

Ethnic Engagement in Bhutan and its Regional Consequences+

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State is a civil community having its own government and law. As per convention, it is attributed to have a definite territory, a population of citizens, a functioning government and its sovereignty of governance. It is entirely another matter that these ideal typical conditions are rarely met even in the case of most appropriate example of the state. Indian Union as a state is similarly no exception to the above generalization. What legally it claims as her territory is disputed by some of her neighbours. There are non-citizens residing illegally within her bounds. Its government does not govern in a similar way to all her regions and citizens. And in the matters of sovereignty, its helplessness gets occasionally exposed when the terrorists mount attacks with impunity. North East India provides an example to the utter negation of all the above attributes of an ideal Indian state. But one cannot wish it as it is. In case, we seriously consider the region for a meaningful understanding, we have to look closely the territorial limits to the neighbouring countries. One such country is Bhutan, which is more exclusive, different, distant and dissimilar to India yet, the Bhutanese scenario has far reaching implications for North-East India in particular and South Asia in general.

We assume that the claimed state system of Bhutan is sacrosanct. Similarly, the territorial limits, legal citizens, and her functionaries provide us with given parameter. Bhutan, located on the Eastern

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Himalayan ranges on the northeastern boundary of India, has been painted as an ideally system of its own. Its monks, forts, snow and the royalty were all described as otherworldly. It was a blissful Shangri-La away from the dean and the bustle of the crowded metropolis. It had a few people and plenty of space; dense forests with roaming wild creatures; perennial snow-fed rivers and lamaseries with monks and nuns perched on the hanging snowy slopes. This ideal and otherworldly image of the Drug kingdom is totally shattered today, because of the on-going ethnic strife. The country is undergoing a phase of Low Intensity Conflict (LIC), a new phenomenon for her, but with a serious potential for a regional conflagration. This paper is an attempt to trace out the background of the ethnic conflict and its consequences to the Indian region in particular and the South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC) in general.

Ethnic Background

The Drukpa state Bhutan is the creation of the Tibetan immigrants. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651), one among them, laid the foundation of this unique polity in the first half of the 17th century. Some significant aspects of this polity may be identified with the theocratic legitimacy based on incarnation, ubiquitous oligarchic conflict, duality of authority, and extremely fragile and limited economic base (Sinha. A.C. 1998). The mode of government continued upto 17th December 1907, when Ugyen Wangchuk (1861-1926) founded the present ruling dynasty. When he was crowned as the Maharaja of the Bhutanese princely state under the tutelage of the British. Ugyen Wangchuk's rise in 1880's also coincided with the arrival of another ethnic group of the Nepalese (who were later designed as the Lhotshampas) on the southern Bhutanese Duars as lumbermen, herdsmen and farmers.

Ugyen Wangchuk and John Claude White, the British Political Officer at Gangtok struck a good working relationship. So much so that the latter was invited after his retirement in England to introduce tea plantation and timber farming in the southern Bhutanese foothills. Much earlier in life, White was impressed with the industrious Nepalese and it was he who was instrumental in introducing them to develop southern Sikkim. He was in close contact with the Bhutanese agent. Ugyen Dorji, who was appointed in 1898 the chief of Haa region (in

entire Bhutan Duars), with a right to settle the Lhotshampas. For the next six and half decade cash starved Bhutan Durbar was provided with their cash requirements by the Bhutan Agent, which he extracted from the new settlers. It was a case of classical exploitation. The settlers had no tenancy rights. Their settlements were haphazard and huddled around bamboo huts after clearing the dense tropical forests.

There were no means of communication and transportation. They had neither education nor any facilities for health. They had no civil rights and they were exposed to the exploitation and brutalities of the Durbar functionaries. Dissent was suppressed with heavy hand so that the settlers did not deny demands made on them. There were instances when an alleged difficult tenant could be sewn alive in a raw leather sack and thrown away in the turbulent river to meet his watery grave (*Dhakal D.N.S. 1994*). In this atmosphere of stark suppression, there was no way a resistance could be organized against the durbar brutalities. The settlers had an limited choice either to comply with all sorts of demands on them or leave Bhutan for good. But all the available alternative destinations to the Nepalese in the first half of 20th century had almost the same features. Thus bulk of them stayed put on slippery Bhutanese Duars.

