

INDIA AND HER HIMALAYAN NEIGHBOURS



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FOREWORD

Himalayan countries, apart from sharing common frontiers, have been traditionally close to India, in terms of culture and language, often sharing similar historical experiences. These are also countries with which India has extensive and increasing trade contact. Yet, taking India as a whole, there is surprisingly very little knowledge about these countries, their people, their flora and fauna, rivers and forests.

In recent years relations between the Himalayan neighbours have fluctuated widely—from very bad in the late 1980s to very good in 1996-98. I had the fortune of accompanying India's President, Sri K.R.Narayanan, during his visit to Nepal in April, 1998, and seeing first hand the overwhelming concern for and interest in India in that country. As a number of senior citizens of the country— from past and present Prime Ministers to businessmen and academics—pointed out, whatever happens in India—flood, earthquake, nuclear test, economic success or failure, and what have you—can not but have their impact on Nepal too. There are immense possibilities for economic cooperation and integration, from the supply of hydel power to India to the establishment of industries making precision instruments in Nepal, much of which still remains unexplored. The Nepalese are seeking corridors to Bangladesh and the sea, and lenient or zero tariff for its goods—concessions that a big neighbour like India can easily give, to buy an enormous amount of goodwill at a surprisingly little cost. There are disputes too, e.g., territorial disputes and the mode of sharing water from Mahakali project—but none that cannot be resolved

amicably.

There also exist many complementarities in trade and economic relationship with Bhutan, and a possibility that economic cooperation would eventually make the three, as also other countries in the region, members of a South Asian common market, with easier mobility of goods, services and people across their borders, by the end of this century. Significantly, Nepal is the headquarters of SAARC, the agency responsible for making such dream a reality.

This book, by Dr. Amitajyoti Bagchi, is a welcome attempt at the study of the ecology, economy and production of these two Himalayan neighbours -Nepal and Bhutan. It is descriptive and informative, and also includes an outline of various efforts by India to help these neighbouring countries. I hope that this study would encourage other scholars to take a keen research interest in this region. I also hope that, for Dr. Bagchi himself, it heralds the beginning of a series of publications, progressively more intensive and analytical as his understanding grows and his grip strengthens on this subject, on this fascinating and beautiful part of the globe, located as it is on the lap of the Himalayas.

Professor Biplab Dasgupta

Calcutta University.

25 July 1998.

PREFACE

The inspiration from my geographer uncle, Prof. Kanangopal Bagchi, Ex Head of the Department of Geography, Calcutta University has worked at the back of my taking Geography as a subject of study and profession. He first suggested me to do research work on an aspect of Geography, where much work have not yet been done. So I selected this topic.

My Ph.D. thesis entitled "India's relations with Himalayan neighbours : A study in multilateral ties and the perspective" was presented in the Department of Geography, Visva Bharati University in the year 1991. Now during its publication in 1998 some changes have been made in the original work in keeping with the global changes in the sphere. Gathering informations about foreign countries is a hard task. Still I ventured to collect as many as possible up to date data and informations from various sources.

I am greatly indebted to my revered guide Prof. T.B. Lahiri, who had kindly guided me through this work, sparing for me some time from his busy schedule in being the then Registrar of the University of Visva Bharati. I express my deep sense of gratitude to him.

I acknowledge the service of Mr. D.P. Bagchi, the then Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India in consulting highly sensitive documents from the library of Ministry of Home Affairs. I extend my thanks to Mrs. Mitra Vasisht, the then Deputy Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India for permitting me to collect informations from the library, Ministry of External Affairs.

I express my gratefulness to Mrs. Kamala Mukherji, hony editor 'Himalaya Prasanga' (a Bengali journal on the Himalayas) for providing me with some important informations avout Nepal and Bhutan.

My sincere thanks to Dr. D.P. Boot, Cartographer, Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University for helping me in collecting informations from the Library of the Centre.

