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**Human Flows, Trade and Security:
The Changing Role of the Chumbi
Valley in the Himalayan Region**

**Dr. Karubaki Datta
Associate Professor and Director
Centre for Himalayan Studies
North Bengal University
District- Darjeeling
India**

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
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Dr. Karubaki Datta
Associate Professor and Director
Centre for Himalayan Studies
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Abstract

Extensive land and maritime networks have crisscrossed Asia for centuries providing for the basis for encounters between diverse people and cultures. The Chumbi valley of Tibet at the tri junction between Bhutan, India and China (Tibet) is one such corridor that has made possible a stream of human migration from Tibet to the south and also the exchange of religious and political ideas leading to the formation of the states of Bhutan and Sikkim (a part of India since 1974) in the 17th century.

The role of the Chumbivalley changed over time. The British from India were allured by prospects of trade with the Himalayan region, Tibet and beyond, through this route and also concerned for the security of their Indian empire from Russia beyond Tibet. The result was the British expedition of 1904 that forced open the valley to British trade marts. Of late China has become interested in the valley by strategic motivations. China's continued military modernization, rapid force deployment and expanding communication network in the region has become a matter of concern for India. China's presence in Chumbi Valley not only gives her proximity to India's North -East and particularly the Siliguri corridor but ultimately gives passage to Nepal and Bhutan.

In this paper we propose to analyse the changing role of the Chumbi valley in the history of the region. From a conduit of human migration it has become strategically vulnerable and is holding the security of the entire region in balance.

Key Words:

Corresponding Author:

Chumbi valley is the region of great geo strategic importance in the eastern Himalayas in the tri junction between Bhutan, India and China. Though in China now, it used to be a part of erstwhile Tibet which after Chinese takeover of the country in 1959 became TARC i.e. Tibet the Autonomous Region of China. It shares border with Sikkim in the west and Bhutan in the east. Sikkim is a part of India now but till 1973 it used to be an independent kingdom. It is 5 km from Siliguri corridor- in the Northern part of the state of West Bengal in India which is commonly described as the chicken neck that connects India to Northeast India and also to Nepal and Bhutan. Because of its location, the Chumbi valley is of geostrategic importance to both the giant states of India and China. It is often described as the as the ‘dagger drawn at India’s heart’.

Because of its strategic location it has been vital in shaping the history of the region. Migration has taken place from the region of Tibet to the south through this corridor, carrying with it the socio cultural influences of one country to the other. It has also been the stage where some great powers have interacted with each other to establish control over the trade and politics of the region.

To begin with a description of the valley itself , the two passes of Nathu-la in Sikkim (14,000 ft.) and Jelep-la (14,390 ft. meaning the ‘smooth and beautiful pass’) in Kalimpong of Darjeeling district of West Bengal, India, are the two gateways to the valley. Of these two, Jelep-la used to be the most frequented of all the passes opening out into the Mochu valley near Chumbi. The road from there leads directly to Lhasa – the capital of Tibet. Two other less frequented passes are Yak-la (14,400 ft.) which is close to Nathu-la and Cho-la (14,550 ft.) which leads more directly to Chumbi than any of the above and was formerly the main route from Sikkim to Phari in Chumbi .(Risley, 1894, p.3)

Phari was a market town -at an elevation of well over 14,000 feet and very cold and windy consisting of a rude collection of stone and sod houses ‘dominated by a huge grim looking fort.’. Even though always bustling with activities throughout the year ‘it seemed an altogether discouraging place to live.’ The town has been described by travellers as the highest, windiest and dirtiest town in the world...(Fader, 2004, p.81)

