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## UNIT 16 TIBET/MYANMAR/BHUTAN

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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Tibet, Myanmar and Bhutan are India's immediate neighbours. Bhutan and Tibet are landlocked. On the other hand, Myanmar is situated along the Bay of Bengal. Bhutan and Myanmar are sovereign independent countries but Tibet is occupied by People's Republic of China since 1950. All the three are Buddhists and influenced by Indian culture and civilisation. Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar retain their faith in Buddhism whereas India is secular. Although Buddhism was born in India, it is preserved in letter and spirit in the Himalayan nations, where Buddhism is an important pillar of their nationalism and identity. The Chinese communist system or India's democratic system have not been able to transform the social values and religious faith of the people in Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar.

## Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- The problems of nation-building in Tibet, Myanmar and Bhutan
- The nature of their political systems and foreign policies
- The movement for reforms along the Gandhian lines

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## 16.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

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### 16.2.1 Bhutan

Bhutan lies in the Himalayan range of mountains with Tibet in the north and India in the South. Stretching along the southern slopes of the Himalayas for 250 miles, Bhutan is comprised of the people of Tibetan stock, culture and outlook. Lamaism is the prevailing religion and the political order is led under the hereditary monarchical system.

The official language is Dzongkha, spoken mainly in Western Bhutan. Written Dzongkha is based on Tibetan script. The state religion is Mahayana Buddhism. Drukpa and Kagyupa sects are considered indigenous, but there are thousands of Nepali settlers, who comprise about one quarter of the country's total population. The Nepali speaking population of Bhutan inhabits in southern part and is known as southern Bhutanese.

Bhutan indeed is a buffer state between India and China. In 1865 Wangchuk ruler of Bhutan had signed Sinchula Treaty with British by which Kalimpong and Duars had been ceded to British India and Wangchuk had promised to stop Bhutani raids into British territories. In return Wangchuk was granted an annual subsidy of Rs.50, 000. The relations with Great Britain started growing thereafter to the extent that the Bhutanese king accompanied Col. Younghusband to visit Lhasa to sign a convention in 1904 through which Tibet agreed to end its special ties with Bhutan in favour of the Britishers. In 1910 a fresh treaty was drawn up between Bhutan and British India by which Bhutan surrendered her foreign relations to British India and accepted the latter as arbiter in her disputes with Cooch Bihar and Sikkim. In return Britain increased the annual subsidy to Bhutan to 100000 and also assured that they will not interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan.

After India became independent, the Anglo-Bhutanese Treaty (1910) was replaced by Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship in 1949, whereby Bhutan agreed to seek the advice of government of India with regard to its foreign relations. India also assured that it would not interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan and also agreed to pay annual subsidy of 500000, which was five times more than the Britishers. India also returned some territory to Bhutan in Devangiri area and promised facilities for transport of all imports-exports, including arms, machinery and stores. Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-72) introduced structural reforms in the political system. He established the National Assembly (tshogdu Chen mo) in 1953 and Royal Advisory council of Ministers (Ihengye Zhungtshog) in 1968. Bhutan became a member of the UN in 1971.

Bhutan has landlocked status and it is full of hilly terrain, forests and snow. It faces developmental problems because of its geography. Besides, it has some ethnic groups like Drukpa, Nepali and Tibetans who are concerned about protecting their distinct identity and culture. Situated along Tibet (China), Bhutan has to address the concerns expressed

by the Chinese authorities from time to time. When China occupied Tibet, Bhutan gave asylum to 6000 Tibetan refugees on humanitarian grounds. When China raised the alarm that those refugees were engaged in spying and subversion in Tibet, Bhutan dispersed them in 1976 in different parts of the country, and in 1979 Bhutan told those refugees either to take Bhutanese citizenship or be repatriated to Tibet. By 1985 most of the Tibetans took Bhutanese citizenship but some also entered India to join the entourage of Dalai Lama at Himachal Pradesh.

### **16.2.2 Tibet**

Tibet, situated between India and China, has been the ancient centre of Buddhist learning and civilisation. In 1950 China ignored Tibet's traditional buffer status and sent its army to change its independent status in China's favour. The communist rulers in China were afraid that Tibet might be used against China by the Western world to destabilise the communist system. Although there was lot of opposition to Chinese military moves, China proclaimed the formation of Autonomous Region of Tibet and usurped the functions of local government led by the Dalai Lama. There were violent protests and revolt in Tibet against Chinese actions in 1959 but they were suppressed with an iron hand. The Dalai Lama, who symbolised Tibetan sovereignty, fled to India in 1959. China removed the Dalai Lama from his post in 1964 and Tibet was declared an Autonomous Region of China. The Dalai Lama lives in exile in India and is leading the movement against Chinese occupation. He is highly revered by the Tibetans and has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

The population of Tibet, according to the 2000 census, is 2.62 million. The ethnic Hans are encouraged to migrate to Tibet and Tibetan culture and national identity have been marginalised. The political dissidents are severely punished and there are restrictions on religious freedom, as the Chinese authorities dislike the expression of Tibetan Buddhism. The Chinese occupation, however, cannot erase the glorious history of Tibet, which existed in the past.

