

## HIMALAYA REGION : RECENT TRENDS IN CO-OPERATION & CONFLICT

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### I. The Himalaya :

The top-most and crowning peaks around South Asia were emerged due to the geological movement of Plate tectonic theory of Mountain building. They are the youngest mountain and still increasing their height by 2 cm. per annum. These majestic mountains are spread from pamir Knot to East, West, South and South-west. Among them, noteworthy mountain ranges are - Himalaya, Hinduraj, Hindakush, Tianshan, Karakoram, Jhanskar, Ladhak and Kailash. Of which Himalaya is the longest mountain range, which covers an area of 2500 km. from East (Namcha Barha-Tibet) to west (Nanga-Parbat-Pakistan). The river Brahmaputra flows from Eastern part and river Sindhu flows from the Western corner of the Himalaya. Out of 14, the 10 highest peaks of the world (above 8000m) are situated in Himalayan range. The Himalayas contain Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan in its southern lap, Afghanistan in West and China (Tibet) in North. Thus, Himalayan region consists of the territory of Afghanistan, Bhutan, China (Tibet), India, Nepal and Pakistan. Therefore, the people, culture, societies, resources etc. of these countries could be considered as Himalayan.

But Himalayan ranges, by all the countries have been looked at more as a divide than a factor creating common bond between the countries situated around it. Narrow political and national considerations have supported and encouraged fallacies and rumours in place of serious objective studies of common life and culture of the countries sharing Himalayan ranges. For example, in Nepal at the school level the children are taught that Himalayas emerged from Kanchanjunga in east and ended at Api-Saipal in west. In Indian literature the school childrens are taught that Himalaya is a sacred abode of Gods and is the guard of northern borders of the country and that there is no Himalaya in Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China (Tibet). The perspective requires immediate change supported by facts based on factual objective studies of common bonds of life and culture of these countries.

In order to achieve peace, prosperity and progress between the countries unity function of the Himalaya ranges need to be recognized

and emphasized more than divide functions, which have been overemphasized in the past.

In this brief paper I would like to present some factors and figures about Nepal in order to emphasize in what way Himalayan vicinity has determined the pattern of mobility of different ethnic people and in what way ecological factors have created opportunities of co-operation and conflict between India and Nepal.

### II. An Overview of Nepal :

Nepal is landlocked country situated between two Asian super powers India at the east, west and south and China at the north, with an area of 147181 square kilometers. The country is situated along the south slope of Central Himalaya between the Indogangatic Plain and Tibetan Plateau. Topographically the country is characterised by three ecological zones, the Terai, the hills and the mountains. It contains eight of the world's ten highest mountain peaks. Its' cultural landscape is diverse: consisting of more than 60 ethnic groups, speaking as many as 60 dialects, more than 6 creeds, coexist in this narrow buffer state. Hinduism and Buddhism overlap and mingle with tribal tradition. Up to the present there is no tradition of ethnic, religious, communal and regional conflict.

The mountain area lies between 4877 meters to 8848 meters above the sea level. This region comprises 35% of the total land area of the country and only about 2% of this land is cultivable. Sheep and Yak raising, transhimalayan trade and tourism are the main occupations of mountain people of Nepal. Hill area lies ranging between 610 meters to 4877 meters above the sea level and occupies 42% of total land area. This area is very hospitable for human settlements. The Terai zone consists of low fertile land area covering 23% of total land. Following tables will illustrate the population distribution by ecological zones for last three decades in Nepal.

Table 1  
Population Distribution by Ecological Zones 1971-91

Population Area	1971	1981	1991
Total Population	11555953	15022839	18491097
Mountain Population	9.9%	8.7%	7.8%
Hill Population	52.5%	47.7%	45.5%
Terai Population	37.6%	43.6%	46.7%

Source : C.B.S., H.M.G., Nepal, 1995.

**Table 2**  
**Population Density by Ecological Zones, 1991**

Ecological Zones	Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Population (Lakhs)	Density per Sq. Kms.
Mountain	51817	14.42	27.8
Hill	61345	84.14	137.1
Terai	34019	86.36	253.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>147181</b>	<b>184.91</b>	<b>125.6</b>

Source : C.B.S., H.M.G., Nepal, 1995.

The inhabitation of the Nepalese Himalaya was the outcome of successive waves of migration of Mongoloids from the North-East and caucasoids from the western gate of Nepal. The centre of Mongoloid migration was in the Sechaun-Yunnan hilands, while those of the caucasoids was in the Central Asia and India. The first important migration wave occurred around 2000 B.C. through northern Burma, Assam, Bhutan, Sikkim and Eastern Nepal along the Southern slope of Central Himalaya. Another important migration is said to have taken place about 200 B.C. across the Himalaya. This group today is represented by speakers of Tibeto-Burman language family.

