



# Geostrategic Location of Bhutan and its impact on the Indo-Sino Emerging Regional Geopolitics

Priya Chaudhary

**Abstract:** Bhutan's geostrategic position is most important for both the high weight playing countries; India and China in the arena of Asia. Bhutan is old allied of India but along this china also trying to footprints in Bhutan. The present paper is discussing and analysing the changing geostrategic consequences of Bhutan for India and China's geopolitical situation. Main objectives of the study are to examine the changing scenario of the geostrategic location of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. To analyze the strategic triangular relations between India, China and Bhutan. While on one hand, Bhutan's geostrategic conditions play a vital role in the geopolitics of India and China, on the other hand, India remains worried due to its security reasons. This research paper is descriptive and analytical.

**Keywords:** Geostrategic, Bhutan, Geopolitics, Indo-Sino, Security, etc.

**INTRODUCTION:** Geostrategy is the geographic direction of a state's foreign policy. Geostrategy describes where a state concentrates its efforts by projecting directing political activities and military power. The inherent statement is that states have inadequate resources and are not able, even they are still willing, to conduct all foreign policies. In its place, they must focus militarily and politically on the world's specific areas.

Geostrategy describes the foreign policy of a state and it is not related to decision-making or motivations processes. The geostrategy of a state therefore, it is not necessarily motivated by geographic or geopolitical factors. A state may project power to a location because of ideological reasons, interest groups, or simply whom of its leader. Significance of geostrategy is

a very important factor for shaping the destiny of any country.

Geopolitics is the study of the influence of physical factors on state behaviour. In studies how location, climate, natural resources, physical terrain and demographic characteristics determine a state's foreign policy option and its position in the hierarchy of the state. The meaning of "Geopolitics" refers to the relationship of geographical setting on one side and the political process on the other side.

Geostrategic position of Bhutan in the world is known based on its natural resources and also known as sandwiched nations between two giant nations of Asia; India and China. Bhutan's geostrategic locations make it is the most important part of the geopolitical scenario in the Himalayan region.

Bhutan, along with Sikkim, lies in the eastern part of western half of the south Himalaya. As like Bhutan, Nepal also adjoins Chinese part (Tibet) in the north and India remains all directions east, south, and west. It is also an important point in the defence of the glaciers of the Himalaya.

**Geostrategic location of Bhutan:** It is a pocket-size landlocked country surrounded by spectacular beauty with mountains and hills, denizens by a tranquil and soundless race of people with a very humble King and Queen.

An enclosed Himalayan country covered an area with 46,000 sq km. and has a maximum length and width respectively from east to west of 300 km and 170 km from north to south that is most important for India. The geographical position of Bhutan is 26°N and 29°N latitudes, and 88°E and 93°E longitudes. Bhutan shares its common borders with China and India, the one of the most powerful nation of Asia. The country is the border with China (Tibetan part) in the north, India's state Sikkim and Chumbi Valley of Tibet in the west, the Indian state Arunachal Pradesh in the east and the states of India Assam and West Bengal in the south of Bhutan.

### Bhutan's Geostrategic Location



**Source:** Geostrategic location of Bhutan data collected from Shapefile converted into vector data with QGIS technique.

### Bhutan's Geostrategic Location is Important

**for India:** It is very clear that strategically, politically and economically Bhutan is very important for India. Bhutan is a tiny country but a large buffer state between India and China. The country has occupies a unique geographic position where real geopolitics have seen on natural resources and security basis.

India and Bhutan have been sharing ties since 1910 when Bhutan became a protectorate of British India, allowing the British to "guide" its foreign affairs and defence. When India declared independence in 1947, Bhutan was among the rest nations to recognise it. Since then, the countries have become a strong relationship; because Bhutan has previously strained ties with China.

India and Bhutan also share deep religious-cultural relations. Guru Padmasambhava, a Buddhist saint played an important role in spreading Buddhism and cementing traditional relations between people in both countries.

### Bhutan Acts as a Buffer State between India and China:

The time when India turns away from Bhutan, China will want to take ground there. India cannot tolerate this Chinese presence in Bhutan. From a military standpoint, China is already has tried to surround India.

