

NEPAL—AN INTRODUCTION

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I

Nepal is situated in the Central Himalayas with India on one side and Tibet on the other. The natural streams of exports and imports are from India or through Indian territory. There is, however, a sizeable trade with Tibet also. Because of this primary geographical fact, Nepal has had very intimate relations with India throughout her history.

Nepal can be sub-divided into three regions—each being the drainage area of a large river. These rivers are the Karnali in the west, the Gandaki in the middle and the Kosi in the east. Between the Gandaki and the Kosi there is a large fertile valley from which the country derives its name and which is drained by the river Baghmati.

The rivers have fertile valleys throughout their lengths. The villages in the countryside are mostly situated at the basins of the rivers or nearabout the basins. The higher ridges of mountains are covered with thick forest lands and excellent pasturage ending in snowy Himalayas. At the other end where the rivers come down from the hills there are thick forest lands bordered by fertile rice-producing areas. These "Tarai" lands lie on the borders towards the Indian sub-continent.

There are very few lateral roads inside the country. There is a good motor road from Raxaul to Kathmandu and from there to the Tibet border. The Nepal Government is now very keen to develop means of communication from different important towns to the capital at Kathmandu. A number of air-services are, however, being run in Nepal which connect the more important townships.

The races of Nepal have in them an admixture of Indian and Tibetan elements. Towards the West and the South, the races are predominantly Indian in origin whereas in the North-East there are several groups who originally came from Tibet. In the Nepal valley and in the city of Kathmandu one can see both the Hindu and the Buddhist temples. To the east there is a preponderance of Buddhist monas-

teries and to the west of Hindu temples.

The language of the people is primarily Nepali or Parbatia. It can be easily understood by the Kumaon is and the Garhwalis but the dialects as they proceed to the east have more and more of Tibetan words and in some areas the language is basically a derivative of Tibetan.

II

Throughout her history Nepal has had close cultural relations with the Indian kingdoms to her south. The influence of Kasi or Varanasi has been immense. There is no record of an Indian king invading Nepal although there are several instances of people coming from different parts of India to Nepal and staying there permanently. Asoka is said to have visited Kathmandu valley and erected some Buddhist Stupas there. He sent a large number of Buddhist monks and nuns to the valley to give the message of the Buddha to the local inhabitants. Ever since there has been consistent communion between Buddhist priests in Nepal and in India. This must have been very intimate when a sizeable portion of Northern India was Buddhist in religion.

With Tibet, Nepal has fought several wars. Sometimes the Tibetans have had an upper hand and sometimes the Nepalese. The East India Company also sent a couple of military expeditions into Nepal and fought a long war with her from 1814 to 1816. The Chinese have also invaded Nepal in the past.

The major problem of Nepalese diplomacy during the nineteenth century was how to escape the over-riding influence of the British presence in India. The efforts of the rulers of Nepal throughout were to keep the minimum intercourse with the British in India and at the same time not to antagonise them in any manner. This policy had two aspects. First, the Nepalese did not want the influence of the British to increase in their kingdom. Secondly, they did not want their own people to come under the influence of the officers of the British Government in India. Further they, accepted the military preponderance of the British in India and wanted to keep themselves in the good books of that immense power. This continued till the departure of the British from India.

III

When India achieved independence, a new policy had to be evolved. The Prime Minister of Nepal who was wielding real authority in the country gave way to Royal Authority because the people felt that the only way to overthrow the regime of the Rana Prime Minister was to go to the King. A bloodless revolution took place in Nepal in the early fifties, when the King represented new forces as against the traditional regime of the Prime Minister. The new regime had the backing of the majority of the people. All offices in the State had been the monopoly of the Ranas earlier. Now these were thrown open to the general public. Opportunities were also opened for the people to establish large businesses and industries. The King of Nepal had also a very difficult task on his hand of modernising his country. Stability in Nepal was only possible when there were prospects of development and better times to come before the population.

For this purpose the King had first experimented with parliamentary democracy but because of mutual conflicts the political parties could not deliver the goods. The King had to take over administration of the country himself to expedite and guarantee maximum development. In this he is helped by several foreign Governments at the same time. They include India, the U.S.A., the U.K. and the People's Republic of China. The country is very backward and the process of development cannot be charted with precision. The country has immense natural resources in water power, forests and minerals, but the basic requirements of development, namely communications and significant hydro electric projects are conspicuous by their absence. There is also great dearth of entrepreneurs in Nepal. The officers of the Nepal Government have also had very little experience of organising industrial complexes. Apart from the problems of development, Nepal is also faced with the problem of planning her relationship with the two great States on either side of her, namely the People's Republic of China in the autonomous region of Tibet and the Union of India. Because of her geographical position, Nepal wants to keep friendly ties

with both the countries. As the Chinese are the greater military power, Nepal's natural leanings should be towards India in which country Nepal has close ties of race, language and religion. Healthy friendship between Nepal and India will be to the mutual benefit of both the countries and will also be a guarantee for peace in the neighbourhood. For this it is essential that the economy of Nepal should grow from year to year and the common man should get a larger and larger share of the national wealth and improve his general standard of living. There is every hope for this consummation.