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As a small, land-locked country positioned between two large and powerful neighbours, China and India, Nepal's foreign policy has centred on the not always reconcilable task of maintaining friendly relations with both and safeguarding its national security and independence. The long, permeable border (around 1,800 km) with India has upheld a close yet sometimes acrimonious relationship between the two countries, with Nepal's economy functioning as an appendage to that of India. Subsequently, relations between India and Nepal have not only been influenced by cultural and historical links but also by suspicion and resentment. One should however also keep in mind that the Nepalese people in general have great affection for India. In a survey (Insights South Asia. Nepal survey. 2011 results), conducted by the South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF) in collaboration with Gallup Europe, 84 per cent of the respondents said they had a rather positive opinion on their big neighbour, while just 9% held an opposite view and 7% said they "did not know" (or preferred not to

give an answer). Respondents who had visited India were overall the most likely to see the country in a positive light (90 per cent).

Besides substantial cooperation and common interests characterizing the bilateral relations, a major reason for such a positive perception is India's role as the midwife of Nepal's democracy, which was formally acknowledged in the 1950 'Peace and Friendship' treaty (as an outcome of the so called 'Delhi Compromise') signed by the Rana dynasty. The Rana dynasty came to an end in 1951, after ruling the country in an autocratic manner, leading to the first general elections in Nepal in 1959. But in 1960 Nepal witnessed a royal coup, which stifled the progress of the 'democratic experiment'. In order to reduce dependence from India, the then monarch expanded the country's foreign relation with China. Subsequently, New Delhi extensively supported the pro-democratic elements, especially the National Congress (forced into Indian exile after all political parties were banned) which launched an insurrection from the border areas. New Delhi Nepal's policy changed after the 1962 India-China border war and India switched to improving relations with the monarchy. Trade and transit rights were established and India secured, through a secret agreement, a monopoly on arms sales to Nepal. In the 1970s and 1980s there was economic co-operation between the countries as well as friction over India's support for the Nepalese opposition and Nepal's persistent feeling of vulnerability with India as the regional hegemon. The royal palace secret conclusion, in June 1988, of an arms treaty with China and the ensuing Trade and Transit dispute marked a low point in relations. However, relations improved significantly after a democratically elected government came to power in May 1991, although India's security-related concerns remained. Political instability in Nepal has added to fears of possible anti-India activities being launched from Nepal. Furthermore, both countries were wary of spill over effects facilitated by the open border between the two. India being concerned about support cells for India's northeast insurgencies generated by the Maoist movement and Nepal of co-operation between Indian and Nepali Maoists during the last two decades. However, after the ouster of the King by two major pro-democracy movements (Jana Andolan I & II) and the end of the Maoist insurgency (People's War), Nepal is once again in a process of transition towards democracy. However, the subsequent positive ramifications for India-Nepal relations were not utilized due to an ambiguous foreign policy of the Indian National Congress/United Progressive Alliance governments during the last decade.

Today, besides the above mentioned economic and security related dimensions of the bilateral relations between New Delhi and Kathmandu, the cultural dimension is gaining more

traction. It is especially noteworthy that Nepal is perceived as the world's only officially Hindu kingdom, which in turn always attracted the focus of the Hindu-Nationalist movement in India.

For example Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who should be considered as the most remarkable person among the Hindu-Nationalist thinkers, was pointing at Nepal as the ideal Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State). In his Hindutva concept, in which Savarkar elaborated on the ideological foundation of a theocratic Hindu state and its citizenship (Who is a Hindu), he emphasized the importance of the Hindu-Kingdom of Nepal as a model of governance and fabric of society. According to Savarkar such a Hindu-state needs a coherent collective identity in order to avoid a lack of commonly accepted norms (identity) as well as disintegration of the (Hindu) people. The latter was perceived as the major reason why various attempts to build a national entity in the history of the South Asian subcontinent have failed. To counter this failure, a homogenous community of the Hindus (Hindu-Sangathan) had to be built up in which all heterogeneous elements were excluded. Subsequently the fundamental conception of this identity project is the vision to transform Indian society as well as its political-institutional structures from a secular into a theocratic Hindu state.

