

## Soft power diplomacy in India- Nepal relations

Suvarna Bhaurao Bagul

Senior Research Fellow, Department of Civics and politics, Mumbai University, Mumbai, India.

Email – suvarnabagul@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Soft power, according to Nye, is a power of attraction of a state based on the appeal of its culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye Jr. 2004, p. 11, 2008, p. 96). The ties between India and Nepal are based on civilisational reasons and are further strengthen due to developmental cooperation, stronger connectivity, expanded infrastructure and economic projects. The economic projects have paved the way for greater trade and commerce relations and the water sharing resources between India and Nepal are also vital points of cooperation. Cultural ties of Buddhism is a powerful soft power resource of Nepal and India which is utilised by the present government for mending ties between both the countries. The paper tries to explain what is soft power and scope of soft power diplomacy between India and Nepal. The paper mainly focuses on historical and civilisational ties, economic connectivity and interdependence, defence diplomacy, medical diplomacy, value system of governance, travel and tourism, education, climate change, terrorism, digital connectivity, disaster management, skill-development, exchanges between think tanks and people-to people as a part of Soft power diplomacy. India-Nepal can successfully present their culture, values, and way of life in a positive and appealing light to forge better partnerships and alliances leading to greater stability and prosperity in the region.*

**Keywords:** *India, Nepal, Soft Power, cultural diplomacy, peace.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

India and Nepal has completed over 75 years of diplomatic relations. The relationship is based on an century-old connection of history, a shared civilization, culture, and religion. The relationship is a fascinating one that is deep and wide, multidimensional and dense as it is chaotic, and marked by many contradictions. The people to people relationship is not observed anywhere in world that exist between two, the interdependent be it socially, culturally, economically or even politically.

India is apprehensive about china's influence in Nepal while Nepal remains concerned with Indian overreach. Though concerns are legitimate, these worries often translate into obsessions that restrict both countries from finding out new ways to tackle problems in their relationship. The relations between Nepal and India marked their lowest ebb in 2015 due to anti-India sentiments in Nepal, in reaction to the perceived political interference by India, when Nepal was making its new constitution and economic blockade imposed by India, and further in 2020, on the boundary issue in Nepal's North-western region. During the spread of COVID-19 in the two countries, a hardening of relations between the two countries were observed as the open border was closed for over one-and-half years, beginning in March 2020. India-Nepal need to find amicable solutions for many pertaining disputes like revision of 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, security issues due to open border, trade deficit with India, Hydropower-water cooperation, border dispute etc. Soft power diplomacy gives a wider scope for both the countries to engage at multilateral level and address all existing problems.

### 2. What is Soft Power?

Joseph Nye coined the term 'soft power' in 1990 and is most debated in the field of international relations and diplomacy. Nye says that, 'The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies. A number of factors caused India's shift from hard power to soft power diplomacy in Nepal. Its is argued that the changed occurred after the 'unofficial' border blockade imposed by India over Nepal for five months in 2015. The shift from hard power to soft power policy are due to the internationalisation of Nepal's conflict; the opening of border transits and construction of roads to China; the trade agreement and signing of Chinese One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative by Nepal; change in interpretation and recipient of activities of official Indian

governmental and bureaucratic structures by the subject of power (Madheshi ethnic Nepali) and contemporary political situation in India.

The Global Soft Power Index report (Brand Finance, 2020) published in 2020 evaluated the soft power of countries within the following indices:

**Business and Trade:** This index analyzed the country's capacity in terms of economy, business, brands, taxation, trade and investment parameters. Platforms Business, digital networks and technological platforms in business and trade has great value in the report.

**Governance:** This index explored the country's political dynamism in terms of rule of law, human rights, crime rate, security, constitution, political elite.

**International Relations:** This index took account in its analysis from the commitment and practices of concerned country in terms of diplomatic relations, international organizations, conflict resolution, international aid and climate action.

**Culture and Heritage:** The index emphasized tourism, sport, food, fine arts, literature, music, film, gaming and fashion to measure the culture and heritage potentialities. **Media and Communication:** The index categorized Media and Communication pillar of soft power in traditional media, social media and marketing branches.

**Education and Science:** The index analyzed country's strength in education and science through the lens of higher education, science and technologies.

**People and Values:** The index accessed the soft power capacity of people and values of concerned country in values, character and trust parameters.

### **3. How Soft Power Diplomacy mending relationship between India and Nepal?**

Nepal has established itself as civil popular democracy through the promulgation of its constitution, on September 20, 2015 and India is the largest administrative popular democracy in the South Asia. As both countries now have same political values there's greater scope for multinational engagement to break all bilateral controversies icing the period of peace, substance and stability in whole region. There's hardly any important sector in which India didn't extend support to Nepal, be it education, health, culture, roads, hydropower, agrarian, forestry, transport, or communication.