Bhutan could not remain untouched by the fast changing political scenario all around neighboring countries. China had invaded Tibet in the north. The British had withdrawn from India, leaving behind two successor states of Indian Union and Pakistan. The two Himalayan Kingdoms on the western border of Bhutan. Sikkim and Nepal, were under the spell of anti-feudal agitation and for the installation of popular governments. Needless to add that Sikkim State Congress and Nepali Congress — both spear heading the populist movements in Sikkim and Nepal respectively — were predominantly Nepali. In very first year of the third Druk rgyalpo's regime (1952-72), one finds the ripples of the Lhotshampas, agitation in the form of Bhutan State Congress". The agitation programme on the part of the Bhutan State Congress was ill-timed because of the fact that in a universally illiterate, isolated and an extremely despotic regime a popular agitation for civil and political rights, abolition of landed estates, responsible government, was premature. No doubt, the movement was suppressed with an iron hand and all types of political agitation were banned on the soil of Bhutan for the time to come. Naturally, the leaders of Bhutan State Congress kept away from Bhutan and lived in exile till the royal pardon was granted to them in 1960's.

Events forced the third Wangchuk ruler to review the Bhutanese approach to the Lhotshampas from a cold tolerance to reluctant acceptance in the Dukpa state structure. For the first time, Bhutan Citizenship Act, 1958 was enacted which provided with a status to the Lhostshampas. Their language was recognized and it soon began to be taught in the primary schools. They were permitted to build their shrines and teach Sanskrit, the language of their scriptures. Moreover, the state adopted a conscious ethnic policy of assimilating the Lhotshampas in the Dukpa fold by encouraging inter-ethnic marriage by granting first Rs. Five thousand then increasing it to Rs. Ten thousand as incentives. Furthermore, the Lhotshampas were encouraged to participate in the proceedings of the Tsongdu (national legislative body) ; they were sent abroad on scholarship for higher studies, were appointed as the bureaucrats; were accorded membership to the Royal Advisory Council, the council of ministers, when such dispensations were introduced in 1970's .

The Lhotshampas provided a much-needed labour force when Bhutan decided to undertake planned development through Five Year Plan in 1962. J. B. Pradhan, the Commissioner of Southern Bhutan, was entrusted by the Durbar to provide manual labourers and ration required for their consumption on construction sites. Transport, buildings for schools, rural dispensaries, administrative and public offices, hydel projects, electric installation and a host of developmental activities were undertaken on a big way.

Erstwhile insignificant sleepy border settlement such as Samchi, Penden, Phuntshilling, Geylegphu, Samdrung Jongkhar etc. turned into border townships with thriving commercial activities. These settlements also turned to house the infant industrial establishments such as fruit preservation, liquor, cement, woodcraft, etc. Needless to add that it was the Lhotshampas, who were the only local labour available to handle these demanding accomplishment. It also goes without saying that the Bhutan Durbar went out of way to make the Lhotshampas' life as comfortable as possible. Bhutan was plunged into political turmoil in 1964, when the first and only Prime Minister of the country was shot dead at Phuntshilling. The Lhotshampas kept away from the ensuing royal factional conflict. In fact; two decades from 1962 to 1982 or say 1985 were the hay days of Lhotshampas in Bhutan. Reluctantly in beginning but slowly and steadily they developed a sense of assertion and by late 1970s the Lhotshampas found their feet planted on the grounded and began to voice their opinions. To the

utter surprise of the Bhutanese ruler, the democratic fever caught up in Sikkim and 334 years old Namgyal rule came to an end in 1975. This was the movement almost entirely organized by Nepalese with support from Indian democratic forces.

Land Tenure and Feudal Social Structure

The Bhutanese commoners could be divided into two, the farmers and the serfs, which were further, divided into a number of local variations. Further more, various district had different land tenure practices. For example. Tashigang dzokhang paid taxes to the king. There were regions, which paid taxes to the queen mother, queen, king's sisters, royal uncles, crown prince and other relatives. There were aristocratic families with free land grants, dependent peasants, and hundreds of serfs. The important monasteries had their estates for their maintenance. Then, there were tracts of land, which paid taxes directly to the state treasury. The southern Bhutan was in the charge of the Dorji family, who depended on the Nepali *thikedars* for revenue collection. Further more, the incarnate *Lamas* with estates were special charge of the king. For example. Tulku Gangtey, a constant companion to the second Druk-rGyalpo, had died in 1931. His estate in Bumthang valley lapsed to the royal household because of delayed discovery of his incarnation.

