

## **India-Nepal Relations: Problems and Prospects**

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**Abstract:** *No two countries in the world are as closely placed geographically, culturally, economically and strategically, as India and Nepal. It is therefore, natural for them to have extremely intimate and extensive relationship with each other. The time, temper and thrust of this relationship has been changing according to the changing contexts of regional and international politics, rising economic and nationalistic aspirations of the people of the two countries and the dynamics of internal political pressures within their respective systems. There are also factors, which have provided platform to various irritants and constraints between the two countries. Despite the differences in size, population, resources and economy there are numerous causes which bring India and Nepal close to each other and also pulls them apart. The article seeks to examine India's policy towards Nepal. It analyses the issues, problems as well as the future prospects relating to India-Nepal relations in the changing international scenario. However, considering changes in the strategic equations in the region, India- Nepal bilateral relations must be remodeled into a strategic partnership that seeks to provide security, modernization and prosperity. The paper is based on secondary sources like various Journals, Articles, Books and Reports etc.*

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### **I. Introduction:**

Ties between India and Nepal have consistently been close and reflect the historical, geographical, cultural and linguistic links between the two nations. The signing of the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950 established the framework for the unique ties between the two countries. Modern engagement between India and Nepal began after India's independence from British Colonial rule in 1947. India sought to continue the British "Himalayan Frontier Policy" i.e. keeping Nepal within its de facto sphere of influence while recognizing Kathmandu's de jure sovereignty. Due to Nepal sharing 500 miles of border with India in the Terai plains region, Delhi view Nepal as a second frontier protecting India from Chinese military expeditions thus making Nepal as an essential aspect of its national security strategy.

India being a major power in the South Asian region has its concerns for peace and stability in the region. Even if it does not affect India, its concerns are obvious, because it has direct or in direct implications for her. Apart from this general situation in South Asia, Nepal has specific importance for India in many respects. Nepal has a strategic location in the southern slopes of the Himalayas. Nepal's security has a direct bearing for India's northern security system. Therefore, any conflict leading to instability and disorder in Nepal becomes a concern for India in respect to its own security in the Himalayas. Another important aspect is that the India-Nepal border is open and there is an unrestricted flow of the population across the border. There are many implications of the open border in the context of volatile situation in Nepal. For India, Nepal is the principal strategic land barrier between China and its own resource rich Gangetic plain. The strategic stakes in Nepal dramatically increased with the Communist victory in China and the country's subsequent occupation of Tibet in 1950. As long as the British power was dominant in Tibet, India's northern border remained tight and secure, as it remained a buffer zone between India and China. But, with the occupation of Tibet by China, Tibet not only ceased to be buffer but Nepal's position as frontier state vis-à-vis India's strategic concerns came to the fore. Therefore, if Nepal fell under the influence of China the entire Indo-Gangetic plain would be gravely exposed. This geo-political reality make India an important stakeholder in Nepal and therefore it cannot remaining affected with the developments taking place in Nepal.

The following are some of major concerns of India:

1. Strategic interests in Nepal: India wants to continue keeping Nepal in its security umbrella, which was designed by Prime Minister Nehru in the 1960s. Indian response, was generated from that strategy.
2. India is in need of a huge amount of energy for sustaining and expanding its economic growth, and Nepali water resource is one of the best available options. India is constantly interested in Nepal's water resources, and its engagement in the political process paves the way towards achieving this end.
3. Psychological dimension; the vast majority of Nepalese perceive that India is overtly and covertly interfering in Nepal's internal affairs. Even in the case of Nepal's armed conflict the Indian role was

4. Severely questioned and criticized by large sections of Nepali society, in particular the dual approach India took in the course of the armed conflict by supporting both the warring parties. The Nepali public attitude towards the behavior of Indian rulers is by and large negative and India wants to minimize the growing anti-Indian feeling among Nepali People.

Beginning with the 12-point understanding reached between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Maoists in Delhi in November 2005, Government of India welcomed the roadmap laid down by the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement of November 2006 towards political stabilization in Nepal through peaceful reconciliation and inclusive democratic processes, India has consistently responded with a sense of urgency to the needs of the people and the Government of Nepal in ensuring the success of the peace process and the institutionalization of multi-party democracy through the framing of a new Constitution by a duly elected Constituent Assembly. India contributes to the development efforts of Government of Nepal by undertaking various development projects in the areas of infrastructure, health, rural and community development, education etc. The overall quantum of India's assistance to Nepal is approximately 3600 crores which include the Small Development Projects scheme at grass-root level in sectors identified with the local population.

From the Nepali perspective, India provides vital lifeline to the Himalayan country which is dependent on India for most of its essential supplies for food grains like rice, petroleum products, infrastructure goods like steel, cement, medicine, transport vehicles, chemicals, agricultural equipments etc. India is also a major investor in Nepal. Nepal as a land-locked country needs the access to the sea that India provides it through transit points that it had made available to Nepalese exporters in addition to the major ports in Kolkata, Mumbai and Kandala. India is, moreover, Nepal's largest trading partner, accounting for 63 percent of Nepal's total trade, source of foreign investment and tourist arrivals and India also remains Nepal's primary source for its imports accounting for 60 percent of total imports.

