

India-Nepal border feud plot thickens

A longstanding and bitter feud between India and Nepal over the annexation of nearly one-third of Nepali territory by the past colonial British masters of India gets a fresh lease of life with a documentary urging the restoration of the lost land winning a national award in Nepal.

Debutant Nepali filmmaker Manoj Pundit moved away from mainstream cinema to make a documentary on the controversial subject of "Greater Nepal".

The tale goes back to the 19th century Anglo-Nepal war fought between the East India Company, that was then ruling India, and independent Nepal.

Though the Himalayan kingdom averted being annexed, it, however, had to sign a humiliating treaty, surrendering almost one-third of its land, including much of the fertile Terai plains.

After India became independent, Nepal has been clamouring for the abrogation of the infamous Sugauli Treaty, demanding that India return the annexed land.

Both royalists as well as the Maoists are against the treaty.

A Nepali organisation, Unified Nepal National Front, has recently resurrected the demand for the restoration of the lost land.

Its president, Phanindra Nepal, wrote a book, "Greater Nepal", that forms the basic plot for Pundit's documentary.

This year, as the Nepal Film Development Board announced the national film awards after a hiatus of nearly three years, Pundit's controversial documentary bagged the "Critic's Choice Award".

Maoist chief Prachanda, who is poised to be the next prime minister of Nepal, is scheduled to hand over the award in the capital Monday.

Pundit's 100-minute documentary also rakes up other contentious border issues.

It projects the Nepali accusation that India is encroaching on Nepal's territory. The border areas of Kalapani, Susta, Pyaratal, Bhadrapur and Kakarbhitta are said to be encroached upon by Indian settlers.

The documentary, made about three years ago, had been gathering dust despite attempts by the Front to garner public support for the issue.

The demand for the creation of a Greater Nepal lost momentum after the death of Yogi Naraharinath, a venerated nationalist historian.

However, the award will give a new impetus to the movement.

Nationalists in Nepal contend that the Sugauli Treaty was invalidated in 1950, when India and Nepal signed a new pact, the Peace and Friendship Treaty.

Therefore, they say, the provisions of the earlier treaty should be scrapped as well and India return the annexed land to Nepal.

Sudeshna Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)