

# AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONS

Priyanka, Bhagyadhar Sethy  
M.A, PhD. Scholar

Indira Gandhi National Open University, Jawaharlal Nehru University  
Department: Political Science

**Abstract:** India-Nepal relations started their relationship with the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty of peace and friendship. Both countries enjoy close, linguistic, marital, and cultural ties at people level between Indian and Nepalese. Since late 2015 political issues and border disputes have strained relations between the two countries with anti-Indian sentiment of growing among the government.

**Keywords:** Relationship, Linguistic, Issues, Disputes, Government

**Summary:** India and Nepal shares close cultural and Political ties with each other. The relationship is based on 1950 treaty of Peace and Friendship. There are problems between both countries on several issues. New problem arose after promulgation of Nepal's Constitution in 2015. Both the governments are trying to resolve the issues between them.

## INTRODUCTION

Relations between India and Nepal have traditionally been close since ancient times as a result of geographical location and common religious, linguistic and cultural identities that overlap the two countries. This also manifests in state to state relations which have grown stronger over the years, reinforced by regular exchange of visits at high levels, notwithstanding the political changes in both the countries in the past few years. Both the countries have periodically acknowledged each other's value and importance and have also described the relationship as 'special' on various occasions.

The relationship between India and Nepal is guided by the geo-politics of the region. Nepal lies on the northern frontier of India and its border on the South extends till the plains of India. The geographical contiguity of Nepal with India makes the former lie within the geo-strategic perimeter of the latter.

Nepal is a landlocked country, situated on the southern slopes of Himalayas. It has Tibet in the north and India in the south. It has common frontiers both with India and China. Ever since China established its full sovereignty over Tibet, Nepal's position has become all the more important for India. It may be regarded as a buffer state between India and China. Nepal shares an open border with India and is bounded by three sides, east, south and west. Nepal has her unique position in the South Asian Region, either in geographical terms or in political aspects.

India and Nepal started their special relationship with the 1950 Indo- Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship and accompanying letters that defined security relations between both the countries, and an agreement governing both bilateral trade and trade transiting Indian soil.

There are some irritants in relationship of India and Nepal such as border dispute related to Kalapani and Susta territories. Another issue is sharing of water between these two countries, Nepal shares 6000 rivers and streams with India. Various treaties have been reached to divide the water between the two, but many in Nepal say they are disproportionate with India getting far more than its fair share.

Recently there are some issues which created problems between the relations of both countries such as Madhesi issue which started after promulgation of Nepal's new constitution. Relations between New Delhi and Kathmandu during the last ten years had reached an all time low, with all mainstream political parties in Nepal doubting India's commitment to facilitating the process of writing new constitution in Nepal.

The Modi government came to power in May 2014, New Delhi has reoriented its foreign policy to boost bilateral ties with Nepal. Reason for the Modi government to engage Kathmandu at the highest political level is China's increasing investment in the infrastructure, energy and other sectors of Nepal.

It is in interest of both India and Nepal to maintain close relations with each other.

### AREAS OF DISPUTE AND CONFLICT

Relations between India and Nepal are close yet fraught with difficulties stemming from geography, economics, the problem inherent in big power- small power relations, and common ethnic and linguistic identities that overlap the two countries borders.

The Nepalese people, have the impression or the believe that they are badly been cheated upon, by India in all water agreements, treaties on water resources and other cases, the people in Nepal look onto every Indian activity with great suspicion.

There are various contending issues in India-Nepal relations such as water has been a issue of contention because of hydropower sector in Nepal face problems on several counts. There is a sentiment in Nepal that India has cheated Nepal in these treaties. Natural resources have been sold out without taking into accounts its interest.

There exists a long list of treaties which are considered unfair by the Nepali side. This list includes 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Koshi and Mahakali water treaties, among others. Nepali people feel that they are not provided with their fair share of water and also they are angry about how Nepal's political leadership easily bows down to India's terms.

The issue of replacing the 1950 Friendship treaty with India according to the spirit and aspirations of the Nepalese and according to the need of the time and situation is another issue in the relationship between India and Nepal. Nepal grumbled that the treaty had been signed on unequal terms. The Nepalese government argued that the treaty was signed at a time when Nepal was weak and not in a position to articulate its demands.

Border disputes between two countries are another contentious issue that creates friction in bilateral relations. Nepal and India must resolve border disputes including two major areas Susta and Kalapani. During Jaswant singh tenure as external affairs minister high level talks were held between the two countries on the issue of Kalapani, an enclave located at the tri junction of India, Nepal and China. Nepal claim that the enclave located within her territory was strongly objected by India. Although Indian Government kept quite in this issue, the Nepalese parliament, political parties and the general people and the street were heated by the Indian army presence in Kalapani.

