

## HISTORICAL TIES BETWEEN INDIA AND NEPAL

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### Abstract

*The first Indo-Nepal treaty of peace and friendship appeared in 1950 as a pivotal treaty which not only lays down the defense arrangement between the two countries but also the principle of commerce. Our relations have been historic and very strong over the years due to the excellent relations between India and Nepal supported by the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship having secret security understanding and trade through Indian territory. Statistics dating back to the recent social networking prove that strong correlation is what exists between the populations that connect through linguistic kinship military alliances, religious affiliations, and cultural ivy. Hindi remains the other spoken language in Nepal though a large number of Indians practice mixed religious practices that slowly integrate with Nepals. Citizens of the two nations apart from having a political relationship have a deep respect for each other and are closely related because they share cultural aspects of their origin. The interchangeability of people's movement from India to Nepal and vice versa because of family, tourism or pilgrimage further strengthens the friendly relationship between India and Nepal. Despite occasional diplomatic disputes which are typical for relations between the countries, the two still embrace centuries-long historical and cultural relations. Trade issues borders and security agreements are managed by bilateral negotiations while diplomatic talk provide both countries an avenue to address emerging conflicts. India and Nepal both parties strive to maintain positive relationship and commitment by enhancing cooperation between the two countries in many fields such as trade enhancement, defense and cultural heritage promotion.*

**Keywords:** *India-Nepal relations, Indo-Nepal Treaty, bilateral trade, cultural ties, security cooperation, people-to-people relations, diplomacy.*

### Introduction

Nepal and India have a special relationship which can not be explained in any other way than in terms of geography, culture, language and history. Assistance from India thus has always been the largest share of development assistance to Nepal and infrastructure and connectivity continue to be the key goals of its development cooperation. Nepal and India diplomatic relations began in the mid-1950s key projects being the East West Highway

project and construction of Tribhuvan International Airport. India has deployed its recent assistance towards building large infrastructure such as the Jayanagar-Bijalpura-Bardibas Rail Link and the Motihari-Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline that improves connectivity and energy within the region. Developmental cooperation today implies more, down-to-earth activities as a result of over 550 High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP) India has financed and implemented since 2003. With development projects in Education, health, rural electrification and sanitation important improvements in the quality of life of the Nepalese people are achieved. India supports reconstruction efforts in post earthquake countries and extending USD 1.65 billion lines of credit for Grant for infrastructure development. The projects have reached two major milestones: Fifty thousand homes have also been put back into habitable conditions and seventy one education sector project has been delivered.

Cooperation in the power sector serves as a somewhat crucial basis of the bilateral relation between two countries. The Joint Vision Statement on Power Sector Cooperation signed in April 2022 & Pave/ gives comprehensive instructions regarding the cooperation in generation of power together with the creation of transmission and power trading relations between the two countries in each direction. Each nation procures benefits from their power sector cooperation programs.

A clear example of the Emergency support delivered by India was clear in the 2015 Nepal earthquake as well as in the COVID-19 crisis. Some employers reported to have involved the National Disaster Response Force teams as well as medical supplies and vaccine distribution services in the emergency response. During serious pandemic stages, the country offered important help by supplying oxygen plants with ventilators and ambulances.

India and Nepal increase their bond with educational programs such as cultural practices and exchanges. The People to People contacts between the two countries have improved over the years through. This has been made possible through, 'The Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre and Nepal-Bharat Library and Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scholarships. The people of India and Nepalis have a unique bond that is culturally represented through some occasions that were conventionized both nations which saw their climax during the last year's "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav" events.

