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China-India Relations and North-East: An Overview

Dr. Chander Bhushan Nagar

Principal Investigator for UGC Project

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Dasaratha Deb Memorial College,
Khowai, Tripura, India*

Abstract

Geography as clement of national power plays a vital role in the understanding of strategic relations between two states. It is stable, tangible, permanent and natural element. The geographical symmetry of any country determines its advantage or disadvantage to fulfil its national interest. In order to understand the role of geography one needs to divert it into several factors like, study of maps, size of the country, climate of the country, topography of the terrain and boundary of the country. These factors strongly determine the strength and weakness of the national power of the concerned state. The Indian approach towards security has been conceived of this idea and the India China relations are affected by it is case of the North Eastern region of India. To investigate this jugglery in relations it is important to firstly, understand the relevant corners of the India China relation in reference to the strategic location of the North East region. This paper presents an overview of North-east region in context of Sino-Indian relations. A chronological presentation has been the major factor in explanation.

Keywords: Communism, Geography, NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Province), Security, Look East Policy, ASEAN (Association of South East. Asian Nations)

Introduction: Napoleon once said, “The foreign policy of a country is determined by its geography.”¹ It is no doubt a fact that the shirking of world with globalization has increased the significance at interdependence among the regions of the world. In this way, geography matters a lot for the neighbouring countries. As one going to argue the quote being mentioned above, it puts up a pertinent question.

Geography seems to be as important determinant of national power of any state. There are number of ways national power by as on element has been interpreted. Morgenthau classifies them as permanent and temporary. Organ ski classify them into natural and social determinants. In the natural determinant, geography tends to be an important one. Whereas, palmer and Perkins, Charles. O Lerche, Abdul Said, Theodore A, Couloumbis and James. H Wolfe has classified national power as tangible and intangible elements. As a matter of fact, geography as clement of national power plays a vital role in the understanding of strategic relations between two states. It is stable, tangible, permanent and natural element. The

geographical symmetry of any country determines its advantage or disadvantage to fulfil its national interest. In order to understand the role of geography one needs to divert it into several factors like, study of maps, size of the country, climate of the country, topography of the terrain and boundary of the country. These factors strongly determine the strength and weakness of the national power of the concerned state.

Another important discussion to understand is that the ideal geographical conditions can be a source of strength and non-suitable conditions could be hindrance in the national interest of the country. If one looks at the case of United States of America, it has become and is holding a status of super power which transcendence the geographical limitations. As Padelford and Lincoln have quoted, "The astronomical impact of intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) systems, nuclear weaponry, intelligence gathering and satellites has drastically collapsed the geographical obstacles to the projection of national power"². Similarly, the Sino-Indian relations have thwarted beyond the geographical limitations.

The discourse on security has been one of the biggest concerns for the current democratic state. The threat perceptions were clearly divided into two realms, one concerned to domestic issues and other related to eternal issues. In case of the later one, this debate seems more relevant. With the dissolution of bipolar world order, a change has been witnessed in the priorities towards security issues as the conventional aspect of deterrence has been converted into a growing influx of insurgent activities in a state. It has been a non-conventional method of waging war against a state to destabilize and jeopardise its national and strategic interests. The Indian approach towards security has been conceived of this idea and the India China relations are affected by it is case of the North Eastern region of India. To investigate this jugglery in relations it is important to firstly, understand the relevant corners of the India China relation in reference to the strategic location of the North East region. The famous scholar Howard Zins once said, "History is an empty vessel and you can fill it in whatever way you can"³. The India China relation often seems as note book of a child who often tries learning on it, write something, erase it, again write something etc., etc.

The North-eastern region of India previously eloquently known as the "Seven-Sisters" and now comprising of eight political units of the Union of India namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. A part of the North Eastern region is surrounded by China on the north, Bhutan on the immediate northwest, Myanmar on the east and Bangladesh on the southwest boundaries. The topographical calculation is 29⁰ North Latitude and 98.46' and 97.5' East Latitude. The region occupies an area of 2.55 lakh sq. km (8.06% of India's total area) as per Thirty-Sixth Report on Developmental potential of commerce in the North Eastern Region, December 1998. The North-eastern region of India has a huge potential to become gateway for the future trade of India's look East Policy and its integration into South East Asia. Thus, this project is relevant in the sense that the study of the Chinese influx and its intentions in the north east region seems relevant.