Phari was also called the head of the Chumbi valley. The route from there led to Gyantse and then to Lhasa itself. Gyantse was the seat of an important Tibetan administrative district with population of about 5000. This was also the meeting place of the three travel routes. To the western side along the river Nyang was situated Shigatse, Tibet’s second city and the seat of the Panchen Lama. Towards the east over the six thousand feet Katro la was situated Lhasa – the sacred as well as the forbidden capital of Tibet. ‘Situated in the middle of a fertile valley which was entirely surrounded by hills (reaching to 16,000 feet) that was crisscrossed with irrigation channels, Gyantse (itself over 134,00 ft. high) had from time immemorial quickly become one of Tibet’s leading communities in as much as through its portals passed all the trade from the east on its way to Northwest Tibet and to Ladakh and to Nepal, India and Bhutan’ (Fader, 2004,p.81) Gyantse possessed a particularly busy and

elaborate market that was rich in colour , human interest and activity , wrote one visitor in 1949 ‘ the goods are spread out on the ground or on rough table...and the merchants often sit under large umbrellas or awnings, where they enjoy gossiping as much as making sales....here one could find Chinese brick tea, Tibetan salt and soda, dried fruits, jewelry, dyes, handwoven Tibetan rugs and bowls made of silver birch transported from Bhutan’ (Fader, 2004,p. 86)

Through this route- in Tibet at the end of which lay the Chumbi Valley in the southern tip of Tibet was carried on the entire southward bound Tibetan trade with Bengal or Sikkim. In 1962, following the Indo China war both the routes were closed down. Of late however, trade has started once again through Nathu-la in Sikkim.

Migration from Tibet to Sikkim and Bhutan

The influence of Tibet on the demography and culture of Sikkim has been profound and this influence has travelled mainly through the Chumbi valley. The valley, at one point of time was regarded as a part of Sikkim itself. Sikkim was situated just next to Tibet but in this mountainous region with little or no communication and very few inhabitants, there was hardly any concept of a border between the two countries and thus, it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion regarding the actual extent of the state. According to some British sources Sikkim used to be much bigger than what it is now and that it included the Mochu valley (Risley, 1894, p.1). Since the river Mochu is variously known as Amochu or Chumbi, it implies that Chumbi valley was very much a part of Sikkim. Sikkim has lost a bulk of its original territory over time– one portion that has become part of West Bengal now is Darjeeling that was handed over to the British by the king himself in 1835. On the whole it is possible that Chumbi valley at one point of time was indeed a part of Sikkim. The boundary between Sikkim and Tibet was ‘clearly defined’ for the first time by the Britain –China Convention of 17.03.1890 .

The influence of Tibet on Sikkim has been profound. This influence has come basically through the Kham-pa or Kham –ba- immigrants from the Tibetan province of Kham, commonly called Bhutias.

The original inhabitants of Sikkim were some tribes viz. Rongs or the Lepchas and some Limbus and Mangars. The Bhutias were later migrants but being dominant by nature they managed to establish their supremacy over the original inhabitants. These Bhutias, representing Tibeto-Burman stock introduced Tibetan culture, a combination of pastoralism and settled agriculture and of course Tibetan Buddhism. Docile and unassertive, the Lepchas were easily relegated to a secondary position. They were gradually converted into Buddhism and brought into the fold of the ruling community over time but the Limbus, unable to adjust with the Bhutias migrated out of Sikkim.

It is tough to reconstruct the history of Sikkim prior to the 17th century. The Lepchas did not have any script and hence no written account and the vast

body of Tibetan literature with occasional reference to Sikkim are abstract in character and mixed with myths and legends. Being so, little does it help to get a clear picture of the course of events.

Legend has it that there are 14 original main families of Tibetan origin in Sikkim. Bhutia migration took place in phases KhyeBumsa being one of the earliest immigrants. The descendants of KhyeBumsa were divided into six families. With KhyeBumsa came other Tibetans or Khampas who founded the other eight families of respectable names. Besides these there are other families of Tibetan origin which form the *raichhung* or the little families who came to Sikkim at various times since the establishment of the monarchy. Like those 14 original families they are also enjoying some religious and social privileges in Sikkim society. While their exact place of origin is not mentioned specifically, at least one family viz. the sTod-pa or Tumn-sTod-pa are so called from their having first settled in Tumu or Upper Mochu Valley. After them came others such as Chumbi –pa, immigrant from Kham in Tibet and Ha in Bhutan to the lower reaches of the Mochu near Chumbi. The history of immigration from the Chumbi region is indicated by the name of the group itself. (Risley, 1894, pp.28-30)