In undertaking this research analysis, India-Nepal development cooperation has been evaluated based on cooperation dimensions of infrastructure development and energy distribution as well as equal emphasis on provision of education facilities and exchange programs, and emergency response arrangements. Basically, the enduring partnership meant

for the development of India and Nepal is sustainable since both parties invest their time to improve their understanding of each other as they solve identifiable cooperative problems.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyze the historical evolution of India-Nepal bilateral relations: The paper assesses key historical occurrences that mark India–Nepal diplomatic bilateral relations from the Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in 1950 up to the current intergovernmental relations.
2. To examine the impact of territorial disputes on India-Nepal relations: The present study consequently explores the way continued border tensions over Kalapani and Susta hinder diplomatic cooperation and turn economic integration and military collaboration between India and Nepal.
3. To assess the role of India in Nepal's socio-economic development: This research goal analyses the part played by India in developing infrastructure systems in Nepal and its contribution towards improving the health care facilities and educational institutions besides aid extended to manage disasters.
4. To explore the influence of China on India-Nepal relations: The paper assesses China growing economic and political influence in Nepal and its impact on Nepalese – Indian relations as well as Nepalese strategy against Chinese regional integration.

### **The Foundation of India-Nepal Relations (1950–1971)**

The Indian Nepal bilateral relationship originated from the 1950 Indo-Nepalese Treaty of Peace and Friendship. As a part of the creations between the India and Nepal this treaty was historical occasion to determine diplomatic relations for maintaining peace and common security and economic cooperation. As such while during the 1950s Rana rulers of Nepal remained fully engaged in the pursuit of the goal of India –Nepal relations because of post-revolution political developments following the establishment of the People Republic of China with the end of 1949. The Ranas preferred to seek assistance from India because they feared that a communists' coup would depose the autocratic regime.

Political transformation in Nepals political map occurred for the first time after the signing of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty. The Rana rule ended three months after the treaty ushered in a pro-Indian Nepali Congress to power. In the same period, India retained a powerful influence in foreign relations but implemented newly democratic and open diplomacy with other foreign entities.

This led to the view that the growing presence of Indian residents in the Terai region of Nepal raised Nepal's discomfort with what it saw as Indian intrusions. When Nepal enacted

the Nepalese Citizenship Act in 1952 Indians was given the franchise to apply for Nepalese citizenship. But this action though got initial support from some people awakened more resentment particularly from those whose concern was not only confined to Nepali identity but also included assimilation. Setting up of India's military mission in Nepal during 1952 helped in escalating Nepalese suspicion to be engulfed by India. As much as India's growing involvement was seen in positive light by some of the leaders it created resistance from some of the Nepalesse top officials.

This period Nepal get legal rights under the trade and commerce treaty through which it got the leverage to import and export dut-free by Indian sea ports. The economic advantage that has been derived from these agreements helped Nepal to grow but it also helped India to strengthen its dominance over every segment of Nepal's trade. The Nepalese monarchical structure felt the heat of the increased domination by India and thus initiated diplomatic negotiations to reduce this control from the 1960s. Thus, to maintain Nepalese independence, the country imposed a more robust diplomatic relationship with China so that it does not be overdependent on Indian affairs pertaining geography.

### **Tensions and Diplomatic Struggles (1971–1990)**

Getting into the constructive diplomating of the early 1990s, India and Nepal resumed a new diplomatic relations. People in New Delhi welcomed Nepalese Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai who to meet V.P. Singh to reinstate diplomatic relations in June, 1990. After an economic blockade of 13 months, Nepal resumed its trade relations when the transit routes needed for importing and exporting at the meeting in June 1990 reopened.

New contracts per se in terms of trade and transit provided an official commercial interaction during December 1991 while at the same achieving a balance between India's needs and Nepal's necessity. On paper, these deals as envisaged by Nepal and India were to open up Nepal engagements with international markets alongside strategic watch-points for the trade-main through the region. In the course 1991 official visit to India Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala campaigned Nepals sovereignty and economic freedom of Nepals economy from Indian influence.

Thus, Although Nepal was getting results in its favor Sundarlaharuddy was keen to go for demanding change of the 1950 treaty of Peace and Friendship as much as to minimize the direct Indian interference in the Nepalese domestic politics. Nepalese Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikary visited New Delhi in 1995 because he realized that economically Nepal needed to be more self reliant since Indian immigrants were gradually settling in the Terai area through demographic changes. In the 1990s this diplomacy balance appears to intensify

based on Nepals Neighbors & international relations where China emerged as a more important powerful partner during that period.