With the adoption of Look East Policy, India tries to enhance its presence in the region through enhanced diplomatic and strategic engagements. India's presence on Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) forum has affected the dynamics of governance and trade in East Asia. It is bit natural that China may not lag behind to behold its presence in the region. It is a pertinent fact that People's Republic of China, a permanent member of United Nations Security Council and member of nuclear club of 'P-5' does not want to lose its grip in the strategic matters in East Asia. Professor Ma Jiali of strategic study centre, Sichuan, China argued that China and India do not share a common view on security concept which is the result of the fact that border dispute concerns huge homeland interests. Tibet and Twang region of Arunachal Pradesh in India concerns core of the Sino-Indians relations. The strategic footprint of China in the North-eastern region of India looms large in the coming years, with a growing apprehension that insurgent activities in the North-eastern region may be sponsored by China. Decades before the advent of communist revolution in China, the Chinese communist leaders considered India as a key to expand the horizons of Communist frontiers not only in China, India but as a whole in the world. They regarded India as a future hub of the proletariat's struggle in the world⁴. The Chinese idea of India's post-independence era was a ray of hope for the supporters of Mao. They considered India as their associate in their struggle against capitalist intents and imperialists intents. Even Mao-Tse-Tung, the god father of Chinese revolution predicted that, he had discovered the key to the revolution in colonies and believed that he would prescribe the path to colonies those must traverse to reach the goal of Communism. He further observed that Chinese model of revolution would be a key factor to the World revolution. Thereby, the colonies would follow China model of revolution⁵.

However, after 1947, the Indian Communists came under the influence of Russian Communism. The Communist party of India (CPI) looked towards Moscow for inspiration and membership. The CPI supported Indian National Congress's idea of Purna Swaraj and their formation of first Indian Nationalist Government in 1947. However, this policy had far reaching implication and resulted in the CPI's restraining of mass agitation against the congress Government. The fact of the matter was that an inclination towards Soviet Union leads the Chinese towards hostility against India. However it is interesting to note that even, USSR has also raised question on the foreign policy of Indian government, which was named to the world as 'policy of Non-Alignment'. In December, 1947, a Russian Communist leader Andrei Zhdanov stated that the congress government had entered into a compromise with the imperialist world especially, the United States of America to support their policies. The concept of 'Third World' is nothing but an imperialist device designed to slander the United Soviet Socialist public (USSR) by placing it on the same level with American Imperialism⁶. A group of the CPI has also supported this hostility against India and later the CPI has adopted a resolution to adopt violent attitude against Nehru government in 1948. The CPI made radical changes in its earlier process to support the democratic procedures in India. The resolution changed Nehru for selling India out to imperialists. It was further observed that, in every country, including colonies, the bourgeoisie and their servitors the social democrats, menaced by the revolution are living up

with the Anglo American imperialists in their fight against the forces of democracy and socialism. This new correlation of forces expresses itself in the formation of two camps which face each other in irreconcilable conflict⁷.

A fact of the matter to find out in this entire debate was that the CPI was playing in two different ideological planks. The main argument was that the post independent India should opt which kind of revolutionary model, the Bolshevik model or the Mao's model of communism? There was an inner deviation in the ideologies of Communist Party of India. A few argued that Bolshevik Model could not be suitable for India because Indian conditions are not suitable to the Bolshevik idea of revolution for India. The Chinese model seems more relevant for India. Even in State of Andhra Pradesh a few communist haul up has witnessed those were influenced with Mao's model of communism. But there eruption failed to ignite a flame of Maoist intent in entire India. In an article written by V. Maslennikov comparative analysis has been made on the suitability of both the models for Asian region. It was argued that, Chinese armed revolution had a major significance for all peoples of East Asia fighting for their liberation never the less, Stalin had correctly anticipated the Chinese strategy as far as back as 1926 and endeavoured to build a fusion of Soviet and Chinese revolutionary theories and methods to which the Soviet Union held and indisputably superior position⁸. This presents an interesting dichotomy to understand the India China relation from a different perspective. On the one hand it was well known that the communist party of India never appears to be a mass party at national level at time of Independent in 1947. On the other hand, a continuous debate in CPI to either opt Russian model or Maoist Model seems like a 'damp squib' of communism in India. It is no doubt a fact that, it has indeed channelized the Sino- India perceptions since India's independence and put up a great impact of the bilateral relation in the early phase.

