

Shaheen Afroze

## FOREIGN POLICY OF SMALL STATES : A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BHUTAN AND MALDIVES

### Introduction

The study of the foreign policy of small states is a relatively new aspect of the discipline of international relations. Commenting on the status of international relations research, Kenneth Waltz deplored that nothing seems to have been accumulated, not even criticism. Studies of the Third World foreign policies are in an even worse state and can still be called the underdeveloped study of the underdeveloped countries.<sup>1</sup> Small states are recent phenomena. Soon after the end of the Second World war and with the advent of the decolonization process the small states began to emerge as independent entities. As they grew in number, the political map of the world radically changed. Since then, a veritable revolution has taken place in the position of the small states in world politics. They are now playing a very important role on the world stage. The growing importance of smaller states has its origin in the era of the cold war when both the super powers sought to increase their influence in the Third World courting the small powers. Subsequently as bipolarity gave way to multipolarity in international relations the small states received greater attention of the world community. And in today's world of ever-increasing interdependence of nations politically,

---

1. Bahgat Korany, "The Take-off of Third World Studies ? The Case of Foreign Policy", *World Politics*, Vol. XXXV April 1983, No. 3, p. 465.

economically and strategically, the need for studying the process of interaction of small states with the outside world can hardly be overstressed.

Among all the small states in Asia, Bhutan and Maldives are among what may be called least interacted in international arena. In recent years, however, these countries have drawn considerable interest, both intrinsically and because of their geopolitical settings in the regional and international contexts. As a matter of fact, geopolitically both Bhutan and Maldives have important positions. Bhutan is sandwiched between India and China. In case of war, its possession would give both India and China an offensive/defensive advantage against each other. Maldives' importance lies in the fact that it is astride line of communication in the Indian Ocean. This advantage has been heightened over the recent years as the super powers have steadily built their military presence in the Indian Ocean off Afghanistan, Iran and the Gulf.

This paper seeks to study the foreign policies of Bhutan and Maldives. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part presents an analytical proposition on the external milieu of small states and with reference to the same, in the second an attempt is made to examine comparatively the foreign policies of Bhutan and Maldives.

### **Geopolitical Setting and Security Perspective of the Small States.**

Geopolitical setting of a country sets the matrix within which its relations with the near and distant neighbours develop. Geopolitical setting is formed by the relativity of physical size, politico-economic and military strengths in the context of particular geographical locations. Thus variables like the lie of the land, the flow of rivers, the height of the mountains, the depth of the surrounding sea and ocean, the size of the country, the political state of the country and its military strength<sup>2</sup> become determinants as well as constraints as one

---

2. T.N. Kaul, "India in South Asia," *World Focus*, November-December 1983, p. 49.

country relates to another country or a group of countries (regions). This applies to all countries including the small states. But the situation of small states becomes particularly critical when it is located in a theatre of a clash of interests between two or more bigger powers. It becomes a matter of necessity for the big powers to woo the small states with both positive and negative implications for the latter. The small states also acquire importance when it becomes a buffer state separating two big potential adversaries. It is then in the interest of both the powers to keep the small state intact, but such a condition exacerbates the vulnerabilities of the small states because its coexistence depends to a great extent on the goodwill of the potential enemies.<sup>3</sup>

For the small island states their geopolitical position also has tended to be both an asset and a liability. It is a liability because the rivalry and competition of the major powers, if manifested in an overt conflict situation, has tremendous potential of adversely affecting their supply life lines. It is an asset to the extent that it can capitalize on its strategic location by scrupulously manipulating and playing off the interested parties.<sup>4</sup>

The small states, particularly the ones in the Third World, because of their technological and economic backwardness, endemic socio-political instabilities have little or no influence on other states, save certain bargaining advantages seen in specific cases. Hence safeguarding of security and sustenance of national growth and development, not assertion of dictatorial influence on other states turns out to be the focal point for these states.<sup>5</sup>

3. A.I. Akram, "The Security of Small States in South Asian Context"; paper presented at the international seminar on *The Security of Small States* in Dhaka during 6-8 January 1987.
4. Urmila Phadnis, "Political Dynamics of the Island State: Comparative Study of Sri Lanka and Maldives" *IDSJ Journal*, Vo. XII No 3, January March 1980. P. 317.
5. Ataur Rahman, "Small States in the International Security System." Paper presented at the international seminar on *The Security of Small States* in Dhaka 6-8 January 1987. p. 3.

The obvious problem of definition of small states and the uniqueness of the various features pertaining to small states necessarily makes it difficult, perhaps impossible, to evolve an across-the-board security perspective applicable to all small states. Perhaps it would be prudent to recognize that the small states have their unique and as such country specific security requirement. However, there exist certain common elements among the small states that place these states on a broad common platform. Taken the global security systems in terms of centre-periphery metaphor, most of the small states lie on the periphery. Thus the small states, particularly those in the Third World, are exposed to enormous threats of insecurities from many directions. Poverty and under-development keep them insecure and vulnerable to both internal and external pressures. These states are militarily weak and unable to defend themselves from aggressions and intervention by the more powerful and large members.<sup>6</sup>

Added to these, political, economic and social insecurities strain the independence and sovereignty of the small states more than the physical aggression across the borders. Huge debt burden, slumps in commodity prices, rising protectionism, ever-deteriorating terms of trade, shrinkages in developmental aid add to the threats of insecurity. Under such circumstances the policy dictations by the international loan giving agencies and governments are instruments through which options and manoeverability of small states are generally curtailed. Because of such frailties of the small states, they are made to believe that they can only develop under the umbrage of big powers. Thus the small states seek and obtain protection of bigger states both within and outside their particular region, more often under the duress than on their own choice. Vulnerability becomes more critical when it originates from the actions and

---

6. Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Regional Organisation and Security of Small States." Paper presented at the international seminar on *The Security of Small States*, held at Dhaka January 6-8 1987. p 10-12.

postures of bigger powers with physical proximity. Factors of geopolitics combine in such situations with intrinsic weakness and dependency of smaller states to make them pawns in the chess-game of regional politics. The stronger and large states of a region have their influences, own power and ambitions which often clash with the interest of the small ones. Thus the regional powers may emerge as an immediate threat to the neighbouring small states while the super powers may assert remote influences. Thus as in the case of other regional powers, India's neighbours perceive it to be hegemonic and feel threatened because of its enormous size, vast manpower, considerable military, economic and technological strengths and its aspirations for regional supremacy.<sup>7</sup>

Small states are therefore insecure (1) when they are too dependent on a major power or a super power for national security, political stability and economic viability; (2) when cold war has penetrated a Third World region linking small states to the regional or global strategic postures of a super power leading to counter-thrusts of the other super power on its regional friends and allies, and (3) if the neighbouring states are grossly unequal in size, manpower, resource and military strength in a region that lacks strategic symmetry and is afflicted with bilateral disputes and conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

It would be pertinent to understand how do the small states survive in such security environs. So far as the geopolitical setting is concerned a small country in particular has very little to do. Only the impact of such geopolitical forces to an extent may be changed to its advantage by way of employing mechanism to create a chain of very effective external linkage in the regional and international context. Such external linkages are utilized by small states to mobilize resources, technological supports and necessary inputs from external sources. Multiplicity of such relations can quite significantly reduce the political and economic over dependence on large

7. *Ibid.* p 15-16, 32.