The migration of the caucasoids from the north-western gates of India is better recorded. Western Nepal was settled by Hindu intruders as well as Hindu refugees from the plain with increasing invasion of Islam on Hindustan around 10th Century A.D. onwards. Due to their routes of migration the Mongoloids are numerous in the east while caucasoids (Hindus) predominate the western Nepal.

High mountain area throughout the northern part of the country are inhabited by the Bhotias early as well as recent migrants from Tibet. In the hills, the temperate zone is generally occupied by Mongoloid tribals and Sub-tropical zones and Terai region by caucasoids Hindu caste groups.

The population of country was 18.5 millions in 1991. The Census of 1991 has recognized 60 ethnic and caste groups of which 29 are from Terai, 29 from hill and 2 from mountain region. The ethnic/caste composition of the country is given below.

**Table 3**  
**Ethnic/Caste Composition of Nepal, 1991**

	No. of Groups	Population %
Mountain : Caste	-	-
Ethnic Group	3	0.7
Hill : Caste	9	40.3
Ethnic Group	11	25.8
Terai : Caste	20	15.9
Ethnic Group	12	9.0
Others	-	7.3

Source : Harka Gurung, 1996.

According to Toni Hagen (1971), the people of Nepal are classified into three communities, they are :

- (1) Original Nepalese Tribe,
- (2) Indo-Nepalese Race and
- (3) Tibeto-Nepalese Race.

The original Nepalese tribes include several ethnic groups that exist in the country from very ancient period. The majority of Nepalese population is of Indian origin. The original Nepali tribal sub-groups that are mostly of Mongoloid stock constitute the next important section. The new migrants from Tibet are in minority.

It is amply evident from above discussion that Himalayan factor has been a major determinant of pattern of population mobility in and out of Nepal. These ranges have encouraged international and intra-national accommodation, acculturation and cooperation. Not political ideology or security consideration but mutual trust and feeling of good neighbourhood generated by sharing a common mountain range and other ecological factors, irrespective of their racial original, has historically nourished a feeling of oneness among the people in this region.

### III. Co-operation and Conflict :

Cooperations and conflicts are indispensable phenomena and are found in each and every society. Therefore, the conflicts are not unusual things among the closed neighbouring states like Nepal, Bhutan and India. In fact for the progress and development of human society and culture the conflicts and differences are as essential as mutual agreement and cooperation. Participation and bilateral and multilateral agreements are the solution for the resolution of the conflicts in such situation. The aim of all countries of Himalayan region undoubtedly is main of peace, prosperity of people, upliftment of their socio-economic status, preservation of culture and human heritage, conservation of natural resources and establishment of an ideal multi-cultural Himalayan society in the region. Hence all of them are required to co-ordinate their programme and co-operation with each other to achieve the common goals through mutually organized efforts.

Therefore, through this paper I would like to open floor for some of the major issues of mutual concern in relation to Nepal and India. They are : Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950, Nepal's Zone of Peace Proposal, Harnessing of Water Resource, Border problem and Bhutanese Refugees problem.

#### (a) Zone of Peace Proposal :

The foreign policy of Nepal and India is guided by principles of

Panchashila, UN Charter, Non-Alignment Movement, SAARC spirit and so on. Because of its buffer status in between two big Asian Super Powers, Nepal is in a position to play vital and constructive role in this region. To materialise the aforementioned goals the occasion of King's coronation in 1975, in his address to the distinguished delegates and heads of states, King Birendra had proposed that Nepal should be declared a zone of peace. Then and there, it was approved by several countries including the super powers. Upto now it approved by more than 100 nations. The ratification of Nepal's proposal of zone of peace would be a landmark for the enhancement of peace, prosperity, development and stability in Himalayan as well as in South Asian Region. I would like to emphasize that Nepal's peace zone proposal should be given a serious consideration. It will help for the establishment of peace and will pave way for rapid development of the region if it supports by India by enabling the two countries to use their scarce resources in a better way.

**(b) Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 :**

In July 31, 1950 a treaty was signed in Kathmandu between Government of India and Nepal on peace and friendship. Both parties had recognized their ancient ties which have successfully existed between these two countries from time immemorial and have further decided to strengthen these ties in the years to come. The Article 1 has assured everlasting peace and friendship and both countries have agreed mutually to recognize and respect each other's national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. But few articles i.e. V, VI, VII are not on a reciprocal basis therefore some ultra-nationalistic and leftist forces in 1950 treaty. Great agitations and movements were evoked in the streets of Kathmandu as well as in the Nepalese Parliament. Therefore, Nepalese delegates led by first leftist government have put forward a proposal to the Government of India for reviewing that treaty in 1950. Hence to reduce and overcome anti-Indian sentiment in Nepal, it would be better to review, revise and update those articles on the basis of mutual understanding to strengthen peace, friendship and co-operation between the two neighbouring states in the years to come.

