



MAOIST MOVEMENT AND INDIA – NEPAL RELATIONS

Anamika Kumari*

Nepal is a Himalayan Territory and a land locked country has a close cultural, historical, geographical, political relation with India and shares its boundary with other interrelated trade pact through India via four transit routers agreed upon by Indo-Nepal Treaty. Traditionally India has a good relation with Nepal and has an open border with it. Therefore, any socio-political and economic change in Nepal has a direct bearing on Indian security. Nepal being a buffer state between India and China, is of great concern for India from security point of views. Nepal is a small landlocked country of less than 55,000 square miles, where more than 23 million human souls are compressed. Sandwiched between the two Asian giants-China and India-its geographical position is hardly enviable, as it has been traditionally characterized as a yam trapped between two rocks. The country is separated from its other two neighbouring countries. Bangladesh and Bhutan, by a narrow strip of Indian territory. The territorial detachment from Bangladesh is particularly notable, for it makes Nepal totally dependent on India for its external transit routes and sea access, even for most goods and products coming from China. The country is hence, absolutely vulnerable to India's trade and transit policy toward Nepal as was demonstrated by the trade embargo that the former imposed on the latter in 1989. It is precisely this geographical squeeze between China and India that has historically played a paramount role in defining Nepal's human geography.¹

Nepal's Border with India :

Open border between India and Nepal, a unique dimension of their relationship has results of geographical constraints to a large extent. The present border between India and Nepal was shaped by the Treaty of Sugauli concluded between the British and the Shah rulers of Nepal in 1816.² It is well demarcated.³ In the west, Mahakali river separates Nepal from Pithouragarh district of Uttar Pradesh state of India. In the south and east U.P., Bihar and the West Bengal from nearly 1700 Km. long border with the Terai region of Nepal. Geographically and culturally the Terai is a transitional region between the Hills of Nepal and the Gangetic -plains of India.⁴

This long border does not provide any natural barrier. Most of its area is covered by agriculture fields, forests and rivers and streams at certain places, which flow from north to south and enter into the plains of India after crossing the Terai region of Nepal. The Indo-Nepal border, indeed provides an example how geography has interlinked the two countries with same kind of agriculture fields forests and settlement patterns on both sides.⁵

* Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribag

In fact geographically it is not possible to distinguish the Tarai region of Nepal from the neighbouring region of India. In the absence of means of transportation and communication between the eastern and western region of Nepal for a long time the movement of people between these two region was possible only via India. Most of the Nepalese still travel through India between these two region.

On the other hand Nepal's northern border is contiguous with the Tibetan region of China. This border is formed by Snowclad Mountains of the Himalayas. Due to harsh climatic conditions and poor economic prospects the entire mountainous region is scarcely populated. The land-locked nature of the country has made it dependent on India for its outlet to the sea and for many other things. It may also be noted that Nepal's strategic location in the Himalayas has made its significant for India's security concerns in Himalayas.⁶ It is thus clear that geography has endowed Nepal with peculiar position wherein it is natural and essential for her to maintain close links with its southern neighbour.

The Strategic Buffer :

Nepal is sandwiched between two giant countries and is strategically located to play the role of a buffer. During the British period when Tibet was autonomous from China and British power extended beyond the Himalayas—Tibet (not Nepal), played the role of buffer. But with the rise of China, as a power and her occupation of Tibet, it ceased to serve the role of buffer. China's frontier was extended up to Nepal. India's interest in Nepal became important because the five hundred-mile long, Nepal-Tibet border which was also the main natural defence line of

India had now been exposed. The threat to India's security became real because the Himalayas on the north of Nepal could be penetrated in quite a few passes. India has an open border with Nepal and the latter's northern border runs along the Tibetan frontier, therefore, if Nepal falls under the occupation or influence of China or any every power, the entire Indo-Gangetic plain would be gravely exposed. It is in this respect that Nepal occupies an important strategic position in India's northern security system. Jawaharlal Nehru had highlighted the point by observing in the parliament on 6 December 1950.

"Apart from our sympathetic interest in Nepal, we are also interested in the security of our own country. From time immemorial, the Himalayas have provided us with a magnificent frontier of course they are no longer as imposable as they used to be. But they are still fairly effective. We cannot allow that barrier to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India."⁷

The strategic significance of Nepal is indisputable. However, the role of Nepal as a buffer has serious limitations. Since the main Himalayan range lies to the north of Nepal. It is the Himalayas and not Nepal that dominate the frontier between China's Tibet and India. Since there is no natural frontier between India and Nepal, the latter in spite of its separate political entity, remains geographically a part of India and cannot be excluded from its defence parameter. Besides this, as a buffer state should physically be so viable as to be able to survive the pressure of external subversion. The physical depth of Nepal is too narrow to serve the purpose of an ideal buffer. However, despite these limitations, both the countries have never lost sight of Nepal as a buffer and both would want Nepal continue playing this role.