8. Bhabani Sen Gupta *op. cit.*, p 3.

regional powers and super powers. Ideally threats generated from the super power conflict, regional power equation may be best reduced by adopting a policy of non-committal and non-partisan approach to such conflict. This walking-the-tight rope policy is, however, very difficult to follow.

In order to counter threats to security some countries prefer adopting a policy of rapid militarization. Under conditions of underdevelopment such efforts lead to a super-imposed development aimed at increasing strength. Such grafting in no way can contain the threats in the face of prolonged security crisis. Instead of superimposed military development, development of the entire social system of a given country through strengthening the productive capacities

---

*Under conditions of underdevelopment, militarisation leads to a superimposed development aimed at increasing strength. Such grafting in no way can contain the threats in the face of prolonged security crisis. Instead of superimposed military development, development of the entire social system of a given country through strengthening the productive capacities of the economy, would increase the overall strength including the military factor.*

---

of the economy, would increase the overall strength including military factor. Until then a policy of accommodation and adjustment through shrewd and skillful diplomacy (in order to avoid submissive postures) may prove very effective. However, with the gradual gaining of national strength it might be possible to employ assertive diplomacy in order to crystalize the national identity factor. It is essential to realize that the policy of maintaining sound and friendly relations can never be substituted by any other means, although economic and military strengths may help increase its bargaining power. All these highlight the great importance of diplomacy in international affairs.

It has also been observed that for small states diplomacy is very effective in generating concerted impetus in the UN and other international bodies, where attention of international community can be drawn to their special needs and problems. Concerted diplomacy in international forums including UN, UNCTAD, NAM, Group of 77 and regional organisations is most pertinent in evolving ways to solve many of their common problems like debt-burden, protectionism by the developed states, slumps in commodity prices, shrinkages in development aids etc. Regional cooperation and extra-regional cooperation with other developing countries geared to ECDC within the broader frame of south-south cooperation are also attracting the attention of the small states, although these efforts are yet to yield any significant and tangible outcome.<sup>9</sup>

Perceptions of threats originating from big neighbours can best be combatted through the development of regional cooperation because security is best and most effective when it is shared, when a balance of strength is maintained which is sufficient to make a nation feel secure and to discourage aggression. In any regional setting, no state can be secured, and at rest, if its neighbours feel insecure.<sup>10</sup> An environment of mutual understanding between the neighbours in regional settings can thus arrest such detrimental developments and ensure regional security. Therefore, regional cooperation clearly presents itself as a favoured alternative for ensuring peace and stability of a particular country and region.

From the above discussion it turns out that much of the response to the security concerns of the small states pertain to the arena of diplomacy and foreign policy. It is against this backdrop that we intend to examine the foreign policy compulsion and pursuits of Bhutan and Maldives on a comparative basis.

---

9. Md. Golam Mostafa, "Economic Vulnerabilities of the Land Locked Countries: Possible options," Paper presented at the international seminar on *The Security of Small States* held at Dhaka, 6-8 January 1987, p 16.

10. A I. Akram. *op. cit.*, p 19.

### Security Concerns and Foreign Policy Compulsions of Bhutan and Maldives

Since both Bhutan and Maldives are small countries of the Third World they are exposed to a set of compulsions both internally and externally. The internal compulsions emanate mainly from the pressures of socio-economic underdevelopment. The analysis of the state of economy would perhaps reveal the internal compulsions of a particular country. The external compulsions to an extent originate from the internal ones and often relate to the specific geopolitical setting.

#### *Bhutan:*

Bhutan's gradual emergence as a modern nation on the world map is a recent phenomenon although its history can be traced well over 1000 years back. The Tibetans who migrated to the region subjugated the local tribals and established their supremacy in the 12th century and thus founded origins of Bhutan as a nation state. It took four centuries for the feuding migrant Tibetans to establish clear cut geographical boundaries of Bhutan and set up a politico-religious system of governance and thus an ethnically, politically and culturally homogeneous entity was established. Its existence as a unified state dominated by a politically and militarily active Buddhist theocracy dates back to three centuries.<sup>11</sup> In the early 17th century an autonomous polity was established characterised by a dual system of spiritual and temporal rule which continued until the 1907 election of Sir Ugyen Wangchuk as the first hereditary king of Bhutan.

The British interest in Bhutan's Tibet exposed Bhutan to formidable threats. The British concluded treaties in 1774, 1785 and 1910 to settle the affairs between Bhutan and British India. The treaty of Punakha in 1910 laid down the provisions for Bhutan to be guided by the advice of the British Indian authority in its external relations.

---

11. B.S. Das, "Bhutan" *World Focus* November-December, 1985, p. 73.



Such a provision was inherited from the colonial power and the treaty of 1949 between India and Bhutan set similar provisions. Since 1960s there had been signs of Bhutan's gradually drifting from isolation toward more international exposure in order to add impetus for modernization and self-reliance.

With per capita GNP of US \$80 in 1980 and a total population of 1.2 million, Bhutan has been bracketed in the group of least developed Third World countries. The mainstay of the population is agriculture, about 95 percent of the population being engaged in the sector. The total arable land is about 15 percent of the total area.<sup>12</sup>

The country, however, is not self-sufficient in food grains and between 15,000 to 25,000 tons of grains had to be imported annually in the recent years. The agricultural sector is primarily a traditional one. Because of limited arable land, increased production necessarily calls for the extension of irrigation and introduction of new techniques to be imported from abroad, thereby increasing the extent of dependency. Due to low literacy rate and traditional culture, Bhutan suffers seriously in terms of scarcity of skilled and technical manpower to meet development needs. Dependence on expatriate manpower mainly Indian is quite high.<sup>13</sup>

The development potentials of Bhutan are, however, not that bleak with immense natural resources like deposits of copper, metal, talc, and forest resources including valuable timber. But the resources remains untapped and unexploited due to poor infrastructural facilities. As a matter of fact, an estimated capital of US \$60 million will be needed to exploit these resources, which is perhaps beyond the capacity of domestic financing. The principal mode of transport

12. *Asia Year Book 1986, Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hongkong, South China, Morning Post, 1986. p. 112-113.