Tibet exercised cultural influence in the neighbourhood, especially in Bhutan and Ladakh. While Buddhism came to Tibet from India in the seventh century, both Bhutan and Ladakh derived it from Tibet. The geographical and genealogical similarity of Bhutan, Ladakh and Tibet are close and similarities in gesture, rituals, language and the social customs are more pronounced.

Religious mask dances, folk songs, including Gesar war songs from gesar epic are extremely popular in Ladakh and Bhutan. Every festival assumes a religious tone with the sounding of cymbals, clarinets and drums, all suggestive of the sanctified atmosphere of a Tibetan festival. Masked dances entertain their audience with humour. Chham, the religious dance, is popular that shows the triumph of good over evil. The most spectacular is the observation of death rites in Ladakh, Bhutan and Tibet, which is similar. Offerings to Lamas and monasteries are made for the deceased and prayer flags and thang-ka are erected for the departed soul. The actual date of cremation is decided by astrological calculation and the corpse is kept for forty nine days during which there is continuous recitation of the holy Tibetan book of the dead (Bardo Thodrol) in front of the dead person.

Tibetan interaction with India had been from time immemorial. Buddhism was the important subject of our discourses. Along with Buddhism, traders also used to travel in the area and thus religion and trade had been interlinked. According to Geshe Gedun

Chophel, Tibetan King Trisong (836-43) sent a large expedition of caravans to Magadh, to import relics related with Lord Buddha for the Samya Stupa in Tibet. When the caravan arrived at Magadh, they were unwilling to return back to Tibet. They settled in different parts of the Himalayan regions. These people were eventually known as Tamang, from whom the numerous Himalayan hill tribes descended, including Tamang tribes of Nepal.

Trade was an important channel of cultural exchange and influence. Leh, Ladakh's capital, used to be the foremost barter centre of Central Asia and caravans from Tibet, India, Turkey and China used to gather there to sell their wares. K. Thondup (1977) says that Bhutan used to collect dyes, coarse silk arecanut and tobacco from Assam and Bengal and exchange them for wool, tea, salt and musk from Tibet. Again the spices, timber, agricultural products were also bartered for the merchandise of Tibet. It is also well known that Hah (Bhutan), situated closer to Chumbi valley (Tibet), was also a busy centre of trade where numerous caravans of horses and pack mules passed back and forth until quite recently.

### 16.2.3 Myanmar

Myanmar (Burma) lies to the east of India and Bangladesh and to the southwest of China. It shares common frontiers with China, Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh and India. It has a long coastline facing the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Irrawaddy, Chindwin and Sittang are the major rivers and Patkai, Naga, Chin Hills and Arakan Yoma are important mountain ranges.

Myanmar's population is about 48,379,000 and their major concentration is in the Irrawaddy delta. Ethnic Burmans (Bamar) form the majority but the number of ethnic minorities is substantial. The Bamar, whose ancestors came from the Sino-Tibetan borders, comprise 68 per cent of the total population and Shan seven per cent, Karens six percent, Arakanese four per cent, Mon two percent, Kachins two percent, Chin two percent and others comprise nine percent of the total population.

Myanmar had powerful kingdoms in the past. Although the Mons and Pyus had dominated initially, there was large-scale migration of Tibeto-Burmans in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century and they conquered the Mon and Pyus. Tibeto-Burmans absorbed the culture and religion of Mons and Pyus and laid the foundation of a large Kingdom known as Pagan in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Theravada Buddhism became the religion of the majority.

Pagan was destroyed by the Mongol invasion in 1287. Its successor Ava proved a weak state because of the infighting between ethnic Mon and the Shan. In 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Toungoo dynasty expanded the frontiers but it was not sustainable. Toungoo was succeeded by Konbaung in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which tried to unite the country. They, at the same time, began to expand the territories but in doing so, it came into conflict with Britishers who had established a strong foothold over India. The Britishers retaliated against Burmans against their expansionist policies. The British India intervened militarily and colonised Burma. Hence monarchy was abolished in 1885.