The most important impact of Bhutia migration was the consecration of the first *Chogyal* or king of Sikkim in 1642 by three Tibetan *lamas*.(one of them from South Tibet i.e. Chumbi Valley through Darjeeling), Incidentally, Phuntsog Namgyal, the first king of Sikkim was the great grandson of Khye Bumsa the first immigrant from Tibet. Henceforth Buddhism was proclaimed as the state religion and a spree of monastery building activity set in. This Buddhism was basically of Tibetan type but intermingling with local beliefs and rituals gave it a particularly Sikkimese character. Buddhism remained the state religion till the merger of the state with India in 1974 when monarchy was abolished. But even after that the Bhutias managed to maintain their dominance in all spheres of life and now with influx of Tibetan refugees in the state, the impact of Buddhism and Tibetan culture continues to remain prominent in the state.

As stated above, the hill regions of the district of Darjeeling of West Bengal was with Sikkim till 1835. As a result Darjeeling too came to share some of the demographic and cultural characteristics of Tibet. There are some Bhutias in Darjeeling till this date.

The border between Bhutan and Chumbi Valley is formed by the Great Himalayan range the highest peak being the Chomolhari (23,997ft). The access to Bhutan from all directions is difficult due to its various river systems that cut through the country in a North South direction. The rivers are wild and impossible to navigate in the rainy season. There are some passes on Bhutan's border with Tibet but only three are of significance. Of these the one which is historically the most important is the route from Paro and Ha valleys in western Bhutan into the Chumbi Valley in Tibet. Streams of Tibetan migration have taken place through this route and these Tibetans have shaped the history of culture and politics of Bhutan.

Unlike in Sikkim we do not have any record of the specific branches of Tibetans who migrated into the country but Tibetans have entered the country in waves and the political history of Bhutan is closely interlinked with its religious history which is actually the history of branches of monastic Buddhism imported from Tibet by these Tibetans in phases.

The earliest introduction of Tibetan Buddhism through Tibetan migrants is difficult to identify but there are references to the descendants of a member of Lhasa Royal family who had fled to Bhutan in the 10th century. From 12th century onwards one comes across references to various subsects of Tibetan Buddhism in Bhutan. Most of the elite families in Bhutan in subsequent centuries claim descent from these *lamas* belonging to these sects. (Rose, 1977, pp. 24-25) The route through which they migrated is not specifically known but their concentration and dominance in the western Bhutan highlands point to the possibility of their having taken the route through Chumbi Valley.

The protagonist of modern Bhutan was the prominent *Drukpa lama* Ngwagang Namgyal who came in 1616 and unified almost the whole country. In all probability he too came from the west because he established his political and religious authority in western Bhutan first and towards the end of his life in 1652 his authority was established in parts of eastern Bhutan as well (Rose, 1977, pp. 25). The political system that he founded bore a strong resemblance to that of Tibet under the *Dalai Lama*. The system, headed by both the *Dharma* and the *Deb Rajas* continued till 1907, only to be replaced by the monarchy. Buddhism continues to be the state religion even now when absolute monarchy has been replaced by constitutional monarchy and democracy by the promulgation of the new constitution of 1908. In other words, the influence of Tibet and Tibetan culture on Bhutan has been profound and this has been possible due to Tibetan migration, a large part of which has taken place through the Chumbi Valley.

Trade through the Chumbi Valley

One purpose of human movement through the Chumbi valley was definitely trade. There was a regular small scale transborder trade carried on by the locals. The growth of trade between Tibet and India through the Chumbi Valley on a much larger scale was a later development of the British period. Initially Nathu *la* and then Jelep *-la* became the entrepots of this trade.