13. *Asia and Pacific 1984 and Far Eastern Economic Review, Asia Year Book, op. cit.* 1979. (World of information England) p. 100, p. 148.

and communication is still on foot or mule back.<sup>14</sup> However, some road links have been established with the assistance of India.

Industrial base of Bhutan is still very narrow and is mainly at cottage level. Only a few units like cement plant, fruit products, brick factories etc have been established. The Rs 150 million cement plant was set up by India and handed over to Bhutan as a gift, with the bulk of its output to be exported to India. The Rs 1.53 billion Chukha hydroelectric project also a gift from India, is to export 70 percent of the output to India, but Bhutan faces difficulty in utilizing the rest of the output in the absence of a national grid. In May 1985 World Bank announced a US \$9 million, 50 years interest free loan as a part of a US \$ 29.9 million project to produce calcium carbide at Pasakha. Other participants in this venture include Kuwait, Norway and Bhutan Government. Of the 22,000 tons, expected output, 17,000 tons would be exported to India.<sup>15</sup>

Bhutan's foreign trade is almost entirely linked and dependent on India with which it has customs free open border, so its trade earning is almost entirely in rupees. Tourism is Bhutan's principal foreign exchange earner at US \$ 1 million a year followed by Philatelic sales at about US \$ 250,000 a year. The major imports are aircraft, fuel, foodgrains, raw materials, motor vehicles, metal containers, Soya fortified bulgar, the major source being India. The major exports include, cement, talc, fruit products, cardamon, sawed timber, potatoes, the major destinations being India, Middle East, Singapore and Western Europe.

Also Bhutan's telecommunications links with the world run through India making it further dependent on the latter. The Indo-Bhutanese microwave link set by India enables Bhutan to maintain telephone and telex link with all Indian cities and with the countries linked to India.<sup>16</sup>

14. *Asia Year Book* 1986. *op. cit.* p. 115, p. 100. Also *Asia and Pacific* 1984.

15. *Asia Year Book*, 1986. *op. cit.* p. 15.

16. *Asia and Pacific* 1983, p. 97. also *Asia Year Book* 1983. p. 118.

As a small state Bhutan has been dependent upon the outside world specially through trade and aid for procuring commodities of day to day needs as well as for building the economy. For a land locked country like Bhutan there are several geopolitical constraints that make economic independence even to a functional extent not a very easy task. But as the economic links expand horizontally its reliance on New Delhi is likely to decline. A framework of five year plans was initiated in 1961 and for the finances of the first three five year plans Bhutan was exclusively dependent on India. The depen-

---

*As a small state Bhutan has been dependent upon the outside world specially through trade and aid for procuring commodities of day to day needs as well as for building the economy. For a land locked country like Bhutan there are several geopolitical constraints that make economic independence even to a functional extent not a very easy task.*

---

dence on New Delhi was to the extent of 80 per cent the total outlay for the fourth five year. But in the latest plan (i.e Fifth five year plan) over 40 percent of the finances are from UN and its agencies and countries like Australia, Japan, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Singapore, New Zealand, Austria and some multinational agencies or foreign based voluntary associations, while India's contribution was reduced to 42 percent. Bhutan has also been recipient of foreign experts from diverse sources beyond India like the World Bank, UNICEF etc. In very recent time, from European countries like Switzerland and even the US are being invited.<sup>17</sup>

On the whole, however, there is considerable dependence of Bhutan on India for its social and economical development, trade which, in turn, enhances vulnerabilities of the Bhutanese economy to external pressures.

---

17. *Asia and Pacific* 1983 and 1984. p. 96. p. 100. Also Manorama Kohli, "Bhutan's Strategic Environment: Changing Perceptions" *India Quarterly*. Vol. XIII No. 2, April, June 1986. p. 150,

The external compulsions emanates from the geopolitical location of a country. Bhutan is caught between the politics of two big regional powers, China and India. Bhutan has no access to the sea. Its relations with China have not been historically very warm, although some overtures for improvement of relation have been made in recent time. As a land locked country, therefore, Bhutan is dependent on India in almost all conceivable aspects of its national life. Its foreign trade, economy etc. depends on the use of Indian territory. Another constraint is the friendship treaty of 1949 with India. This treaty puts bar on the foreign relation with a third country. Only in recent years Bhutan has been expanding its diplomatic relations with other countries.

### Maldives

There has been considerable difficulty in tracing when the first settlers arrived in the remote atolls of Maldives. It is believed that the islands were first inhabited by Dravidians from South India as early as in the 4th century BC. Aryans from India and Ceylon eventually dominated the settlement in the Island. Buddhism was the religion of Maldives until 1153 AD. When the King was converted into Islam by a Moroccan saint the entire country was ordered to adopt and accept Islam as the religion. From the 12th century until 1968, the Maldives was governed as an hereditary sultanate. During the period of British rule in India the islands were ruled indirectly through Ceylon. The Maldivians, in effect, governed themselves and so remained largely untouched by western political and legal institutions. The last Sultan Mohamed Farhid Didi was only a titular ruler while his Prime Minister ( since 1957 ), Ibrahim Nasir, who later became President gained increasing control as the architect of the modern Maldives. In 1965 when the British withdrew, Maldives became an independent nation.<sup>18</sup>

18. *Asia Year Book* 1979, *op. cit.* p. 247. and Adney and Carr., *The Maldives Republic* in "The Politics of the Western Indian Ocean islands" ed. John M. Osthiemer. Praeger Publishers, New York, USA, 1975. p. 141.

Maldives Republic is strung like a coral chain 512 miles north to south through the Indian Ocean, stretching from 7 degrees north to 1 degree south of the equator. The southern most island of Addu Atoll lies only 240 miles north of Diego Garcia and about 450 miles south west of Sri Lanka. The archipelago, measures only 81 miles at its widest. Only 202 of the 1190 islands are populated. The Islands rise only 6 feet above the sea from a long dead Volcanic landmass. The Islands are grouped in atolls and are protected from ocean storms by reefs. With a population of 156-160 thousand (1981 estimates) and a per capita GNP of US \$ 300 (1981) the country has been categorised among the 20 least developed nations in the world.