**(c) The Issue of Water Resource :**

Nepal is one of the richest countries in water resources, possessing about 2.27 percent of the world's water resources. The major sources of water are glaciers, snowmelt from Himalaya, rainfall and ground water. It is estimated that there are some 6000 rivers having about 45000 kms length. These rivers originate from within and beyond the Himalayas. Nepal is mainly drained by three major river systems, all of

which are tributaries of the Ganges, they are the Koshi, the Gandaki and the Karnali. Other important rivers are Mechi, Kankai, Kamala, Bagmati, Rapti, Danda, Babai, Mahakali etc. All rivers emerging from the Nepalese Himalaya flow southwards, join the Ganges and finally go to the Bay of Bengal.

At present, the development of hydropower in Nepal is at very initial stage. At the end of 1995, Nepal had a total installed hydro-electric generation capacity of 253-043 Megawatts. This comes to 0.30 percent of total hydropower potential of the country.

India by an agreement (treaty) in 1951 and 1960 has been granted permission to harness the water resources of Koshi and the Gandaki rivers for generating power and creating irrigation facilities. Tanakpur treaty was signed in 1996 and on February 1996 a new treaty was signed by Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao and His Nepali counter-part Sher Bahadur Deuba related to the Integrated Development of Mahakali River, including Sarada Barrage, Tanakpur Barrage and Pancheshwar project. After serious debates and discussions, this treaty was ratified by Nepalese Parliament by two-third majority on 20th September 1996. This ratification allowed both the Government to construct 315 M. high dam in Pancheshwar to generate 6400 MW of power which cost approximately 10 billion US dollars. This treaty became a hot-cake in Nepalese Parliament and streets throughout the kingdom, since its ratification and approval.

However, India has played an important role in building up developmental infrastructure in Nepal i.e. roads, power, irrigations, education, industries, health and so on. Somehow or other Nepalese harbour a feeling that Nepal has not been given its due share and these treaties have cheated the confidence of the people. Sufficient resources have not been made available according to the developmental requirements of Nepal. Moreover, Nepalese are compelled to purchase electricity generated from their own resources. Therefore, Nepal seems to be afraid of integrated development of river projects with India. Flooding and Swamp of land during the rainy season and soil erosion are common problems being faced by the people of barrage site. On the other hand Medha Patkar and other Indian environmentalists are also against the building of a high dam in Mahakali from environmental point of view. Sunsari, Saptari, Rautahat, Parasi, Banke, Kanchanpur districts of Nepalese Tarai are adversely affected by flood due to the construction of high dam in and around Nepalese border by India.

The Nepalese people and Government feel that they have not been taken into confidence and Indian Government is indifferent to the plight of Nepalese people who are adversely going to be affected by such river

dam construction. Another offshoot of this kind of action is that Nepal is being driven to approach other countries which may not be beneficial in the longer and larger interest of these two countries.

**(d) Border Problem :**

Indo-Nepal border has been decided by the Sugauli Treaty of 1815, the British India Government erected border pillars throughout the Southern Border of Nepal. Mechi and Mahakali rivers were accepted as border rivers in East and West respectively. The rivers are keeping on changing their courses and falling down of old pillars created problem in identifying the clear border line between the two neighbours. This has sparked conflict and controversies sometime in Mechi, sometime in Mahakali, Tinkar, Susta, Maheshpur, Ilam and so on. In addition to these disputes, another problem is that about 900 km. long East-west border of Nepal is open. Because of this open border criminal activities, women, unauthorized trade, smuggling etc. have given rise to some very serious problems in Indo-Nepal relations. To control the smuggling, unauthorized trade, women trafficking, regulation of Nepalese migrants to India and for clear identification of the territorial boundry, a permanent border should be marked and Nepalese border should be sealed and regulated by certain entry points.

Nepalese nationals have contributed a lot for independence of India. Their esteemed leaders such as B.P. Koirala, Puspala Man Mohan Adhikari etc. had took part in Indian Independent Movement 1947. Number of Nepalese have sacrificed their life and properties for safeguarding the Indian sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence during Indo-Pakistan and Indo-China war. Even today, there is Gorkha Regiment in Indian Army. In place of such respect, honour, sacrifice and historical bonds, the presence of Indian Army in Kalapani (left bank of Kali River), which lies within Nepalese territory, is felt by people of Nepal as a symbol of dishonour and disrespect for the people of Nepal. Therefore, Nepalese Government and people are demanding withdrawl of Indian armed forces from Kalapani, which will help in reducing the tension between the two countries.