By this period Tibet had become a forbidden country for all the people of non Buddhist origin. No formal permission was given to the Britishers to carry on official trade or to open any trading mart inside Tibet. Informal trade however was indeed carried on along the border. Transborder trade began to develop in a more systematic manner after the handover of Darjeeling to the British in 1835 by the king of Sikkim. The earliest reference to Tibetan traders is from the account of Campbell. In 1848 he came across a party of Tibetans en route to Darjeeling but the negligible character of the trade is indicated by an account left by Rennie in 1865 –

‘At the present time, no extent of trade exists and what does, is carried on chiefly on sheep used as pack animals. Wool is the principal commodity brought from Thibet, cotton and tobacco being taken back in exchange. Ponies also, gold, silver, precious stones, coarse woollen and China goods are sometimes brought over from Thibet. The traders generally pass from Thibet about November before the snows set in, and return in spring after the melting of the snow has commenced: passes in the mountains being impracticable in the interval. Judging however, from the number of Thibetians seen about Darjeeling during the period I was there, they evidently either remain until later periods of the year or come across during the summer months as well.’

It was around this time that the British rulers explored the possibilities of transborder trade in the region. Reports were prepared by officers in Darjeeling in 1864 and 1873 on the possibilities, along with all other related information like routes, items and impediments, if any, of trade. Both the reports pointed out the imperfect communication system as the basic obstacle to development of trade.

There are references to Tibetan traders in such reports. The report of 1873 mentions such traders but it is not very clear whether the people who traded were actually Tibetans from the heartland of the country or people living in the border areas of Sikkim. In any case it was clear that these people had access to Phari in Chumbi valley and they had already started exploring the possibilities of trade with Darjeeling. On 28th October 1873 Edgar (reprint 2004, p.32) also met some traders who were on their way to Darjeeling where they wanted to exchange coarse blanket for tobacco. At Keu Laka he met a family of herdsmen from whom he learnt that they had supplied butter and cream cheese to the markets of Darjeeling and Lhasa. These markets were mainly dependent for beef, butter and cheese of the herds of cow of the Phari region of Chumbi valley. By the turn of the century Tibetan trade ventures in the region became quite frequent. Darjeeling grew as a coveted hill station and the scope of trade and business also expanded. Around the last quarter of the 19th century Tibetan traders visited the Sunday market of the town regularly. The items they dealt with included ‘salt, yak tails, sometimes gold dust, musk and other commodities of various kinds besides sheep, goats in large flocks. Brien, a contemporary writer, in his account of Darjeeling has described how they sold and returned laden with tobacco, broadcloth, piece goods, and other commodities in February, March. During their stay in Darjeeling they used to live in small tents which they brought with them. Items exported to Tibet included tobacco, indigo and *kutch*. The Tibetan traders took the route starting from Chola, Yekla, Nathula, Cumra, and Dangas. All this met in Sikkim through which they entered Darjeeling via Gangtok and Dikeeling.

The trade route changed before long when following the annexation of Kalimpong (another town in the subdivision of Darjeeling) in 1865, the Indo Tibetan trade of Darjeeling gradually shifted to this newly developed town which was more suitably located for the caravan coming down from Jelep-la and Nathu-la from the Chumbi. Coarse wool of Tibet began to be imported in huge amount and became the most important article of trade. While the traders

from Tibet carried the bales of wool to the godowns in Kalimpong and there were several Indian traders, most of them Marwaris, who traded with this article and re-exported them to the south of Bengal and sometimes to other parts of India and even abroad. Rise of this trade changed the character of the Darjeeling hills and particularly Kalimpong. Fader, in his book (2004) has given a detailed description of the life and business activities of these Tibetan traders in Kalimpong.

As for the trade from Sikkim to Tibet, the nature of this trade by the British was defined by the Sikkim –Tibet Convention of 5.2.1893. Before that in 1861, by the Treaty of Tumloong the British Government had extracted full liberty of commerce between the British and Sikkim subjects. The right to open roads through Sikkim for trade was also ensured. It was a matter of time that they would step out into the Chumbi valley from Sikkim and this was ensured by the Convention of 1893. A trade mart was to be established at Yatung on the Tibetan side of the frontier that would be open to all the British subjects for trade. The government of India was to be free to send officers to reside there to watch the condition of British trade and the British subjects were at liberty to travel to and fro between the frontier and Yatung, to reside in Yatung and to rent houses and godowns for their own accommodation and the storage of their goods. The foothold that the British gained in the Chumbi Valley as a result of this Sikkim Tibet Convention of 05.12.1893 culminated by the Great Britain – Tibet Convention of 07.09.1904 following the Younghusband Expedition of the same year.