**Security Issues Purpose:** Strategically located, the small-packet Himalayan country is at the centre of rising pressure between India and China two great power of Asia. Security of Bhutan's represent borders especially its western border is most important for India.

Security issues always remain a cause of great concern for any country. India shares km, which shares by India and Bhutan. China's

interruptedly asserts to essential border areas such as Doklam and Chumbi valley, it's frequent efforts for establishing sturdy economic, and diplomatic relations with Bhutan has been a continuous source of concern for India.

**Economic Relations:** Bhutan provides a market for Indian commodities and is a destination for Indian investment. Trade and Transit Agreement took place in 1972 between India and Bhutan, which was last, revised in 2016; govern the trade between the two countries. This agreement establishes a free trade management between Indo-Bhutan and provides tax-free transport of exports of Bhutan to other countries. India is the largest trading and development partner of Bhutan. India exports major products to Bhutan are machinery and mechanical, mineral products, electrical types of equipment etc. while India imports major products from Bhutan are ferrosilicon, electrical equipments, Portland cement etc. India has export to Bhutan in 2018-19 was 657.3 US\$ million and has import from Bhutan was 369.5 US\$ million. As per "International Monetary Fund", India is the largest export and import partner of Bhutan with 91.7% of sharing Bhutan's total export and 87.9% sharing of Bhutan's total import with India from 2014-18. (IMF DOTS Database)

India is Bhutan's largest development partner. Since the following of First Five Year Plan of Bhutan in 1961, India has been extending economical hold up to Bhutan's FYPs. India has allotted Rs 4500 crores for a five-year plan to Bhutan.

**Hydropower:** Bhutan is a home of the plentiful source of hydropower for India. Bhutan produces a lot of electricity during the summer season, and

India imports electricity from Bhutan in summer months. India import total electrical energy form Bhutan is 36.8% of total imports from Bhutan in 2018-19. Many heavy hydroelectric power plants had set up by India. India is playing an important role in the development of hydropower projects. Electricity not only provides Bhutanese for domestic use but also profit from exported to India in with excess electricity.

Yet, the GoI has set up many Hydropower plants in Bhutan. Chukha hydroelectric project 336 MW project located on Wangchu River in Chukha district of Bhutan, Kurichhu hydropower plant 60 MW on the river of Kurichhu River in eastern Bhutan, tala hydroelectric project 1020 MW on the river of Puntsangchhu river in Wangdue Phodrang district in western Bhutan, Dagachhu hydropower plant 126 MW located in Dagana district of Bhutan. Many other hydropower projects in Bhutan are in process with the collaboration of India, Punatsangchhu-1&2 hydropower pproject, Mangdechhu HEP, Kholongchhu HEP etc. (Taneja et al.2019)

**Tourism:** India's neighbour Bhutan is a green and clean nation, which pays very special attention to ensure that it remains carbon negative to contribute its mite towards countering global warming. One implication of this approach is that Bhutan follows a "high value, low volume" tourism policy. Now, however, and particularly over the past three years, the number of tourists from India to Bhutan have skyrocketed.

The Happiest Country of Asia may not be such a happy one now for Indian tourists. Well, Bhutan now has a major change in its policy, due to which the country is set up to levy charges on local tourists from India, Maldives and

Bangladesh just as if they do other countries. These countries until date are free from any charges. Now the foreign minister talked through the new draft likely to be finalised by the Bhutanese Cabinet next month Tandi Dorji and the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. Visitors of India, Bangladesh and the Maldives to pay a fee of ₹1200 per day for its "sustainable development" from July this year. The Himalayan kingdom, which is worried about its environment and ecology, determined to impose the fee increase for tourists of India, Bangladesh and Maldives. There was a ten per cent incensement in the number of tourists from all these three countries who visited Bhutan in 2018.

**Bhutan-China Relations: a Security Concern for India:** India has also need to be aware and practical in its approach toward bilateral relations of China and Bhutan. Along this, India has to think about new policies and have in mind the new demands. Now, if India is doing not work practically, China possibly will passed in convincing kingdom of Bhutan.