However, Maldives maintains an international bargaining power unlike most of the Third World small states. The Islands are close enough to both Sri Lanka and South India and this provides convenient anchorage for merchants and military. It also commands important sea lanes for merchant ships. More recently, its importance has been enhance as an airfield and communication centre, a major staging post on the way from Europe to Southeast Asia and Australia.<sup>19</sup>

Maldives has also been bracketed by UNDP among the most seriously affected countries needing special assistance from the global community. In a country paper presented by the National Planners of Maldives at the Paris Conference of the LDCS in 1981, the manifold problems of the country were summed up as shortage of qualified manpower, poor health conditions, rapidly changing structure of fishing industries, past neglect of the agriculture sector, and severe regional imbalances of economic development.<sup>20</sup>

Like Bhutan, Maldives is also characterized by a subsistence agriculture. Most of the food stuffs have to be imported. Primary

19. *Ibid.* p. 248.

20. Urmila Phadnis, "Maldives", *World Focus* November-December, 1983, p. 102.

commodities like fish and coconuts have been Maldives' traditional exports but by and large, the balance of trade has been unfavourable. Fisheries and shipping are the mainstay of the economy. Motorized boats have been introduced in the 1970s. However, the economic condition of the fisherman class has not improved substantially over the centuries despite a modest level of modernization. Except in Male the capital of Maldives, the element of a modern national infrastructure is yet to be developed. Although a few motorized boats ply between the islands and radio communication exists among them, technical skills are in scarce supply, and natural resources except fish are unexplored and unexploited in the surrounding area. The strains on its thin resources base are compounded further by demographic factors—a growth rate of 2.8 per cent annually and a population that is expected to double in 20 years.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of trade, Maldives had been extremely dependent on Sri Lanka. Added to these, is the undiversified export patterns resulting in a vulnerable state. The main imports are food and animals, basic manufactures, miscellaneous manufactures, mineral, fuel, machinery and transport equipment, beverages and tobacco, chemicals and raw materials. The main sources being Japan, U.K., Thailand and principally Sri Lanka. The exports are fresh fish, dried salt fish, dried shark fins and tortoise shell, the major destinations being Japan, Sri Lanka and Thailand.<sup>22</sup> The trade patterns clearly indicate the dependence on a few export commodities, few sources and destinations increasing the vulnerability to the economy. Maldives shares with the rest of the LDCS, a number of problems, namely, an acceleration of import costs of essential commodities, insufficient export earnings to cover the rising import bill, low level foreign exchange reserves and increasing cost of transportation.

Like Bhutan, Maldives is also an extremely aid dependent country. Consequently soliciting aid for developmental purposes is clearly one

21. Urmila Phadnis, and Ela Dutt Luithui "Maldives Enter World Politics" *Asian Affairs*. January-February. 1981. p. 167, 172.

22. *Asia and the Pacific* 1983. p. 209-211.

of the important foreign policy grab of Maldives. Its efforts since independence has been to have as many friends as possible, from the antipodes in order to tap aid sources.

UNICEF is a major promoter of provincial development in Maldives contributing toward health, water, sanitation and education programmes. The Libyan Government is also a major donor to Maldivian Education mainly through offering scholarships. Apart from the oil squeeze, massive grant from the Islamic bloc countries have helped sustain the economy of Maldives. But other impor-

---

*Maldives is exposed to threats due to its strategic location. Gan island in the Indian ocean has been used by the British and since they have left, it attracted increasing attention of the powers owing to enhanced super power interest in the Indian Ocean. This calls for careful manipulation of the foreign relations for its development.*

---

tant benefactors for Maldivian national development include Japan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, Britain and UN agencies and now, the World Bank. Besides countries like Iran, Libya, Pakistan, India, Kuwait and Sri Lanka have come forward with soft loans and technical assistance and training programmes for Maldivians in medicine, engineering, nursing, fisheries, tourism and communications.

During 1981-85 the external assistance required for Maldives development programmes was estimated to be about \$ 122 million. Maldives has been an aid recipient with a certain degree of discretion and circumspection so that the aid can be absorbed and to the extent possible, does not lead to an unending spiral of the debt trap. Consequently, debts are projected to rise and so will be the debt servicing payment. Debt servicing charges, for instance, are expected to rise from \$ 10,000 in 1981 to \$ 1.8 million in 1985. This will be an added strain on a country which has a long way to go in meeting

its developmental challenges and as such will require considerable cushioning from the neighbourhood but much more so, from the world beyond.<sup>23</sup>

As stated earlier, external compulsion emanates from the geopolitical conditions of a country. Maldives is exposed to threats due to its strategic location. Gan island in the Indian ocean has been used by the British and since they have left, it attracted increasing attention of the powers owing to enhanced super powers interest in the Indian Ocean. This call for careful manipulation of the foreign relations for its development.

As a matter of fact, both Bhutan and Maldives are seriously handicapped by the technological backwardness. They have a very weak defence capability and are unable to withstand slightest military pressure. Both the countries have direct or indirect influences of colonial powers and share the colonial legacies. All these set the threats perceptions of the countries that are generated from within and outside and thus shape the foreign policy of the countries.

### **Objectives and Principles of Foreign Policy**

Preservation of national security i.e. political independence, territorial integrity and attainment of the objectives of national development, peace and progress form the core foreign policy goals of any country. Particularly in the Third World countries which are characterized by resource scarcity and technological constraints, foreign policy plays a vitally important role and hence it is imperative to develop the tools of diplomacy and other political strategies falling within the general purview of foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> With this general remark we may review the objectives and principles of the foreign policies of Bhutan and Maldives.

23. Urmila Phadnis *op. cit.* p. 103. and *Asia and Pacific* 1981, p. 229-232.

24. Talukdar Maniruzzaman, *Security of Small States in the Third World*, (Canberra Papers, No. 25. SDSC, ANU, 1982)



*Bhutan*

Jigme Singye Wanchuk of Bhutan once said, "Our aim continues to be three fold : Firstly, we are committed politically to a strong and loyal sense of nationhood to ensuring the peace and security of our citizens and the sovereign territorial integrity of our land. Secondly, to achieve economic self reliance and the capacity to begin and complete any project we undertake & thirdly to preserve the ancient religions and cultural heritage that has for so many centuries strengthened and enriched our lives."<sup>25</sup> This remark of the Bhutanese monarch underlines the basic premises of Bhutanese foreign policy.

