

Recent Indo- Nepal Relations through the Lens of Hindutva

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Abstract

Recently, Nepal is witnessing a surge in support for the idea of Hindu Rastra (nation state) and restoration of Monarchy. Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) along with different section of society started movement which was fuelled by dissatisfaction of the people with the current political system and their process of governance. They want to bring back traditional values of “Akhand Nepal” These groups believe that Nepal should be recognised as a Hindu nation, with Hinduism as its state religion. It is true that Nepal’s urge for Hindu state was impacted by the Hindutva ideology of India. They have implemented Hindutva political ideology in their governance process which spill over neighbouring state Nepal where Hindus are majority. Therefore, in this article we are going to analyse why Nepal asking for Hindu state and restoration of Monarchy? How far recent Hindutva ideology of BJP in India impacted on political landscape of Nepal.

Keywords: India, Hindutva, Monarchy, Nepal, RPP.

Introduction

Nestled in the heart of the Himalayas, Nepal holds a significant place in Hindu mythology, frequently mentioned in sacred texts such as the Vedas, Puranas, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata. Its unique geographical location—situated between the northern plateau of Tibet and the southern plains of India—has enhanced its prominence in the religious and mythological traditions of ancient Bharatvarsha. The concept of Bharatvarsha, a term found in ancient Hindu scriptures referring to the landmass that encompassed present-day India, Nepal, and surrounding regions, is key to understanding Nepal's enduring role in these spiritual and cultural narratives (Ahman, 2021). Over the past eight decades, Nepal has experienced a dynamic political evolution, adopting, implementing, and modifying various systems of governance. In 1951, the Nepali people overthrew the Rana oligarchy, and by the early 1960s, briefly established a multiparty democratic system that lasted for about eighteen months. This was followed by a thirty-year period under the party-less Panchayat system, initiated by the monarchy. In 1991, multiparty democracy was reinstated. A major turning point came in 2006, when the monarchy, having ruled for over 240 years, was abolished. Today, Nepal functions as a federal democratic republic, characterized by inclusivity and participatory governance (The Kathmandu Post, 2023). Following the resounding victory of the Hindu nationalist in the Indian elections of May 2014, anti-secular sentiments gained momentum in Nepal. During the drafting of the new constitution, various political parties and religious groups organized protests and rallies demanding the reinstatement of Nepal as a Hindu state.

Objective of the study

- To analyse the surge of Hindu Rastra in Nepal
- To discuss establishment of Hindutva ideology in India and its impact on Nepal
- To examine the Indo- Nepal relations in present scenario

Methodology

This study is qualitative, exploratory, and analytical in nature, utilizing only secondary sources of data. Secondary data have been gathered from government official records, books, academic journals, news reports, opinion pieces, and various websites.

India- Nepal traditional Relations

Geographically, nature has positioned India and Nepal as integral parts of a single regional landscape. Nepal is one of India's closest neighbours, holding considerable geo-strategic, economic, and political significance for India (Gupta, 2009, p. 57). The two South Asian countries share an open border stretching 1,850 km across five Indian states—Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Bihar, and Sikkim—and a 1,415 km border with Tibet (Sahu, 2015, p.197). This open-border arrangement reflects the deep-rooted socio-cultural, emotional, and economic ties between the peoples of both nations (Shukla, 2006, p.356). Consequently, any major societal or political developments in one country tend to influence the other.

India and Nepal have shared deep-rooted traditional ties since their inception. These longstanding relations are evident through their historical and religious connections with places such as Janakpur (birthplace of Mata Sita), Tanahun (birthplace of Maharshi Vyasa), Lumbini (birthplace of the Buddha), the Himalayas, the Ganges, the Pashupatinath temple, and the Char Dham pilgrimage sites—Jagannath Puri, Rameswaram, Dwarka, and Badrinath. These sacred sites are revered by people in both countries and symbolize the enduring religious and cultural bond between the two (Sahu, 2015, p.198). As such, shared traditions, religious beliefs, and cultural values have shaped and influenced the relationship between India and Nepal since their early histories.