All the households in a village were subjected to an obligatory labour tax (*chunidon* or *woola*) to the State, which could be allotted for a number of assignments decided by local level functionaries. There could be three types of households in a Dukpa village: *Trepla* (liable to pay taxes). *Zurpa* (splinter household not yet liable to pay taxes) and *Suma* (the households paying taxes to the nobility, e.g. royal family). There were two types of grain taxes: *Wangyon* (levy for blessings) and *Thojab* (grain tax on land out put). There were numerous other taxes to be paid such as textile tax, butter tax etc. a typical tax payer would pay annually the following items to the state functionaries: 462kg of paddy. 28 kg butter, 120 pair of wooden shingles, besides textiles. Basket s. paddy straw, mustard, dry chillies, dry sliced pumpkins, bark for the paper and ash for the field..They had to till the land for the monasteries and local officials in varying man-days without payment. On an average, a Bhutanese farmer spent half of his time working for the state without an express benefit to himself.

There were royal, aristocratic and even monastic herdsmen, and slaves grazing cattle. These herdsmen had to provide butter, calf, wool, hide and meat and yak tails in taxes. Though there were regional variations, but in effect, there were two types of slaves: *drabas*—who worked for their masters in lieu of land granted to them for their upkeep and *zaba*—who worked only for sake of food and cloth. *Suma* were privileged serfs, who paid taxes in kinds to the aristocracy and ran errand for them. There were other types of slaves as well. It was an extremely violent, unequal and exploitative system in which commoners had a hard time. No wonder, many of them turned to the monasteries for a life of elergy.

In such a situation, one may surmise the welcome waiting for the members of the mission (Bangchen) sent to levy fines/penalty to the defaulting peasants. There existed a number of officials at district level, who consumed bulk of revenue paid in kind. For example, there existed till 1960s in every *dzong* (forts) the post of a fodder master, a chief of stable, a cattle master, a meat master, a gate collector, a senior store master, a chamberlain, a chief attendant, a guest master, a fort governor and so on. Needless to add that all these functionaries had an impressive array of staff under them to help them perform their official duties. Evidently, any tax reform intended to alleviate the sufferings of the peasantry equally demanded an administrative reform.

The Lhotshampas were subjected to a classical tenancy pattern. As the southern foothill were assigned to the Dorji family since 1890s to develop the region through the migrant Nepalese labour, these newly settled tenants had not to pay the taxes in kind. However, they were also not free from labour tax. The Dorjis collected taxes from the heads of the families through their contractual officials in cash on the basis of cultivated land, number of cattle, fruit and other considerations. Even Dorjis did not transmit the collected taxes regularly to the king. However, they were supposed to provide cash requirements of the ruler, and his establishment as and when required.

Stimuli for the Ethnic Conflict and Strategy to Tackle it

We have enumerated elsewhere the steps initiated by the Dukpa establishment to contain the alleged demographic invasion of the Lhotshampas (Sinha. A. C. 2002). These may be recounted as (i) the Bhutan Citizenship Act. 1985, (ii) the Green Belt Policy, and (iii) the Population Census. 1988. These steps created so much upheaval among

the Lhotshampas that they failed to comprehend the situation initially in the absence a tradition of a acknowledged dissent. By June 1990, students, teachers, bureaucrats, village headmen and even chimes (the members of the Tshongdu), all felt so much suffocated that they began to attack the state property, schools, offices, factories, workshops, electric installations and even loyal state functionaries. They spontaneously organized common people, agitators, students, teachers and all the sundry elements under the banner of the Bhutan Peoples Party in June 1990. The police and army of the Royal Government of Bhutan were equally determined to suppress the dissension. As their homes and settlements were no more safe shelters against the organized state terror, the dissident Lhotshampas fled from Bhutan first to Indian and then to Nepal. The refugee exodus significantly picked up after the demonstration at Samchi in September, 1990. And within two years, their number swelled to about a hundred thousand : 70,000 in the UNHCR run refugee camps in Nepal and rest scattered in India.