Bhutan subscribes fully to the charter and principles of the United Nations and the non-aligned movement and accordingly has continued to play an active and committed role in both these international organizations. The foreign policy of Bhutan is thus based on the principles of peace, friendship and non-alignment. To quote the Bhutanese King, "We have based our policy of non-alignment on our determination not to align ourselves with one bloc and to hate the other or to play power politics with both. Indeed as the Dhammapada says, 'Never in this world does hatred cease by hatred, it ceases only with love. This is the law Eternal.'<sup>26</sup>

Bhutan's foreign policy pursuits are characterised by subtle but significant initiatives. Such initiatives have been in two broad fields : (1) in relation to their neighbouring countries and (2) with regard to regional and international organisations and forums like SAARC, the United Nations and its associated agencies and the non-aligned movement.

---

25. Siraj Chowdhury, "Bhutan Maintains Separate Identity", *Holiday Dhaka*, May 14, 1983.

26. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk's address to the Sixth conference of the Heads of state or Government of the Non-Aligned countries, held at Havana (Cuba), September 3-9, 1979 and published along with other addresses by the Editorial de Cinaas Sociales, La Habana, 1980 p, 134.

With skilful diplomacy and surprising maturity, Bhutan has so far succeeded in harmonizing an inherently contradictory situation by pursuing its three-pronged strategy of consolidating the home base, correcting the Indian connection and seeking new friends abroad.<sup>27</sup> The two Asian giants—China and India situated in the north and south of Bhutan respectively are so vital in geopolitical terms that their attitudes towards this buffer state as also their relative capability distribution in the Himalayan region and in South Asia will always determine practically all foreign policy considerations of Bhutan. It hardly needs to be stressed that Bhutan is strategically important for both its big neighbours because of its location. This is the most compelling reason for both China and India to strive for special and friendly relationships with this Buddhist theocratic state.

Derived primarily from its location, coupled with its small size and limited capability vis-a-vis both its neighbours, the paramount consideration before Bhutan is its own preservation. Therefore any event or issue in the region, immediate or distant, to the extent of a decisive shift in favour of either India or China is likely to be reacted to very strongly and with a certain amount of anxiety by Bhutan. It was the developments in Tibet in 1950-51 and the impact of the loss of Tibet which formulated Bhutan's perception of its new neighbour-China. The 470 km. long common boundary with China and its claims on some of the Bhutanese enclaves not only involved it in a controversy but also exposed the kingdom to a new threat.<sup>28</sup> Mao Zedong in his book, 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese communist party' had listed Bhutan as one of the lost territories of China. 'In defeating China in war', Mao wrote 'the imperialist powers took many Chinese dependent states and a part of her terri-

27. Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Indo-Bhutanese Relations: Bhutan's Quest for an International Role" *Regional Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1984. p. 11.

28. Manorama Kohli, 'Bhutan's strategic Environment Changing Perception', *op. cit.* p. 142-144

tories.<sup>29</sup> Thus when China claimed Bhutan as one of the fingers of its palm, the Bhutanese ruler decided to end the centuries old secluded status of his country. A closed Bhutan was now perceived to be an open invitation to the Chinese subversive and expansionist strategies into the Himalayas. Hence the 1960s saw a change from Bhutan's close door policy to rapid inputs of economic and military aid from India.

Despite an opening out to India, Bhutan's long time quest for sovereignty remained. Bhutan believed that Tibet could not have been occupied by China had it been a member of the UN. The Bhutanese played their game diplomatically. Obtaining this commitment from Nehru, they maximised their efforts to develop their country with Indian aid on the one hand and persist in branching out towards an international personality, on the other. Thus Bhutan was able to get for itself from India a sovereign status despite the Treaty of 1949.<sup>30</sup>

The recent efforts of Bhutan to strengthen its international personality demonstrates vividly the clarity of its purpose. Although hesitant in the face of world diplomacy, Bhutan made cautious and calculated moves to diversify its diplomatic contacts into the world beyond the Himalayan context. With a slow but steady approach Bhutan has prudently and selectively initiated its diplomatic thrust in order to step into a new phase of political evolution.

In its search for establishing an identity distinct and separate from India, efforts are visible in two directions. Till 1971, economic dependence on India was total. Today, international agencies like UNDP, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Kuwaiti Development Fund and others are involved in Bhutan's economic progress in a fairly significant way. Though Indian aid is still the largest, the dependence has been reduced purposefully.

29. Pradyumna P. Karan and Willam M. Jenkins Jr., *The Himalayan kingdoms : Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal* D. Van Nostrand Company Princeton, New Jersey, 1963.

30. Nirmala Das, 'Bhutan', *World Focus*, November-December. 1983. p. 98.

All these have been achieved in a very cautious manner without unduly upsetting India whose interest are critical in this area. None of the political links with India have been devalued on the surface, so as not to give offence or invite an unfortunate response.<sup>31</sup>

Over the last five years or so there has been further expansion in Bhutan's external contacts. Bhutan has opened new trade contacts with countries in South Asia. In 1983, Bhutan and India signed a

---

*The recent efforts of Bhutan to strengthen its international personality demonstrates vividly the clarity of its purpose. Although hesitant in the face of world diplomacy, Bhutan made cautious and calculated moves to diversify its diplomatic contacts into the world beyond the Himalayan context. With a slow but steady approach Bhutan has prudently and selectively initiated its diplomatic thrust in order to step into a new phase of political evolution.*

---

new trade agreement replacing the earlier agreement of 1977. The new agreement simplified the procedure to facilitate Bhutan's trade with third countries. Some of the countries with which Bhutan is having trade contacts are Bangladesh, Nepal, Singapore and Hongkong.

A parallel development in the political and diplomatic field has also been progressing. Bhutan opened its first diplomatic mission outside India in 1978 in Bangladesh. In 1982, it appointed honorary consuls in Singapore and Hongkong. In 1983, Nepal and Bhutan established formal diplomatic relations. In 1985, diplomatic channels were opened with Denmark, Switzerland, Netherlands and EEC. The most important development was of course, the opening of direct border talks between Bhutan and China. In 1984, a Bhutanese delegation visited China and held talks at Beijing on the question of the settlement of their boundary dispute. Another round of

---

31. *Ibid.*

talks was held in Bhutan in 1985. The event of 1984 is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it marks the opening of direct contacts, though for a limited purpose, between the two countries. This may pave the way for the establishment of full-fledged diplomatic relations. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, it is evident that henceforth the Bhutan-China border issue will not be considered an integral part of the sino-Indian boundary dispute. In this context one of Nehru's remarks can well be recalled "the Government of India is the only competent authority to take up with other governments matters concerning Bhutan's external relations. As such if any rectification was to be made regarding their boundary it must be discussed along with the boundary of India." From the events of 1984-85 it is clear that Bhutan no longer adheres to that meaning of the treaty of 1949; indeed they have a more liberal interpretation of the words aid and advice of the government of India.<sup>32</sup>

But in whatever way Bhutan interpret the treaty of 1949, one thing is clear: Indo-Bhutan relations must be very smooth because India is a big neighbour and much of Bhutan's internal economy and political stability depends on India. Although it has to a large extent reduced dependence on India by diversifying international links, it would not be profitable for Bhutan to counterbalance India as Nepal did by using the Chinese factor, because that would involve a great risk for Bhutan to handle.