The term *Hindutva*, meaning "Hindu-ness" (Bownas, 2024), is often used interchangeably with Hindu nationalism (Banik, 2022). It became a political ideology after V.D. Savarkar articulated its foundations in his seminal 1924 work *Essentials of Hindutva* (Graham, 1990, p.44). Savarkar defined Hindus as a nation based not solely on religion but on common ties of race, blood, culture, and territory, stretching from the Sindhu River to the Indian Ocean, unified by the Sanskrit language and revering Hindustan as both fatherland and holy land. He acknowledged Nepal within this vision, stating that "Hindu and Hindustan own a loving allegiance of millions of our people from the throne of Nepal to the begging bowl of the street" (Savarkar, 2021, p.28), thereby praising Nepal as a Hindu-ruled nation. While Hindu nationalism in Nepal shares some cultural and historical roots with India, it has developed uniquely. In Nepal, Hindutva has emerged as both a cultural and political force, aimed at unifying diverse ethnic groups under a single national identity.

Shifting Perceptions of Hinduism in Modern Nepal

Though Hindu nationalist forces in Nepal gained traction with the rise of a pro-Hindu government in India in 2014 (Siyech, 2024), the roots of this movement go back to history. In 1960, King Mahendra introduced the Panchayat system, grounded in Hindu nationalist ideology. He promoted three pillars of Nepali identity: Hinduism as the state religion, Nepali as the national language, and monarchy as the political foundation (Pulami, 2023, p.38). Declaring Nepal, the world's only Hindu Kingdom (Shrestha, 2007), King Mahendra glorified the Shah dynasty. The 30-year Panchayat era gave rise to Hindu religious organizations such as the World Hindu Council (*Vishwa Hindu Parishad*) and, under the initiative of King Birendra and Yogi Narahari Nath, the World Hindu Confederation (*Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh*) was established in 1981 (Bownas, 2024).

Given the Hindu majority in Nepal, promoting Hindu culture and traditions continues to have strong appeal. Recently, pro-monarchy and pro-Hindu nation political forces have regained momentum. This resurgence is fuelled by internal dissatisfaction with mainstream political parties' inability to meet public expectations, and externally by the growing influence of Hindu nationalism in India (Pulami, 2023, p.41). Some influential leaders from mainstream Nepali parties have also endorsed the idea of restoring a Hindu nation, further empowering Hindu nationalist groups (Narayan, 2022). The movement for reinstating Nepal as a Hindu nation, along with a Hindu monarchy, has been actively supported by Indian religious and political Hindutva figures. Indian gurus, saints, priests, and nationalist leaders advocate for this cause, viewing it as an extension of the broader Hindu nationalist agenda. Even the Member of Parliament (presently Chief minister of Uttar Pradesh), Jogi Adityanath the icon of Hindutva ideology in India desired that Nepal should again have declared as Hindu state (Srivastava, 2015). His pro-Hindu ideas and activity impacted on the people of border areas of Nepal.

India's Soft Hinduism and Cultural Diplomacy with Nepal

In India, since 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Hindu nationalist ideology has gained prominence in the region (Lal, 2023). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal on May 26, 2014, seeking to normalize bilateral relations and foster goodwill. He employed cultural diplomacy as a means of celebrating shared heritage and religious ties. His most recent visit to Lumbini on May 16, 2022, for Buddha Purnima, emphasized spiritual connections. Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' visited India from May 31 to June 3, 2023, and again attended the swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi on June 9-10, 2024. Religion plays a central role in shaping Indo-Nepal cultural relations. S.D. Muni, an expert on Indo-Nepal ties, argues that Hindu nationalism has become a core part of India's Nepal policy since Modi's rise, largely due to the influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Muni asserts that Nepal's political leaders are being "pressured and incentivized" to support the idea of a Hindu state (Singh, 2024). Nepal's Hindu nationalists increasingly look to their Indian counterparts for support, especially after BJP's electoral victories. However, Modi is cautious about the risks of promoting radical interpretations of Hindutva.

Firstly, despite attempts to globalize Hindutva, it is primarily a nationalist ideology centred on Indian identity and loyalty, which is less resonant among Nepali Hindu elites.

Secondly, any overt support for Hindu nationalism in Nepal risks provoking backlash from Maoists, as well as religious minorities—Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims—whose presence is significant. Such actions could destabilize Nepal's internal politics and harm India's strategic interests in the region.

