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"INDIA AS A FACTOR IN PAKISTAN-NEPAL RELATIONS"

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The relationship between Pakistan and Nepal presents a fasicinating case study of two small powers of the South Asian region trying to develop close relations in order to denigrade the position of the core power-India in the region. An attempt is being made in this article to highlight various factors and objectives which have determined the course of their relationship and to discuss as to what extent both of them have tried to bring extra regional powers-United States and China primarily as a counter weight to India.

Determinants and Objectives :

Among the determinants few have exercised a more decisive influence on the foreign policy of a country than geography. It should be recalled here that prior to the emergence of Bangladesh, the East Pakistan was surrounded on three sides by India and was separated from Nepal by a strip of Indian territory. In view of its strategic location in the Indian sub-continent, Pakistan and Nepal felt a need to balance Indian interests in the area and for the purpose tried to develop close relations with each other. However, it should be noted that this factor has become less important with the emergence of Bangladesh.

From the point of view of political system, Pakistan and Nepal both have experienced authoritarian system since their inception. During the times of President Ayoob in Pakistan and King Mahendra in Nepal, both the rules adopted a narrow based political system of 'Basic' and 'Panchayat' democracy respectively. Both the rulers also believed that the western type of democracy was not fit for their countries. Both the rulers therefore, tried to develop close relations with each other in order to consolidate their power in their countries. This factor is also relevant today despite the fact that now both the countries have adopted western type of democracy.

The relationship between the two countries is also governed by their respective security interests. Pakistani leaders have been perceiving & threat to their national security for their domestic consumption mainly from India. Pakistan has always been keen to collaborate in any scheme aimed at containing India's influence and power and towards that objective it has been seeking cooperation of other South Asian states. In this context Z.A. Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan rightly

observed that :

Nepal is to Pakistan what Afghanistan is to India-Nepal's proximity to East Pakistan and the vital stakes of Sikkim and Bhutan and the province of Assam with its Naga and Mizo freedom fighters give Nepal a high place in the calculations of Pakistan's foreign policy.

Nepal, on its part although has no direct security threat from India. However, the Nepalese ruling elites are also trying to deveop their relations with Pakistan so that they can use the feeling of anti-Indianism in order to retain their political power.

The crisis of national identity is yet another common factor which binds Nepal and Pakistan. The people of Pakistan and Nepal are deeply influenced by their socio-cultural affinities with India which naturally burts their feeling of nationalism. Therefore, the objective of both the countries is to project their national identity which could separate them from India and for that purpose both the countries are trying to come closer against India so that they could refrain themselves from India's cultural imperialism.

In the economic sphere both the countries have the similarity in the sense that both Pakistan and Nepal are heavily dependent for their economic development on foreign aid. The economic interaction between the two countries is however very insignificant. The only mis-advantage which Pakistan takes in Nepal is that Kathmandu is a paradise for Pakistanese who are engaged in Drug trade business.

Evolution of Pakistan-Nepal relations :

Having briefly discussed the factors and objectives which have determined the nature and basis of the relationship of the two countries, it is proposed to analyse the course of events which brought the two countries together mainly to counteract India's predominant influence in South Asia. We can identify the couse of relations between Pakistan and Nepal in three phases; (i) the period of indifference; (ii) the beginning of relations and (iii) the period of consolidation.

The period of indifference : 1947-54

During this phase Pakistan-Nepal relations can be identified as of indifference and non-involvement in each other's affairs. There were some obvious reasons for this approach. Firstly, Pakistan, which emerged as a nation in 1947, was involved in a series of deomestic risis. The post-partition years constituted an era of problems for the Pakistani ruling elite. The problem of refugees and the task of building up economic infrastructure for the survival of the new nation kept the policy-makers pre-occupied with the domestic affairs. Pakistan, therefore, paid little attention for establishing diplomatic relations with

the Himalayan Kingdom. On the other hand, until 1951, Nepal was itself preoccupied with serious domestic crisis. On the other hand, until 1951, Nepal was itself preoccupied with serious domestic crisis. The isolationist policy of the Ranas discouraged the Nepalese from initiating diplomatic manoeuveres to come closer to Pakistan. Secondly, during the Tribhuvan period Nepal had close and special relationship with India on account of its intimate cultural relations and latter's active support in overthrowing the Rana regime. Pakistan, tried to woo the Nepalese by alleging that India had undermined the independence and sovereighty of its small neighbours and pursued aggresive policies towards them. But Nepal reacted sharply to Pakistani attempts by sending a strong protest to Pakistan. Thus during King Tribhuvan's period Pakistan could not get the slightest encouragement to create any anti-Indian feeling in Nepal, nor diplomatic relations be opened.