NEFA: Important Dimension in Sino-Indian Relations

The North-eastern frontier agency (NEFA), which nestles in the extreme north-eastern region of India has been a projected episode in the Geographically this territory consisting of rugged hills stretching from Brahmaputra to far of Sikkim and other related areas NEFA extends over 3000 square miles full of ridges, deep gorges, steep valleys with a constant spell of rains as important feature. The primordial and complex geographical terrains have always been a challenge to manage the strategic calculation for the armed forces of India. NEFA was originally divided into five divisions those now become districts. They are kameng, Subansire, Siang, Lohit and Tirap, named after the major rivers flowing through them. The demographic features of NEFA has been occupied by tribal culture where practicing, head hunting, witchcraft, opium and other narcotics business were main phenomenon of social life.

This region came into limelight with the conflict between India and China in 1962. Another important fact to mention is that NEFA seems like: A JOINT HORSE SHOE FIRING THE NORTH EAST CORNER IN INDIA banded by Bhutan in the west, Tibet &

China in the North, Myanmar in the east and the plains of Assam and the Tuensang district of Nagaland in the south.

The up rise of Tibet as a part of Chinese claim followed by a growing hostility between India and China in 1962 has made this region important in the discussion on India China relation. In 1958 a Chinese magazine, 'China Pictorial' has published a map projecting four divisions of NEFA, some areas in the north of Uttar Pradesh, large areas in Ladakh and a part of Bhutan. This map was summarily rejected by India and a protest has been lodged with the authorities⁹. As a matter of fact such kind of hostilities have been expanded and thus resulted into a conflict in 1962. Since this project is focusing on the north eastern region of India, therefore, NEFA assumes an important position in the debate. Since 1959 several incidents took place in the NEFA region of India where a sense of dispute was witnessed between India & China troops. On August 7, 1959, a section strong Indian border post at Khenzeman in the Kameng frontier division of NEFA was pushed back by 200 Chinese troops on the bridge at Drokung Samba. On Aug 25, 1959, another weak Indian post at Longu in the Subansiri frontiers division was surrounded by Chinese troops with exchange of fire. The Chinese troops maintained that the international boundary between India & China has not formally delineated and therefore differences exist on the map. The conflict mainly exposes the three regions –Ladakh, Sikkim & NEFA. Chinese further claims that historical convention of Shimla in 1913-14 is false decision. Moreover China did not sign this agreement. Therefore, there is no reason to accept MACMOHAN LINE between India & China.

Facts to argue:

1. As a matter of fact, the NEFA region which has been recognized as a part of North East region of India presently, occupies an important showdown in the picture of Sino- Indian relations.
2. This statement Justifies the relevance in context of not only 1962 dispute but, also in case of Tibet as issue ion Sino- Indian relations.
3. Further, it seems relevant to state that Northeast region of India conceived of apprehensions about Chinese involvement to destabilize the region through different kinds of intrusions directly of tacit support for insurgent activities etc.

The North-eastern region of India provides ample opportunity to carryout investigation on strategic matters especially related to diverse characters of ethnic issues. Whether is it the Naga's or Mizo's, Tribal vs Bengali conflict in Tripura or ethnic diversity at Assam. All these issues required to be unfolding academically or well strategically. That's why regular updates have been brought in the field from academic and professional backgrounds (i.e. from armed forces officers served at North-eastern region and personnel from press and media associated with writing on North Eastern issues). The fundamental problem in India's relations with North-eastern region is twofold: firstly, the dwellers of the area, for valid socio-cultural reasons, do not believe that they are part of mainland India. Secondly, mainstream India, for us good reason, ignores and neglects the region as being peripheral to

its interests. This two-fold issue, which fuels the thought of succession, adds a support with the expanding intention of the people Republic of China. It is pertinent to mention that the following chapter focuses on these hegemonic intentions of China. If one talks about the nature of the security threat to North-east, it would be multi-fold.