Bhutan's admission to the United Nations on September 21, 1971 and the Non-aligned Movement in 1973 marked the international endorsement of its sovereignty and integrity as a nation. This was universally welcomed in Bhutan as one of the proudest achievements of the country's foreign policy, its advent at the UN signalled that it had at long last come out of its shell. Hitherto, it was depicted as some mysterious land of placid Buddhist population whose tempo of life had changed little over the centuries. It was

32. Manorama Kohli, *op. cit.* p. 151.

this image which led foreign writers to describe Bhutan as the 'world's last Shangrila', 'land of the thunderbolt', 'the secret Himalaya kingdom' 'the Himalays borderland' & the 'gateway to Tibet'.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the opening of the permanent mission to the UN in New York in 1972 had several immediate consequences. For one thing, it provided Bhutan with an alternative channel of communication to the outside world, and one that is in some respects of more important than the mission in New Delhi where the mission had to function in an Indian environment. Bhutan's dependence upon its intermediary for linkage with the outside world has thus been substantially reduced. While the provisions of the 1949 Indo-Bhutanese Treaty still apply, the manner in which guidance is provided by New Delhi has undergone modifications. According to Bhutanese sources, India has now accepted Thimpu's interpretation of the treaty-namely, that Bhutan is obligated to seek India's advice on foreign policy questions but is not necessarily obliged to accept it. New Delhi has never publicly acknowledged this but appears to operate on this basis as a general practice.

The establishment of two missions abroad and the need to maintain contact with a growing number of foreign countries on a regular basis have had another significant consequences-the formation of a Foreign Affairs Department in 1970 and a Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972. For the first time there is a Government Institution in Bhutan whose primary responsibility is the formulation and implementation of foreign policy, a task that had been managed previously on an adhoc, non-professional basis.<sup>34</sup>

Other indication that Bhutan was asserting its position as an independent nation state came at the Non-aligned summit conference at Havana in 1979 on the question of the admission of Kampuchea. While Bhutan supported the claims of the ousted Polpot regime of Kampuchea, India was in favour of keeping the seat vacant. That

33. Rahimullah Yusufzai, *op. cit.* p. 22.

34. Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, Cornell University Press, US 1977. p. 90-91.

Bhutan did not vote identically with India on a world issue did not happen for the first time. In fact, both in the UN and Non-aligned conferences Bhutan voted counter to India on the issue of the rights of the land locked countries.<sup>35</sup>

Though Bhutan did not take much initiative in the establishment of the SAARC forum, once the idea was articulated and put forward by Bangladesh, it has enthusiastically viewed it as a forum to project its aspirations and pursue its other regional initiatives.<sup>36</sup> Bhutan was chosen as the co-ordinator of the working group on postal services, which was in fact a recognition of the great strides this lilliputian Kingdom has made in the field of mail service and philatelics. Bhutan later hosted a number of meetings of the technical committees including the one on postal services in Thimpu. Thimpu was also one of the venues where preparatory talks for launching of SAARC were held. Bhutan also organised a coaching camp in Table Tennis as part of its commitment of the SAARC cooperative training activities. Furthermore, Bhutan was also chosen as the meeting ground for the diplomats seeking a resolution of the ethnic problems of Sri Lanka. To quote Bhutan's official weekly 'Kuensul', Bhutan is emerging as an 'Eastern Geneva', a venue for peace making efforts in South Asia. Bhutan attaches great importance to the opportunities SAARC will provide for more beneficial economic relations with countries other than India. Bhutan's keenness to promote the concept of economic cooperation in South Asia is compatible with its efforts to increase its capabilities through internal growth and foreign trade as means to effect its military and political vulnerability. The trade agreement with Bangladesh signed in 1980 is another significant step. Not only does it establish Bhutan's right to trade with third countries it obtained transit rights and customs facilities from India. The Trade Agreement with India of 1983 recognises Bhutan's rights to trade directly with other countries. To be of mutual interest, the

35. Manorama Kohli *op. cit.* p. 148.

36. S.D. Muni, "Bhutan's South Asian Initiatives", *Strategic Analysis*, March 1984. p. 1004

Bangladesh Trade Agreement gives reciprocal transit privileges to Bangladesh through Bhutan to Tibet despite Indian reservations. Air communication linkage has also been recently established between Dhaka and Thimpu. Thus Bhutan has made considerable headway in establishing its links with its immediate neighbours both politically and economically. SAARC framework may lead to a wider network of collaboration in Bhutan's bid to steadily diversify its trade and economic ties with the regional countries.<sup>37</sup>

### Maldives

The main thrust of Maldivian foreign policy has been two fold : to ensure a tension-free security environment in the Indian Ocean and to secure for Maldives assistance in its programmes for economic development. In the words of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the fundamental objectives of Maldivian foreign policy include the preservation of the country's national independence and the development of peaceful and friendly relations with all other states. "The policy is strictly consistent with the observance of the principles of non-alignment, and the sovereignty, integrity and unity of other nations. We support all just and legitimate causes throughout the world, foremost among which are the cause of the Palestinians and the people of southern Africa," he said. Gayoom further said that his country desires to play an active role, however modest it may be, in international and regional affairs and to cultivate strong bonds of friendship and closeness with the republic's neighbours and the Islamic states.<sup>38</sup>

Maldives' strategic location in the Indian Ocean, is one of its main assets in foreign relations. Attracting world attention in 1978 when it rejected a Soviet offer to lease the former RAF base on Gan Island in Addu Atoll, Maldives found itself courted by several mutually antagonistic states. The late Shah of Iran toyed with the

37. Rahimullah Yusufzai *op. cit.* p. 33. and Manorama Kohli *op. cit.* p. 151

38. For Eastern Economic Review *Asia Year Book 1986.* p. 194.



idea of leasing the base for himself, if for nothing else at least to keep the Soviet Union out. This evoked a counter response from his foe Libyan President Gaddafi who resolved to do every thing possible to keep out the Shah. But Maldives wisely chose not to compromise their non-aligned status and to develop their Islamic bond with the Middle East without getting involved in the mutual antagonism of the Muslim states. President Gayoom said, "the Soviet base would have militated against our non-aligend status annoyed our brothers in the Muslim world like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and created suspicions in the minds of our neighbours like India and Sri Lanka." He also said that since the argument still remained valid, his government was firmly resolved not to open Gan ever for refuelling and servicing facilities to any visiting military ship or aircraft of any nation.<sup>39</sup>

As a matter of fact ever since Maldives entered world politics by joining the United Nations upon its independence from British protectorate status in 1965, it has insisted that neutrality and interest in establishing the Indian Ocean Peace Zone are the foundation of its foreign relations. But until the RAF left its shores, Maldives had difficulty in being taken seriously on these stands. Now that the British military presence has gone, Maldives proudly espouses a non-aligned stance. Being a small and poor country, increasingly dependent on foreign assistance as it moves into the modern world, Maldives is attempting to be friend to as many nations as it can.