**(e) Bhutanese Refugees Problem :**

Refugees problem is an important issue in Indo-Nepal relation. Although social and demographic data with regard to Bhutan are meagre Bhotiyas, Nepali linguistic groups and people of Indian origin are main inhabitants of Bhutan. Of these 30-40% people are of Nepalese linguistic group, who have settled in the southern part of country since remote part and are known as Lhotshampas in Bhutan. The rise of wave of Drukpas Nationalism has disturbed the ethnic, linguistic as well as

communal harmony and integrity in Bhutan. Ultimately the Lhotshampas were displaced from their homeland Nepal has provided shelter for those displaced Bhutanese refugees in Jhapa and Morang districts.

The first batch of 60 Bhutanese refugees arrived in Nepal in December 1990. In accordance with the UNCHR report : 1995 Nepal has been providing shelter to 103, 300 refugees from Bhutan who fled their country to escape from state sponsored acrocity against its own citizens. More than 95% of the refugees had Bhutanese citizenship certificate, UN agencies like UNDP, FAO, WHO, UNICEF, and peace-keepers, Human Right organisations as well as number of NGOs are working together to solve the problme of Bhutanese Refugees.

The Bhutanese who are in and outside Bhutan; including Bhutan peoples Party, Bhutan National Democratic Party, Druk National Congress and 4 Human Right Organizations have formed as Bhutan coalition for Democratic Reforms (BCDR) in 1995. They are trying to repatriate Bhutanese refugee through Appeal Movements, Peace Marches, Dharnas and so forth. The first bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan were initiated in 1993, and 6th round talks had ended in a deadlock in 1995. After 7th round talk Nepalese foreign minister said in a press conference that, "If the refugees are not Bhutanese citizens, then they certainly are not Nepalese citizen also, if they can apply Bhutanese law (by automatically cancelling, citizenship after voluntary migration) then Nepal, too, must apply its own law which does not provide Nepali Citizenship to refugees." According to law, then these refugees are stateless people. Thus, the problem of Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal is very acute. India could not remain blind to the refugees entering Nepal through Indian territory. The Indian police has stepped the Bhutanese peace marchers to enter the Bhutan, therefore, some of the Bhutanese refugees, Human Right workers has raising serious question that if the Tibetan refugees are free to organize mass demonstration in India, so why Bhutanese are not allowed to be repatriated into their homeland via India according to international refugee rules ? India, which has provided citizenship to Bangladesh refugees, why she is interrupting the passage of refugees to their own country ? This on the whole, it may be pointed out that has been facing several natural and man-made problems. Today the solution of these problems does not lie in the hands of these two countries alone but international agencies, world powers, human right activists and environmentally active groups, all have to play a constructive role in finding solution deeply pervading interitance of historic evolution, geographical contiguity and social cultural identities.

### Conclusion :

Himalaya is the largest mountain range, which extends 2500 Km. East (Namchabarba-Tibet) to West (Nanga Parbat-Pakistan). The Himalayan region consist of the territory of Afghanistan, Bhutan, China (Tibet), India, Nepal and Pakistan. Narrow political and national consideration have encouraged disorder standing in Himalayan region. In order to achieve peace, prosperity and progress among the countries, unity function of the Himalaya range need to be emphasised more than divide function, which have been over emphasised in the past.

Nepal is land locked and situated between two Asian Super Power with an area of 147181 Km. The country is characterised by three ecological zones, the Terai, the hills and the mountain. It is inhabited by the people of various caste, ethnoses, creeds, linguistic and cultural groups. Nepal is second richest country in water resources, possessing about 2.27% of the world water resources, co-operation and conflicts among and between neighbouring countries is maintainance of peace, prosperity and stability in Himalaya. Hence, they require co-ordination and co-operation in their activities.

There are some major controversial issues of mutual concern in relation to India and Nepal of which Nepal's proposal of zone of peace review and revision of peace and Friendship treaty of 1950 regulation of border and withdrawal of Indian armed force's repatriation of Bhutanese refugees integrated development of water resources are of prime concern, same of them have been discussed this on the whole, it may be pointed, out that as an important country of Himalayan region. Nepal is facing several natural problems. Today the solution of these problems does not lie in the hands of these two countries alone but international agencies, world powers, human right activists and environmentally active groups, all have to play a constructive role in finding solution to the problems, which are passing a grave threat to the peace, prosperity and co-operation between different countries situated in Himalayan region specially Nepal.

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