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**Tandan, P.**

A PhD thesis awarded by the University of Westminster.

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<https://doi.org/10.34737/w13yv>

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**A postcolonial approach to Nepal's geopolitics, hydro-politics, and border-politics**

**Promod Tandan**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of  
Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2022

## **Abstract**

Postcolonial approaches have challenged as parochial the conventional International Relations frames and their limited one-dimensional consideration of power. Study of Nepal as an international actor remains dominated by conventional IR that prioritises the interests and views of great powers like China and India. In this context, considering the case of Nepal's relationship as a small state vis-à-vis its much larger neighbours India and China, I contend that a postcolonial approach allows us to reveal hitherto marginalised relational dimensions and recognise the agency of Nepal as an international actor. The empirical focus is on key areas of geopolitics, hydro-politics and border-politics. The thesis identifies and highlights power asymmetry, representation, and resistance within a neo-colonial context that marks Nepal's relations with China and India.

The thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in two ways. Firstly, it applies a postcolonial approach to the study of Nepal's relationship with its neighbours, which has been dominated by the mainstream IR realist/neo-realist approaches. This marks a shift from the conventional one-way interaction that was too focused on the great powers' interests and actions, paving the way to unleash the hitherto marginalised form of 'resistance' and 'agency' of the small state, Nepal. Secondly, it encourages researchers to venture into new possibilities in their study on small states in the context of South Asia and beyond.

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## Preface

The foundation of this thesis has its origins almost two decades ago, in a report on BBC radio during my study toward a master's in Environmental Science in my home country of Nepal. The report was about the impact of the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that began in 1983 that claimed millions of lives. Later, I came to know that the DRC is one of the resource-rich countries in the world that has been victimised due to unchecked external intervention. While in this respect the DRC and Nepal may not appear to share many similarities, I believed that the case of the former might illustrate not only the inextricable interlink between resources and politics, but also the significance of resistance to external interests, which would be relevant in the case of Nepal.

My interest in the link between resources and international relations further increased when I pursued my master's degree in International Relations, through which I got an opportunity to get insights into small state and postcolonial IR. Influenced by this, I completed the degree with a thesis that highlighted the foreign intervention in Nepal with focus on water resources and borders. This provided a platform for the design of my PhD project that I had long dreamed of. I acknowledge that the theme of my thesis may have been influenced by my being a citizen of Nepal. However, I primarily believe that the surrounding issue of small states in the Himalayan region, which is gaining increasing global geopolitical gravity due to the geopolitical competition of the emerging powers India and China, urgently called for attention to reveal the marginalised viewpoint of small states.

As a small state, Nepal's geopolitical disposition, including its water resources, has made it vulnerable to various forms of interventions by its bigger and more powerful neighbours India and China. Such questions have shaped Nepal's relationship with India and China. Here, the case of water forms only a part of the wider relational dimensions that reflect the urge of these great powers to utilise the key domains of interaction as a geopolitical tool, even including national borders. Deep beneath such urge lies the body of knowledge constructed about Nepal.

Here the discussion about the knowledge constructed about Nepal is important, as such knowledge, rather than being innocent, is motivated to feed the great power's interest, to define the relations in their terms. For instance, within the conventional account, Nepal is considered a buffer state (as discussed in detail in Chapter 3). While such consideration as a buffer might

be apparent in terms of its geographical location lying between India and China, the representation of Nepal as such is problematic for various reasons.

Firstly, this is an attempt to unjustly amplify the pre-supposed geographical specificity of Nepal to various other dimensions of its relationship, which considers Nepal a passive player in the international system. Secondly, this represents a form of domination, and risks justifying the great powers' actions towards holding authority over the affairs of Nepal, if not outright control. Finally, such an account consciously downplays the independent status of Nepal, limiting its status as something given or granted and that needs external framings or definitions, rather than achieved or acquired by Nepal through its struggle against the ever-expanding British empire; and thus feeding the colonial project rather than opposing or resisting it. These accounts, while highly problematic, are significant for their real effects, as they have been the driving forces behind various relational affairs, including geopolitics, water and borders, enacted through the privilege of power asymmetry that Nepal has with India and China.