Nepal stepped up its commitment to the principles of non-alignment together with its goals for regional peace in South Asia in the first half of the 1990s. After starting the diplomatic process in creating 'Zone of Peace' in Nepal but India was not fully committed to support the proposal. The growing complexity of the Nepalese diplomatic situation came from the fact that it had to conduct its foreign policies between national independence and Indian hegemonic influence in a neighboring corridor.

### **Restoring Diplomatic Relations and New Beginnings (1990–2000)**

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### **India-Nepal Relations in the 2010s: Development, Challenges, and Shifting Dynamics**

During 2010s the diplomatic ties between India and Nepal had improved concurrently the stress in the bilateral relation between both these countries enhanced. Two major support measures were provided by India to Nepal in the year of 2010 such as credit line amounting to US\$ 50 million and 80,000 MT food aid for Nepals development needs. India and Nepal established a three tiered minister secretary technical dialogue system related to water resource development the visit also highlighted India's direct play in Nepal's development. India supported Nepal politically when India's external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee said to Nepali PM Prachanda his country supports his commitment to peace and development in Nepal.

India offered the "Open House" service through its Kathmandu Embassy for the better future of its Indian communities living in Nepal in 2014. The Indian gesture was an actual nudge performance in the ongoing Indian diplomatic efforts to strengthen the Nepal diplomatic relationship and diplomacy. During his recent trip to Nepal in 2014, follow up by another Indian agriculture visit, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi created history by becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Nepal in last 17 years. During his historic visit Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed a very significant bilateral arrangements mostly on development cooperation, including the US\$1 billion concessional line of credit and extending a commitment for the building of a 900 MW hydropower plant. As for 2016 India earmarked 250 million USD through direct assistance to help the devastated Nepal after the earthquake.

While internal political changes were taking place in Nepal the country began to move in political directions that differed from India political trends. Maoist thinking influenced Nepal more at the same time, while the Chinese economy and politics expanded thus resulting in a political decoupling between Nepal and India in the process. Sino-Nepalese relational growth, which focused on trade with infrastructure development activities, was particularly a problem to India regional political dominance. After the newly conferred independence in the foreign policy formulation, Nepal has tried to intensify diplomatic independence from India, especially by aiming towards better relations with China rather than developing a more and more disapproving attitude towards the Indian supremacy in the Nepalese internal affairs.



The birthplace of Gautama Buddha at Lumbini in Nepal gradually transformed to a crucial territorial controversy between the two countries. Historically Buddha's origin site is cultural but soon it became the site related to politics during recent years. The Nepalese Culture Ministry that decided to transform the theme of the recent International Buddhist Conference held in Kathmandu into promotion of the birthplace of Buddha in Nepal and involving China in the conference had negative impact on diplomatic relationship between Nepal and India. The conference boycott by India escalated tensions between the two neighbors because the Nepalese side used the event to emphasize the Buddhist connection with the country, while India preferred to deny those divides.

The murder of a Nepali protester in 2017 contributed to heightened conflict between Nepal and India because he protested against Indian military incursion into a disputed territory along the border. Indian soldiers halted development activities in the Kalapani disputed area that saw the parties protest before moving to the use of force. Unearthing the simmering border disputes, this new flare up of open hostility between Nepal and India also showed increasing Nepali impatience with Indian domination of their relation.

### **The 1950 Treaty: Special Relationship and Controversies**

The 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship continues to establish the fundamental framework for relations between India and Nepal. Through this treaty the two countries established their "special relationship" while working together for bilateral defense cooperation as well as fostering economic development and permitting border crossing access between India and Nepal. Under the treaty both nations promised to defend each other from all security dangers including aggression from outside forces. The treaty provided Nepalese and Indian citizens equal economic and educational possibilities in both states while granting specific economic advantages to residents of India inside Nepal.

Under the treaty terms Nepalese and Indian nationals could travel between the territories without needing visas or passports. Indian migration into Nepal's Terai region has become a major point of contention for Nepalese authorities because of this free movement policy. Current tensions notable for their persistence emerge from Nepalese freedom to work in India but their inability to access equivalent options for their citizens within Nepal's government institutions while owning land.