Burma was integrated with British India and thus it was projected as a part of Indian Territory. A number of Indians migrated there to be inhabited and their representation in police and civil service is substantial. Indians helped in the expansion of agricultural land and Burma emerged as one of the largest rice exporting country. Subsequently, the Indians emerged as big land-owners, which was disliked by the ethnic Burmans. Therefore a

campaign was launched against the Indian interests and 'hate Indian' was one of the agenda of the Burma nationalist movement. Thus, when the country became independent in 1948, the government of Burma passed citizenship laws to turn their Indian population stateless. Their landed properties were nationalised in due course and the majority of Burmese Indians were compelled to migrate elsewhere.

When Burma became independent, it adopted the system of parliamentary democracy. There was a national assembly and multiparty system. Anti-Fascist people's Freedom League, which led the freedom movement under the leadership of Bogyoke Aung San, had popular mandate to rule. Unfortunately, Aung San was assassinated in July 1947 and his successor Thakin Nu (U Nu), whose skills of governance were so inadequate, could not stay in power for long. He was ousted from power by General Ne Win in 1962. Therefore, the military came into power and suspended the democratic institutions including the constitution. The military has been in power in that country ever since and the struggles for restoration of democracy have been crushed.

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## **16.3 PROBLEMS OF NATION-BUILDING**

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Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar are facing the problem of nation building, but the nature of their problems differs from one another. Tibet is occupied by China and it does not recognise the existence of Tibetan refugees in contrast to their policies vis-à-vis overseas Chinese. Again ethnic Hans who have migrated to Tibet in recent years, find difficulties in integrating with the Tibetans. On the other hand, Bhutan has thousands of settlers from Nepal and their integration with Drukpas is difficult. Further, Myanmar is witnessing ethnic conflict ever since its independence. The integration of ethnic Burmans with Rohingyas, Karens, Kachins and Nagas are intricate issues for political leaders.

### **16.3.1 Bhutan**

The ethnic unrest was witnessed in Bhutan for the first time in 1990, when the southern Bhutanese (Nepalese), organised demonstrations to protest against the domination by the Buddhist Drukpas. They demanded greater role in the country's political and economic life. The demonstrators resented official attempts to strengthen Bhutanese sense of national identity derived from Tibet.

The government of Bhutan had earlier, in June 1989, issued an order that all Nepali-speaking Bhutanese nationals in southern Bhutan are required to wear the national dress (Gho for men and Kira for Women). Failure to observe the order would first invite a police warning, then a fine, and lastly disciplinary action. Another order was passed declaring that the learning of national language Dzongkha is compulsory for southern Bhutanese. Yet another order was issued to prevent the Bhutanese nationals from getting married to non-nationals, to stand for election to the National Assembly. All these orders were disliked by the migrant population from Nepal and this prompted Teknath Rizal to appeal to the King to stop discrimination against the Nepali speaking people. The king was unhappy with Rizal's appeal and the reports are that he has been persecuted on the grounds of holding pro-Nepali sentiments. The activities of pro-Nepali dissidents are banned and many have been arrested. A number of ethnic Nepali population have deserted their homes in Bhutan and have come to Darjeeling, Sikkim or Nepal to carry on agitations against the royal government in Bhutan for a separate ethnic identity.

### 16.3.2 Tibet

Tibet, which has been permanently occupied, is under the influence and control of Han Chinese. In their daily lives, ethnic Tibetans have not gained anything after occupation. The Chinese authorities continue to arrest political dissidents and there are many instances of human rights abuses as their cultural and religious rituals and customs are under control. The completion of their first railway line in 2005 to China increased the fears of the Tibetans that they would lose more of their culture and that Han Chinese will forever remain in the dominating position.

In November 2005 when the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson visited China and expressed concern about separatist groups in Xinjiang and Tibet, the Chinese authorities declared that anti-human rights strategies were part of the global anti-terror battle. Sidney Jones, the Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, on the other hand has argued that the war on terrorism has been a heaven-sent opportunity for some governments in Asia to justify oppression against government critics.

China has consolidated its grip over Tibet. Education policies are aimed at Tibetan integration. Although Tibetan has been recognised as the official language, the university and technical education are uniformly given in Chinese language. China's western development campaign is geared to link Lhasa with Beijing by railways and roadways and migration of Chinese from other provinces to Tibet will certainly dilute the essence of Tibetan life and culture, which had been the source of inspiration in all parts of the Himalayan region.