Along with traders came the others as well. The route to Kalimpong through Jelep-la was frequented by the whole range of people who wanted to visit this part of India - from the sacred to the profane, the monks and the pilgrims, students, politicians, and activists, and even some common people who wanted to make India their home. Tibet's relations with China complicated from the 1911 Republican Revolution onwards and particularly worsened in the 1950s. The movement of people also increased. Rich Tibetans who could afford, sent their children to schools in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, rented houses and even settled down in these towns. After 1959 when the *Dalai Lama* the IVth Himself fled Tibet and took refuge in India, He was followed by thousands of his countrymen, most of whom followed this much trodden path through Chumbi valley to enter India.

From Chumbi to Lhasa – The British expedition of 1903 -04

The Younghusband Expedition of 1903-4 to Tibet was an event of far reaching significance for the history of this region. Not only did this expedition forced open the doors of the forbidden land of Tibet for the first time, it also changed the political equation between Tibet and China with the result that from then on Tibet tilted more towards the British and ultimately severed its relation with China.

Actually the British interest in Tibet stemmed from its concerns for the security of its Indian empire. Tibet was a 'forbidden land' and there was hardly any information available about its relations with Russia or actual political status vis a vis China. The first mission was sent as early as 1782 under Bogle and several more followed in course of the next century. ¹Younghusband expedition was the culmination of this. The decision to send the expedition was taken by Lord Curzon out of his concern for the Northern frontier of the British India particularly from the threat of Russian advance and unconfirmed stories of a secret Russian agreement with China whereby China had permitted Tibet to orientate towards Russia in exchange of Russia's assent to permit China to take over areas of eastern or Chinese Turkestan and eastern Mongolia. Any possible Russian influence in Tibet, Curzon feared, coupled with support of China would pose a dangerous threat to the entire frontier of British India.²

Convinced that the only way to prevent that was to send a British mission to Tibet, Lord Curzon submitted a proposal to the Imperial Government in London seeking permission to send a 'pacific mission' to conclude a treaty of friendship and trade with Tibetan government.

The Home government authorized him to send the mission but only as far as Khamba Dzong in Chumbi Valley, a Tibetan fortress town just beyond the Sikkim border. The mission was led by Col. Younghusband with J.C.White- the Political Officer of Sikkim as his second in command. The mission reached the Dzong in July 1903 but talks failed. This prompted Curzon to extract a reluctant permission from the Home Government to mount an expedition accompanied by a sizeable protective military contingent. The expedition proceeded to Lhasa but by then 13th Dalai Lama had already fled Lhasa to Urga in Chinese Mongolia and the British could not find any trace of Russian presence or activity in Lhasa.

The British force in absence of the *Dalai Lama* drafted the Lhasa Convention and got it signed by the Tibetan officials on 7th September 1904. The main features of the convention called for opening of new trade marts at Gyantse and Gartok with a British trade agent to be the resident at each. No selling or leasing of Tibetan territory to any foreign power (aimed basically against Russia), the imposition of an indemnity of Rs.75 lakh. on Tibet for Britain to be paid in 75 installments . The Chumbi valley was to remain under the British until the indemnity was paid.

The terms of the Convention, unilaterally imposed upon Tibet were nullified in course of the next few years the most significant consequence being the resignation of Curzon himself. The Government, eager to prove to the

¹Bogle Mission was originally sent by Warren Hastings in 1774-75 to Bhutan to induce better relationship with Bhutan and to seek some information about Tibet as well. The Bogle Mission was followed by that of Turner in 1783, K. K. Bose in 1815, Pemberton in 1837, Eden in 1853, Rennie in 1865 etc.