Despite decolonisation, the South-Asian post-colonial world has experienced a reproduction of colonial practices with the emergence of the India as an independent country (1947) and China as the People's Republic of China (1949). As such, their attitude to and activities in Nepal featuring a neo-colonial relationship characterised by hierarchical relations between the centre-periphery or top-down cannot simply be ignored because they themselves are postcolonial entities. However, mainstream IR, such as neo/realism as will be discussed in the following chapters, has remained preoccupied with the power contestations and conflicts, consequently relegating small states to the status of passivity or victimhood of such geopolitical competitions. Thus, these approaches cannot sufficiently address the experience of power politics, resistance to power asymmetries, and the underlying norms of representation pertinent to the interaction as are made evident in various affairs, including various transboundary river agreements and the border disputes that Nepal has with India and China.

These aspects are important for different reasons. Firstly, the excessive focus on great powers only provides a unilateral and parochial account of how an interaction takes place, largely ignoring the vantage point of another entity that is an equally important player, the small state. Secondly, insofar as representation is inescapably a part of the interaction, overlooking it risks ignoring or justifying the neo-colonial practices of the great powers that are evident in various affairs. In this context, it is necessary to allocate space for small states in such interactions. Considering the small state's perspective is not intended to negate or demonise the great powers, but to reveal the small state's resistance and agency. Thus, for a

deeper and more accurate understanding of the case of Nepal vis-à-vis its neighbours, a postcolonial approach has been selected, focussing on power asymmetries and the resistance to them that identify the colonial norms of othering.<sup>1</sup>

### **A. Research questions**

Keeping in view the changing trends of the trajectory of Nepal's relationship with India and China, the broad aim of the study is to analyse Nepal's relationships with these neighbours through a postcolonial approach, focussing on hydro-politics and national borders with the following research questions:

1) Does the study of the relationship between a small state and neighbouring rising powers require a postcolonial approach to IR? To answer this question, the study takes the case of Nepal, and suggests that, due to its inclusive nature of incorporating the voice of small states, the postcolonial approach can better address the surrounding issues of Nepal vis-à-vis India and China that mainstream approaches such as neo/realism are oblivious to.

2) How does the asymmetry of power between a small state and its neighbouring rising powers shape geopolitics, hydro-politics and territorial identity? To answer this question, the study intends to unearth the hitherto overlooked dimensions of power asymmetry with respect to the neo-colonial actions of India and China, which I suggest represent aspects of an 'imperial encounter' (Doty, 1996). The conventional account, while recounting Sino-Nepal and Indo-Nepal relations, has remained silent on the aspect of the asymmetry that shares characteristics of the neo-colonial relation in terms of the knowledge produced, featuring the self-attribution that standardises 'self' for 'others'. Such knowledge produced about Nepal and its people that share the attribute of othering is not innocent, but harbours the norms of power asymmetry, unilateral interest and paternalism. Such knowledge is then universalised as a means to naturalise the hegemonic expansion of the great powers in respect of small states. Against such a backdrop, I take a critical stance to such knowledge and power nexus.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said in his influential book *Orientalism* (1978) argues that it was the European coloniser's ability to invent a discourse of Otherness that involved the re-creation of the history of the people different from the 'self', establishing the hierarchies of knowledge that were later utilised to denigrate them and to justify the colonial rule. Moreover, Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1996, p. 5) affirm that "colonialism has not involved simply the use of physical force and military might; it has also involved the construction of representations or discourses of the oppressed which serve to justify and legitimate the oppressor." Thus, the theme shared by the norms of othering is that the definition of 'others' is inextricably linked to the definition of the 'self,' and notwithstanding the neo-colonial practices, it is necessary to identify the ways in which such otherness is constructed in the state and people of a small state in exposing the domination sustained through the privilege of the power asymmetry.

3) How does a small state respond to the asymmetry of power vis-à-vis its neighbouring countries' rising power? To answer this question, I highlight that it is not only the unilateral exercise of power that is apparent in the asymmetrical encounter, but also the resistance of the small states.

In this respect, the study is important for two reasons. Firstly, the Himalayan region has been gaining increasing geopolitical gravity, and nuanced research into the political dimensions of the region is important to counter the simplistic and exclusive tropes of great powers that highlights the position of a small state such as Nepal. The contour of Nepal's international relationship (with India and China) is significant to define Nepal beyond these frames of its neighbours, thus unearthing the agency of the small states. Secondly, such a study will be of significance to other small states that find themselves wedged between great powers in South Asia and beyond.