My thanks to Dr. Suren Chatterji, Lecturer, Department of Palli Charcha Kendra, Visva Bharati University for preperation of necessary maps for the thesis. I shall not be doing justice if I do not mention the names of Mr. Sib Sankar Ghosh and Mr. Suhrid Pal who took so much of care to type my thesis.

I owe to Mr. Indranath Majumder, proprietor, Subarnarekha Publications for taking interest in publishing my thesis.

The External Boundary and Coastline of India on the maps published in this book agree with the Record copy certified by the Survey of India. For this certification I am thankful to the Director, Map Publication, Survey of India, Dehra Dun.

Lastly I take this opportunity of paying my tribute to Prof. Biplab Dasgupta who has very kindly written the foreword of the book despite his busy schedule as Member of the Parliament.

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INTRODUCTION

This present research work is related to the branch of Political Geography. Political aspect of geography was first evolved in Germany after the World War I. After defeat in the war the geographers of Germany started thinking about geo-political frame of global activities, particularly extra-territorial aspirations. Their thinking got reflected in some of their works. The noteworthy contributions are 'Political Geography' by Arthur Dix, 'Political Geography' by Ratzel, 'Guiding Principles of General Political Geography' by Supan etc. In 1924, Karl Haushofer, a former general and later a professor, founded the 'Zeitschrift für Geopolitik', which later became a geographic bible of the Nazi party. He wanted restoration of German power. From this time onward over emphasis on physical aspect of geography got reduced and studies on regional aspects of geography gradually caught attention of the scholars.

In course of time, further development of geopolitik or geopolitics as the science of political life in natural environment took place. Geopolitics was defined as the study of the geographic foundation of political events. A work unit of geopolitics was founded which made geopolitics officially a basic principle and an inward state of mind assimilating the result of geography, history and biology. Apart from Karl Haushofer many others contributed to this school, viz., Otto Maull, Erich Obst, Hermann Lautensach etc. At present the thoughts of geopolitics has advanced a lot. In understanding the present day international relations a good knowledge in geopolitics is

essential.

We may project our attention to India in the above context. In spite of the fact that India is a vast country situated in the southern part of Asia surrounded by natural barriers like mountains and seas she could not save herself from being attacked from outside. Her history tells us that the first incoming people from outside were the Aryans. Later on came the intruders like Sak, Hun etc. Then came the Pathans and the Mughals. Interestingly they came and conquered India and stayed here. From time to time foreigners' political control of India changed the political boundaries of the country. In course of time these invaders got assimilated in the main stream of Indian people.

The only exception was the Britishers. They stayed in India for long 200 years but after independence in 1947 they went back to their native land England. When Britishers came to India and became the rulers they effected far reaching changes in India involving substantially political structure of the subcontinent.

India's maximum territorial expansion took place during British period. This time India's boundary was extended upto Burma (Myanmar) in the east and east of Afganistan in the west. In south the island nation Ceylon (Srilanka) was also under British India rule. The Himalayan States; Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim became the protectorates of British India Government.

It is obvious today's neighbouring countries of India were under Indian hegemony during British India rule. As a result it has become very delicate for independent India to have smooth relations with her neighbouring countries. So a thorough study is needed to understand India's foreign policy in general and it's application in different situations. In order to do so here focus is given on India's Himalayan neighbours Nepal and Bhutan. A thorough probe has been made to understand the relations India is having with Nepal and Bhutan and their geo-socio-economic status.

CHAPTER-1

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS HER NEIGHBOURS

India achieved her independence in 1947. Since then India is following a foreign policy of her own. It has helped her to gain a distinct position in the world. India being ruled by foreign rulers for centuries understands well the very need of freedom for a nation. This is a pre-requisite for peaceful existence of nations in the world. Peace is a vital necessity for economic development. Economic advancement again can be achieved if there is co-operation among nations. Thus peaceful co-existence and co-operation has got much weightage in India's foreign policy. The main elements of her foreign policy are promotion of international peace, co-operation with the United Nations, friendliness with all nations particularly with neighbouring countries in Asia, membership in the Commonwealth of Nations, freedom of dependent people and opposition to racial discrimination.¹

