

Full Length Research

Nepal's Transition from Monarchy to Democracy: An Analytical Perspective of Post-2008 Indo-Nepal Relations

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The Indo-Nepal relationship has witnessed a major transformation in post-2008 period. India and Nepal share a unique relationship due to geographical contiguity, social propinquity, common religion, culture and ethnic ties. However, the two countries had seen many ups and downs in their relationship after the transition in Nepal from Monarchy to Democracy. With Nepal's adoption of the constitution, the relationship has witnessed a paradigm shift. India provided all necessary help for the holding of Nepal elections and has welcomed Nepal's transition to democracy. This paper will explore the narratives to showcase the implications of Indo-Nepal relations after the transition. Further, the authors have disseminated India's part in Nepal's transition from Monarchy to Democracy. Lastly, the various approaches that the government of India must be directed while dealing with newly democratic country was also advocated.

Key Words: India, Nepal, Relation, Monarchy, Transition, Democratization

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INTRODUCTION

The India and Nepal relations are very old and dates back to ancient times. During ancient times (4th to 3rd century BC) Nepal and India constituted one entity of the landmass of Bharatvarsha¹. It was only in the 18th century

¹Sadhuguru Jaggi, "Nepal- A land with ancient and unique culture", *Hindustan times*, Jalandhar, 2 May 2015. (in the classical Sanskrit literature the term Bharatvarsha is taken to comprise the territory of Republic of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, as well as portions of eastern Afghanistan. This corresponds to the approximate extent of the historical Maurya empire under

that Nepal emerged as a distinct political entity after Prithvi Narayan Shah consolidated the area surrounding the Kathmandu valley and named it Nepal.²The geographical location of Nepal, common religious and cultural linkages between the two countries have made the relationship unique and close. Benoit Caimal in his 'Fall of Hindu Monarchy' says that "Nepal is

emperors Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka the Great from 4th to 3rd century BC)

²Sachchida Nanda and A.K.Lal, "Elite and Development", Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1980, p. 248.

the guardian of Indian culture or we can say Nepal is the warehouse of Indian civilization. The Nepali language – borrowed partly from Sanskrit and Hindustani – as well as literature and pictorial art, reveal the cultural links that exist between Nepal and India. Likewise, important are the religious ties, which are partly evinced in the Hindu canonic literature, such as the Bara, the Matsya, and the Pashupati Purana, Nepal is regarded all the more a sanctuary for Hindus in that it was once the only official Hindu kingdom in the world` till 2006”.³Both are part of the same civilization. Nepal is a landlocked country surrounded by India on three sides on the south, east and west and by China to the North. India and Nepal not only share 1700km of completely open and accessible border without any natural barrier and free movement of people and goods but both the countries also share the magnificent Himalayas that have for centuries acted as barriers to the incoming influences and military adventures into India from the north. Nepal shares border with five Indian states- Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.⁴ There is no natural barrier in this border.⁵ Most of its area is covered by agricultural fields, forests, rivers and streams at certain places, which flow from north to south and enter into the plains of India. This unique and complete porous border provides an example how geography complete two countries with similar agriculture, forest and settlement patterns on both sides. Thus geographically it becomes difficult to distinguish Nepal from India and because of lack of independent access to any third country compels her to depend on India. Nepal’s confined geographical situation has made it dependent on India not only for trade and transit but also for the livelihoods of some of the population. Because of this situation, it has remained one of the potential key areas of interest in Nepal’s relations with India.

Relationship between India-Nepal in Pre-2008

The official relationship between India and Nepal started during the British rule in India. British India and Nepal started officially their relationship with the ‘Treaty of Sugauli’ in 1816 that apart from other provisions maintained the exchange of resident diplomats⁶. The relations were further strengthened with the signing of

³ Benoit Camail, “*The Fall of Hindu Monarchy*”, Asie Vision, France, 2008, P.16.

⁴ Pramod Kumar, “*India-Nepal Eco-Political Relations; Retrospect and Prospect*”, *World Focus*, New Delhi; 2012, p.49.

⁵ The usage of word ‘This border’ is correct as it is border sharing with only one country not with many.

⁶ Daniel Wright, “*History of Nepal*”, Asian Educational Society, 1990, p.54.