Having this in mind, it is important for Hindu-Nationalist ideologues that Nepal consists of a Hindu theocratic structure of governance as a point of reference for their own identity constructions. Therefore, it does not come by surprise that several members of the Hindu Nationalist movement sector, primarily represented by three major organizations Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Organization) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council) are arguing that Nepal should re-transform into a Hindu state (for example Ashok Singhal, leader of the VHP). However, such bold statements have to be seen in the context of the usual electoral rhetoric of the more conservative elements among Hindu-Nationalists in order to mobilise their followers. But the former BJP government (1999-2004) government proved that such radical demands would not find their way into the political-decision making process in New Delhi. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that such demands from India aimed at preserving the Hindu-identity in Nepal or to re-establish a Hindu state function as a catalyst for anti-secular thinking and respective forces in Nepal.

This is increasingly gaining significance, since a major controversy appeared after Nepal was declared a secular state in its interim constitution of January 2007 (following a parliamentary

declaration from 2006). Promoting secularism instead of a 'Hindu-state' provoked heavy criticism among Hindu-nationalist forces in Nepal like the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) or the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP). Basically the phenomenon of Hindu-Nationalism is not new in Nepal. Several monarchs in the past had instrumentalized it in order to gain legitimacy. In consequence, the idea of a single identity for multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Nepal was introduced. This found its expression in the attempt to try to enforce a Nepali nationalism, based on one religion, one language, one culture, and one nation, to form a homogenous (Hindu) society. Doubtless, this notion of state and society was tremendously influenced by India's Hindu Nationalists, especially through the RSS which maintained links to the Hindu monarch. Despite the fact that the monarchy was abolished, Hindu-Nationalist thinking remained in Nepal's political arena. Here, the current deep political and constitutional crisis serves as the platform for an ideological battle over the country's identity. It seems that various sections of the Nepalese society (especially the HSS and the RPP) are pushing towards a debate over the definition of the relationship between state and religion, which is until today not adequately defined. The main goal of the Hindu-Nationalists is to fervently refute the idea of secularism, which is portrayed as a Western import to promote Christianity on the expense of the Hindu community and/or a Maoist project to strengthen their (ideological) influence in the country. Subsequently, secularism is perceived by the followers of Hindutva as a crucial threat to the identity and unity of Nepal's Hindu-Sangathan. In order to improve their position in this struggle, Nepal's Hindu-Nationalists are looking towards their Indian 'fellow travellers' for support, especially after the landslide victory of the BJP and their allies. However, India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his current visit made it clear that Nepal's constitutional crisis is an internal affair and that India will not interfere. Furthermore, Narendra Modi will not accept any disturbance of his economic driven agenda and his attempts to push business with Nepal. Any open support for Hindu-Nationalism would risk the latest deepening of India-Nepal relations. In this context, Modi is quite aware about the limitation of radical interpretation and implementation of Hindutva.

First, besides all ideological engineering to give Hindutva an international dimension, Hindutva is primarily about patriotism and loyalty towards India. This is a fact, which is not much appealing to the political (Hindu) elites in Nepal.

Second, certain elements within Savarkar's Hindutva concept like the abolition of the caste system (understood as the rejection of each societal structure which is based on birth and not

on merits) will not be accepted by the Nepali Hindu caste elites as well as for the various Hindu-Nationalist organisations in the country. Obviously such ideas would not only change the social fabric but also undermine the legitimacy of Nepal's leading political circles.

Third, each attempt to support Hindu-Nationalism in Nepal would provoke harsh reaction of the country's Maoists as well as the different religious groups like Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims – which are significant in numbers too. Additionally it would further complicate the political situation and most likely lead to the re-emergence of violence, which could create negative effects for India's economic and political interests in Nepal. In this context, one should also mention that the RSS support for the monarchy and its political use of Hinduism to gain legitimacy and to counter the secular opposition (even with the help of outside forces) was not well taken by Nepal's pro-democratic movement.

Last but not least, Hindu-Nationalism in Nepal is rising but its political influence remains limited. Besides the above-mentioned reasons, a major challenge for the success of Hindu-Nationalism in Nepal is the relatively weak organisational structure as well as the lack of a coherent, united front of the different organisations. This might change in the future and there will be without doubt attempts by certain segments of India's Hindu-Nationalists to support Hindutva in Nepal. However, the BJP leadership in the last decades was able to keep the hard liners among the RSS and VHP in check and it seems apparent that Prime Minister Modi will tread a similar path.

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