The Royal Government of Bhutan decided to reverse its ethnic policy of assimilating the Lhotshampas with the Dukpa fold. The earlier efforts to find commonality between the Dukpas and the Lhotshampas were discarded. Teaching of Nepali and Sanskrit was stopped. Monetary award to the couples engaged in inter-ethnic marriages were discontinued. State holidays on significant Nepali festivals were given up altogether or were reduced to the bare minimum. For example. Dasai holiday, which used to be five days in a year, has been reduced to one day. Three day long Diwali holiday has been done a way with and so is the fate of the festival of *Holi*.

Rounds of talks between the delegates of the RGB and the RGN (the Royal Government of Nepal) were held alternately in the two royal capitals at Kathmandu and Thimphu respectively for as many as about ten years. After initial bickering and impasse, the two sides agreed to verify the identities of the refugee family lineage and as on the individuals, as demanded by the RGB. By December 2001, the Joint Verification team had checked the papers of 12,374 refugees from 1,960 families at Damak, Eastern Nepal and found that almost all of them wanted to go back to their respective lands in Bhutan from where they were allegedly evicted. However, the RGB is silently and stealthily re-setting the shifting cultivators and alleged landless Dukpas from the 'North' on the land left behind by the Lhotshampas refugees. This development was first mildly disclaimed and then grudgingly

accepted on the plea that even the RGB had limited land for its landless farmers from the 'north' who needed to be settled in the 'south'.

The RGB adopted a four pronged strategy to tackle the international outcry in favour of the suppressed Lhotshampas: (i) expanding and consolidating their hold on the nation, (ii) facade of talks and verifications of the refugees in the UNHCR camps, (iii) building pressure on the left-over Lhotshampas in Bhutan and (iv) using presence of the ULFA/NDFB insurgents in Bhutan to stall the refugee and resettlement (Sinha. A.C 2002 A). The RGB continued to negotiate with the ULFA/NDFB insurgents to leave Bhutan peacefully and willingly. The Indian rebels, flushed out of Bangladesh and India sanctuary in thinly populated and poorly defended eastern Bhutanese districts. At one time they had as many as 32 camps in Bhutan. When the RGB threatened to use force to expel the unwelcome guests, the ULFA had even threatened to blast away the Thimphu palace of the His Majesty, the King. There are unconfirmed reports that some of the state functionaries were even provided with the inducement by the ULFA. The rebels used a two pronged strategy vis-a-vis the RGB: they used threat and inducement. They paid very handsome price to the villagers for the commodities they procured from them so they did not turn hostile to the rebels. Ultimately RGB had to use force to flush them out.

It is said that an agreement was reached between the rebels and the RGB that the former would disband four of the nine rebel camps by December, 2001. In case, the agreement was not honoured, the RGB might use armed forces to evict the unwanted guests. The government of India as well has been pressing the RGB to jointly flush the rebels out of Bhutan. The RGB has been avoiding confronting the rebels as well as seeking armed support from India in this context. It goes without saying that the insurgents were located in the districts, which are predominantly settled by the Lhotshampas. Anticipating a potential linkage between the two, the RGB advised the Lhotshampas to vacate their settlements and shift to a safer region preferably in the 'north'. The Lhotshampas saw it differently. They felt that the RGB was using the opportunity to displace them from the fertile and well-developed agricultural fields to the barren North.

Such a situation was reported from thickly populated Bhanthar sub-division of Samdruk Jongkhar district, the south-eastern most part of Bhutan. The Lhotshampas of Bhanthar were advised to shift to the safe places in the North. Or they could remain in situ at their own

risk, as the RGB was not in position to provide them with security against the imagined onslaught of the rebels. The residents saw through the game played by the establishment. They reasoned among themselves and realized that the land hungry Dukpa functionaries were behind the eviction conspiracy. They felt that once they would leave their land, they would have no control on the affairs and only alternatives left to them would be to join their brethren in the refugee camps and all the promises of alternative land would vanish in the thin air. Incidentally, the settlers dilemma was resolved by the rebels, who advised the harassed farmers to stay put unmolested and promised to see to it that the former do not suffer because of the presence of the latter.