‘Treaty of Peace and Friendship’ in 1923. After independence, India continued British policy based on Himalayan Frontier policy towards Nepal. In 1950 India and Nepal signed “Treaty of Peace and Friendship” that discarded all previous treaties, that forms the bedrock of relations between two till now. With the uprising in Nepal in 1950 for change in government led to change of dimension in India Nepal relations too. The change of government in Nepal in 1950’s also changed the dimension of India-Nepal relations. It was due to Indian intervention the Delhi Accord⁷ was signed that settled the political instability in Nepal and monarchy was reinstated in Nepal after the abolition of 104-year-old Rana hereditary. This brought positive developments in India-Nepal relations too. The relations that were marked by common socio-ethnic propinquity and geographical contiguity got deepened and strengthened with the takeover of King Tribhuvan Shahin Nepal. In fact, there were anecdotes of merging Nepal with India.⁸ But this narrative in India Nepal relations changed with the change of leadership in Nepal in 1955 as King Mahendra became the king of Nepal after the death of his father King Tribhuvan. King Mahendra adopted a completely different approach towards India. His focus was on to

⁷ With Delhi Accord or Delhi agreement in Nepal hereditary Rana regime was abolished ending a century old rule, and replaced by hereditary Shah Monarchy. King’s power was reinstated by the active political involvement of India in February 1951. Under the Delhi agreement, negotiated between the three parties—the King, the Ranas and the Nepali Congress—under Indian mediation, the King accepted a democratic system to be established by an elected Constituent Assembly. All the three parties were adjusted in the system.

⁸ On 7 November 1950, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had forwarded a letter to Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru stating, “the undefined state of the frontier (in the north and north-east) having affinities with our population on that sides... the people inhabiting these portions have no established loyalty or devotion to India. So the political and administrative steps that we should be taken to strengthen our northern and north-eastern frontiers would include whole of the border consisting of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and tribal territory in Assam”. This shows that there should be a single territory from the Himalaya on the north to Kanyakumara on south. (Durga Das (ed.) *Sardar Patel’s correspondence*, Vol. X, Navajivan publishing house, 1974 pp. 337-338). Indian Prime Minister J. L. Nehru’s statements in the Indian Parliament on December 6, 1950, where he referred to ‘Nepal’s independence only formal before Indian security’, struck a note of ominous ambiguity in India’s attitude towards Nepal’s sovereignty. There were apprehensions from certain sections in Nepal that India aims at merger of Nepal with Indian Union.

shift from mono-dependence to least dependence on India and for that, he tilted towards China.⁹ This brought strains in the relationship between the two. With the 1962 Sino-India war, the India-Nepal relations thawed. Nepal provided India to maintain Indian forces on certain territories of Nepal (especially on tri-junction of Kalapani) to check activities and infiltration of the Chinese army.¹⁰ After a brief rapport in relations in late 1970's (with the change of government in India in 1977) the relations sank to low in 1980's. India blamed Nepal of breaching 1950 Treaty (by introducing work permits to Indian workers by Nepal in 1988). Moreover China-Nepal proximity and frequent use of China-card by Nepal brought rift in relationship and the climax was 1989 Economic-embargo imposed by India on Nepal following the expiry of trade and transit treaties. These crises ended in 1990 when democratic forces came into power in Nepal.¹¹

In the 1970s with certain developments from both the sides brought a brief rapport in the relations but the relations sank to low following the Indian claim of Nepal's breach of 1950 treaty (like Nepalese introduction of work permit to Indian workers in 1988) and Nepal's tilt toward China, All this leading a serious friction in relations and the climax was 1989 economic embargo imposed by India on Nepal following the expiry of trade and transit treaties. The crisis ended after more than a year when partyless panchayat government was overthrown by democratic forces in Nepal in 1990.¹²

The new multiparty democracy under a constitutional monarchy in Nepal resulted in positive bilateral relations; the democratic forces adopted a soft approach towards India. There were certain developments in relationship, but the rise of Maoism in Nepali politics brought rift in relations. India adopted a tough attitude towards Nepali Maoists and supported Monarchy in curbing this issue as India linked the rise of Maoism with its security issue. But the Royal coup by King Gyandera in 2005 led India to change its stance towards Nepal. It put weapon supply embargo on Nepal and fully supported the ongoing democratic movement in Nepal.¹³ It was due to Indian

intervention that a peace accord was signed between different political parties of Nepal with Nepali Maoists, thus paving the way to settle political instability in Nepal and mainstreaming the Maoists in Nepali politics. India welcomed Nepal's transfer from Monarchy to Democracy.