Moreover, this study makes an original contribution to knowledge in two ways: 1) It applies a postcolonial approach to the study of Nepal's relationship with India and China, a domain hitherto dominated by mainstream IR realist/neo-realist approaches; 2) it encourages new possibilities for study and analysis in the context of a small state, geographically located between rising powers, in the context of South Asia and beyond.

## **B. Methodology and Limitations**

As mentioned previously, this study uses a postcolonial approach to IR to articulate how power asymmetry has been evident in the relationship of Nepal, as a small state, with India and China; and how Nepal negotiated affairs in the areas of geopolitics, hydro-politics and national borders with these neighbours, equally highlighting the issues surrounding the knowledge produced to serve the interests of the great powers. The aspects of power asymmetry, representation and resistance are important because the aim of the thesis is to show that Nepal is not a passive stakeholder, which has been subject to oppression due to the existing power asymmetry between Nepal and its neighbours.

As I will argue later, the structure of power that has been a significant attribute of Nepal's relationship with India and China represents continuing legacies of colonialism. Against the backdrop of the sites of knowledge about Nepal, dominated overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, by the Indian and Chinese discourses, featuring the colonial modes of power and hegemony, this study attempts to locate a space for Nepal taking account of geopolitics, hydro-politics and borders.

Hydro-politics and borders are selected for the reason that Nepal's water resources agreements and sustained border issues are considered to be the hallmark, if not exclusive, of Nepal's relationship with its neighbours, which are influential on mainstream public discourses in Nepal. In this context, there are certain foreign policy measures taken by Nepal to maintain its territorial integrity and independence that need to be considered.

This study aims to focus on qualitative research, as geopolitics, hydro-politics and border issues are wide ranging affairs with varieties of interpretations that demand a thorough understanding of the subject. As Creswell (2007, p. 37) states, "Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.". Moreover, as a type of qualitative research, case study has been selected as the research design, to focus on Nepal's relations with India and China across different time periods since WWII. Case study is judged appropriate because it "... involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" and it can be considered "a methodology, a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry" (Creswell, 2007, p. 76).

The study reviews the existing literature on Nepal's water agreement with India and China, along with notable border issues, including the present condition of the Tri-border territory (Nepal-India-China), and various responses/reactions made by the regime during major events and actions (such as war or treaties) performed by the neighbours. Each of the transboundary water agreements signed with India and China were analysed to explore the role played by power asymmetry in the context. Given the nature of the selected subject matter, required information was collected through secondary methods of data collection. Data and information were collected from books, articles, and newspapers and thoroughly analysed to address the research questions. Information thus obtained was analysed through the processes of descriptive and analytic consideration and in relation to presentation and examination by using various data analysis techniques and methods.

This is to perform the critical work on account of a small state that has been neglected in the international system by mainstream IR approaches. As a critical and bottom-up approach to the big power considerations, it can also be considered as partly an endeavour of

subalternizing geopolitics<sup>2</sup>, which according to Kaul (2021a, p. 16), “recognizes the myriad ways in which dominant powers have shaped both the geopolitical environment as well as knowledge-making that has constrained small states” (see also Kaul, 2010, <https://idsa.in/event/Subaltern%20GeopoliticsofBhutan>).

My study adopts a mixed approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and textual analysis. Generally, discourse can be defined as “the creative use of language as a social practice” (Mullet, 2018, p. 119). Apart from examining the ways in which discourses produce social phenomena, as in discourse analysis, CDA prioritises the role of discourse as a power resource, including the discourses of oppression, exploitation, or the abuse of power. Thus, critical discourse analysis can be defined as a qualitative analytical approach to critically describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which social inequalities are constructed, maintained, and legitimised by discourses (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this sense, it aligns with the norms of postcolonialism approach that recognises the role of discourses in domination.

Generally, the basic methodological structure to follow in CDA is to define the research question, select the content for analysis, select procedures and techniques relevant to the research purpose, analyse the content for certain themes and patterns, and draw conclusions. This constitutes a focus on the examination of the language for the aims of the text, representation of a context, events, and the positionality of the producer of such text, whereby the sources are selected on the basis of the dominant practices and norms (Mullet, 2018).