Politico-Strategic Consideration India and Nepal's Open Border :

As pointed out earlier, Nepal's strategic location in the Himalayas has been significant for India. Nepal separates Indian plains from the Tibetan region of China. Its border with Tibet is constituted of high snow clad mountains which make it almost inaccessible. However, in modern times, due to technological advancements, the border is no more s inaccessible as it used to be.

Problems and Issues :

1. Border Demarcation :

The problem of border demarcation between India and Nepal has existed ever since the days of British rule in India. The issue of maintenance of border some time acquired a serious dimension as well. In 1829 an agreement was concluded between the two to erect new border pillars whenever the old pillars were destroyed.⁸

The problem of border demarcation arises due to reasons. Firstly, sometimes the stone pillars erected on the border are destroyed with an intention to grab land by the people of both sides or by accidents which create confusion about the line of demarcation and which give rise to dispute between the two countries. Secondly, the rivers like Kosi and Gandak, sometimes change their course and destroy the existing border pillars which also give rise to border demarcation problems. The border dispute has serious implication for relations between the two countries. In the 1960's Susta border dispute became prominent. The displacement of border pillars in the Tanakpur dam area was raised, along with the Tanakpur barrage controversy by the opposition political parties in Nepal. Nepal has also

raised the Kalapani issue by claiming that the Kalapani area belongs to her. This region forms a narrow neck along Mahakah river in Pithauragarh and Dharchula districts of India and Nepal respectively. Indian para military forces have been guarding this region since the Chinese attack in 1962. This issue is still not settled.

2. Problem of Controlling Crime and Terrorism :

The open border is a boon to criminals, murderers, bandits and other anti-social elements of both sides. After committing crime on one side of the border they easily escape to the other side. These activities naturally give rise to the problem of jurisdiction, incidents of police crossing the border without consulting its counterpart on the other side of the border etc. More recently the problem of terrorism across the border has become serious. The terrorists wanting to operate in India find Kathmandu a safe place whenever they are under pressure from security forces, because of their unchecked entry in that country. Both the countries have concluded extradition treaties to help each other in the case of criminals. But it is extremely difficult to identify anti-social elements due to open border. These activities bear security problems for both countries. For instance, increased terrorist activity Indo-Nepal border may have serious implications for national security of the two countries. It is in this context that the crime and terrorist activities in the border is a serious issue which may even affect other aspects of relations between two countries. Thus, an open border may become a source of threat to the internal security of the concerned countries.

Historical Backdrop :

India and Nepal bear a complex nature of relationship, which is not oriented of political factors alone but cover the entire gamut of socio-cultural and economic issues. During the time of Nehru, he wanted to create a security zone around India's neighbourhood where Cold War politics could be kept at bay. Thus on 31st July 1950, 'The Treaty of Peace and Friendship' and 'Treaty of Commerce and Trade' were signed by India and Nepal. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship required India and Nepal to consult mutually on matters relating to national security. The Treaty recognised Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. From Indira Gandhi to Manmohan Singh, India followed the same established pattern of foreign policy shaped by Nehru. India realised that stability at times was more important than establishment of democracy.

After the accession to throne in 1955, King Mahendra took up the tasks of defining the fundamentals of Nepal's identity and self image were possible only by reducing its dependence over India. In 1960, he dismissed the Koirala government and himself took power.⁹ This led to the deterioration of relations with India. Anti-Indian sentiments and furtherance of Nepalese nationalism were major happenings which affected heavily the future course of actions at political level between the two countries. During the time of King Birendra, Nepal started was declared as a "zone of peace". By 1955, as the process of change in the domestic and external milieu advanced in Nepal, the pattern of its 'special relations' with India also changed alternatively. Nepal started evolving the policy of balance of power in relation to the neighbouring region. The Panchasheel agreement between India and China prompted Nepal to normalise its relations with China.

