

Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties : A Book Review

Indira Devi Prasain, Lecturer, Faculty of Political Science, MMAMC, Biratnagar

Email : indiraprasaintu@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of the study is to analysis of Ranjit Rae's Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties (2021), which provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex relationship between India and Nepal, examining political, economic, and social dynamics. This is a qualitative study, employing secondary data without engaging primary data. The book addresses key issues such as the Maoist insurgency, the peace process, border disputes, the impact of the 2015 earthquake, and Nepal's growing ties with China. Through ten chapters based on the author's diplomatic experience and qualitative methods, Rae explores the evolving bilateral relationship, focusing on Nepal's constitutional developments, economic challenges, and strategic positioning. While offering valuable insights from an Indian perspective, the book highlights the complexities of cross-border relations, including historical tensions and cultural connections. Although the analysis predominantly reflects India's viewpoint, the work remains an essential contribution to understanding the current state of India-Nepal relations and provides recommendations for strengthening future cooperation.

Keywords: cross-border, economic, geostrategic, maoist insurgency

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Introduction

Ranjit Rae, a distinguished Indian diplomat and former ambassador to Nepal, explores the complexities of India-Nepal relations in his book Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties (2021). The book published by Penguin Random House India delves into the intricate and evolving dynamics between the two neighbouring countries, offering insights into historical challenges and potential pathways for future cooperation. With ten chapters drawn from Rae's personal experiences and observations, the book covers various aspects of the bilateral relationship, including Nepal's political and constitutional changes, border disputes, economic development, and the influence of China. Rae addresses critical topics such as the 2015 earthquake, the Maoist insurgency, and the longstanding border issues between India and Nepal. Through a combination of qualitative methods, personal recollections, and interviews with scholars, the author comprehensively analyses India-Nepal ties from an Indian perspective. While offering valuable insights into contemporary issues, the book also acknowledges the complexities and tensions shaping the two countries' relationship. Kathmandu's Dilemma is a significant contribution to the literature on Nepal-

India relations essential reading for policymakers, academics, and anyone interested in understanding the intricacies of South Asian diplomacy.

Objective of the study

This study aims to discuss Ranjit Rae's Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties (2021). He is an Indian diplomat who portrayed Nepal based on his experiences and observations while living in the country as a diplomat.

Method of the study

This study is based on secondary data, scholarly articles have been analyzed without engaging primary data. It used a qualitative approach to analyze Ranjit Rae's Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties.

Result and Discussion

Ranjit Rae, a distinguished Indian diplomat and the former Indian ambassador to Nepal, wrote the Book "Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties." Penguin Random House India Pt. Ltd., located in Haryana, India, is the book's publisher. The book has a total of 256 pages and is written in English. The price of this book is 499 rupees, and the year of publication is 2021. The author describes the complicated and distinctive relationship between India and Nepal, Nepal's political, economic, and constitutional development, the cross-border dispute between the two neighbors, and Nepal-China relations, which aligns with the title. The book's title is exciting: Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties because it hints at a critical analysis of the complexities and evolving dynamics in the India-Nepal relationship, offering insights into historical challenges and potential pathways for future cooperation.

This book has ten chapters based on the author's experience and assessment. The author beautifully reflects on two neighboring countries' unique and complex relationship and explores its complexities in-depth. Set against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving geopolitical and geostrategic landscape, the book offers valuable insights and addresses key questions concerning the contemporary dynamics of India-Nepal relations.

In the first chapter, the author argued that Nepalese people remain suspicious of India's intentions despite massive support from India. Despite shared geography, deep political, socio-cultural, historical and economic ties between Nepal and India, which contributed significantly to the development of Nepal, unique relations between army chiefs of both nations, with chiefs of both countries receiving honorary chiefs, many student studies and people-to-people links with India, why Nepali people don't like us?" The author has made an effort to respond to India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's query.

Chapter two covers the Maoist insurgency in Nepal from 1995 to 2008, the following democratic settlement, and India's role in supporting Nepal's democratic consolidation. Regarding the Maoist issue, Rae highlights various accusations directed at India, noting that skepticism about its intentions persists, even after the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement initiated Nepal's new constitution-making process. In the third chapter, the author describes the political change in Nepal, transforming the state from a centralized unitary state to a federal state and ceremonial monarchy to a democratic republic and inclusive state system. After 70 years of long waiting, how does the new constitution aim to fulfill the needs and ambitions of the populace? Chapter four deals with the fallout of the new constitution: dissatisfaction with

the Madheshi blockade of the border area, the inhuman suffering of the Nepalese people, and the protest of the undeclared Indian blockade by Nepali people. The dissatisfaction of the leaders and many Hindu organizations with the decision to abolish the Hindu state by Janajati, the communist party and Westerners toward secularism. Similarly, the author mentioned K.P. Oli's anti-Indian nationalist card, etc.

Chapter five deals with boundary disputes between India and Nepal related to Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiadora and the claim of Indian Territory. The border dispute became complicated after both countries published a new map of their country. India also thinks that Nepali elites are working under the direction of China.