The Triangle-ULFA/NDFB: *NGOLOP* and the Druk Establishment

The Royal Government of Bhutan frequently alleges that the Lhotshampas refugees from their camps in Nepal terrorize the Dukpa subjects inside south-western Bhutan and even the Dukpas travelling in northern West Bengal (Kuensel: vol.xvii. No. 6.5). On the eastern side, it was reported that the Indian rebels hold-up in Bhutan got a much frequented Hi-Fi guest house located at the district town of Samdruk Jongkhar bombed (Sentinel: November 16, 2000). The RGB has also been raising an issue of the Lhotshampas involvement in the movement for the Greater Nepal in the Eastern Himalayan region (Dixit K.M.; 2001). Apparently, the bogey of Nepali design on the eastern Himalayan foothills was raised as a propaganda and, thus, no body took it seriously. However, a vague warning was issued on the part of Lhotshampa refugees (Dhakal. D.N.S. and C. Strawn: 1994) way back in 1994.

The future of the Greater Nepal scenario is uncertain, but several factors could shape existing tensions into a violent reality. The Nepali Bhutanese really have not developed their external links, not even with Darjeeling and Sikkim. Outside the region, there are other terrorist groups and of course China, which the Nepalis could approach for links. Needless to say, this would create a virtual war, and Nepal would probably resettle the refugees in Nepal rather than risk an all out war with India. If all the conditions are there—if the violence seems the only option for the refugees, Nepal and Darjeeling-India could face a frighteningly serious terrorist movement, a disturbance on a Himalayan scale. This plan might have its supporters, and there are

plenty of people.... Possibly militants in Assam and Darjeeling, people who fought for themselves and achieved little, would support this kind of action for their own gain ...this is probably something that (New) Delhi can't and shouldn't take lightly".

The presence of the Indian rebels in Bhutan was simply intriguing to say the least. It appears that a segment of the RGB was hand in glove with the ULFA/NDFB as a counter-foil against the Lhotshampa refugees (Gopalakrishna. R and J Saikia: 2001: 73-74). The presence of the Indian rebels on the Bhutanese soil would provide a counter balance against the possible support to the Lhotshampas from the Indian and the Nepalese democratic forces. But the story is taking a sinister turn now in case the so called *Ngolop* (the anti-national in *Dzonkha*).

The 10th Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) had established in 2000 the joint verification team of the Bhutanese and the Nepalese officials to categorize into four the refugees claims of being bonafide Lhotshampas. The respective positions of the two sides were harmonized in 2003 and 3158 families from the first camp of Khudanbari were divided into four agreed categories (Kuensel: vol 28. No. 10: p4). Among them 74 families were identified as the bonafide Bhutanese, 2182 families were termed as the Bhutanese, who claimed to have emigrated forcefully, as much as 817 families were found to be None-Bhutanese, and only 85 families belonged to the Bhutanese, who had committed criminal acts in Bhutan. As both the Governments have agreed to the above stipulations, the refugees had little options left to them and continue to, wait for its implementation.

The *Tshongdu*, the national assembly, debated the issue threadbare on the floor of the house and Lynop Jigme Thinley, the Foreign Minister, explained the implications of the four point categorization of the refugee. "the bonafide 74 Butanese families consisting of 293 persons would be repatriated to Bhutan from September onwards this year. On their arrival in Bhutan they would be given full citizen's status and all the right and privileges enjoyed by a Bhutanese citizen" (Kuensel: *ibid*). Mr. Thinkely explained that some of the persons placed in this category were those, who had proved that they were served with written eviction notices. Further the Minister informed the house that, in early 1990, some officials and *gups* (headmen) had gone beyond the call of duty and had issued eviction notices to the Lhotshampas.