At the time of independence India's economy was at a very bad state. The partition of India had tremendous adverse effect on her economy. So her first work was to make a recovery of her shattered economy. India knew very well that economic advancement can not be achieved without peace at doorstep. Peace and tranquillity along the Indian border line was very essential for her economic programmes.² War with neighbouring countries means drainage of wealth. And a nation like India just

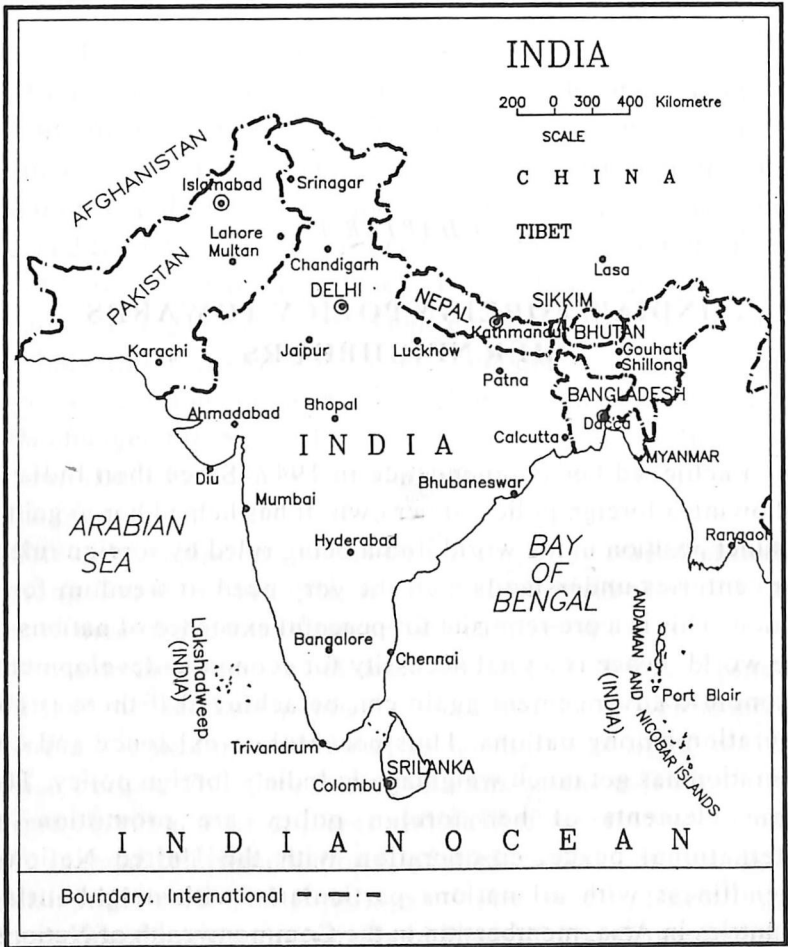


Figure. 1. India and her neighbouring countries.

- © Government of India Copy right 1997.
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- © The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line.
- © The administrative headquarters of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab are at Chandigarh.
- © The external boundaries and coast lines of India agree with the Record/Master Copy Certified by Survey of India.

could not afford a war at that time. So India adopted a peace approach towards her neighbours.

Interestingly in South Asia many nations like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan are having common border with India. Sri Lanka is the neighbouring island of India. Besides enjoying common border line with India the states are related to India in terms of their cultural identities, economic patterns, philosophical orientations and historical experiences.³ Moreover India appears to have the privilege of being common friend to many nations in South Asia in terms of her strategic position.⁴

The foreign policy towards the neighbours in South Asia is based mainly on the objectives of establishment of friendly relations, co-operation wherever it is possible in economic and other matters, building consensus on common security perceptions including the prevention of non-regional powers from undue meddling.⁵ For this India is strongly in favour of projecting Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. The geographical location of Indian Ocean is very important to India and to her neighbouring states. India wants preservation of peace and stability in this area because these are the very essentials on ground of security. The zone of peace means the dismantling of all existing military bases in the zone of Indian Ocean. No foreign power would be allowed to threaten the sovereignty, security and integrity of the littoral and hinterland states. The Indian Ocean would not be used for the global policy of war and aggression. This region will be free from military pacts.⁶ It is possible only when the states surrounding Indian Ocean can form a group and act in unison.