²Accounts of exchanges of gifts between 13th *Dalai Lama* and the Russian Tsar through the Russian monk Dorjjeff has been recorded by several contemporary writers including the Japanese monk Kawaguchi. A Zen Buddhist monk, he had travelled and studied in Tibet for three years including a 14 month stay in Lhasa. There were suspicions regarding his actual motives and he has been accused of spying by some but this is a debatable issue.

world that it had no territorial ambition in Tibet took a policy of non interference and withdrew all troops from the Chumbi Valley in 1908. The British garrison however continued in the trade marts. New trade agreement was signed with China and all the trade marts at Gyantse, Gartok and Yatung would now be placed under the control of the Chinese officials. The Chinese promptly paid the Rs. 25 lakh of indemnity in three annual installments and asserted their presence in the scene. The Chinese control continued only till 1911 when their very presence in Tibet was eliminated following the Republican Revolution in China itself.

The post of British trade agent came into being from the days of 1904 treaty. The British were permitted to maintain one trade representative in Tibet accompanied by one company of Indian infantry with two British officers in charge stationed in Gyantse. A small detachment of them remained at Yatung which became the trade agency's headquarters.

Between Yatung and Gyantse - a distance of about 140 miles was dotted every 10/15 miles with comfortable British built *Dak Banglows* i.e rest houses for use of both travelers and officials. This strategic trade route was jointly administered by both British and Tibetan trade agents in accordance with the treaty of 1904 at Lhasa. The term Trade Agents however was in a sense misleading because British Trade Agency had little to do with trade matters. The agent was more of a vice consular or even a consul general. He was given the title of Trade Agent because he was appointed by the British Foreign Office due to the indefiniteness of the political relations between China and Tibet.

The Indian colonial functionaries began to draw schemes for further commercial linkage of Tibet with their Indian empire. Steps were taken to establish trade agency in the Tibetan town of Shigatse also. Charles Bell, Settlement Officer, Kalimpong proposed and surveyed the route to link the valley to the Indian railway system. About 50 miles long railway track between the Gangetic plains and Chumbi valley on the narrowest location across the Himalayas was proposed to be the commercial link of the Himalayan plateau to the industrial belt of Bengal. But it was not to be as Curzon had to leave India.

Chumbi Valley – The High Security Zone of Modern Times

Of late Chumbi Valley has assumed a different geo strategic importance and has become crucial from the perspective of Sino Indian relations. In the second half of the 20th century two new regimes emerged in the Asian scene – The Peoples' Republic of China and the Indian Union which turned out to be two adversaries in terms of their ideologies as well as territorial interests. In 1962 within a few years from Independence of India in 1947, the two armies clashed over the McMahon Line in the Eastern Himalayas. Despite several talks since then, the border issues involving 5045 kms of undemarcated borders have not been solved and the Indian policy towards the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan refugees is not well accepted by China. China's continued military modernization and incremented upgrade of its military posture in Tibet to

enable rapid force deployment backed by logistics capability and communication infrastructure are worrisome. The two sides continue to maintain a frigid friendly relation and Chumbi Valley has become crucial for territorial ambition and security concern of both China and India. The valley is of great geo strategic importance to China because of its shared border with Sikkim and Bhutan.¹

By virtue of its control over Tibet, China has gained proximity to India's Northeast and Siliguri corridor. Nepal is already following a pro Chinese policy since June 2010. China has already started a policy of enhancing connectivity through a well laid out road and railway network all around Tibet to enhance its connectivity with the other parts of China as well as with the countries of South Asia. The 1142 km section from Golmud to Lhasa competing the Quighai Tibet Railway is another indicator of China's urge for connectivity. These and other infrastructure developments are creating security threat for India. Shigatse is just 250 km from Nathu-*la* and Yatung just 50 km. (Jacob, 2007, p.83) According to reports, (South Asian Idea, 2012) China has plans to extend its railway network from Lhasa to Zangmu as well as Shigatse and possibly to Yatung at the opening of the Chumbi Valley.