Due to Nepal’s geographical location and its transit route to Tibet, which has only recently been changing, the multiple strands of its relational dimensions with its neighbours India and China have been characterised by the simultaneous construction and marginalisation

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<sup>2</sup> Considering the case of Bhutan, Kaul (2021a) highlights how the construction of concepts such as ‘asymmetrical inbetweenness’ sustain the (British) colonial legacy in terms of the way the small state’s geopolitical constraints can be understood. According to Kaul, such narratives have narrowed down the encounter featured by the mere gain in the strategic context, which frequently pushes small states to the verge of conflict or even war. Thus, there is necessity of revisiting such narratives to challenge the pre-defined trope of ‘inbetweenness’ or buffer, equally applicable in the case of Nepal, which shares a similar geographical location (between India and China), which I will discuss in chapter 3. Here, it is relevant to underline that there are also other ways in which subaltern geopolitics are defined. For instance, Sharp (2011) considers subaltern geopolitics as a bottom-up approach that challenges and offers alternative to the dominant geopolitical scripts and structures without relying on otherness, and rather than focussing on states (without ignoring them) takes account of the people marginalised by the dominant geopolitics. As Sharp (2011, p. 271) puts it, subaltern geopolitics “focus on the various practices engaged with by people who have been marginalised by dominant geopolitics.... While there are clear overlaps between subaltern geopolitics and feminist, anti, and alter-geopolitics (and all with critical geopolitics), I use this term to highlight a postcolonial emphasis bringing in the voices of those usually rendered marginal and silent in other accounts.”



of knowledge about Nepal due to power asymmetry. The legacy of this access to, production of, and control over knowledge continued by the post-colonial states India and China, concomitantly ignoring, subverting, marginalising, or even denying the voice of Nepal (as exhibited in geopolitics, hydro-politics, and border-politics after WWII) is of interest in my study. The use of CDA helps to unearth the norms and practices of inequality that Nepal experiences in its relationship with its neighbours.

This study aims to highlight the existing asymmetries of power between Nepal and India and China by problematising the existing interactions and the way Nepal negotiates them. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it interrogates the conventional understanding about the attitude and practices of those countries towards Nepal that are considered as standard or natural. Secondly, it opens up an avenue for the allocation of space for small states like Nepal, wherein the focus is not to ignore the geopolitical significance of India and China for Nepal, but to shift the focus away from a power-centric, imperialistic, and ethnocentric considerations.

However, despite its flexibility and simplicity, the framework that CDA uses relies “solely on the analyst’s interpretation of the data, and the degree of systematicity of textual analysis is also left to the analyst” (Mullet, 2018, p. 223), and thus runs the risk of undermining the agenda of the disempowered. Prior to the study, I spent several years living and working in Nepal. Due to family/personal circumstances, I took this opportunity as one that would help in my endeavour of learning and unlearning about Nepal, including its culture, history, and contemporary internal and external political processes and developments. Gradually, I learnt about various narratives of inequalities that Nepal has experienced in terms of its geopolitics, water resources, and border affairs vis-à-vis India and China, and the dominant public discontent about it, which I found myself specifically interested in. During the time of the study, I had opportunities to interrogate my own scholarship and epistemological stance.

Moreover, my research argues that India and China exercise dominance over Nepal, including due to the hegemonic texts produced by the Indian and Chinese discourses. This resonates with the colonial model, and I therefore also use textual analysis with the postcolonial approach. Textual analysis can be defined as an interpretative methodology that highlights the understanding and examination of messages in language, pictures, and symbols existing in the text. As Smith (2017, p. 1) defines it, textual analysis is a method of study “utilized by researchers to examine messages as they appear through a variety of mediums. The data

generated for textual analysis can come from documents, films, newspapers, paintings, web pages, and so forth. These forms of data serve as the ‘texts’ under study and are used to assess the meanings, values, and messages being sent through them.”

It is important to note that texts are produced by different actors for different reasons, as a result of which affirming objectivity, or the universalisation of a text, ought to be subjected to critical interrogation, and understanding that production is the basic frame to the textual analysis. Frey et al. (1992, in Smith, 2017) state that textual analysis serves three purposes: allowing researchers to 1) ascribe meaning to the text, 2) understand the influence of variables outside the text, and 3) critique or evaluate the text. Though these purposes are not inclusive in themselves, the multidisciplinary adoption of the method with its peculiar undertakings helps to provide a method the use of textual analysis. Here, the qualitative research focuses on the interpretative dimension that highlights the ways knowledge is dominant within a specific context. Textual analysis based on this dimension helps to overcome the fallacious stance of positivism, unearthing the dimension of the positionality of the researcher (Deetz, 1977).