### 16.3.3 Myanmar

Burma came under military dictatorship in 1962. General Ne Win emerged as the supreme leader in the new dispensation that believed in the policy of "Burma for Burmans". He did not care for other ethnic groups like Rohingyas, Karens, Shans, Chins and Kachins. He disliked the Indian diaspora and envisaged no role for them in business, trade or farming. His policy of Burmanisation forced Indians to desert their homes and emigrate elsewhere. Rohingyas were targeted to the extent that thousands of them deserted their homes and took shelter in Bangladesh. Shans and Karens have been persecuted especially in the post-1988 era, when the military gave logging contracts to Thai merchants in that area and purchased weapons from China to contain ethnic insurgencies. In short, it can be stated that the military rulers are trying to integrate the country through terror and intimidation. The ethnic minorities such as Shans, Karens and Rohingyas are frequent targets of state repression and the most common abuse being their induction into forced labour. On occasions the villagers are displaced and their lands are confiscated. A policy of burning homes and planting landmines to terrorise the Karens and others have been executed.

In March 2006, the Geneva based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that at the end of 2005 Myanmar had the worst internal displacement situation in Asia. There were 540,000 internally displaced people in Myanmar and approximately 92,000 were hiding in forests. The most popular leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi has been kept under house arrest and the movement for the restoration of democracy has been ruthlessly suppressed.

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## 16.4 POLITICAL SYSTEM

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### 16.4.1 Bhutan

Bhutan has the system of monarchy, which is introducing the democratic reforms. A new constitution has been framed, which has made the provision for the establishment of a democratic constitutional monarchy in accordance with the principle of hereditary succession, the establishment of a parliament consisting of the monarch, a 25-member National Council (Upper House) and a 47-member National Assembly (Lower House), with members of the latter body to be elected by universal secret ballot from constituencies with approximately equivalent populations, and for two political parties to be represented in the National Assembly, the election campaigns of which would be funded by the state. Within the National Council, 20 members - one representing each of the 20 electoral districts - were to be directly elected by a national vote, with the remaining five 'eminent members' to be selected by royal appointment. According to 2006 royal decree (Kasho), Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel is the head of the state, who advocated the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Bhutan. The two recognised national political parties are (a) the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) led by Lyonpo Jigmi Yozzer Thinley and (b) People's Democratic party (PDP) headed by Lyonp Sangye.

DPT secured 45 seats in 2008 elections and PDP got the remaining two seats and DPT leader is now the Prime Minister of Bhutan. The King of Bhutan is keen to provide enlightened leadership to his country and therefore the powers are divided into legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government.

### 16.4.2 Tibet

On the other hand, Tibet is occupied by the Communist China. When the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950, Tibetan leaders were forced to sign the "17 Point Agreement" in 1951 surrendering Tibet's independence to China. However, under that agreement, China gave a number of undertakings, including promises to maintain the existing political system of Tibet, to maintain the functions of the Dalai Lama, to protect freedom of religion and the monasteries and to reform, from compulsory reforms. These undertakings were entirely violated subsequently. Thus the government of Tibet was entitled to repudiate the agreement, as they did in 1959. Today, the International commission of Jurists Report (1997) observes that, "Tibetans are a people under alien subjugation, who are entitled under international law to the right of self-determination, by which they can freely determine their political status. The Tibetan people have not exercised this right, which requires a free and genuine expression of their will".

All powers of the government in Tibet are centralised in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese have been oppressive against the Tibetan nationalist dissent and trying to marginalise Tibetan culture. There have been numerous instances of destruction of houses belonging to the ethnic Tibetans and forced evictions. There is no freedom of speech, expression and religion. In 1996, a patriotic education campaign in the monasteries was initiated wherein monks were called on to denounce the Dalai Lama. Hundreds of monks were forced to leave their monasteries and many were arrested for maintaining their allegiance and links with the Dalai Lama.

In fact, in 1964, China had formally removed the position of the Dalai Lama and Pancham Lama posts and in 1965 the Autonomous Region of Tibet was created. 301 delegates were elected to the first People's Congress, of whom 226 were Tibetans. But

these exercises could not legitimate the sovereignty of China over Tibet. There is a large concentration of Tibetan refugees in India, who expose Chinese actions intermittently. The essence of Tibetan Culture is preserved at Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh), where the headquarters of the Tibetan government in exile is located. The Dalai Lama's office is placed there and they articulate the response of Tibetans. Several Free Tibet organisations in India and abroad have connections with Dalai Lama's office, who believe in larger Buddhist tradition and culture. To sum up the political system in Tibet, it can be stated that the Chinese have established an authoritarian system there, which is disliked by the indigenous people.