Relations with Britain — under some strains since the RAF's precipitate withdrawal—have improved much and Maldives is hopeful of soon reaping the benefits of friendlier relations through the receipt of foreign aid. According to Gayoom, his government has also improved relations with other western nations and continues strong and friendly ties with a variety of oil rich Islamic states —Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, because, as Gayoom put it, these countries have been active in developing strong ties by initiating aid

39. *Asia Year Book 1983. op. cit.* p. 202.

programmes, offering soft loans for development and being generally sympathetic to Maldivian problems. Male has not joined in any boycott move against Egypt since its treaty with Israel. Maldives is a poor country that cannot really afford to cut any ties it has.<sup>40</sup>

Further more, Maldives has greatly improved relations with his nearest neighbour, Sri Lanka. Maldives relations with that country came under strains towards the end of 1981 and early 1982 because of a steady upswing in tourist arrivals in Maldives without any corresponding increase for Sri Lanka. Additionally, the inauguration of Male international airport enabling direct arrival in Maldives of flights from Europe, created fears in Sri Lanka that Maldives would be inducing tourists to bypass Sri Lanka. President Gayoom remarked that the new facility would erase all traces of the country's isolation and would bring Maldives' honour and prestige through making it more self-reliant.

The Maldives-Sri Lanka tension reached a point arousing speculation in certain quarters on possible open conflict between the countries. However, both governments tacitly agreed on steps to calm the situation. A delegation arrived from Sri Lanka to Male in 1981 which was followed by President Gayoom's own private visit to Colombo. Later Sri Lanka's foreign minister A.C.S. Hameed visited Maldives and at the banquet in his honour, he declared, 'Maldives is Sri Lanka's nearest, dearest and smallest neighbour'. Maldivian Foreign Minister Fathulla Jameel said: "Relations between our two countries cannot be any better and closer and these go back to the time when Sri Lanka had not tasted Maldives fish and the Maldivians had not tasted Sri Lankan tea."

The first major step towards strengthening Indo-Maldivian ties was taken when Mrs. Indira Gandhi paid an official visit to Maldives in 1975 in return to the earlier visit to India of the Maldivian Prime Minister, Ahmed Zaki. Speaking at a banquet in her honour, Mrs. Gandhi said, 'I myself hastened my visit in order to maintain the

40. *Asia Year Book*. 1979 p. 248-250. and 1980, p. 240-243.

momentum of your visit'. At the conclusion of the visit a joint communique said that Mrs. Gandhi and Prime Minister Zaki had agreed on the need to improve their bilateral cooperation in the fields of education, fisheries air and sea communications with a view to promote commercial, cultural and other exchanges.<sup>41</sup> As a matter of fact, India has become by far the closest collaborator in the region, helping in the construction of a canning factory in the north, the modernization of Huhule air strip to receive widebodied jets and the building of schools on every atoll, in addition to the provision of technical training and exchanges in education, assistance in infrastructure facilities and fisheries research and development.

Though Maldives become a member of the United Nations soon after independence, it hardly evinced any interest in the UN till the mid-1970s and it was only in the non-aligned conference at Colombo in 1976 when particularly at the insistence of some of the Islamic countries like Libya it joined the non-aligned group. Its active participation in the US began in 1977 when the present President Gayoom was appointed as the first permanent representative of his country. Gayoom in retrospect infused a dynamic view of the world in a hitherto inward looking foreign policy. Maldives was always cautious in international affairs and this is shown in their voting at the UN General Assembly. They were one of only three countries—the others being Oman and nationalist China itself, not to vote on October 25, 1971 when the People's Republic of China was admitted. In fact, no Maldives Representative attended the General Assembly that year or in the 1973 session. Among motions it supported were those called for a Zone of Peace in the India Ocean, a world disarmament conference, the suspension of underground nuclear tests (on which the nuclear powers abstained), on self-determination for the Palestinian people as well as the plethora of issues pertaining to a new international economic order. Maldives voted firmly for equal

---

41. *Asia Year Book 1983* and Umashanker Phadnis, 'Maldives', *World Focus*, November-December, 1985. p. 78.

rights for women and for the ending of capital punishment even though many brother Muslim countries such as Iran, Iraq, UAR and Libya opposed this. What stands out is its increasing support of the Arab countries, and strident criticism of Israel. Apart from the oil squeeze, massive grants from the Islamic bloc countries have helped preserve the 'neutrality' of the Maldives.<sup>42</sup> But over the past few years, irrespective of its obvious limitations, Maldives has been represented at virtually every international or regional meeting of which it has been a member. In 1982 Maldives also became a member of the Commonwealth. In October, 1986, Maldives hosted the annual meeting of the Commonwealth finance ministers, taking great pride in its ability to handle its first major international conference. The

---

*Maldives has successfully developed friendly and beneficial relation with a number of countries, at the same time helping itself emerge with independent and non-aligned foreign policy posture, clear of power blocs and rivalries.*

---

Maldives was endorsed as a full member of the Commonwealth four months before the conference. Prior to that, the Republic was a 'special member', entitled to attend regional meetings but not full dress summits.

The Maldives has also made a positive and constructive contribution to the process of regional cooperation in South Asia. Right from the beginning of the SAARC process the Maldivian representatives at various levels not only supported the idea but actively cooperated in its proceedings. Thus Maldives took the responsibility for coordinating and preparing the programme of action on transport at the Kathmandu Conference 1981, which was held at the Foreign Secretary level. The Foreign Minister of Maldives once remarked, 'Maldives will continue in its sincere efforts to make South Asian

---

42. Urmila Phadnis and Ela Dutt Luithui, *op. cit.* p. 174. and Adeney and Carr *op. cit.* p. 157.

Regional Cooperation the most vital instrument the family of South Asia has evolved for the maintenance of peace and security, and for the promotion of the principles of freedom, justice and human dignity.<sup>43</sup> Thus it can be said that through pragmatic diplomacy and active participation in regional and international forums Maldives has successfully developed friendly and beneficial relation with a number of countries at the same time helping itself emerge with independent and non-aligned foreign policy posture, clear of power blocs and rivalries.