Chapter six clarifies the most important historical treaties between India and Nepal, the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 and its unequal provision. It has also explored the Gurkha recruitment treaty in the Indian and British armies. The relationship between India and Nepal regarding economic growth is explained in Chapter 7. It also explains Nepal's poor financial situation, unemployment, and young people working abroad. Nepal's enormous potential for hydropower, tourism, commercial agriculture of medicinal plants, and organic farming should be harnessed along with India's economic dynamism. Chapter 8 focuses on the devastating earthquake that struck April 25, 2015. It highlights how the Indian government responded swiftly by providing food, medication, and other essential supplies. Additionally, the chapter discusses India's role in supporting Nepal's reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the disaster. Chapter nine discusses the connection of common Hindu and Buddhist civilizations between Nepal and India.

Similarly, both countries have granted asylum to political exiles, and there is also a socio-economic and "Roti-beti" relationship between the people of the two countries. The final chapter addresses Nepal's relations with other countries, particularly China. Here, Nepal and China formalized their diplomatic ties in 1955. Following that, B.P. Koirala went to China in 1960. During King Mahindra's rule, China and Nepal's relations improved. In the regime of King Gyanendra in 2005, the Olympics in Beijing in 2008, and the so-called Indian blockade, it grew even more. After Nepal became a republic, China increased its engagement with political parties, primarily the communist party Maoist, despite its desire to maintain links with a strong king rather than political parties.

The author used qualitative methods, such as diplomatic and personal experience, observation, and interaction with multiple people, by analyzing the changing dynamic between India and Nepal relations. The author has expressed this from an Indian perspective based on subjective and qualitative analysis. This book is based on recollections and the author's memory. Many Indian colleagues such as Binaya Kumar and Shyam Sharan, as well as Nepalese Scholar such as Prof. Lok Raj Baral, Prof Dr. Krishna Hatchhetu and many others, helped the author to develop different chapters of the book to know Nepalese society and culture, cross-border issues, India-Nepal relations and Nepal-China relations, 1950s treaty, earth-quake incidence, cover design, graphic design, to read manuscript and to provide comments overdraft, translating language, and referencing public domain etc. The author claimed that this is one view on some contemporary issues. The author does not claim to be an authoritative commentary on a complex, intense, and broad relationship.

The book provides a comprehensive overview of Nepal's key issues, including the Maoist insurgency, the peace process, constitutional debates, border disputes, national identity, economic

development, humanitarian aid, and cultural ties such as the roti-beti relationship. It also addresses the impact of the 2015 earthquake and Nepal's strategic positioning between India and China. Written in accessible English, the book emphasizes the Indian perspective, presenting its content systematically across various themes.

Similar topics are explored in works like *India-Nepal Relations: Continuity and Change* by Prof. Lok Raj Baral, which discusses the political, economic, and cultural ties between the two countries, and *Foreign Policy of Nepal* by S.D. Muni, which highlights the historical and socio-economic connections. Both scholars underscore the importance of the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty and India's support for Nepal's democratic movements and political reforms.

The book's strength lies in its multidimensional analysis of India-Nepal relations, offering valuable insights into contemporary issues. However, its primary limitation is a lack of neutrality, which predominantly reflects the Indian viewpoint. While the author acknowledges anti-Indian sentiment in Nepal, the relationship is portrayed as distinct from India's ties with Pakistan or Bangladesh, suggesting that some tensions may stem from Indian government policies.

People in Nepal have a negative perception of residents of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, which mirrors the attitudes found in cities like Mumbai and Delhi towards these regions. Similarly, the rhetoric of leaders such as KP Oli and King Mahendra often reflects anti-Indian sentiments. In Nepal, there is also a prevalent anti-Madhesi sentiment among the hill communities, with some viewing Nepal's relationship with India through a lens similar to India's historical ties with Sikkim. Notably, 70 percent of Nepal's voters, predominantly from the hill communities, align with communist ideologies. Meanwhile, many young Nepalese face harsh working conditions in Gulf countries, where their supervisors and engineers are often Indian. These experiences contribute to strained perceptions of the worker-supervisor relationship, which they bring back to Nepal. Lastly, as India has fought for the rights of the people against the Nepali government, it is seen as an opposition force in Nepal.

This book is a significant addition to the literature on the bilateral relationship between Nepal and India. The book informs the readers about Nepal's most recent foreign and strategic elements in detail: boundary issues between India and Nepal and many Indian scholars talking about these issues, debate and discussion of the new constitution, China card, Maoist insurgency and historical, socio-cultural and people-to-people relations. Here, the author openly wrote about all the issues: border and block in a balanced way; Indian scholars have made significant contributions to improving ties. The author also suggests that the Indian government and policymakers should strengthen their relations. This book keeps the reader connected, updated, and detailed on Nepal's most recent foreign and strategic aspects. The book is a "must-read" for academics, decision-makers, the strategic community, media professionals, and researchers. This book is a treasure for all those interested in foreign policy and diplomacy.

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