Role of China is perceptible, as it has begun to intervene to weaken Indian influence in the politics of Bhutan. It is a matter of concern for India that China is growing its interest in Bhutan and it had seen in large numbers about the meeting of the Chinese officials and the leaders of Bhutan.

In the face of growing the Chinese pressure on Bhutan to open relations with China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a 50 per cent enhancing in Indian asset to Bhutan, to around \$970 million annually. From the disputed area of western China-Bhutan border, China could easily hit India's geographic "chicken neck" Siliguri Corridor a narrow band of land, that connects

India with seven sister state of India. Strategically, Doka la plateau fall in the Bhutan's territory. India being a close friend of Bhutan, it must stand up for its neighbour country as well as a good friend Bhutan against the violent by China.

### Location of Bhutan with the boundary lines of India and China:



Source: internet website

**Bhutan's Geostrategic Conditions are Important for China:** A landlocked country, Bhutan has a unique identity among the nations as a sovereign state, but it holds an unstable balance between India and China. Bhutan has limited options of foreign policies priorities and its 'strategy for survival' due to being geographical bondage. To the south, east, and west, Bhutan has encircling frontiers with India. Northwards, the Himalayas constitute an almost impossible frontier beyond which lies the border with China.

Bhutan and China do not uphold good official political and historical ties were intense. China shares a proximate 470 km. border with Himalayan country Bhutan and its boundary and territorial disputes have been a source of a potential crash. From the decade of 1980, both countries have tried to conduct continuously meeting on major territorial border and security issues aimed with reducing tensions between them.

Bhutan has longitudinal well-built historical, socio-cultural, economic and religious relation with Tibet part of China. China is the only neighbour of Bhutan, which does not have any official political relations. Even now, economic relations are very less, Bhutan import from China 0.9% of total import.

Bhutan's geographical importance has led China to focus its policies on preserving and growing the Himalayan state's independence and neutrality by trying to decrease its dependency on India in the security, political and economic arena. (K. Rohit, 2017).

Bhutan and China's relationship historically perspective reflects the Tibet relations with Bhutan. Connections of politics and perceptions of security in the context of Indo-Sino relationship have also described. Bhutan's geographical position makes it strategically and politically crucial in the region of Himalaya. Bhutan has a long and similar traditional culture and religious connection with Tibet. Bhutan and China both countries relations open fresh action towards politics and economic affairs in Himalayan region.

Bhutan needs to improve of infrastructure and new industries to gather employment, and China is very keen on providing both. China has already started working toward developing its better relations with Bhutan. This can be seems from the increasing in Chinese imports to Bhutan in the form of toys, cement and technical materials. Tourists of China visited Bhutan in large number. China can also see to keen for open an embassy in Bhutan and wants to standardize their relations. However, the focus on that will be resolving of their border disputes. Without reaching any result, Bhutan and China

have sum up around 24 rounds of boundary talks. The 24<sup>th</sup> round of boundary talks held between Bhutan's Foreign Minister Damcho Dorji and Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao took place on 11 August 2016, and both gave a clarification for their willingness to make stronger coordination in different areas and expect to solve the territorial disputes. The 25<sup>th</sup> round of talks was postponed because of the Doklam standoff and is yet to be concluded.

The inflow of Chinese goods to Bhutan has been on the rise and China is extending fellowships to Bhutanese students and encouraging Bhutan to join the One Belt One Road (OBOR). Before the Doklam incident, Chinese media were states in articles arguing that China and Bhutan are not able to sort out their boundary and territorial dispute because of India does not want. China has always argued that it is because of India that China and Bhutan not managed to have normal bilateral relations.