### Conclusion

The search for identity and economic development had ever been at the core of the policies of both Bhutan and Maldives. The policy of isolation as practised by land-locked Bhutan did not bring the desired result of identity assertion and nation building and as such Bhutan is currently striving to secure international identity and to activate its developmental efforts by way of gradually opening up to the international community. On the other hand, Maldives until the recent past had been characterised by its traditional insularity which in the present context appears to be far from effective. Over the last decade and a half, however, the island state has been opening rapidly to new ideas, and behaviour, in order to assert its independent course of action as a nation state. Today it is a political entity still in search of a frame of reference to cope with the developmental problems that confront it.<sup>44</sup>

Both Bhutan and Maldives, in their efforts to strengthen the national economy have expanded and diversified their linkages with the rest of the world. In either case the condition of underdevelopment bears great similarity. Both the countries are being bracketed

43. Statement made by the foreign minister of Maldives Mr. Fathullah Jameel at the South Asian Regional Cooperation meeting of foreign minister in New Delhi 1983 published in SAARC Final Documents Issued by Economic Division Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. p. 20.

44. Urmila Phadnis, *Asian Affairs*, *op. cit.* p. 176.

in the band of poverty stricken nations with extremely undiversified economy and limited trade and economic linkages. These similarities of internal compulsions breed similar foreign policy postures despite the differences in geopolitical, geo-strategic conditions, other specific historical imperative (Bhutan is Buddhist, whereas Maldives is a Muslim Country), colonial legacies (in case of Bhutan 1949 treaty and in case of Maldives RAF base in Gan islands), historical dependencies ( in case, of Bhutan, India and in case of Maldives, Sri Lanka ) there are certain variations in foreign policy.

On a comparative basis both the countries subscribe to the similar objectives of preservation of national independence and development of peaceful and friendly relation with other countries and at the core both pursue similar approach of diversification of diplomatic and economic linkages with the rest of the world. Currently, both the states are members of a number of world bodies and their diplomatic relations are gradually expanding. Both subscribe to the NAM, to the UN charter, to the idea of making the Indian Ocean a Zone of Peace, etc. For both the countries, foreign aid continues to remain a significant determinant to shape the foreign policy postures. Bhutan's increasing need for finance to support its developmental plans continue to remain a major thrust in establishing economic linkages beyond India. As already pointed out, Bhutan for its fifth five year plan sought to obtain finances, for over 40 percent of its planned outlay from United Nations and its agencies and from countries like Australia, Switzerland, Japan, the UK, Singapore and Australia while in the past it depended on India entirely. A similar tendency is observed in the case of Maldives. With an overarching policy of neutrality, the acquisition of aid for development purposes seems to be the major thrust of Maldivian foreign policy. The Maldives Foreign Minister Fathullah Jameel is constantly on the move, jetting around the globe, making friends with a variety of nations and soliciting aid from many resources.<sup>45</sup> The Maldivians have

---

45. *Asia and Pacific 1981.*

gradually allied themselves with their Muslim brothers. Prospects of aid from the oil rich countries and political calculations seem to determine such a pattern. Characteristic of small and weak states of the Third World and located at strategic points both Bhutan and Maldives are exposed to severe threats from external powers. As measure to protect themselves both Bhutan and Maldives counter balanced the external powers without antagonizing them by the adoption of high skill diplomacy. Bhutan, even though leaning towards India has been able to maintained balanced relation with the two regional giants, China and India, while Maldives has been pursuing a balance in her policy action vis-a-vis the great and super power interest of the strategic point in the Indian ocean by maintaining neutral posture.

Bhutan is gradually putting efforts to reduce her overdependence on India. Consequently, in the recent years there had been notable dynamism in the foreign policy of Bhutan. Similar trend has also been noticed in Maldivian foreign policy in so far as Male's excessive economic ties with Sri Lanka. Such dynamism appears to be paying dividend to both countries particularly in terms of reducing their extent of economic vulnerabilities.

Unlike Bhutan which is a Buddhist state, Maldives is a 100 percent Muslim state which bestows Maldives with an added advantage over Bhutan to share the strengths of the Muslim world. So far colonial legacies are concerned both the countries are exposed to constraints of different nature inherited from the colonial rulers. Provision of Indo-Bhutanese treaty, is the case in point, which restricts Bhutan's free choice to maintain external contacts. However, in the recent years it had been able to overcome the bars considerably. Prior to the departure of British from Gan, Maldives had largely been following an inward looking approach to foreign affairs. This low profile may be explained by the presence of the British, following whose departure an interest in the Maldives began to be evinced by other countries inside and outside the region.

Another notable trend in the foreign policy posture of the two in recent years is that regional issues seem to be of more concern than global ones. Both have strong commitments towards regional cooperation and SAARC. Bhutan's concern and efforts to diffuse the tension in Sino-Indian relation and Maldives whole hearted support for making Indian ocean a zone of peace are other examples. Another striking success of both the countries' foreign policy is the adoption of shrewd and skillfull diplomacy using the bargaining strength bestowed by the geopolitical and geostrategic locations to the best of their advantage. Bhutan has used the China factor to its advantage in order to reap benefits from India. Indian apprehensions of aggresion from Tibet in turn strengthened the importance of Bhutan as a friendly buffer state to India. On the other hand, the increasing militarization of the Indian ocean has in a sense strenghtened the bargaining position of Maldives. Ever since the British evacuated from Gan in 1976 and left the base idle like a lure for all the powers watching the strategically placed Maldives, the little country has been blessed with suitors bearing gift. In all Maldives dealing with other countries and in all pursuits of foreign aid, Gan appears to have been in the background drawing in the big fish from various directions.

Finally, it may be observed that both the countries had been evolving their foreign relations with extreme caution. Keeping an intention to contribute constructively in all international forums, these countries have apparently restrained themselves from opening up themselves abruptly to all and sundry international forces and become a cockpit of power politics. One may conclude therefore that a policy of moderation combined with the diversification of dependence is perhaps suitable to meet the domestic needs and pressures of underdevelopment.<sup>46</sup>

---

46. Urmila Phadnis and Ela Dutt Luithui, Maldives enter World Politics *Asian Affairs*, *op. cit.* p. 176.