After numerous years of continuous Nepalese discontent about the treaty's terms India agreed to modify the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty in 2014. The revision goal was to bring the treaty up to speed with current political and security circumstances of the region. Nepalese Prime Minister received an Expert Panel Group (EPG) report on the treaty revision but India

remains without public disclosure about changes to the agreement. Nepal continues showing frustration regarding the treaty's ongoing influence since no clear details have been provided. Additionally the agreement contains provisions regarding trade and transit facility permissions. Due to being landlocked Nepal depends on neighboring country India for all commercial trade operations. After signing the 1950 treaty Nepal received favorable privileges for its commercial networks that included lawful access to Indian naval harbors. The preferential treatment provided by the treaty has raised worrying doubts about India's relationship with Nepal. Since its inception Nepal actively pursued market independence in economic operations while India's international influence transformed through time. The presence of Indian security forces through military checkpoints in Nepal has been a perpetual dispute since Nepal attempted past withdrawals of these troops.

This special relationship between Nepal and India faces new challenges stemming from Nepal's expanding diplomatic bonds with China because fundamental principles set in the 1950 treaty no longer fit with modern interests of both nations. The heritage treaty functions as a pillar of diplomatic history yet Nepal seeks its modification to meet the present-day goals and hopes of Nepali citizens.

### **The Diplomatic Struggles and Rising Tensions (2017–2021)**

The relations between Indian and Nepali diplomatic, during second half of the 2010s and early 2020s, was confronted with several issues of territorial and diplomatic characters. The political relation between Nepal and India remained stagnant even though the nation got the economic aid and infrastructural aid. The home grown Maoist movement and China's economic encroachment in Nepalese territory has gradually brought a systematic shift of Nepalese foreign policy from India.

Both India and Nepal have engaged in armed exchanges throughout time in conflicts over the Kalapani territory. There have been tensions between India and Nepal, over the Kailapani territory since 2017 when Indian security forces opened fire on Nepali protesters at the border. The infrequency of military interaction between both countries caused the conflict between them to turn into a nationalist issue in Nepal that created mass protests in Kathmandu.

Crunch onsetting, the border dispute on Kalapani is part and partial of a broader conflict on setting well-defined border between India and Nepal. Out of this stretch known as Linking Road, specifically Kalapani area along with Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura again fell under Indian controlled territory according to India but Nepal once again suing its sovereignty claimed ownership by engraving these territories in its new political map unveiled in 2019.



The diplomatic relation between India and Nepal reached a low after India rejected those mapping claims made by Nepal. Nepalese prime minister K.P. Sharma Oli relied on boundary advocacy as he formed domestic support while painting Indian reluctance to address borders as failure to prove its respect for Nepali territorial integrity.

Both parties paid more attention to Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha during their strained relationship phase. During the International Buddhist conference held in Kathmandu the capital of Nepal in 2016 leaders revealed on the fact that Lumbini is the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama which is the national pride of Nepalese people. Nepal's approach evoked Indian criticism and led India to avoid the meeting besides degrading its relation with Nepal. The Alarm bells rang for India when China joined the conference because New Delhi saw the increase of Chinese influence in Nepal as an attack on their status as regional hegemon.

Nepal keeps supporting Indian interests at multilateral forums such as the United Nations, while the relations between the two countries remain strained. As Chinese power has developed alongside increased Nepali political assertiveness, it is not longer Indian Nepalese politics that translates the country's geographic dominance into political control.. Nepal needs to carve out an autonomous route to the new geopolitical future as both India and China have to reimagine the bilateral relation staring into the future of geopolitics.

### **Infrastructural and Financial Support: A Long-Standing Partnership**

After 1950, India has played the role of promoting socioeconomic development in all sectors for Nepal. In infrastructure delivery India has brought support to areas such as education with health interventions as well as in agriculture with energy plus more. Indian development aid has increasingly formed the basis of Nepalese development as India is their principal development actor.