China wants to obtain control over the Doklam plateau for tactical military reasons by building a road in this region. China stated that Gyemochen is a tri-junction, which situated between Tibet, Bhutan and India. The border, as it stands between both China-Bhutan and India-China, affords India strategic benefits since its forces based in the north and north-east Sikkim can simply cut off the Chinese deployment in the narrow Chumbi Valley should China try any misfortune here. Furthermore, once the Chinese have power on the plateau, they can effortlessly move down the Zimplri ridge and challenge India's defence forces in the Siliguri Corridor. That is why India has kept a close observation on Chinese actions near the Doklam plateau since it has probably the possibility of the Chinese

attempting to catch behind Indian security via Bhutan.

Spirit of cooperation between all three countries India, China and Bhutan can be beneficial of the region. With the changing geostrategic scenario along the Himalayas, China is opting for greater engagement with archrivals and unwanted friends to secure its geostrategic interests and develop a greater understanding of border area topography to facilitate military assertiveness, if required, at times of crisis. The border disputes between the two countries are based; on four areas in the western border - Doklam, Charithang, Sinchulimpa and Dramana pastureland.

China has offered Bhutan a package deal; this package deal was to exchange Bhutan's north-western areas in exchange for its central areas. This north-western area lies next to Chumbi Valley in Bhutan that is very important for both India and China in terms of geostrategy as it is the border of Sikkim and Tibet. Geostrategic importance of Doklam Plateau drives China's offer to wrest command over the plateau with "package deal." Doklam has a commanding view of the Chumbi Valley in Nepal, which positioned where India, Tibet and Bhutan make a tri junction near the Siliguri Corridor, the strait strip of land that links the India's mainland to its remaining seven north-east states.

If Bhutan accepts the "package deal", it would bring a steady and established common border with China. Nevertheless, it will not be simple for the government of Bhutan to seal the agreement in national assembly of Bhutan are opposing the "package deal". More importantly, concede Doklam Plateau include with rich agrarian land that is very profitable for the

increasing the livelihood of people of western border district of the country and legislature of Bhutan which are belongs to the districts. Bhutan will have to face difficulty with India's force to refusing the "package deal" pressure. India was aggressively against to "package deal" because; its security consideration would be weak if Bhutan agrees for the mastery of the Doklam Plateau to China.

**India-China Bilateral Relations:** The Sino-Indian relations have witnessed profound upheavals over the past five decades. The two neighbours have put aside their decades-old border dispute and frosty relations as their stakes in bilateral trade and investment relations take over. Despite the positive developments in the last two decades, the relations remain as complex as ever.

China and India both countries are the oldest civilizations of the world beside both are the largest developing countries of Asia. Countries are competing with each other for increasing the influence and power in Asia. China and India are the largest populous countries respectively stand on 1st and 2nd rank in the world. A Trade agreement the Panchshilla was marked by a new phase of the friendship of India and china's relationship. Prime Minister of China Zhou Enlai came to India in June 1954 and both leaders passed the resolutions, "Panchshilla be applied not only to Sino-Indian relations but to international relations in general". India's Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru visited Beijing in October 1954, and another round on issues and common interest has held which helped further strengthening the bilateral relations. On 29 April 1954, India's Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai,

Trade and Intercourse eight-year historical agreement between India and China (Tibet region). Fifteen years of the beginning of the Closeness between India and China and rose impressively to the heights of PanchSheel, but the bilateral relationship between the two countries took a bad form after the 1962 Border War.

Recently, both countries are facing many issues. There are many factors internal and external between Indo-Sino, which is affecting their bilateral relations, for example, Tibet, border disputes are more notable, and latterly, the water disputes have as well emerged between India-China. All these issues are not only spoiling the current relationship and these are wrongly influencing the coming time relations as well. Besides this, it will also influence the process of their rise and the peace and external stability.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Geostrategy is all about foreign policy of a state, which determined by geographic features of any region, or state. Significances of geostrategic are playing a vital role in giving the shape of future of the country. Bhutan is well known for its unique geographical position and natural resources base in the in South Asia. That is why it is going to become centre of attraction for India and China. The research paper found that Bhutan's geostrategic conditions are playing a vital role in the geopolitics of India and China. The country's location is horizontally along the Himalayan region and surrounded with borderline of three sided by India and one sided by China face interrelated threats to their cultural, environmental, economic and political integrity. As per result of research paper, which, both countries India and China are showing the