Problems:

1. The issue of replacing the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India according to the spirit and aspirations of the Nepalese and according to the need of the time and situation is the most critical issue in the relationship between India and Nepal. 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. This treaty is described not only unequal but as an attack on Nepal's sovereignty on the ground that the circumstances in which the treaty was signed have changed and therefore, there is no relevance of this treaty anymore.
2. Another issue and challenge is the Gorkha Recruitment. The recruitment of Gorkha soldiers in Indian army is considered a scar on the country's sovereign and independent status. Though, this practice has been going on for many years, but now it is considered as a disgrace for all the Nepalese to have their sons getting recruited as soldiers in Indian army.
3. Water has been a contentious issue between the two countries. Many Nepalese take the view that India is keen to exploit Nepal's huge hydropower potential to its advantage. This opinion is based partly on Nepal's experience with the Kosi and Gandak projects in the early 1960s under which India secured disproportionate benefit to Nepal's detriment. The Mahakali Treaty of 1996 is the most controversial water sharing treaty signed between India and Nepal that has become a source of friction between the two countries. The main tenet of the treaty is the Pancheshwar project which has the potential to produce 6500 mega watts of hydro power. But, Nepal considers this treaty as flawed lacking clear provision of what constitutes Nepal's water rights.
4. Another area of concern is the expanding role of China in Nepal. Over the years, China's policy towards Nepal has been guided by its larger strategic game plan via a vis South Asia. China's behavior is not of a state that is satisfied with the status quo in Nepal. From being bilateral relationship that was largely focused on the single issue of Tibet, Sino-Nepalese relations today cover an entire gamut of issues. Underscored in China's South Asia policy is the strategy to marginalize India's influence in Nepal. Marginalizing India would allow China not only to dominate South Asia but also provide easy access to Nepal's hydropower potential. Looking into the Future: India-Nepal relationship is shaped by centuries old socio-cultural, historical and geographical linkages. Extensive people-to-people contacts permeate all aspects of the lives of the people of India and Nepal and transcend borders and governments. India-Nepal relations have been going in two currents, a visible current and a very basic current that is not visible. The visible current may have ripples

Going up and down but the invisible current is guided by the links of history, geography, culture, community and family relationship. However, more often than not, this relationship has been troublesome as the nationalistic passions of small neighbors like Nepal tend to get inter twined with antagonistic feelings towards big neighbors like India. The most difficult part of the whole gamut of bilateral relations is that they get perpetually entangled in the domestic politics of Nepal which has remained volatile and unstable.

India's Options in Nepal: 1. Stability in Nepal is extremely important for India. India has to acknowledge that the

present political stalemate is an internal matter of Nepal and should encourage the stakeholders to hammer out differences. India should strike a neutral stance and play the role of an honest negotiator to bring the various factions together.

1. Existing controversial treaties, border disputes, encroachment issues and the Indian embassy's alleged support to certain groups in the Terai region and the personal level support to Nepali Congress are major irritants in India-Nepal relations. These issues have been generating huge anti-India feelings and thus need immediate attention.
2. India should focus more on socio-economic and developmental programmes. India's assistance to Nepal should be enhanced and directed towards projects which benefit the Nepalese people directly. India can do a lot of good if it delivers a political commitment at the highest levels and in public that New

Delhi does not have preferences in Nepali domestic politics and any legitimate government will have its full cooperation. This must be followed by instructions to its agencies not to play a destabilizing role. The roots of the present crisis in Nepal are internal and can be attributed to the deepening divisions within all parties, especially Maoists.

**Conclusion:** The visit of Prime Minister of India opened a fresh chapter in Indo-Nepal relations. His momentous speech in Nepal's parliament won the hearts and minds of Nepalese. Both countries endorsed new developmental projects, showed their willingness to improve peace and security at border, promised to improve border infrastructure and express concern over the slow pace of implementation of many projects. By emphasizing the absolute sovereignty of Kathmandu and affirming that Delhi will not interfere in its internal affairs, Prime Minister Modi has tried to address one of the main concerns that animates Nepal's elites, that is, the deep fear of India. Modi has confronted this central problem by offering to revise the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship which is the symbol of unequal relationship for Nepal. Infact, momentum has been generated in Indo-Nepal relations and it must be continued with better followup and implementations. India and Nepal are both very important for each other. Nepal looks upto emerging India as an opportunity for growth in the form of easy access to technology, investment and market. Nepal hopes for greater tangible cooperation from India. That way it look at the fact of being India-locked as an opportunity rather than a hindrance. India is more than likely aware that it has reached a watershed in its relationship with Nepal. The latter is no longer a mere buffer that can be dominated through economic asymmetry or because it requires access to sea ports. Given Mr. Narendra Modi's stated objective of developing India's relationship with its immediate neighborhood, New Delhi will need to re-calibrate its relationship with Kathmandu. It will need to talk to Nepal as an equal, small country that depend on India to a very large extent and one that has cultural ties that extend backwards for millennia. India must recognize that Nepal serves India by virtue of its geographic location and its cultural ties. If India can demonstrate that it is willing to treat Nepal as an equal partner, it is likely that it will gain the good will not only of Nepali citizen but also of the majority of its neighbors.

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