Relationship between India and Nepal Post-2008

In 2008 India- Nepal relations underwent major changes. India helped Nepal in the execution of its historic first Constituent Assembly elections. India contributed to the training of Nepalese election observers, provided 200 electronic voting Machines, computers and vehicles to the government of Nepal to support the elections,¹⁴ about 500 vehicles in the first phase of Constituent Assembly elections in 2008 and again about 700 vehicles in the second phase of constituent assembly.¹⁵ India granted visas to observers in the Terai, allowing them to evacuate to India in case of an emergency during the historic constituent assembly elections.¹⁶ This gave a momentum to India-Nepal relations. Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi visited Nepal and addressed to Nepali Parliament in August 2014.¹⁷ It was after seventeen years that any Indian prime minister made an official visit to Nepal after I.K.Gujral. He struck a chord when he told the gathering of lawmakers of Nepal that, "we have not come here to interfere with your internal matters, but we want to help you to develop." In light of the then ongoing work in framing a new Constitution of Nepal Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi addressed them that, "those involved in writing the Constitution should have a heart like that of a *Rishi* (sage) and they should think far ahead."¹⁸ Prime Minister Modi also remarked that India was prepared to accept a revised version of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in 1950. He said that Kathmandu had only to bring forth the amendments in the treaty and New Delhi would sign on the dotted line, since it implicitly trusted Nepal. Indian Prime Ministers focus on 4C's –Cooperation, Connectivity, Culture, and Constitution to enhance bilateral ties and staying away from internal interference, as India was accused of

⁹ A. Appadori and M S Rajan, "India's Foreign Policy and Relations", South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1988, p.164.

¹⁰ Jayanta Kumar Ray, "India's Foreign Relations from 1947-2007", Routledge Publications, 2011, p. 427.

¹¹ Surya. P. Subedi, "Dynamics of Foreign Policy and Law, A Study of Indo-Nepal Relations", Oxford University Press, 2005, p .2.

¹² Surya. P. Subedi, "Dynamics of Foreign Policy and Law, A Study of Indo-Nepal Relations", Oxford University Press, 2005, p .2.

¹³ Michelle Hutt (ed.), "Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion", Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 2004. p 8.

¹⁴ Sandra Dastratdi, "India's foreign and security policy in south Asia: Regional power strategies", Oxford University Press, 2017. pp. 114- 115

¹⁵ *Hindustan Times*, 14 November 2013

¹⁶ Adam cooper, "Nepal constituent Assembly Elections 2008", Piyawan Hosakulsuwan and Pongsak Chanon Thailand, 2008, p.3.

¹⁷ "Modi concludes historic visit to Nepal," *The Hindu*, 04 August 2014.

¹⁸ Rajesh Singh, "Bringing India-Nepal Ties back on Track", Institute of Defense and Strategic Analysis, India, September 3, 2016.

previously significantly marked improvement in relations between two.¹⁹ While addressing Nepali parliament Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi maintained that, 'strengthening relations with Nepal has been his top priorities and he anticipated for the India-Nepal relationship to serve as a model and catalyst for South Asian partnership for prosperity', Narendra Modi gave the new concept of HIT; H; highways, I; i-ways and T; trans-ways for the rapid development of Nepal and bilateral relations²⁰ thereby strolling improvement in relations. The New Delhi-Kathmandu bond grew stronger after India rushed in expertise and relief material within hours after a massive earthquake hit Nepal in April-May 2015, and promised any additional assistance that Nepal would ask for.²¹ This brought a substantial improvement in bilateral relations.

But after Nepal's adoption of the constitution on 20 September 2015 India openly expressed its displeasure with it. India criticized the constitution by expressing its concern on the issue of Madhesi²². Dissatisfied by the constitution Madhesi political leaders went on to impose a four-month blockade. The perception in Nepal was that the blockade was backed by India though through India denied any role in it.²³ Nepal held that constitution-making and its promulgation are essentially internal matters of a country. The message was clear for India that it cannot dictate democratic norms and procedures to Nepal. Nepal clearly maintained that India cannot interfere in domestic affairs of a sovereign nation in the name of democratization.²⁴ It was regarded as Indian intervention in Nepal and a hurdle in constitution making process.²⁵ Nepal discarded the Indian notion that it holds a position of privilege in political matters of Nepal.²⁶ Nepal acknowledged India's role in striking peace deal between Maoist leadership and Nepali government in

2006,²⁷ but questioned Indian intervention in micro-managing Nepal's internal affairs.²⁸ This was vivid when India asked Nepal- a sovereign state- to roll back a constitution that it had produced after years of political turbulence. Second, is the timely attempt by Hinduvta forces of India to declare Nepal a Hindu state,²⁹ as was evident when the VHP leader Ashok Singhal in 2004 in his address urged all the Hindus of the world to follow Nepal kingdom and to protect the Hindu Samrat whom God has created to protect Hindu Dharma.³⁰ These emotions were evoked again in 2013 by right-wing Nepali parties like Rashtriya Prajamtra who declared that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will help his party in reinstating the Hindu state in Nepal³¹ and finally when Constitution was brought up in Nepal India informally conveyed a seven-point Constitutional amendment in support of Madhesi groups. Such developments were regarded as an interference with landlocked Nepal's sovereign and internal affairs and a negative attitude towards democracy establishment in Nepal.³² Things began to take an ugly turn when Nepal blamed India for being complicit in an unofficial economic blockade and began to use the "China card" to balance India. In May 2016, Nepali government cancelled Nepali President Bidhya Devi Bhandari's visit to India and recalled its ambassador in New Delhi.³³ These steps were symbolic of frosty relationship between India and Nepal. But the relations were back on track in 2017 with frequent high-level bilateral exchanges (like Indian finance Minister visited Nepal in March 2017, Nepali president visited India in April 2017, Sushma Swaraj's visit to Nepal and Nepali prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba visited India in August 2017).³⁴ But with the increasing dominance of leftist in Nepal's domestic politics,³⁵ along with the deepening economic and political influence of China has led to distance in relationship than then what the