interest in Bhutan because of their natural resources and major reason for security concern. Both the countries have had very strong cultural and historical ties with Bhutan and it only makes sense to carry forward this relationship. Bhutan is a very good and old friend of India and it will never hurt to have a friend that close. China wants India to play a secondary role to China. Moreover, the Chinese regime would accept that as good enough. India should keep a distance from the U.S. China and Russia make arms India should join the Russo-Chinese alliance. India should support the Belt initiative and make peace with Pakistan under a Chinese negotiated settlement. India should compliment China not compete against it. China, India and Russia should join to be a joint superpower.

The issue with this list of demands is that they are not as feasible as they look. First India is not against China. It is not looking to challenge China on every venue. It would be good, if India and China could have a near similar economic size. In addition, China could benefit, but India cannot have such massive trade deficits. India and China must have peace to develop all that was lost when the Western powers looted both nations. However, there is too much friction between both for borders.

### **REFERENCES**

- Kumar, R. (2017). Geo-strategic status of Nepal between India and China: A Security perspective, International Research Journal of social science,
- Sharma, G., Sharma, K. A., (2016). Geopolitics of Bhutan and its Relevance in the Security of India, International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science Society and Culture, Vol: 2, Issue:1,ISSN: (P) 2395-4345, (O) 2455-2909.

- Sigdel, A. (2018). China's Growing Footprint in Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities for India, observer research foundation, ISBN 978-93-88262-43-9
- Upadhya, S. (2012). Nepal and the Geo-Strategic Rivalry between China and India. Oxon: Routledge
- Bhattacharya, A. (2009). China's Inroads into Nepal: India's Concerns. Institute of Defence and Strategic Analysis.
- Sahu, A.K (2015). Future of India–Nepal Relations: Is China a Factor?, Strategic Analysis, 39:2, 197-204, DOI: 10.1080/09700161.2014.1000670
- Gill, S. M., Kumar, T. (2005). Indo-Bhutan Relations (An Evolutionary Perspective).
- Thapa, M. (2014), The Great Himalayan Game: India and China Rivalry in Nepal, contemporary south Asia.
- Singh, U P. (2017). A Study of Sino-Indian Border, International Journal of Multidisciplinary. ISSN: 2455-3085 (Online) Issue-09
- Tang, S. (2009). The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis, Security Studies, Taylor & Francis Group, LLC ISSN: 0963-6412 print / 1556-1852
- Scott, D. (2008). The Great Power 'Great Game' between India and China: 'The Logic of Geography. Taylor & Francis Group. ISSN: 1465-0045
- Ramachandran, S. (2017). Bhutan's Relations With China and India. Publication: China Brief Volume: 17 Issue: 6
- Thapa, M. (2014). The Great Himalayan Game: India and China Rivalry in Nepal, contemporary south Asia.
- Bhattacharya, A. (2019). India–China Relations: Putting the Record Straight. India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs, 75(2), 262–268. doi:10.1177/0974928419841801
- Dhungel, D. N. & Pun, S. B. (2009). The Nepal-India Water Relationship: Challenges. Springer Science & Business Media, Berlin, Germany.
- Next door Nepal - china is welcome, India is not. The Indian Express. 2016. <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/k-p-sharma-oli-nepal-india-relations-china-is-welcome-2768662/#sthash.1GdrDGNn.dpuf> (accessed 2016 25-April)
- Guihong, Z. (2005). Sino-Indian Security Relations. South Asian Survey, 12(1), 61–74. doi:10.1177/097152310501200105
- Mehra, P. (1990). The Elusive Triangle: Tibet in India-China Relations—A Brief Conspectus. China Report, 26(2), 145–156. doi:10.1177/000944559002600203
- Available on <https://warontherocks.com/2017/07/high-noon-in-the-himalayas-behind-the-china-india-standoff-at-dok-la/>
- Available on this site: [http://www.strategic-affairs.com/details.php?task=other\\_story&&id=413](http://www.strategic-affairs.com/details.php?task=other_story&&id=413)