Secondly, the Bhutanese who emigrated to Nepal willingly will be permitted to apply for Nepalese citizenship in accordance with the law

of the land. Those of the emigrants, who were forcefully evicted from Bhutan and are willing to return will be permitted to re apply for citizenship. It is the most numerous category in which 2, 182 families and 8,595 persons are affected. Re application for Bhutanese citizenship is permitted under provisions of the citizenship Act of Bhutan. Article NGA1 of the citizenship Act, 1977 stipulates that a Bhutanese citizen, having left the country, returns and applies for citizens, his application will be kept pending on probation for a period of at least 2 years. The citizens will be granted to him provided he had been responsible for any activities against the government during the probation. It is possible that some of these persons may apply for Bhutanese citizenship. They shall be dealt with under the provisions of the law of the land.

Thirdly, 817 families of Non-Bhutanese extraction must return to their respective countries. Fourthly, 85 families falling in the 4th category had criminal records behind them such as: (i) terrorist activities, (ii) destruction of schools, bridges and other service facilities (iii) violent demonstration (iv) kidnapping, extortion and blackmail (v) loan default, embezzlement of public funds (vi) attempts to undermine Bhutan's good relations with neighboring and donor countries. On their arrival in Bhutan, they will be handed over to the police for custody, they shall be charged for their crimes in the High Court and will be given opportunity to prove their innocence. If they are innocent, they shall be treated as if they fall under category 2 above. And those of them who would be found guilty by the Court, will serve their full sentences.

When Lhotshampas refugees and the ULFA/NDFB co-ordinate their anti-state actions, one wonders why the RGB has bargained for such an eventuality? One may take even an indulgent view that India with her five decade old experience of counter insurgency may face the situation some way or other, but will the poorly manned ill equipped and inexperienced RGB forces fare in the confrontation? It goes without saying that Bhutan by its own admission is undergoing a phase of Low Intensity Conflict (LIC). It is maintaining its armed presence on the entire southern Bhutan from Samchi in the West to Bhanthar in the east. Its limited human and material resources are over-stretched and in spite of all the bravado it is finding it hard to maintain a semblance of presence within the region.

Jaideep Saikia reported on a possible ULFA-RGB coalition in terms of a temporary gain in logistics and manoeuvring (Saikia. J. 2001). The Indian Press reported that Ulfa was desperately trying to gain the status in the Unrepresented Nations Peoples' Organization

(UNPO). So much so that it is claimed to invite two European human rights activities on April 7, 2002, on its raising day at their clandestine camp at Marshala in Bhutan (Telegraph. April 7, 2002). Needless to add that Marshala ULFA camp is one of the left-over camps ideally located on the most strategic vantage point and shortest route between their Bhutanese haven and their Bangladesh sanctuary. Its location on the reverie and marshy char land of Manas and Brahmaputra rivers and Manas Wild Forest Sanctuary suits an human trafficking across the three countries. Needless to add that this area is the adobe of the poorest of the poor and the most neglected part of the SAARC region.

The above scenario invites our attention to a shared destiny of the SAARC countries. Is it not ironic that professedly anti-national elements have clandestinely been defying the national barriers for their anti-national activities and the 'States', which are recognized representatives of the people, are so helpless to do any thing positive? National priorities, ideologies, ethos, ego and vanity-all are all right to the extent that they contribute to the well-being of the citizens. It looks that every thing is happening, but for that, SAARC was envisioned as a regional answer to the common ailment of our region, but its charter and noble objectives remain largely unattended. It is a fact that some the founding leaders could see the limits of the SAARC agenda. But should the future generation be a captive of the past helplessness? In a recent academic conclave on the comprehensive security of South Asia a noted Nepalese scholar. M.P. Lohani, rightly identified the urgent agenda for the regional security: "The common threats (for the Region) include ethnic crisis, national and transnational terrorism, religious fundamentalism, atmospheric pollution, poverty, trans-border migration and re-defination of state sovereignty in accordance with the burgeoning trend of supra-nationalism" (Lohani. M.P., 2001).

French diplomat Thierry Mathou has identified three circles of the Bhutanese foreign policy since 1961: the Indian circle, the regional circle and the multilateral circle (Mathou, P. 1994). He also found its diplomatic policy steady, cautious and remarkably stable. The Bhutanese elite realized the existential reality of South Asia much earlier than most of her partners among the SAARC countries. In the words of its former foreign minister: India, by virtue of its size and technological achievements, has a pre-eminent role in the region. The smaller South Asian countries have to live with this reality." However, it is not clear how deep is the Indian factor in the on-going ethnic conflict in Bhutan. As per the past practice there must have been consultation between the

two. But the view that the Indian advice would prevail in all the cases is to expect too much. However, one must hasten to add that there is an impression that Indian silence on ethnic conflict in Bhutan is too eloquent to be ignored. Is India alienating Nepal at the cost of Bhutan?