The reopening of the Nathu-*la* for trade between the two countries can be looked at from two perspectives. This is definitely a sign of improved relations between the two. Yet at the same time it calls for caution on part of India as foothold on Nathu- *la* can also give the scope to fulfill its territorial ambition to China. It gives a scope to China to enhance its proximity and trans border trade with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Even Tibetan region of China would be able to avail the facilities of Kolkata port and it would be easier and cheaper to travel to the eastern region of China from Tibet. The situation calls for an overall strengthening of India's defence preparedness in the region. (Jacob, 2007, pp.85-86) The Indian Prime Minister Dr.Manmohan Singh had once admitted that China would like to have a foothold in South Asia and we have to be aware of this reality. (South Asian Idea 2012)India needs a penetrating understanding of this reality in shaping its response to China's advances and accordingly has embarked upon a policy of infrastructure development and road construction along the border with China. The border trade from Nathu-*la* is also kept under control which has, in fact disappointed China. China complains of a certain kind of apathy and restrictions on trade on India's part in Nathu-*la*. The volume of trade too is much less than expected – China complains.

Bhutan is located in a strategically critical point. Should the country diplomatically ally with China the two Indian vulnerabilities at Chumbi Valley and Tawang in North-east will be greatly exposed. Access to Chumbi Valley through Bhutan in addition to the traditional routes would sever and isolate N.E in the event of a war with China. Thus, with Nepal already taken a pro Chinese

¹Mao se dong had once defined Tibet as the palm which had five fingers, Ladakh, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. With control over Tibet now, Chinese ambition is to bring these regions under its area of influence. The importance of Chumbi Valley in this context cannot be underestimated.

stand, India cannot afford to lose Bhutan as a partner in its foreign policy option. This can be achieved not only through infrastructure construction but also by engaging Bhutan as strategic partner. There has been suggestions that in order to retain Bhutan India should also maximize its soft power approach providing an enabling environment, encourage Buddhism to flourish in Sikkim and thereby highlight the commonalities between Bhutan and this region of India and encourage cultural exchanges.

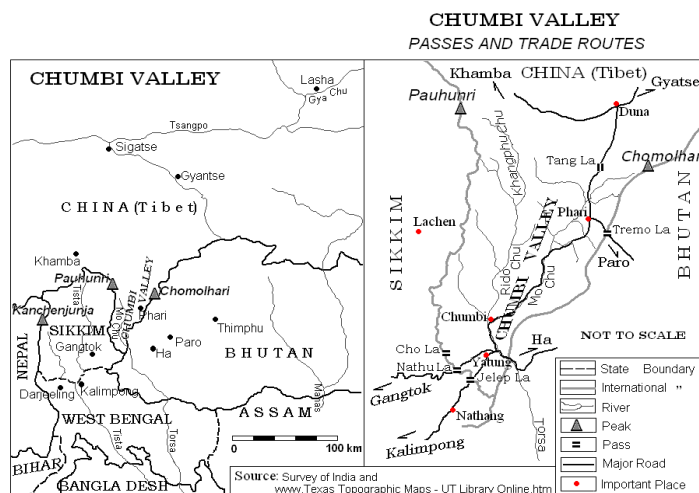
Conclusion

Chumbi Valley of Tibet is one of those many geographical corridors that have enhanced connectivity between the different parts of Asia. In this case it has been the route through which migration has taken place from Tibet to Sikkim and to Bhutan as well. The politics and culture of these Himalayan states have been shaped by this interaction with Tibet and this has certainly added to the cultural diversity of the region. Yet the route gradually assumed a different economic and political significance when in course of the 20th century the British rulers of India, out of their economic interests and imperial ambitions got involved in the great game over Tibet with their probable political adversaries – the Chinese and the Russians. Chumbi Valley became the stage where the British ambition to open up Tibet was played out. With the changed political scenario of conflict Chumbi Valley has now become the gateway of possible Chinese expansion beyond the Himalayas in South Asia. The Valley, now- the point where the two great Asian powers of China and India face each other in a war of nerves has become one of the most fortified and secured zones in the Himalayan belt.

The politics of the region has passed through various transformations. The greatest change was in the status of Tibet .Chumbi Valley has also transformed from a little trodden path to a high security zone. It symbolizes the historical transformation of the region as a whole.

The Region





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