Lastly, although Hindu nationalism in Nepal is on the rise, its political impact remains limited. The movement lacks a unified organizational base and a coherent leadership structure. While this could change, the BJP has so far managed to restrain hard-line voices within the RSS and VHP, and Prime Minister Modi appears likely to continue this balanced approach (Wolf, 2014).

Despite these challenges, support for the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)—Nepal's closest equivalent to a Hindutva-oriented party—has grown. In the 2022 federal elections, the RPP secured 5.7% of the vote, up from 3.3% in 2017 (Daniel, 2021). The inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024, further energized pro-Hindutva organizations in Nepal (Nepal Khabar, 2023). Though the RSS has supported a return to monarchy and Hindu statehood in Nepal, it lacks strong electoral backing. Furthermore, its leadership differs significantly from that of India, whose key figures, including Prime Minister Modi, rose from the grassroots as *pracharaks* (volunteers) within the *Sangh Parivar*.

Why Nepali people want to bring back Monarchy and Hindu State?

Why the people of Nepal asking for monarchy and Hindu Rastra again is a big question? Actually, they have experienced worst situation during democracy in the country. Since 2008 when Nepal become secular republic and monarchy was excluded from entire process the democratic parties had made big promises which have not fulfilled till date. Since last 17 years' instability in Government become a natural phenomenon (Prime Minister has change 13 times and 11 times government could not even last for 2 years); Secondly: Currently the unemployment rate in Nepal is more than 12 percent, which is frightening. This rate is even above 20 percent among youths (Kathmandu post); Thirdly: Corruption is another big issue that came after democracy in Nepal. During the monarchy, power was centralized and the general public did not have to face corruption in day-to-day life. But now corruption has taken deep roots in Nepal; Fourthly: The people of Nepal fed up with democratic Government due to the poor governance. Different reports show that 73 percent people of Nepal do not get clean drinking water, people are still deprived of electricity, roads are not properly maintained in hilly areas; Fifthly: During democratic Governments when Christian missionaries and Islamic fundamentalism making roots in Nepal. A BBC report in 2023 said that the Christian population in Nepal has increased by 68 percent in last decade. Taking the advantage of instability, they increased their rate of conversion in remote areas of Nepal. Along with this Islamic fundamentalism is also spreading in Nepal during last few years; Sixthly: With the end of Monarchy the gap between Mahesh's and Pahari people widened worsened the situation. As experience of the people of Nepal was bitter regarding democracy, they wanted to come out from the situation. In this context, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has initiated a movement advocating for the abolition of Nepal's costly federal structure and the

reinstatement of the country as a Hindu state. According to RPP leaders, “People are not angry, they are exhausted—worn down by corruption, inflation, and persistent political instability” (Agarwala, 2025). Beyond the RPP, businessman Durga Prasai has also launched a populist—some would argue demagogic—campaign calling for the restoration of both the monarchy and a Hindu state (Giri, 2023).

Conclusion

To conclude, the growing movement against Nepal’s current federal government reflects public frustration with ongoing instability, corruption, and miss governance. At this critical juncture, India must think carefully. India needs to examine that return of monarchy is a setback of democratic process which can hamper bilateral relations with India in future. Any overt or perceived support for Nepal’s royalist or Hindutva forces is fraught with potential consequences. By appearing to align with these groups, India risks alienating Nepal’s republican majority, who regard secularism as a cornerstone of national sovereignty. Such perceptions could fuel anti-India sentiment and drive Nepal closer to China. If New Delhi is seen as interfering in Nepal’s internal affairs to promote monarchy or Hindutva ideology, Beijing is likely to seize the opportunity to strengthen its strategic foothold in Kathmandu. At present India is lacking friends in South Asia. Pakistan’s terrorist activities in Pahalgam and India’s Operation Sindoor to destroy terrorist den in Pakistan occupied Kashmir, dethrone of Seikh Hasina from Bangladesh and closeness of Yunus to Pakistan and China already created a complex situation for India. Therefore, India should play a responsible role in the context of Nepal’s internal politics otherwise it would be detrimental to India’s position in South Asia as well as global arena.

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