India- China Relations 1962 onwards: The analogy Of India China interaction is almost as old as the two civilizations themselves. This countries long peaceful co-existence, mutually enriching, both materially and spiritually is possibly unparalleled in human history. Their last fifty years however, when the two countries began the latest and easily the most contentious phase in their age old relationship have cost such long in their age old relationship have cost such long shadows that the multi textured and multi dimensioned earlier periods of infinitely great variety and of tremendous benefit to both , are now merely the subject of academic research and discussion are encapsulated in clichéd statements, referred to only when thought for and when the moments demands. Thus is clearly a situation which needs to be reminded. It is generally accepted that the relation between India and China began as early as the time of Christ era, although there is as yet no definite record to establish this. Trade and commerce flourished between them via the Silk Road, also cultural contacts. One of the most significant aspects of the ancient contacts was the establishment of Buddhism in China. The Chinese responded with great enthusiasm to the arrival of Buddhist missionaries and thereafter initiated a number of moves to bring Indian Buddhist monks and scholars to help teach, explain and establish Buddhism firmly in China¹⁰.

Citing the reference to the historical narration mentioned above, it would have been perceived that the Sino-Indian relations would have been very cordial and polite. And a projection of it has been even witnessed during the early era of India's independence. An exchange of letter between Nehru and Zhou Enlai began in December 1958 and continued up to 1960. These letters revealed the difference between the Indian and the Chinese stand on a range of issues right from borders to Tibet and from Ladakh to North-east Of India. The differences eventually emerged as basic irresolvable contradictions. They also contributed to an attitudinal change in China with regard to the ruling classes of newly emergent states of Asia along with two other developments those were: launching India's 'Forward Policy' and the uprising in Tibet And Dalai Lama's seeking and obtaining political asylum In India. These mentioned changes brought India-China relation to breaking on the ground, but in addition mutual suspicions were intensifying as regards the border especially because of Tibet. These negotiations between India and China continued throughout 1960-62 to no avail. Matters were made worse by the media as on both sides, politicians of different has especially in India intensified the suspicion by their ultra nationalist and at times cold war rhetoric. The climax came in the shape of a border dispute in 1962. To lessen out friction, several countries of the world like Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia and Tanzania being among the most prominent of the Afro- Asian group gathered at Colombo Conference of the Afro Asian Group which took place from 10-12 December 1962. However the proposals brought in the conference failed to bring India and China to

the negotiating table despite mediation. The post 1962 period saw the People's Republic of China on once again adjusting its policy viz-a-viz the Sub-continent, which was at establishing a special relationship with Pakistan after which, a realignment of relationship in the sub-continent was witnessed. Kinds of two triangular equations were emerged. One was of United States, Russia along with China and China, India and Pakistan at work. This became evident with the Indo- Pak war of 1965 and the liberation of Bangladesh liberation war in 1971. These were extremely critical and hostile writings in the Chinese media in both cases. Yet there was no physical intervention by China even though pressure tactics were rather crudely applied. The Chinese reaction to the Indo-Soviet treaty of friendship was also restrained. A parallel could draw with their reaction to Pakistani membership of Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and possibility cannot be ruled out that they read the thrust of the Treaty as directed mainly against Pakistan.

In overall terms, the decade of 1965 -66 to 1975-76 saw India china relation gradually move from one of hostility at worst to diplomatic and cultural overturns. This phase has witnessed a slow growth in the relations that too imbibed with cultural expansions. Though, on strategic fronts the relations were contradictory as few of the Chinese intents were raised as concerns in the domestic political scenario in India. One of it has been, Chinese support to the formation of Communist or naxal groups in the state of Andhra Pradesh. There were apprehensions of the Chinese support to extremists tendencies in North-eastern region of India during sixties and onward¹¹. A detail of which shall be discussed in proceeding chapter.