Many Nepali citizens feel that India holds a "big-brother" attitude towards Nepal and interferes in its internal affairs. Time and again, India is accused of utilizing diplomatic power for its vested-interests.

China is growing interests in hydroelectricity projects in Nepal as a means of fueling Tibet's development would raise the stakes for India.

Apart from these old issues between India and Nepal. There are some contemporary issues which led friction in their bilateral relations such Madhesi issue. New constitution which promulgated on September 20th 2015 led to protests by Madhesis. India is unhappy because Nepal denies the rights to the Nepalese Madhesis living on border, many of them have close familial ties with Indians. A discontented Madhesi is of course an issue for India- after all, unrest in southern Nepal bordering India has the potential to destabilize the Indian side of the border. This led to economic blockade on the Indian side of Nepalese border.

The two countries have reached a low point, battered by the Madhesis agitation against new constitution of Nepal. The unrest has left more than 50 people dead, leading the Madhesis to block all crucial entry points on the border with India. This in turn created shortages of essential commodities in Nepal. Unfortunately, the Nepalese government felt that the blockade was done at the behest of the Indian government, placing a serious strain on bilateral ties.

The porous border between India and Nepal has created problems that have adversely affected the relations between the two neighbors.

### AREAS OF PEACE AND COOPERATION

India Nepal's elder brother, not big brother, - Sushma Swaraj (external affair Minister)

No two countries share a more intimate and complex relationship than India and Nepal. Both the countries share close linguistic, marital, religious and cultural ties with each other.

The treaty of Peace and friendship which was signed on 31st July 1950 provide base for special relationship between India and Nepal. The Indo- Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship provided for an open border between the two nations, permitting free and unrestricted travel of people and goods and allowing the immigration of Indians to Nepal and of Nepalese people to India, granting equal rights to them. Both nations agreed to respect each other's territorial integrity and independence.

The Treaty also facilitated extensive cooperation on strategic issues, with both nations required to consult each other on affairs of regional security.

Both countries cannot afford to alienate each other. There are so many reasons for India to maintain cordial relations with Nepal. Politically, Nepal's progress is an affirmation of the Gujral doctrine. It is important for the success of regional integration measures as Nepal is part of SAARC. Economically, Numerous fast flowing rivers in have immense hydroelectric potential which can be use to resolve water crisis in U.P, Bihar and other neighboring states of India. India is also a largest exporter of Petroleum products in Nepal. Strategically, Nepal act as a buffer state between India and China , Ever since China established its full sovereignty over Tibet, Nepal's position has become all the more important for India. India-Nepal jointly man the Nepal -Tibet border under 1950 treaty provisions. On Security lines, Nepal is important to address threats emanating from the open border like trafficking, counterfeit currency flow-inflow, terrorism etc. It is important to prevent the spread of Maoist ideology in the Red corridor region of India.

Hence, we see that Nepal occupies a multi-dimensional relationship with India which magnifies its importance.

India is also very important for Nepal because of the geographical and cultural realities. Nepal's open border with India sits along the low lying Indo Gangetic plain which facilitates trade and travel. Hindus make up more than 80% of Nepal's population, just as they do in India and Madhesis and Indians frequently intermarry. Moreover, India is Nepal's largest trade partner and serves as its only viable transit route. Bilateral between the countries \$5.5% billion in 2014, and Indian goods accounted for 65% of Nepal's imports.

After promulgation of Nepal's constitution on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015 and its opposition by Madhesis leading to blockade on India-Nepal border, all these developments worked against India-Nepal relations. India-Nepal relations were all time low during this phase.

The governments of both countries knew that it will not be in favour of their foreign policy to ignore other country. Government of both countries are working for reviving relations with each other. India is considering in reviving its 'Gujral Doctrine' especially towards Nepal.

Just after assuming office Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal in August 2014 as part of his 'neighborhood first policy' and it was highly successful. He was the first foreign leader to address constituent assembly of Nepal, His remarks drew widespread praise from all Nepalese political parties and seemed to promise new beginning in India-Nepal relations.

Nepal has also shown interest in improving relation with India. K.P Oli visited India after becoming PM of Nepal. His visit helped reinforce India's position as a key player in the Himalayan country and build mutual confidence. The three day visit provided an opportunity to narrow down difference that had cropped up between the two countries over the past few years and it led to the fast tracking of pending infrastructure projects and newly announced initiatives. During the PM K.P Oli's visit to India, Nepal India signed just three new agreements, a partnership in agriculture and plans for connectivity through inland waterways and expanding linkages to connect Indian railway lines in Kathmandu breaking the traditions of signing long list of documents. Both sides described the three initial agreements as 'path breaking agreements' to boost connectivity between the two countries. The two prime ministers also inaugurated a petroleum line to be constructed between India and Nepal.