### **16.4.3 Myanmar**

Myanmar on the other hand, is under military rule and they have established an authoritarian political structure to perpetuate their rule. State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), led by General Than Swe, supports the regimentation in which there is no respect for human rights and democracy. Thousands of political prisoners are detained since 1988. Ethnic minorities have been persecuted and men, women and children are forced to work for the regime to construct railways, roadways, dams and other projects. There is repression and therefore thousands of people have deserted their homes. State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which usurped power on 18 September 1988 under General Saw Maung, had announced that general elections would be held to frame a new constitution. The election took place on 27 May 1990 and the National League for Democracy (NLD), under Aung San Suu Kyi won 392 out of 485 seats but the military did not respect the mandate of the people. NLD was not given a free hand to frame a new constitution and restore the democratic system. The national convention, which was called by the military for a new constitution since 1993, has been adjourned several times and there is no consensus on various provisions despite the absence of core NLD leaders. The rulers stress the central role of the military (as permanent representative of the people) to be enshrined in the new constitution. The key chapters of the constitution regarding legislature, judiciary and executive at the Union, State and Regional level are required to include representatives of the military. People's Assembly must have one-third members from Tatmadaw (armed forces) and the military must remain above the purview of civilian authorities. The military rulers are trying to incorporate the provisions of dwifungsi (dual role of the military) as adopted in Indonesia under Suharto. However, Suharto had neither abrogated the 1945 constitution, nor the elections for the two houses of parliament after five years. The military in Myanmar is apprehensive about holding any elections, as they have no trust of getting popular support through an election. The political system has generated the violation of basic rights of life, liberty and property.

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## **16.5 FOREIGN POLICIES**

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Foreign policies are formulated to fulfill domestic requirements and Bhutan and Myanmar are not much different in their approaches while dealing with their neighbours. Bhutan attaches importance to India whereas Myanmar attaches importance to China on vital security and economic matters. Tibet, on the other hand, is occupied by the Communist China, and the main task of the government is to assimilate Tibetans with Han Chinese. The Tibetan government in-exile, under the Dalai Lama, is trying to mobilise international support for self-determination in Tibet. They organise demonstrations, seminars and workshops to keep the momentum for "Free Tibet" alive.



### 16.5.1 Bhutan

Bhutan is land-locked and sandwiched between India and China. It uses Indian Territory for access to sea or gateway to the outside world. The country does not have railway network or effective roadways because of the mountainous terrain and thick forests. Bhutanese commercial contacts traditionally have been with India, particularly Ladakh, Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur in the West; Tibet in the North; and Sikkim, Cooch Behar and Northern Assam in the East. After the occupation of Tibet, Bhutan's trade with that country was disrupted. Hence Bhutan has to depend upon India for its trade and transit with the rest of the world. Its geo-strategic importance for India after the Chinese occupation of Tibet (1959) and Chinese aggression on India (1962) has been increasing. Although India and Bhutan had signed a Friendship treaty at Darjeeling on 8 August 1949 through which India promised to respect Bhutan's independence, and Bhutan had reciprocated it by assuring that it would maintain the same relationship with India which existed in the past with the British, certain adjustments were required to keep pace with the changing international system.

Article Two of the Indo-Bhutan treaty stated that "the government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part, the government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the government of India in its external relations". The Indian leaders were so happy with the outcome of talks in Bhutan that they decided to return Dewangiri hill strip (Deothan) back to Bhutan as a goodwill gesture. Indo-Bhutan Treaty was subsequently ratified by King Jigme Wangchuk of Bhutan and the Governor General of the newly Independent (India) C. Rajagopalachari of India on 22 September 1949. This treaty also allowed free trade and commerce between India and Bhutan.

The Indo-Bhutan friendship is the cornerstone of Bhutan's foreign policy. Bhutan had always appreciated India's security concern in the Himalayan region, especially after the Chinese occupation of Tibet. India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, remarked that "the protection of the borders and territorial integrity of Bhutan is the primary responsibility of India. India would consider any aggression on Bhutan as aggression on India". India thus had mutual security arrangements like the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan, which would keep surveillance over the subversive elements. But insurgents from Assam and Nepal have been creating problems for the governments of the two countries. The entry into the Royal Bhutanese Army, which is under the direct command of the King, is through voluntary recruitment. The Indian military training team provides army-training facilities. In 2007, the Indo-Bhutanese relations entered a new phase, because a revised India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty was signed in February and ratified in March, which ensured greater autonomy to Bhutan in external and military affairs and increased economic cooperation between the two countries. The Treaty also allowed Bhutan to import arms from and through India, and guaranteed equality and justice for citizens of each country when residing in the other.