In order to achieve this goal the South Asian nations need to search for strong and more abiding ties based on political, economic and cultural affairs. India gave a conscious effort to develop and cement these ties with her neighbours.⁷ The common problems of all these countries is poverty and under development.⁸ To fight against these problems India has showed

her eagerness to co-operate with her neighbours inspite of having her own difficulties. India knows that economic tie is the greatest binding force in foreign relations. In international relations diplomacy without economic relation is of little meaning.⁹ Here needs a discussion what India has done in regard to economic relation with her neighbours.

In South Asia all the states are economically developing countries. It is the nature and character of the economic development which has played a large part in the evolution of their foreign policies.¹⁰ From the very beginning India showed her readiness to collaborate on the economic plane with other countries in South Asia. In this region the first concrete attempt to organize some kind of regionalism in the economic sphere was the Colombo Plan (January, 1950). In the Colombo meeting of the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers the vital needs of the South and Southeast Asia were discussed. The meeting had set up a consultative committee for surveying the needs of the area, assessing the resources and manpower available in the region and providing an international framework within which the co-operative effort for assisting the countries of the region could be developed.¹¹ India's role at the Colombo summit was welcomed as constructive and effective. Here India stressed on the need for co-operation among developing countries in the face of pressure exercised by industrialised countries. She voiced that the developing countries should have their sovereign right to determine their own plans and priorities for development.¹² India wanted that there should be flow of capital from the more developed countries to the less developed countries. This would set up a cumulative process of higher production, higher consumption and higher investment in Asia.¹³

India is considered to be the largest recipient of external assistance amongst other developing countries. But she is not only an aid receiving country, she also provides aid to other less developed countries, specially which are her neighbouring

states.¹⁴ In the 1950s, Nepal depended heavily on India for her basic infrastructures. The Indian technicians, teachers, administrative personnel were sent to help the neighbouring countries like Bhutan and Sri Lanka also. Later on they were seen to be active in Bangladesh and more recently in Maldives. The Indian assistance can be broadly categorised into technical aid and training, scientific and educational assistance and military knowhow. Many thousands of foreign trainees, students and specialists have made use of Indian offers for advice, training or teaching either in their home countries or in India.¹⁵

The most important aspect of India's economic interaction with the developing countries is related to the setting up of joint industrial ventures abroad. The Indian Technology is more suited to the conditions of the developing countries where industrial ventures, at least in the formative stage, have got to be less capital intensive and more labour dependent. Indian technology also offers distinct price advantage over cost of importing technology from industrially advanced countries.¹⁶ In this regard the neighbouring countries of India enjoy their ready access to Indian expertise and entrepreneurship.

To augment more co-operation among South Asian countries SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) came into existence in 1980. At the first meeting of SAARC in New Delhi, the representatives of the states of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka decided to set up working groups to find out areas of economic co-operation among these nations.¹⁷ Incidentally the economic co-operation got prime weightage here. India's role at SAARC has been accepted very vital because of her larger size, resources and progress in economy.¹⁸ Here the question comes how far India could be effectively friendly towards her neighbouring countries who are members of SAARC. In order to get some idea about India's role in South Asia, her relation with Nepal and Bhutan have been probed in depth. However a fuller study of India's

relations with different neighbouring states within SAARC in the above context would provide no doubt an impelling study but now the discussion concentrates on India's relation with Nepal and Bhutan only.

India is having cordial relations with Nepal and Bhutan for centuries. To keep these relations alive and to make it more meaningful, India is providing financial and various other assistance to them. Before going into detail discussions on India's aid giving programmes, it is necessary here to understand why Nepal and Bhutan are also badly in need of aid. For this, geo-economic conditions of these two little Himalayan states have been thoroughly probed. In the chapters 2 and 3 an attempt has been made at this end.

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