We can see that India-India Nepal strengthen the age old friendly ties between the two countries in diverse sectors. India government has now reaffirmed its desire to increase investment in Nepal's developmental activities. This will improve people to people contact accelerate Nepal's economy, and also help India check china's growing presence in Nepal.

## CONCLUSION

Nepal's constitution of 2015 and controversies attaching to it led India's foreign policy towards Nepal into a big dilemma.

India initially extended its support to the Madhesis. India took a strong position advocating that the political discontent be addressed. All this will generate resentment in Kathmandu valley and loose goodwill of the hill communities in Nepal and they criticized India of interfering into internal matter of Nepal. Later it realizes that if it antagonizes the ruling class, it might yield to greater Chinese influence in Nepal.

India took a dramatic U-turn in its policy towards Madhesis and asked Nepal's tarai leadership to drop the demand of changes in constitution and participate in the elections. There was a sense of betrayal among the Madhesis.

China's increasing investment in Nepal in the infrastructure energy and the other sectors of Nepal is a big worry for India. There is consensus among Indian strategic and experts that Pakistan already enjoys goodwill among some sections of Nepalese, China's involvement in the Himalayan country could facilitate the emergence of a China- Nepal nexus against India.

No doubt, the purposes of the visit have been achieved and a new phase of relationship has begun with India acknowledging Nepal as an 'equal partner'. While the visit has set a new tone in the relationship, it has also brought fresh challenges to the fore in terms of each country addressing the other's concerns. Certainly, the challenges are more for India than they are for

Nepal. There is a trust deficit in Nepal because of the Indian reputation for delaying implementation of various projects. This has sent a wrong message in Nepal that the delays are deliberate. After Oli's latest visit, which has created new expectations in Nepal, India needs to seriously address this problem of delivery-lag.

Despite some twists and turns in the recent past there is no alternative to excellent bilateral relations. Both countries have no other choice but to live in harmony.

India shares a delicate relationship with Nepal, which is 'Roti-beti sambandh'. Its approach has to be distinctly different from how it deals with other neighbors. Upfront New Delhi should review the sub-national performance of its diplomatic regime, dealing with complex Nepal's affairs in the last few months so as to send a message that it is committed to its 'neighborhood first policy'.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Baral, L. (1992). India-Nepal Relations: Continuity and Change. *Asian Survey*, 32(9), 815-829. DOI: 10.2307/2645073
- [2] Subedi, S. (1994). India-Nepal Security Relations and the 1950 Treaty: Time for New Perspectives. *Asian Survey*, 34(3), 273-284. DOI: 10.2307/2644985
- [3] Muni, S.D. (1973). *Foreign Policy of Nepal*. Delhi, National Publishing House.
- [4] Nihar Nayak (2011) The Madhesi Movement in Nepal: Implications for India, *Strategic Analysis*, 35:4, 640-660, DOI: 10.1080/09700161.2011.576099
- [5] Gyawali, D., & Ajaya Dixit. (1999). Mahakali Impasse and Indo-Nepal Water Conflict. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(9), 553-564. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4407709>
- [6] Chauhan, Rishika (2017, June 20). Road ahead for India-Nepal Relations. *The Hindu business line*. Retrieved July 13, 2018 from <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/the-road-ahead-for-indianepal-relations/article9731472.ece>
- [7] Nayak Nihar (2018, April 11). Oli's India visit: Resetting bilateral relations for mutual benefit. Institute for Defense Studies and analysis. Retrieved August 2, 2018 from <https://idsa.in/idsacomments/oli-india-visit-resetting-bilateral-relations-for-mutual-benefit-nrnayak-110418>
- [8] Kumar, Sumit (2016, March 08) A Turnaround in India-Nepal Relations. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/a-turnaround-in-india-nepal-relations/>
- [9] K.K, Kavitha (2016, June 11) The Changing Paradigm of India- Nepal Relations: Problems and Prospects, *Quest Journals Journal of Research in Business and Management* Volume 4 ~ Issue 5 (2016) pp: 10-15 ISSN (Online) : 2347-3002
- [10] Upreti.B.C, "Nepal Transition to Democratic Republic State" (India, Kalpaz Publications, 2010)
- [11] S.K. Purohit "Indian Foreign Policy .New Dimensions and Directions", (New Delhi, Swastik Publications, 2011.)
- [12] Sanjay Upadhyay, "Nepal and the Geo- strategic Rivalry between China and India", (New York, Routledge publication, 2012).