Bhutan's economic linkages with India are close. India is the main market for Bhutan's apples, oranges, cardamom and timber. Besides, the hydro-electric power produced in Bhutan is purchased in bulk by India. Chhukha hydroelectric power (HEP) project, generating 336 MW, provides electricity for domestic consumption and also for export to India. The Kurichhu HEP and Tala HEP are supplying most of its electricity to India.

Bhutan is slowly trying to diversify its relations with neighbouring countries. In 1985 it

became a member of SAARC and in 2003, Bhutan became a member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and a signatory to the group's free trade area. In 2004, Bhutan signed the framework agreement on the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA), which is likely to be fully operational by 2016. It has opened dialogues with China. In 1998, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of China and Bhutan signed an official interim agreement to maintain peace and harmony in the border areas and to observe the status quo of the border existing before 1959. The contentious areas were Dogram, Sinchulumba and Dramana areas.

### **16.5.2 Myanmar**

Burma (Myanmar), under the democratic rule (1948-62), pursued a policy of neutrality and Non-Alignment. It was a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. However, when the military usurped power in 1962, it introduced changes in domestic and foreign policies. Initially Burma was isolationist under Ne Win and it sought to exclude foreign influences for almost a decade but later it realised the importance of foreign contacts and investments.

Myanmar, together with northern Thailand and northwestern Laos, has been known as Golden Triangle, where cultivation of opium has been substantial. The bulk of the opium and drugs are supplied in the Western markets. Burma, under Ne Win, began to give an impression to the UN and the US that it would suppress the cultivation of opium and in 1976 took part in the drug enforcement programmes, but it turned out to be an empty promise. Ne Win had to resign in 1988 but it did not usher in the era of democracy. General Saw Maung came into power who had ruthlessly suppressed people's movement for democracy. Burma stood isolated at the international level during 1988-91, when China started pouring support to the military rulers. The two countries signed cross border trade agreement, which opened the Burmese market and resource to the Chinese.

In 1990 China became the major supplier of consumer goods to Myanmar. In 1991 China became Myanmar's main supplier of weapons, sales of which were valued at more than US\$1000 million. Myanmar purchased fighter aircraft from China to curb insurgency problems. China improved roads and bridges and the Chinese firms became important in timber industry. Various places in Myanmar have become tourist centres for gambling, drugs and prostitution. The Chinese Yuan is an acceptable currency there. The Chinese Prime Minister, Li Peng paid a visit to Myanmar in 1994 and signed some agreements for providing soft loans for building infrastructure which included the construction of air base at Mandalaya, a highway to connect Mandalaya to Yunnan, a port at Hanggyi and a passage through Irrawady delta to Bay of Bengal. Another agreement worth US\$400 million for naval frigates, jet aircraft, tanks, APCs etc was also signed. Hence China has emerged as an important strategic partner.

Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in 1997. As the member countries of ASEAN wanted constructive engagement with the military rulers, they supported Burma at the regional level. They wanted to prevent Myanmar to be totally dependent on the Chinese. Myanmar was subsequently offered the membership of ARF also, but ASEAN has proved ineffective to change the pro-China tilt of Myanmar. Thailand has been one of the important protagonists of the constructive engagement. After 1988 it was a major source of foreign investments. The SLORC had granted licences to Thai business interests to exploit raw materials in Burma, especially teak and timber, in return for foreign exchange. Plans were to construct a bridge across Sai River, which would facilitate communication

between the two countries for a gas pipeline to Thailand. However, the efforts of Thailand and other ASEAN leaders for constitutional processes in Myanmar have been a frustrating experience.

India has been trying to cultivate relationship with Myanmar because of their association in ASEAN, ARF and BIMSTEC and also because of its policy of Look East. It has been developing roadways to link Myanmar and Tamu-Moreh road, which has become vibrant for people-to-people contacts. The project to construct other roadways at Mizoram and Nagaland frontiers with Myanmar are in progress. The joint collaboration to explore oil and gas are in the pipeline and initiatives have been taken to promote strategic cooperation in the Andaman region.

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## **16.6 MOVEMENT FOR REFORMS**

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There are undercurrents for reforms in Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar because of several domestic and external challenges. The culture generated by globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands liberal democratic system, free trade, human rights and environmental protection. The developing countries have to set standards to cope with the challenges and introduce reforms accordingly to exploit the opportunities in the new world order. Again there is also a threat of international terrorism led by Al Qaida, Taliban or the like. A new culture has to be evolved in order to face those challenges through political system, educational curriculum and ideals so that the younger generation remains immune from the virus of communal and fanatic elements.