Establishment of the Relations : 1955-60 :

The establishment of King Mahendra to the Nepalese throne in 1955 opened a new chapter in Pakistan-Nepal relations. While his predecessor was in favour of Nepal having special relations with India, the new King wanted to diversify his country's foreign relations in order to reduce Nepal's dependence on India. He believed that Nepal could no longer remain isolated from international pulls and pressures and it must follow an independent foreign policy in order to find its proper place in the community of nations. He wanted to evolve a new policy in order to restore national identity which he believed could well be protected by diversifying Nepal's international contacts and thus reducing his country's utter dependence on India.

King Mahendra's policy postures were welcome to Pakistan as it was keen to establish diplomatic relations with Nepal. When Pakistan was invited by Nepal to attend King Mahendra's coronation in May 1956, the former saw an opportunity to get a foothold in the Kingdom. Froeign Minister of Pakistan attended the coronation ceremony. On this occasion Nepal gave an indication that it was willing to have diplomatic relations with Pakistan, if approcahed by the latter. Justifying the step T.P. Achayra, the then Prime Minister of Nepal said that "Nepal wanted to be friendly with every country in the region".[1]

For three years following the coronation there was no diplomatic move of any sort by either side. It was only in June 1959, when Main Ziauddin, the then Pakistan's High Commissioner in India, visited Kathmandu and had a long discussion with King Mahendra and B.P. Koirala, the then Prime Minister of Nepal, that the process for establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries

consequently began on 19 March, 1960, both the governments simultaneously announced their intention to have diplomatic relations. It was also disclosed that A.K. Brohi, Pakistani's High Commissioner to India, would be accredited as its Ambassador to Nepal and would function concurrently from New Delhi.[2] Thus; with the establishment of diplomatic relations a new era began in Pakistan-Nepal relations, which could be considered as Pakistan's attempt to win friendship of its neighbours and in the process to boost ani-Indian forces, particularly in South Asia.

The period of Consolidation :

The event of great significance occured on 15 December, 1960, when King Mahendra not only dismissed the Koirala Ministry, but also dispensed with the parliamentary system. Whatever King Mahendra's motives might have been, the Royal take-over had far-reaching repercussions on Indo-Nepal relations, which in turn affected Pakistan-Nepal relations as well.

King Mahendra's action of dispensing with the democratic set up gave rise to very sharp reactions in India and was noted as a set back to democratic experiment in Nepal. In view of India's strong reaction to the Royal take over, the King tried to deal with the situation in two ways. Firstly, the Royal regime, lacking a genuine. Socio-economic base and philosophy, laid emphasis on assertive nationalism. Its adoption of the Panchayat system with monarchy at the apex of power, was also calculated to differentiate Nepal's political system both from Indian democracy and Chinese communism. It should be noted that King Mahendra's adoption of partyless Panchayat system in Nepal was in certain ways similar to that of Pakistan's Basic Democracy. Sedondly, the King also tried to arouse Nepalese sentiments against India to rally maximum support for his regime and give an anti-Indian projection to his foreign policy in order to assert Nepal's identity and independent status.

Situation in Nepal was soon exploited by Pakistan. It hailed the King's action. Pakistan had undergone a similar experience as a result of Ayub's military coup in 1958. It was, therefore, a matter of satisfaction to the leaders of Pakistan that another neighbouring country was following in Pakistan's footsteps by adopting a system of controlled and limited democracy. Commenting on the situation a leading Pakistani newspaper wrote :

The overthrow of democratic system anywhere is a matter of concern, but in recent years there have been instances to prove that when a combination of circumstances arise which threaten the very

existence of a nation, there may be no alternative but to scrap the democratic form for the time being and set the country on the road to viability and stability. The same thing has obviously happened in Nepal and King Mahendra is entitled to the sympathy and support of all friendly nations who wish Nepal well.[4]

Pakistan's gesture of goodwill towards Nepal can also be attributed to another factor. India has loomed large in the foreign policy of both the countries. While King Mahendra for obvious reasons was in search of approbation for the overthrow of a democratic regime, Pakistan embarassed India by supporting the move and also charging it of interfering in the domestic affairs of Nepal.

