the East assume importance. Chinese plans to extend the Qinghai Tibet railway to Xigaze and Yadong close to the Sino-Indian border have added to concerns in India with tardy communication links on the Eastern frontier. Given the strategic significance, India has been able to maintain balance primarily through the India-Bhutan treaty of friendship first signed in 1949 and revised on mutually agreed terms in 2007. Thus two arms of the triangle could be said under Indian control and influence, even as China holds the base. This equation may be upset in case China is able to gain greater access to the Bhutanese arm of the triangle with a reset of the China-Bhutan boundary, negotiations for which are underway. Given the difficult terrain on the Western arm of the Chumbi Valley and scope for expansion is primarily in the East. The Indo-Bhutan treaty of friendship in 2007 has led to greater diplomatic freedom to Thimpu opening prospects of engagement across the board. The most significant change in 2007 was mutual reaffirmation of sovereignty and territorial integrity in the preamble of the Treaty which was not there in the 1949 text. More over Article 2 of the

1949 Treaty stated that Bhutan will be guided by the advice of India on external relations. This has been reviewed and Article 2 of the 2007 Treaty that the government of kingdom of Bhutan and the government of republic of India shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests. The sum total of implications of the change is greater freedom of choice to Bhutan in management of sovereignty and external relations. While Bhutan has been expanding foreign relations over the years and in 2011 chaired South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), there was no formal diplomatic relations or summit level contact with Beijing. Significantly, Bhutan and India are the only two countries with which china has not resolved land borders. There are two areas of dispute, one falling in North West Bhutan covering 269 sq km and the other central Bhutan covering 495 sq km. The North West area comprises Dokalam (89 sq km), Sinchulumpa (42 sq km) and Shakhatoe (138 sq km) in Samste, Haa and Paro districts and central parts the Passmlung and the Jakarlung Valley in the Wangdue Phodrang district. The 1998 agreement between Bhutan and China entitled, "Maintain Peace and Tranquility on Bhutan-China Border Areas", provides the framework for stability on the border. However despite this there have been reports of intrusions by Chinese troops in Bhutanese territory. In November 2007 some reports indicate dismantling of unmanned posts in the Dokalam Valley. Bhutan's media reported a number of intrusions in 2009. This was to be carried out of disputed areas in Dokalam, Charithang, Sinchulumpa and Dramana in Bhutan's North West and Pasamlung and the Jakarlung Valley in the Wangdue Phodrang district in central Bhutan. It is reasonably well established by now that china is looking for a package deal with Bhutan seeking areas in the North West while establishing Bhutan's claims in the central region. The offer was first made in the sixth round of talks held in August 1990. Chinese quid pro quo does not take into account that the territory is a part of the sovereign state of Bhutan and strategic interests seem to be pushing Beijing to offer a package to the southern neighbor. Herein lays the rub where India's interest comes in given proximity of the North West areas to the Chumbi Valley. In case Bhutan seeks to appease China to move the trajectory of relations forward, it would most certainly cause concern in Delhi and may even be objected to.

7. Dokalam Dispute: The situation of dispute between India and China regarding the Dokalam Plateau arose in July, 2017. China sailed thousands of tonnes of military equipment for the Sikkim border. This move of china was considered part of policy of pressure on India on the issue of Dokalam, which could not be successful. Dokalam is a land area of Bhutan, located in the mountainous region, which is 18 km wide and 20 km long flat terrain. It is

located on the tri-junction of India-China-Bhutan border, which is just 15 km away from Nathula Pass of India. Located in Chumbi valley, Dokalam is a strategically significant for both India and China. In 1988 and 1998, between China and Bhutan, there was an agreement on the issue of the Dokalam. According to which both countries will maintain Peace in the Dokalam region. As opposed to the agreement, China had tried to build roads and increase military presence in the Dokalam region, which was strongly opposed by India. In response, China said that the Dokalam region has been considered as a part of China by Bhutan. But, on June 29, 2017 the Bhutan declared the Dokalam region its land and dismissed China's claims. The tension of India is that, if China establishes its domination in Dokalam region, then he can make his reach easier to the "Chicken Neck" connecting India with Northeast states. China's reach till the "Chicken Neck" can be a major threat to India's security.

8. Benefits to India: Apart from defence India gets –hydropower - India gets huge amounts of electricity to light up the Indian Households. Right from their first Hydropower generation from Tala to Khaling (ongoing) most of the power is diverted to India. It's because India help them to built it and thus is also controlling them. In fact such is India influence in Bhutan is that it is being said that the first democratic government of Bhutan fell (Next election) because the then Prime Minister bought 2 buses from China which compelled India to remove subsidy on oil and LPG which forced the people to pay four times than what they were paying.

Geo-strategic significance has been always an important factor in shaping the destiny of a country. Bhutan has been well-known for its strategic location and natural resource base in the world. It is a sandwiched between two powerful nations, India and china. Because of its proximity to both the countries, India, is a close neighbour, has traditionally played a significant role in Bhutan. At present, china is interfering repeatedly in Bhutan, which also threatens India's security with India- Bhutan relations. China's role is a detectable as it has begun to intervene Bhutan's development process with an intention to weaken Indian influence.