In 1954 India helped in deciding the fate of Nepalese aviation by constructing Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu, thus marking the beginning of modern Nepalese airport. Apart from developing air infrastructure in India constructed key Nepalese infrastructures such as roads/bridges, irrigation works. The Indian Aid Mission in Nepal started in 1951 laid the base for the formation of economic relation by construction of basic structures in various fields of power, education and health cares.

India provided a Rs 140 million grant to construct the Trishuli Hydropower Station to import 21 MW of power in 1976. : The establishment of Nepal Bharat Maitri Emergency & Trauma Centre in Kathmandu in 2014 was one of the form of assistance that India provided to develop health and education sector in Nepal. The reconstruction effort of Nepalese society

after the 2015 earthquake was financially supported through a Indian commitment of \$ 1 billion. India funded the construction of 50000 houses rebuilding 28 cultural sites from scratch and developing one or more health care facilities across the districts.

Apart from other crises, India provided humanitarian assistance for healthcare exigencies of Nepal. In what can be considered a sort of humanitarian intervention the COVID-19 Vaccine Maitri, India gifted one million vaccine doses to Nepal. The aid offered by the India regarding the pandemic allowed Nepal to do a better job of combating COVID-19 cases. Thus, being India, it continues to stay as a critical strategic partner in the developmental process of the Nepalese society and amidst the disastrous operations.

### **Military Ties: A Foundation of Cooperation**

From 1950 itself Nepal has had a permanent bilateral relationship with India in terms of mutual defense along with training cooperation. The foundation for India and Nepal military cooperation stems from history which ties their interests are mutually bound. Indian military has brought modernization to Nepalese armed forces through defense cooperation between the countries by signing the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty.

Pakistan and India also have a unique bond through this military practice which grants each country's top army brass what amount to an honorary military rank of General. In such a way both armies emphasize their prostrate defense relations which have gone beyond mere military cooperation activities. India assists Nepal in training and supplying its army and fresh Nepali soldiers undergo training at its Indian military academies.

One of the Gorkha battalions necessary for the protection of India recruits soldiers from Nepal's mountains. Gorkha battalions are the assets of the Indian Army and at present there are about 32 thousand Gorkha soldiers in India. That the Military institutions of the two countries remain closely connected the Gorkhas through their participation in the Indian Army illustrate.

The countries build up their military relations through wider navy exercises and mutual emergency measures and occasional reciprocating official visits. The extensive military activities serve a noble purpose on fostering increased combined military operations and the creation of mutual reliable partnership between both countries. The military relationships cause tension now and then due to territorial issues that present problems for both countries.

### **Border Disputes: Kalapani and Susta Issues**

For years now, India and Nepal have had open disputes with their territorial boundaries, mainly including Kalapani and Susta. Both states recognise the Kali River as their border

river from the line of the origin of its tributary Kalapani region of India up to the trijunction of China and Nepal.

Nepal's claims on Kalapani involve western rivermarkers which it says demarcate the country's border from India. India reiterated its assertion that it's not the same stream as Kali because the western boundary river refers to a different stream all together. Official map of India released in 2018 on dangerous and Kali river are insufficient which led the relation between both countries to a complex level. Discussions between both nations were abruptly paused in 1997 when Nepal proposed a hydroelectric development treaty for the river.

The Nepalese government, for instance, protested over Lipulekh Pass 2015 trade deal between India and China over this border area that inclines into the Kalapani region territory. The NEPISF declaration made by Nepal triggered national protests because it was inimical to the Nepalese territorial integrity. The Nepalese government insisted that Indian border forces withdraw from the Kalapani border area that has been under Indian control since its victory over China in the 1962 territorial conflict.

There is a border controversy between two countries Nepal and India that can be seen in the Susta area of southern Nepal. Maps drawn as a consequence of war narratives of the neighboring nations have fuelled the escalation of the border conflict. The geographical features of Nepal were defined in the 1816 Sugauli Treaty which Nepal signed with British India and in this treaty the Kali river was set as the Nepalese western end. The uncertain location of the main riverhead creates several views for the definition of the precise boundary.

