

## Dams in India-Nepal Border

Reviewed by Jeewan P. Thanju

India has constructed several dams, embankments, water holding structures adjoining to India-Nepal border or very close to the border, inundating Nepalese farmland, sometimes with loss of human lives, and benefitting downstream Indian farmers by making available irrigation water and avoiding flood damage. Most of these structures were constructed against generally accepted international norms and principles and without consultation or approval from Nepal. The Nepalese people have suffered greatly due to inundation created by such border area dam/embankment construction. In this book, the author has given detailed description of each case. The book also includes Appendices with various Treaties, Joint Press Releases, Press Statements of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, the Helsinki Rules on the uses of the water of international rivers, etc. There is also a chapter on international law concerning dam construction in border areas and a chapter on river linking projects of India.

This book (in Nepali) is a useful reference for any one dealing with water resources development, or concerned with India-Nepal relations. It is a must read for water resource professionals, and government officials who will be dealing negotiating with India on the inundation/water resources sharing issues. There is also a great deal of coverage about the Nepalese political masters who do not want to annoy the Indian side, and who want to keep their power/position and receive patronage. Nepalese politicians themselves create the environment to give space to India to meddle in the Nepali politics. There are many nationalistic of views by the author in the book. The author is former Director General of Survey Department, Government of Nepal.

The author questions why India does not behave as a good neighbor and why it exerts undue pressure as a 'Big Brother' to a small nation. He explores weaknesses and shortcomings on Nepal side. Sometimes Nepali officials do not notice when India is constructing embankments in the open and he questions the Nepalese intelligence agency. The Nepal side is, most of the time, unable to put up a strong and effective opposition, and is easily fooled by good words. When India starts constructing a dam or embankment, there is no strong protest; and when the Nepalese farmland and houses are inundated, only then is a hue and cry heard. Nepalese requests to stop construction and remove the embankment have fallen in deaf ears.

There is a Nepal-India Standing Committee on Inundation Problems in the Border Areas that meets regularly. Instead of effectively implementing a solution,

By Buddhi Narayan Shrestha  
Kathmandu, Nepal: Bhumichitra; 1st Edition 2008;  
408 pp.; NRs 440 (US \$15)

however, most of the time it proposes joint inspection of the problem, joint survey, etc., as a delay tactic. As a result, nothing solid has been done to deal with the issues.

This Reviewer, as a young engineer from the government of Nepal made a joint inspection with an Indian counterpart in 1973, for easing the problem of inundation of Nepali farmland in Mahalisagar in Kapilvastu District. Now, 37 years later, joint inspection still takes place in the same Mahalisagar, but no solution has been made to avoid inundating Nepalese land by dams constructed by India near the border. In fact, a few years ago, the dam with five gated escape structures was demolished and in its place a new heavy structure constructed with 15 gates.

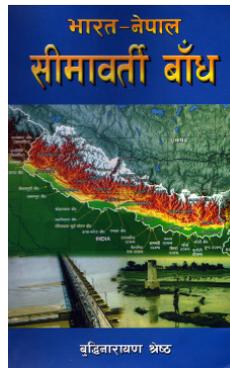
The author has mentioned that on the 1808 km Nepal-India Border, India has encroached on Nepalese land in 54 places in 21 out of 26 border districts, covering 60,000 hectares of land (33,000 ha in Kalapani-Limpia Dhura; 14,000 ha in the Susta area; and altogether 9,000 ha in 52 other locations). Until now, India has constructed dams, embankment, etc., in 18 places very near the border, at these locations:

- dams at Laxmanpur and Mahalisagar;
- embankments at Rasiawal-Khurdlotun, Danda Pharena, Lal Bakaiya, Kunauli, Bairagania Chakra, Bagmati, Siraha, Luna (Bakraha), Kamala and Khando;
- barrages at Koshi, Kailaspuri (Karnali), Sharada and Tanakpur;
- proposed high dams at Koshi and Pancheshower; and
- Proposed reregulating dam at Purnagiri.

The author also details reactions from the Indian side. In the case of Laxmanpur barrage/embankment, India insists that there is no inundation on the Nepal side as the gates are open during the monsoon season. In Mahalisagar, India says that it was built at the time of British India with consent of Nepal. In case of the Rasiawal-Khurdlotun Embankment India maintains that it was built as a road not as a water retaining embankment.