¹⁹"Modi Concludes historic visit to Nepal", Times of India, 4 August 2014

²⁰"Narendra Modi wins hearts by using Nepali in address speech", Indian Express, 3 August, 2014.

²¹Ibid.

²²Madhesi are the persons of Indian origin settled in Terai region in Nepal. Madhesi constitute about one third of country's population. The Madhesi were unsatisfied with their inclusion and representation in constitution and they were protesting against it.

²³"No International to stand on Nepal at the UN", First Post, Nov 5, 2015.

²⁴Yubaraj Ghimire, "Nepal and India; Relations at a New Low?"The Indian Express, 9 May 2016.

²⁵K Bhattacharjee, "Kathmandu Accuses Delhi of Backing plot to topple Government" The Hindu, May 2015.

²⁶Pratim Ranjan, "Constitution changes in Nepal leaves out key issue of Demarcation of provinces", Business Line, Jan 24, 2016.

²⁷Hemant Ojha, "India-Nepal crisis" The Diplomat, November 27, 2015.

²⁸John Cherain, "State of Ferment" FrontlineVol26- Issue 11, May 23-June05 2009.

²⁹S. D Muni, "India's Nepal policy needs Caution, Not Understanding", The Wire, 2016.

³⁰Subash Gatade, "End of Hindu Rashtra: Nepalese People Have Finally stood up", Mainstream Weekly, July 22, 2008.

³¹"Modi for Nepal Hindu state Thapa", Kathmandu Post, October 19, 2013.

³²Sanjay Kumar, "Nepal tests India's much touted neighborhood diplomacy", The Diplomat, 26 September 2015.

³³Kallol Bhattacharjee, "Nepal recalls Ambassador, cancels president's visit", The Hindu, 6 May 2016.

³⁴The Indian Express, 27 December 2017.

³⁵"The rise of Maoists in Nepali politics: from peoples war to democratic politics", East Asia Forum, 15 March 2013.

relationship used to be.

CONCLUSION

India and Nepal being the closet neighbors have so much in common but are yet to overcome their differences. Post-2008 has changed the narrative of India-Nepal relationship from dominance to equality, the relationship is shaped by Nepal's transition to democracy, rise of leftists in Nepali politics, the emergence of China as an important player in Nepali politics (after the transition of Nepal from Monarchy to Democracy). The asymmetric relationship of India and Nepal that was characterized by Nepal as 'dependent on India' has changed to 'independent and an equal partner'. Nepal no longer has remained mere a buffer that can be dominated by economic asymmetry or transit facilities by India (as surrounded by three sides by India Nepal is geographically dependent on India for trade and transit). The inconsistent policies, conflicting priorities, and big brother attitude of India, besides the emergence of new brand of politicians in Nepal has diminished the role of India in Nepali politics. Moreover, Nepal and China are developing close ties, Nepal signed BRI of China in May 2017 that enhanced the engagement between the two. Also, the victory of left Alliance in the latest elections of Nepal is regarded as failure of Indian diplomacy in Nepal since 2015 as the left alliance is closer to China. So there is a pyramid shift in India-Nepal relations from proximity to estrangement in last few years especially since 2008.

So India –Nepal current relationship has passed from deep understanding to estrangement in last few years especially. But keeping in consideration the close ancient people to people contact, geographical contiguity, social propinquity, dependence of Nepal for trade and transit on India there is a lot of scope for improvement. The anti-India sentiment that has taken strong grounds since Nepal's adoption of constitution needs to be addressed. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Neighborhood Centric' policy can serve as an important tool for enhancing bilateral relationship. Moreover, India needs to invest its trust apart from other things in building strong relations, also India needs to shun its big brother image and treat Nepal as an equal partner in relationship. India should reorient its foreign policy to boost bilateral ties with Nepal, need is for creative and patient diplomacy (keeping in consideration the use of China card by Nepal), and to maintain strategic ties with Nepal by catering their economic and infrastructural requirements and helping Nepal in establishing inclusive democracy. This will help India to maintain the close deep rooted relations that two countries are sharing since ancient times and will help in achievement of national interests in the long run.

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