These territorial issues fumed up after India achieved the May of 2020 regarding construction of a road passing through Lipulekh Pass to reach Dharchula region. It has found that Nepal and India have had an opposite perception towards the territorial claim of the road installation that led them to the dispute. These large areas of controversy have not been resolved between two countries that grapple a great deal over issues to do with boundaries in their foreign policies.

### **Trade and Economic Ties: Interdependence and Challenges**

In the fiscal year 2015-2016 China has emerged as the largest source of Nepali FDI whereas it is second only to India for trading partner. Despite demographic transition in Nepalese trade structure Indian commerce reigns supreme mainly due to involvement in more than half of Nepal's total business and via the Indo-Nepal Transit Treaty for exchange in third country goods.

The biggest expression of the Indian economic clout is seen from the massive trade asymmetry between Nepal and India. For the 2017-2018 period, Nepal was performing US\$ 8.2 billion worth of trade operations with India while import from India was over US\$ 7.7 billion at the same period. Oil, gas and petroleum products are in the leading group of commodities that import from India that also includes machinery, vehicles and chemicals. The major exports that Nepal does with India are textiles inclusive of jute products and juice products.

For the total, Nepal has a major trade problem because the trade deficit stands at about 1,724%. Indian hegemonic trade advantage over Nepal along with the Indian exclusive control of supply of petroleum products has led to discussion on possibility of Nepal diversifying its international trade relationships. The Nepalese government has set its goal of increasing exports to India and energy will be the first priority. In its exporting business in 2022 Nepal has exported Rs 10.38 billion worth of electric power to India making it its most valuable exported product.

While Nepal enjoys free trade relations with India, it still has to deal with the current deficit in trades as well as integrating the nation's dependency on Indian businesses. Major transit routes which are in the control of India involve serious risks for Nepal, as it is connected with transportation of goods. Both have life challenges in balancing bilateral trade that undergo hurdles from border closures and economic blockades and tariffs which were witnessed through the 2015 Nepal blockade. The new Nepalese constitution was claimed to have created such hostility between nations that it led to the onset of a worst diplomatic breakdown.

Talks of establishing new petroleum transport pipelines for fresh pipeline renewed the reasons why the bilateral trade between India and Nepal is crucial while new cooperation measures in energy sector emphasized its significance. Nepal's shifts towards attempting to achieve economic liberty through increased commerce with China pose challenges to their later economic relationship with India.

### **Conclusion**

India and Nepal bilateral relations was formed through combination of cooperation and significant interdependence together with trade factors of past several decades. As far as the history of partnership is concerned, both India and Nepal have had a good as well as bad relation since their unification. India is Nepal's primary socioeconomic development partner and its partner in implementing major infrastructure and post-disaster aid schemes and relief operations as well. Both nations gradually build up their military relationship by joint

exercise and the tradition when the chiefs of the general staff award the honorary ranks to their counterparts.

Territorial differences about Kalapani and Susta regions currently represent major sources of disagreement between the two nations. The issues of border have created upgraded nationalism in both Nepal and India besides destroying diplomatic relation by demarcation problems, border control and directional roads constructing problems in the areas of dispute. Despite the conditions, India remains Nepal's main trading and economic development partner and the expansion of China's economic investment and infrastructure programs in Nepal has made Nepalese politicians gradually more economically independent in the management of their foreign policy. This is true on the ground that now the two nations maintain open borders, which have fostered people's free movement to landmark their historical bond. India must undo the reformatory of Nepal policy to maintain composite bilateral relations with Nepal even though India is approaching a trade deficit position and Nepal is keen to shift its International Trade Towards Other Countries.

India and Nepal should devote efforts to the restoration of their relationship with the focus on mutual relations and economic cooperation and at the same time respect each other's rights in the subject of self-governance and control of their development aspirations. Its sustainable partnership relies on the pair's ability to undergo change according to the current regional conditions and revive resentments and cooperation in trading as well as using energy and protection. Sustained dialogues and reciprocated respect between the two nations India and Nepal are needed to develop a long term powerful and viable relationship.

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