The process of activitisation of the relationship between the two countries got a fillip when King Mahendra paid a goodwill visit to Pakistan in September 1961. During the visit Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan, enthusiastically supported the new experiment of Panchayat democracy introduced by the King and assured all possible help to Nepal which he said was making "tremendous efforts to maintain its independence". He also advised the Nepalese King to go ahead with his new scheme without worrying about what "somebody else from outside said".[5] King Mahendra on his part traced the old links of the two countries and emphasised the need for "strengthening the relations of mutual friendship and co-operation of Asia in particular".[6] Thus Nepal's attempt at diversifying political relations prompted Pakistan to come closer to the Himalayan Kingdom which in turn provided it an effective handle to undermine India's position in the region.

The Impact of the Sino-Indian Conflict :

The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 had a lasting effect on the Pakistan-Nepal relations and to some extent, on the whole power mechanism of the South Asian region. In view of the strained relations between the two big powers, both Pakistan and Nepal tried to exploit the situation to their maximum advantage.

Pakistani rulers reacted very sharply to the western military aid to India to face China and viewed it as detrimental to their interests. A Pakistani journalist wrote that Pakistan like some small Asian countries "could not view with equanimity the possibility of a great increase inthe supply of arms and weapons to one of the belligerents i.e., India".[7] The Apprehension in Pakistan was that the Western military aid to India would further add to India's military power in the region and make Pakistan's relative position quite uneviable. By condemning India, Pakistan also wanted to gain moral sympathy of other small neighbours like Nepal.

Coming to Nepalese response to the Sino-Indian conflict, we find that Nepal took a neutral stand vis-a-vis the Sino-Indian dispute. King Mahendra was afraid that Nepal may be pulled in the conflict between the two giants.[8] It may, however, be noted that as the war progressed the Nepali Congress workers, who had been working from India, announced the withdrawl of their movement against King's direct rule. New Delhi had also reconciled itself by this time to the King's rule and the Panchayat system. The changes in India's Nepal policy made the royal regime somewhat sympathetic towards India during the conflict. This development did not leave much ground for Pakistan-Nepal collaboration, yet Pakistan continued to wean Kathmandu away from New Delhi. President Ayub Khan paid a 12 day official visit to Nepal from May 1, 1963. During his visit the Pakistani President highlighted the geographical proximity of the two countries and tried to seek Nepalese support on the Kashmir issue. The President also stressed that both Nepal and Pakistan were determined to preserve their independent sovereign status. He expressed a hope that "the leaders of this region and the world will adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards them in order to dispel their misgivings".[9] Thus he tried to play on Nepali apprehensions about India. Nepal on its part, however, did not show any sign of leaning towards Pakistan.

Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 and Pakistan-Nepal Relations :

At the outbreak of the Indo-Pakistani war in September 1965, the small states in the subcontinent were on the horn of a dilemma. During the conflict, Nepal's attitude was one of calculated neutrality. King Mahendra very tractfully handled his foreign policy as not to antagonise India. He made attempts to convince the military Junta in Islamabad about Kathmandu's inability to prevent the use of the Gurkha troops by India against Pakistan as it had treaty obligations. Hence, even after a personal visit of K.N. Bista, the Foreign Minister of Nepal, to Pakistan immediately after the war and two short visits by King Mahendra to both the wings of Pakistan, Pakistan-Nepal relations in general suffered a set back during this period.

The Bangladesh Crisis and its Aftermath :

The beginning of the seventies witnessed some major changes in the South Asian region. The conclusion of Indo-Soviet treaty, the break up of unified Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh and Sino-Pakistan collusion, all had their lasting impact on Pakistan's relations with the Himalayan Kingdom.

Nepal adopted an ambiguous attitude towards the liberation movement in Bangladesh. Nepal even made its bid for a peaceful solution

of the problem inside and outside the UN. After India, Bhutan and some other countries recognised Bangladesh, Nepal was once again in a dilemma. Notwithstanding its earlier attitude, Bangladesh was a fact accomplished now and Nepal could not refuse to take cognizance of it.

It recognised Bangladesh on January 16, 1972. It is significant to note that Nepal had taken such a stand in the fact of China's refusal to recognise Bangladesh. Indeed, China suported Pakistan to the last. Nor, was Pakistan happy with Nepal recognising Bangladesh.

With the emergence of a sovereign Bangladesh, power equation in South Asia undergone major alteration. The unified Pakistan, which so far had been used by Nepal as a balancing factor against India, no more contributed to Kathmandu's bargaining position vis-a-vis New Delhi to the same degree. Moreover, Pakistan's urge for developing its trade with Nepal, which had given rise to tension between India and Nepal, could no more cause embarrassment from that quarter. Moreover, failure of china to help Pakistan also demonstrated that peking has limited interest in South Asia and there was little likelihood of its military intervention against India in the region. All these developments led to their decisive impact on Pakistan-Nepal relations and to some extent to the deterioration of relationship between the two countries.