The Relations during decade of seventies: The Chinese behaviour with India during India-Pakistan war of 1971 has some interesting dimensions to discuss with. It was believed though the then Prime minister of India Mrs Indira Gandhi and her Government were reasonably certain about Chinese expression, of not involving directly into the dispute. The Chinese rhetoric in it was the mass media which during the Bangladesh crisis, denounced India's role in no uncertain terms as, 'much ire was expected on the threat posed by the Indian reactions to Pakistan. This Indian expansionist interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan and the Scheme for international intervention by setting their entire propaganda machine into motion to fan up anti Pakistan and people in their Just struggle for safeguarding national independence and state sovereignty'¹². Though there has been substantial transformation in the Chinese attitude in view of the India-USSR treaty of friendship and cooperation. There was no Physical intervention and surprisingly, the acceptance speech of the Chinese delegates in October 1971 at the United Nation General Assembly neatly avoided any references to South Asia, although the emergence of Bangladesh was a virtual reality. In retrospect the resumption of diplomatic relations in 1976 seems to be the only concrete achievement in bilateral report of ministry of external Affairs , Government of India stated that, 'These was no significant change in India's relation with China while India continued to seek normalization of relations , Chinese question on merger of Sikkim into union of India in 1975 also, stalled the progress'¹³.

Although, China has refused the acceptance of Sikkim as territory of India but a process of change was underway and gradually various minor developments in conjunction with an obvious re-thinking among political and intellectual elite in India paved the way for the re-establishment of ambassadorial relations in 1976. The general elections of 1977 in India, brought Janata party to power, a development that was welcomed by Chinese media along with a structured critique non acceptance of Indian territorial claim over a few region as, it was cleared by the Janata party government that, the in existence of dispute in relation may gradually move its cause of action whatever developments were taking place were move as usual. A major transformation was expected in year 1978, with introduction of a series of constitutional reforms in China at which Deng Xiaoping has initiated. He begins a series of dramatic reforms in Chinese agriculture, industry and opened China's foreign policy and continued on the merits of situation followed by a class departure from an ideological bent of mind towards a more reformatory character became the focus onwards.

Within such changing context, the first visit to India by a Chinese leader Huang Hua, the foreign minister of China in June 1981 was beginning to exchange official negotiation on the stalled issues of conflict. However there were no indications that either side may relax or bent down on the negotiating table. However, India has agreed to substantiate discussion, it was a major advance on its original stand that there would be no negotiation until China has vacated the Indian territory. The Chinese stance pointed out during the statement during the Huang Hua's visit stressed on the maintenance of status quo and of peace and tranquillity on the border pending its resolution. This visit also initiated for setting up of five sub groups with an aim of initiating co-operation on variety issues like scientific technology, cultural and economic fields so as to improve the atmosphere and begin the process of interaction and exchange. During 1987-88, there were renewed exchanges between India and China geared towards resuming the process of establishing a climate of trust and cooperation that had been stalled since long. By end of 1988, Rajiv Gandhi became second Prime minister of India to visit China, thirty years after Pt. Nehru's visit in 1955. Mr Gandhi stated, 'I have stated to renew an old friendship'¹⁴.

India China Relation in Post-Cold War: It was a changing dimension in the Sino-Indian relation when the than Indian Prime minister of India Mr P.V Narsihma Rao who in 1991, created a public perception of India deferring to Chinese wishes. The two issues human rights and labours standards of international importance brought India and China closer to each other, as highlighted by United State of America. A joint communion was issued in December 1991, which suggested scope for cooperation between India and China resisting to pressure of so called 'international oligarchy' obviously, referring to western powers led by the U.S and allies. This statement had a follow up in February 1992 when the president of China Li Peng expressed his satisfaction at a fact when he said that there was a great deal of parallelism in their speeches in the UN security council as though there was advance consultation before drafting our speeches'¹⁵. A latest in the Chinese perception towards India was its welcoming remark over the present Prime minister of India Narendra

Modi, for which the Chinese Premier Li keqiang argued, 'By working together for peaceful cooperative and common development, China and India will not only bring benefits to their own people but also contribute to peace, stability and prosperity of Asia and beyond'¹⁶. However, a prudent question of non-agreement over border issue still exists.....!

Concluding remarks: The studies on Sino-Indian relations provides ample elaboration in terms of fundamental issues of conflict i.e. to talk of Tibet, border dispute, difference over Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim etc. But, the issue of security in North-eastern region has not been on the official table so far as negotiations were concerned. It is important to understand that without North-east, Sino-Indian relations may not be identified with full shape so far as any analysis is concerned. This argument seems relevant with a fact that, chronology of relations mentioned above even focuses on the point that this region is of utmost significance for both the countries whether it is 'India's Look East policy' followed by 'Act East policy' or China's policy of 'One Road One Belt' is concerned.

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