India's foreign policy towards Nepal has three major and yet interrelated objectives, strategic political and economic. Strategic interest, i.e., to meet any threat coming from China via Nepal.... The political objective constituted mainly of maintaining a 'special relationship' under the 1950 treaty, countering the China and other powers., containment of communism, supporting a regime with a pro-Indian orientation, and looking after the interests of Nepalese of Indian origin and people of India living in Nepal. Its economic objective has been guided by two main considerations to exert influence on harmonising economic policies between the two countries and sharing water resources for mutual benefits.¹⁰ The official establishment in India thinks that China's presence behind Nepal with the former's military consolidation in Tibet will naturally make Indo-Nepalese border much harder even as compared to Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Burmese border.¹¹ Another reason is that the Nepali Maoists. The creation of a Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ) by the Nepal and stretch across more than five Indian states 'hold certain advantages to the insurgents and thus significant security implications for India.'¹²

The fact is that, Nepal's treaties and agreements with India were 'conditioned more by short strategies of regime survival than by genuine national interests.'¹³ The passion of Nepalese ruling class to seek the support of Indian Governments for their own survival and sustenance still continue. In short, the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship created visible strains on the juridical claim of equal sovereignties with the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)-UCPN(M) assuming power in 2008. Beginning with the 12 point understanding reached between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Maoists in Delhi in November 2005,¹³ Government of India

welcomed the roadmap laid down by the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement of November 2006 towards Political Stabilisation and institutionalisation of multi-party democracy which culminated in the 2008 constituent assembly elections. However the strain may be way of fissures as the Maoists in Nepal pledge to scrap the treaty which guides the two countries 'special relationship.'¹⁴ During Prime Minister Prachand's (Pushp Kamal Dahal) visit to India in September 2008, both sides agreed to receive, adjust and update the 1950 treaty of peace and friendship. However, India was not interested at that point of time in the Maoists getting credit for giving Nepal a Constitution and consolidating politically on that basis. It is in these circumstances that India helped to form a Non-Maoist Government in Nepal.

The November 2013 elections for a new Constituent Assembly (CA-II) in Nepal gave a fractured mandate but one that made the traditional upper caste and upper class groups dominant again.¹⁵ While the Maoists have emerged as the single- largest party in 2008, with 240 seats and the three Madhesis parties accounted for 84 seats, the outcome in 2013 elections turned out very differently. Maoists were down to 80 seats and the Madhesis parties which had splintered from three to a dozen, could only manage 40 seats. NC moved up from 115 seats in 2008 to 196 and the UML from 108 to 175 seats. In a way, the defeat of the Maoists in the second Constituent Assembly elections was considered as an angry reaction of a highly frustrated electorate which had placed great hope in the Maoists to lead the way in the realisation of a new progressive constitution, enduring peace, political stability and progressive socio-economic transformation.¹⁶ In the context of the new developments, the issue of updating the 1950 treaty came up

for discussion during the Joint Commission (JC) meeting held in Nepal on 26 July 2014. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal in August 2014, was first by an Indian Prime Minister after a gap of 17 years.

The relations between the two countries have strained since Indian origin people living in southern parts of Nepal, Terai have protested violently against the new constitution. The adoption of constitution in Nepal by overlooking interests of Indian origin Madhesis is seen as a single most diplomatic challenge for the Government of India. The Madhesis believe that the new constitution will lead to their marginalisation in Nepal. India's support to the Madhes agitation against a discriminatory constitution adopted in September 2015 had resulted in restricted supply of essential goods to Nepal for nearly six months, causing unprecedented hardship to Nepal's people and generating strong anti-India sentiments among the country's hill communities.

The blockade has alienated Nepal's political parties as well as public opinion from India and exposed the Madhesi Community to further vulnerability from Nepali national chauvinists who have always accused them of being a fifth column for India. In these circumstances, Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's visit to China in March 2016, is a message to India that Nepal has a viable option in mobilising support from China to counter any pressure generated from India. Mr. Oli concluded 10 important agreements and memoranda of Understanding (MoU)s covering fields of transit and trade, connectivity and infrastructure, energy exploration and storage, banking and education. It is evident that the new government in Nepal ignored India's concerns and advice and has blamed India for encouraging disturbances in the Terai and interfering in Nepal's internal affairs.

The anti-Rana revolution of 1951, the success of UCPN (Maoists) in 2008 and the adoption of new constitution in September 2015 and the Madhesi agitation against it, are all major landmarks in Nepal's political evolution which influenced the content and contours of Indo-Nepal relations. India needs to pay due respect to the democratic aspirations of the Nepalese people, even if this does not collaborate well with India's perceived interests.¹⁶ Instead of using pressure tactics, India should help the Nepali leadership to sort out issues related to Madhes and Janjathis and engage with Nepal as a sovereign entity. The so called Chinese influence on Nepal is to be dealt with diplomacy based on mutual understanding and mutual benefit in trade and security. India needs to change its diplomatic posture from a hardline position to quiet and creative initiatives where it can nudge both the marginalised and the dominant governing elites in Nepal to engage with each other meaningfully to work out credible and lasting compromises.

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