With the dismemberment of Pakistan and birth of a new nation in the subcontinent, Pakistan's capacity to counterpoise India in South Asia was considerably reduced. In terms of geographical proximity Pakistan-Nepal relations lost their earlier relevance. Moreover, with its population and area reduced and outside powers displaying their unwillingness to military intervence in the region; Pakistan was in no position to disturb the new balance unilaterally. However, from Pakistan's point of view Nepal still occupies a position which it would like to use as an anti-Indian prop. Outside powers, such as China and the United States continued to support Pakistan and Nepal against India. That is why inspite of basic changes in the scenario of South Asia, the ruling elites both in Nepal and Pakistan have not displayed any significant change in their foreign policy attitudes towards India. A Nepali diplomat has rightly observed that :

From Nepal's point of view an approximate balance of power in the Himalayan areas as well as between India and Pakistan in South Asia would appear to be quite desirable".[10]

The Proposal of the Zone of Peace and Pakistan's Response :

In February 1975, on the eve of his coronation ceremony, King Birendra mooted the concept of the zone of peace for Nepal. He said that "we need peace for our security; we need peace for our independence

and we need peace for development-it is with this earnest desire to institutionalise peace that I propose that my country, Nepal, be declared as a zone of peace".[11] The aspirations contained in Nepal's aforesaid proposal received a ready welcome in Pakistan. The then Pakistan's Prime Minister, Z.A. Bhutto, immediately hailed the proposal in the following words :

I gave great emphasis on our friendship with Nepal because small countries having the same problems and the same neighbours must appreciate each other's difficulties in order to maintain their independence.

He further added that :

We ourselves intiated certain proposals on the same lines and we welcome any proposal by a friendly country and a friendly sovereign like Birendra.[12]

Obviously, Pakistan supported Nepal's proposal of zone of peace with a view to neutralising Indian influence in the Kingdom and driving a wedge in Indo-Nepal relations.

In July 1977, domestic turmoil flared up in Pakistan, which resulted in the overthrow of Bhutto's regime by the military junta headed by General Zia-ul-Haq. Nepal, with its established policy of cold neutrality towards domestic uprisings in its neighbourhood, kept aloof from these developments. As for Pakistan, in view of its preoccupation at the domestic front, no major develoments have taken place in its relationship with the Himalayan Kingdom. However, the execution of former Prime Minister Z.A. Bhutto in early 1979, a fillip to the process of democratisation in the Himalayan Kingdom which eventually led to general election in Nepal in May 1981, wherein the people voted for the continuation of the Panchayat system in the Kingdom.

Towards the close of the seventies some new developments took place in and outside the South Asian region which had influenced Pakistan-Nepal relations. The most significant development was the super power rivalry in Afghanistan and Pakistan's role in the Afghanistan crisis. On this issue Nepal against the wishes of Pakistan sided with India.

During the eightees except the 1989 crisis wherein Pakistan tried to take advantage of the growing rift between Indo-Nepalese relation, Islamabad did not figure as a factor in bi-lateral relations between India and Nepal.

In the recent years with the dawn of democracy in Pakistan and Nepal, although ideologically they are close with each other, Pakistan except in the economic field in the context of SAARC is trying to develop relations with the Himalayan Kingdom. This is borne out of the fact

that when Benazir Bhutto took a visit to Nepal in May 1994, she expressed her happiness over the establishment of democratic governments in both the countries and expressed need for co-operation between the two countries in economic and commercial area.[13]

Concluding Observations :

(i) Due to geographical distance, it is not possible for Pakistan to develop close political and economic relations with Nepal and vice-versa.

(ii) There are no close cultural and religious affinity between the two countries. Nepal being a Hindu state had no national basis to develop closer relations with the Islamic country-Pakistan.

(iii) The only factor which sustain their relationship is that both the countries are part of the South Asian system and as such they are bound to interact, especially after the formation of the SAARC. Besides, being the mini and mediumsized state, they have developed similar complex against their common giant neighbour India. There is a tendency among the countries of South Asian system to combine against India and the India factor cements their mutual relationship. With Pakistan there is an additional reason having lived in almost constant hostality with India, Pakistan remains always prepared to aggregate India's troubled relations with the neighbours.

To sum up, it could be said that Pakistan's strategy to develop good relations with Nepal to counter-balance and to keep a check on India's pre-eminent positions in the region has not been successful in view of the realisation on the part of Nepal that India's central role in political and economic field in the region as well as in the economy and other social and cultural aspects of Nepal cannot be minimised.

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