### **16.6.1 Bhutan**

Bhutan has Buddhists and Hindus who argue the importance of their identity and culture and there is a need to develop respect for multiculturalism. The country has been facing ethnic unrest and there were several demonstrations by the ethnic Nepalese in 1990 to protest against the domination of Drukpas. King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-72) and his successor Jigme Singye Wangchuk have been sensitive to political developments in the country and have introduced reforms. The King was responsible for the establishment of National Assembly, Royal Advisory Council, Council of Ministers in 1950s and the system of Constitutional Monarchy in 2008. The king also wanted to nurture the party-system in the country, to keep an effective watch on legislative and executive bodies and on the expenditure of the major political parties that are funded by the government treasury.

In 1990-91, a number of ethnic Nepalese left Bhutan and came as refugees to Jhapa district in eastern Nepal. For Bhutanese refugees the UNHCR also arranged a relief programme. The number of refugees in that camp started growing by the number of ethnic Nepalese not only from Bhutan but also by Indian territories of Assam. Bhutan People's Party began to articulate the grievances of the so-called Bhutanese refugees to pressurise the government for more concessions and reforms. The king was sensitive to address the grievances but repeatedly said that his government could not tolerate pressures for change if they were based on intimidation and violence. The violence in Samtse, Chhukha, Tsirang, Sarpang and Gelephu in 1990s had a disturbing impact on the political system. However, the monarchy has been accommodative and is trying to work out a middle path for peaceful coexistence. Bhutan is expected to change gradually as the constitutional system has been evolved only recently, which is likely to support pragmatic reforms. But the victories of Maoist forces in Nepal and the growing Chinese influence in the region have empowered southern Bhutanese. These issues have to be addressed in the new

dispensation. Bhutan has always tried to prove itself as a model of welfare state where all the citizens have the right to free education and free health care facilities.

### **16.6.2 Tibet**

Tibet offers a different case for reforms. Although the Tibetan movement revolves around the preservation and promotion of Tibetan Culture and about three lakh Tibetan refugees struggling in India have ambition to return back to their homeland, the developments in Tibet under the Chinese reign are not favourable. China has been advocating autonomy for Tibet in the name of “one country, two systems”, but substantial steps in that direction have not been taken. For any political solution in Tibet, the presence and consent of the Dalai Lama is required. The Dalai Lama may be keen to visit Tibet with the support of the Chinese to find out an amicable solution but authorities in China are unwilling to invite him. However, the Chinese authorities are so afraid of the popularity of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, that they block every proposal of bringing the Dalai Lama for conflict resolution in Tibet.

According to the 2000 census, Tibet has a population of 2.62 million of which 2.42 million were Tibetans. Most of the indigenous people find their spirits stifled under the Chinese occupation. They aspire to have the functions of old monasteries restored, the role of the ousted Buddhist monks back and above all the return of their most revered leader, the Dalai Lama to Tibet. China is not willing to concede to such demands. There have been demonstrations against Chinese rule in Tibet and outside Tibet. There were mass demonstrations in Lhasa in 1987 against the Chinese rule, but that was suppressed. On the eve of Olympics (2008) in China, there were demonstrations once again but China did not show any sensitivity to address the grievances of the Tibetans. China is pursuing the policy of massive campaign against Tibetan nationalism. Many Tibetans, particularly the political detainees, are deprived of even the elementary safeguards of due process of law.

Further, the educational system needs to be reformed. The exclusive use of Chinese language in middle and secondary schools discourage children; so there is low enrolment rate and a high drop-out rate among Tibetans. Tibetan language teaching has low priority, with the result that Tibetan illiteracy rate is three times the Chinese national average. The objective of Chinese is to generate respect for Han cultural identity, language and values at the cost of Tibetan language, culture and identity. Again Tibetans have no right to homing in TAR and there is a continuing destruction of Tibetan neighbourhood, forced evictions and demolition of their homes. The Han Chinese are given preference in housing policies and Tibetans are discriminated. The Chinese interference and repression of religious freedom and activity in Tibet have been painful. In 1996 China started “patriotic education campaign” in the monasteries. Thus monks were called on to denounce the Dalai Lama. Hundreds of monks were persecuted and forced to leave their monasteries and many more arrested for not understanding the questions of Chinese officials.