In difficult cases, India has agreed to stop construction work in the Standing Committee meeting but goes ahead and builds afterwards, when the complaints cease to be heard. In one instance, India proposed in the Standing Committee meeting that one should consult the other country while constructing dams/embankments within eight kilometers of the border. Nonetheless, India has not kept its own word in this regard.

The author has given substantial information and history about each case of inundation. He presents viewpoints of the suffering Nepalese people, of local government (Village



Development Committees), of Nepalese officials including Chief District Officers, the viewpoint of the Indian side, discussions on inundation in the Standing Committee meetings, and some cases media statements from the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. In each instance, the author has proposed solutions for easing the inundation problems. He also suggests increased public awareness, a strong voice by government to put its viewpoint to the Indian side, threats to cancel existing treaties, and

the prospect of not entering into any new agreement or treaties unless the inundation problems are solved. He further proposes complaining to Security Council of the United Nations, mediation by a neutral third party, and raising the issue at the International Court of Justice.

This is an exhaustive book on the subject of the suffering of Nepali people due to forceful construction of embankments and dams by India very near the international border and its detailed history.

## “Eroding Social Capital through incompatible Legal and Institutional Regime: Experiences from Irrigation Systems in Nepal” by Dr. Prachanda Pradhan.

Reviewed by Ujjwal Pradhan

The book is about social capital: the shared knowledge, understanding, and pattern of interaction that a group of individuals brings to any productive activity and in this case irrigation and their organizations. The book deals with the various forms of social capital and collective action in farmer managed irrigation systems (FMIS) in Nepal, emphasizing them to be: trustworthiness, networks, and formal and informal rules and institutions. Bringing in the various perspectives on social capital by various scholars, Lin Ostrom included, Dr. Prachanda Pradhan explores how these concepts have played out in specific irrigation systems and the FMIS in general, and how the irrigation members and their organization have responded to external interventions and opportunities available. A specific case of Cherlung Irrigation system and the emergence of a community mill within is shown by Dr. Pradhan the dynamism and the internal social relations as well as their reproduction.

He presents the larger socio-politico and economic contexts within which the legal and institutional setups for natural resources management, including irrigation systems. He has taken a historical, contextual and political perspective in elucidating his emphasis on the social capital and the characteristics of FMIS, the nature of customary practices and norms and rules and at the same time how these have had to respond to the larger trends of government and external interventions. He provides a detailed analysis of the various policies and laws and their implications for irrigation management, the nature of external intervention especially through action research at the Indrawati Basin for irrigation system improvement, and the government agency intervention in the Second Sector Irrigation project. From his in-depth research he identifies the factors that have contributed to the erosion of social capital during the interventions: i) transparency of activities; ii) accountability; iii) irrigation investment approach; iv) corruption; v) political polarization; vi) change in demography and migration; and vii) inappropriate rules and regulations. Trust, confidence in one another, reciprocity, and flexibility

Farmer Managed Irrigation System Promotion Trust, Kathmandu, Nepal: 1st Edition 2010; 89 pp.; NRs 200

within these organizations to face challenges through collective action and nurturing social capital: these are some of the take-home messages from this book.

Seldom do we find analysis that takes into account the changing contexts and the realpolitik, including corruption and local elitism, and a serious attempt not to romanticize community management but in ways that show the challenges and the opportunities they face, and understand what binds the members together and implications for equity in general.

With narratives and oral testimony from farmers themselves illustrating that “the irrigation channel up there {referring to irrigation system in Sindhupalchok} cannot stand in the fragile terrain only by iron rods and cement concrete, it is our organization which has kept the irrigation channel functioning,” this book brings out the

**sustainability** aspects of these irrigation organizations: focusing on dynamism, the agility, and the process of creating and/or legitimating new types of livelihood and collective action systems to adapt and be resilient (without being static or reproducing the status quo) to a changing biophysical, social, economic, political environment without compromising the future. The photo on the cover speaks a lot, visually and symbolically, this dynamism and the rules within the socio-ecological setting.

This book should indeed be of interest to many stakeholders and scholars and researchers wanting to understand state-locality dynamics, role of the state, internal community social relations, the reasons for the tenacity and persistence of social capital and collective action, but also the fragility of social capital subjected to inappropriate legal and institutional eroding the very glue, the trust and relations that have bound people over certain meaningful activity. This book has relevance not only for irrigation and water management enthusiasts, but also for other forms of natural resources management, for those dealing with ideas and practices in the development, promoting enduring and responsive institutions, social change and empowerment.