The educational services are available to the Nepalese scholars and subjects of Nepal in the Indian academia leading to significant presence of Nepalese in the Indian Universities to pursue their dreams. This has created good neighbourly relations dispelling fears of collective mistrust, misreading and conflict between two friendly neighbours. India remains Nepal's dominant trade mate, counting for roughly 60- 65 % of all trade with Nepal. The trade deficiency reckoned for nearly two- thirds of Nepal's total deficiency in goods trade. There's an estimated fresh trade eventuality of around US\$ 4 billion if the two countries were to import from each other what they import from the rest of the world. A common medium, comprising original authorities, to resolve problems arising in the concurrence of goods at customs points was handed in the 2009 modification to the trade convention, effectively operationalising this medium could reduce the walls and hassles at the border. Good faith at loftiest political position will be a major demand for the convention to be effective.

India constructed near about three- fourth of the East- West Highway of Nepal that connects the eastern part of the country to the western part. India supported in construction of several airfields in different parts of the country including Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu. India's part was necessary in construction of different structures of Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu as well as handed specialized support for the smooth functioning of the University. The India helped in the construction of road line between Jaynagar( India) and Janakpuri/ Kurtha- Bardibas( Nepal) in 2014, of which the 34- kilometre Jaynagar- Janakpur/ Kurtha section has formerly been completed and handed over to Nepal. But delayed systems gesture that there are deeply settled and undetermined issues that affect in a lack of political will from both countries. Both nations must pave the way for prostrating these issues to achieve a mutually- salutary bilateral cooperation.

According to an Asian Development Bank report, a connectivity- driven strategy for profitable growth would help Nepal pursue all profitable pretensions by reducing the costs associated with trade and transportation. The profitable connectivity enterprise like the Bangladesh- Bhutan- India- Nepal( BBIN) and the smooth working of the BBIN-

combined Motor Vehicle Agreement( MVA) shows that enough compass for both India and Nepal to mutually gain from connectivity enterprise.

The hydropower which at present fulfills only one percent of Nepal's energy requirements. A study has estimated that if Nepal can develop indeed 20% of its economically doable eventuality of about, 40,000 megawatts, it can increase its gross domestic product by 87%. Likewise, import of electricity to India could help avoid about, 224000 tonnes of carbon- dioxide per day. Recently Nepal started to export electricity to Indian government. Before, Nepal used to import power from India now chances of farther exports of hydropower to India are high. Through exports of hydropower to India, Nepal can earn significant profit from India, which could help to bridge the gap in the balance of trade with India. Though being apprehensive of the benefits of cooperation, they're lacking in trouble and political will to restate implicit to reality.

Cultural tactfulness aims to make collective understanding, trust, and cooperation between nations, and it frequently plays a pivotal part in supporting a state's broader foreign policy objects. PM Modi's recent visit to Lumbini at the assignation of Nepali Prime Minister underscores the participated civilisational and artistic heritage of the people of both the countries and will further consolidate the bilateral relations. Tourism is the dependence of the Nepalese frugality and religious tourism is one of the main contributors to the Nepalese tourism assiduity. It helped Nepal in generation of thousands of jobs along with promotion of Nepalese culture, life and traditions. The international Buddhist circuit will be a motorist not only for profitable growth but also for bilateral relations.

Nepal due to her complex geophysical condition and poor socio-economic situation, is facing various types of natural disasters: flooding, landslides, fire, earthquakes, hailstorms, lightning, the bursting of glacier lakes, drought, epidemics, avalanches, and so on. The factors such as organisational weaknesses, resource constraints and an absence of modern technology have hindered efforts to cope with natural disasters in Nepal. India is the first contact of response Nepal seeks support from during emergencies. India was first to reach when Nepal was hit by 7.9 magnitude earthquake in 2015 Within hours, four Indian Air Force planes—including a C-130J Super Hercules—were on their way to Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport with blankets, a mobile "field hospital" and search and rescue teams leading to Operation Maitri. Similarly, also the India was first to supply Nepal with the COVID-19 vaccine. India having achieved significant expertise in disaster management can surely guide and train Nepal during natural calamities.

#### **4. CONCLUSION :**

The capability of a country to impact others through attractiveness rather than compulsion or force is appertained to as " soft power. " India can engage with Nepal's soft power through Nepal's "natural beauty, unique and rich civilisation, culture, lifestyle, diversity, thought processes, art, language, literature and sport". Along with that connectivity brings in all the aspects of soft power as it covers health, education, economic activities, employment and defence movement and so, connectivity is of primary importance. Connectivity with time bound implementation is the need of the hour and connectivity needs to be supported with capital for the smooth flow of infrastructural projects which would help strengthen this relationship.

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