### **16.6.3 Myanmar**

Myanmar is one of the most authoritarian and repressive regimes, where any norms and values of the civilised society are disliked. The civilian leaders campaigning for restoration of democracy are detained, tortured and persecuted. It is one of those countries, where government abolished private e-mail service and Internet is totally banned. Illegal possession of a fax machine or modem is punishable with seven to 15 years’ imprisonment. Naturally there is movement for reforms, but the military rulers have been able to suppress them

with an iron hand. There are about 1300 to 1400 political prisoners detained since 1988 and 70 NLD leaders have died while campaigning for restoration of democracy. The most respected popular leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi is under house arrest and strategies are evolved to delay any election for a popular mandate. (Has been released now).

There is also the difficult question of ethnic minorities, such as Karen, Shan and Rohingyas. They are frequent targets of state repression and violations. Sometimes they are forced to flee to neighbouring countries. Although the military has been calling for the meetings of national convention to finalise the broad contours of the constitution, it has been postponed because the rulers are not determined to restore democracy. It is well known that a roadmap for democratic reforms had been evolved under the leadership of General Khin Nyunt, but he is under house arrest at present. The respect for individual life, liberty and property, is more or less absent; the military wants to remain in power perpetually. Hence, Myanmar is witnessing silent movement for reforms.

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## **16.7 RELEVANCE OF GANDHISM IN TIBET, MYANMAR AND BHUTAN**

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There is a deep impact of Buddhist philosophy in the social life of the people in Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar. The broad meaning of Buddhism is not only confined to Sangha but it covers all aspects of humanism, internationalism and eternal peace. Mahatma Gandhi has taken numerous ideas from Buddhism and hence his political philosophy has relevance for the struggling masses in the Buddhist societies.

Gandhi always opposed the oppression and subjugation policies of the colonial masters. His tools to oppose the oppressive system were truth and non-violence. Lord Buddha had also opposed the political system of King Ajatashatru of Magadh. He was opposed to rigid rituals and animal sacrifices. He preached austerity and brotherhood. He had a great appeal on the social and political life for centuries. Similarly Gandhi wanted to transform social and political values of the masses in such a way that the oppressive regimes would crumble into pieces.

Gandhi had given the ideals of Rama Rajya, which signified great respect for human values. It was a system in which there was to be no oppressor and no oppressed. His Rama Rajya was to give equal opportunities to all the people and set an example of civil society worth emulating. The powers of the government were to be decentralised and all the villages were to be self-ruled and vibrant. Gandhi was also an exponent of the concept of “Unity in diversity”, where all the ethnic groups and races were to be treated without any discrimination.

Tibet is under an alien system. The Communist China has occupied it and any opposition to its governance is ruthlessly suppressed. Strategically the government has superior power and the changes cannot come through violent means. Similarly, Myanmar is firmly under the control of the military and every move against it by the opposition forces is unable to weaken the hold of the military. However, if there is proper mobilisation of public opinion and if there is united action to oppose the imposed political system, the oppressive establishment would be compelled to address their grievances. All this requires the support of an able leadership and leaders who can lead the people for renaissance and reformation. The Gandhian path is difficult to pursue, but in view of the presence of well-armed and strong adversary, this is the only pragmatic alternative to change the society and politics in those countries.

Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, civil disobedience movement or Quit India movement against colonial rulers were non-violent, and successful to arouse the masses. It generated patriotic ideas to throw out the colonial rule. The essential ways through which the movements were launched were not only through demonstrations but also through appropriate literature, dance, drama, short stories and various other activities. The religion and religious symbols were extensively used by Gandhiji to mobilise support. Although the dissident leaders in Tibet and Myanmar are using religion and religious symbols, the political masters are unwilling to give up. The international society has not been able to influence China to hold the act of self-determination in Tibet or free and fair election in Myanmar. Thus the civil societies in those countries have to build up pressure for democratic changes and peaceful coexistence.

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## 16.7 SUMMARY

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Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar constitute different political systems and foreign policies inspite of many similarities in terms of culture and religious systems. All the three of them have been following different modes of struggles to assert their freedom and sovereignty. Nation-building often involves a great amount of statesmanship, community work, cooperation and a larger vision of individual entity. Violence has often been witnessed in the course of these struggles but it is to be noted that the Gandhian way of mass mobilisation is still relevant. Truth and non-violence generate favourable environment for political resolution and bring about positive outcomes. Thus Gandhian method of non-cooperation, mass mobilisation and non-violent means becomes relevant for conflict resolution.

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## 16.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Analyse the characteristics of socio-political life in Tibet.
2. Examine the nature of ethnic conflict in Bhutan.
3. Discuss the role of military in the politics of Myanmar.
4. Evaluate the relevance of Gandhi for democratic movements in Myanmar.
5. What is the common factor in the society and politics of Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar?

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