Unfortunately, this is the impression among a section of the Indian intelligentsia. It is a fact that the entire Himalayan region from Kashmir in the west to Northeast Indian states in the east has turned into a zone of conflict. Besides India, the two Himalayan kingdoms are embroiled in the worst type of conflicts not experienced by them in the past. In such a situation, Indian experience to handle inter-state issues should have been handy to the smaller neighbours. But it appears that India turned out to be a prisoner of her own priority. In the words of former Indian Foreign secretary, J.N. Dixit: " India seems to be imprisoned in a jacket of assertiveness and excessively narrow Indo centric considerations. The argument that India should be generous with its smaller neighbours put forward by some analysts is not a relevant point. Generosity smacks of a certain incipient big brotherly hegemonic attitude. A co-operative and accommodating approach towards Nepal is of at most and vital interest to India in political, geostrategic and economic terms. Good Indo-Nepalese relations have ramifications for our relations with other neighbours in the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation as well as China. This is the empirical reality to which our Nepal policy should respond " (Dixit J.N. 2002).

To conclude the discourse till 1980's Bhutan was a model state in South Asian region with its favourable land-man ratio. Its king had an image of being benevolent ruler, who encouraged integration of the Lhotshampas in its body politic. So much so that it was considered an ideal locale for holding 'Peace Talk' between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) at Thimphu in 1985. Since then much water has flown in Torsha and Raidak rivers. Bhutan has joined the sister nations of the South Asia with its own form of ethnic conflict. We have tried to acquaint the readers with the ethnic scenario and the feudal social structure of Bhutan, which bred ethnic hostility. Secondly, we have traced out the stimuli for the conflict and strategy adopted by the Drukpa state to cope with the ethnic flare up. Thirdly, we tried to caution the concerned citizen of the SAARC nations about the pitfall of the Bhutanese situation, in which there was a possibility of the linkage between the Lhotshampa refugees and the Indian rebels hold-up in south-eastern Bhutan. God forbid, if it was do happen considering the resources in terms of man-power, its limited

experience in handling the violent ethnic conflicts and materials available to it, the RGB was simply not capable to manage the emergent scenario. It was further aggravate already existing explosive ethnic situation. As a concerned student of North eastern Indian ethnic scenario, one apprehends an ominous development, fraught with serious consequences for the region.

Footnotes

1. Essentially Low Inter-city Conflict (LIC) is armed conflict for political purposes, shot of a direct combat between the regular armed forces. Such conflicts are any metrical, ambiguous, and unconventional, and very often develop into war of attrition. LIC is largely a Third phenomena and poses a serious and long term threat to nation building exercises and regional peace and security. LIC subsumes guerilla wars, insurgency, separatist movements, insurrections, communal violence, terrorism etc. there is little evidence of LIC declining. On the contrary, LIC is on the rise because it is more cost effective, especially in the short term, term conventional war and because it carries less risk of escalation. Cold war had a restraining influence on the eruption and spread of LIC. Its subsidence has realistic and cost effective solution to many groups pursuing different political, ideological and territorial goals, Heightened aspirations of the people, improved means of communication, and easy availability of light weight sophisticated weapons have ensured that various ethnic, racial and religious issues turn into uncompromising demands for self-determination and political independence. All these factors make LIC both desirable and possible (Mishra. O. P: 2002).
2. "India is big in size and that means that the proportion of our problems and difficulties are also gigantic. We don't want to take on more problems. Our policy is not to interfere in the affairs of others. But ours is a troubled region. Most of our countries are multi-racial and multi-religious. It would be idle to pretend that we are not affected by what happens elsewhere." Inaugural Address of Indira Gandhi. The Prime Minister of India. at the SAARC meeting of Foreign Ministers in New Delhi on August 1, 1983, in V Grover edt. UNO, NAM, NIEO, SAARC and India's Foreign Policy, New Delhi, 1992.

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