This aligns with the postcolonial approach that seeks to challenge the epistemological and ontological framing of what is considered as a standard or universal form of knowledge. However, despite this, the qualitative approach to textual analysis has its limitations, as its focus on “multiple readings of texts is too broad and encompasses too many viewpoints, along with accusations of researcher bias in the analysis itself” (Smith, 2017, p. 4). These “criticisms can be addressed when situating the analysis within a particular research question and addressing what can be seen as a reasonable interpretation” (in Smith, 2017). In the case of this thesis, the research question provides a guide for the analysis of the texts, describing the expectations of the researcher for the study. The research questions are based on the relevant literature of the subject area being studied, which not only links the study with the previous literature but also helps to feed into the concern of reasonable interpretation considered as fair or valid.

As mentioned earlier, though CDA procedures encompass numerous methods of data collection, most of the approaches examine or analyse existing texts, which are theoretically sampled. For instance, the researcher may single out a text, search for indicators of the key concepts and categorise them, then gather additional texts that are relevant to those concepts

(Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This is specifically relevant in my thesis, including in Chapter 3: Representation.

One notable aspect of representation calling for consideration is how it is stated by a postcolonial approach. Considering my focus on looking at dominant representational practices that have shaped the identity of Nepal and the Nepalese, it is not possible in the scope of my research to look at all the texts that discuss those representational practices – and, more importantly, it is not even necessary. To ensure that the textual sources were collected and analysed systematically, rather than arbitrarily, I made a selection on the basis of three major categories:

- 1) Greatest reach among people: As compared to that of Nepal, the texts that highlight the discourses of India and China have a greater reach in several respects, as would be expected, due to the existing power asymmetry. Likewise, due to their greater access to the representational resources, Indian and Chinese knowledge produced about Nepal predominates over that produced by Nepal, as I have described later in the chapter.
- 2) Long-standing focus in history: The history of such representational practices can be traced back to the colonial period, when Nepalese found themselves the object of the reductive image of ‘fighting machines’. Britain started to recruit Nepalese into the military, obliging them to become engaged in many wars, including the two world wars and even in the Falklands War (1982) in the post-colonial period. Such practices were influenced by a vision of the ‘self’ as the modern present, endowed with the moral duty of bringing progress to the ‘other’ in the name of civilisation (see Anand, 2007), standardising the ‘self’ upon their interest while objectivising the ‘other’. Such practices have even been sustained by the popular culture of post-colonial India and China, considering Nepalese as less than human, as exhibited in the trope of considering them as fighting machines or watchmen.
- 3) Tied to popular culture: Certain Indian and Chinese representational tropes are both created by and resonant with popular cultural essentialisations and stereotyping, which leads to the construction of a derogatory image of Nepal and Nepalese. For instance, the image of Nepalese as fighting machines and security guards is both long-standing and durable, and also entirely interwoven with popular culture representations such as

in films, print and online media, and social humour. Popular culture can be generally defined as the culture that is based on the experiences and perceptions of ordinary people. Gupta (2022, p. 117) defines popular culture as a culture that is widely accepted by the common public disseminated through sources such as films, TV, music, radio, and the internet. Such popular culture has been subject to interrogation by various critical theories, including poststructuralists, on the basis of its tendency to “homogenize social reality” (Gupta, 2022, p. 120).

Notably, the popular cultural images, narratives, and practices have a great deal of influence that are reified through the actuation of power. Popular culture is prevalent in real-world politics and within their disciplinary study. “Popular culture has been conceived as a constellation of sites of representation and representational practice through which identities are constituted, meaning is constructed, power is produced and exercised, and where world politics, what we can know about it, and how we can know it, are constituted” (Clapton, 2018, p. 1).

Many representations are based on cultural stereotypes that highlight how people are different from the ‘self’, and therefore tend to marginalise the other with a limited and distorted view about them. For instance, Kaul (2018) demonstrates the way Kashmir has been exoticised by India as a territory, which results in the feminisation of the Kashmiri landscape and territory, considering Kashmiri women as beautiful or as ‘objects of desire’, while positing Kashmiri men as potential terrorists. Such orientalist stereotypes and cinematic tropes of viewing Kashmir as Other in ‘polarised binary terms’, referring to natives as innocent or cruel within the Indian imaginations, connotes that they are incapable of self-governing and thus rationalises Indian patronage over the area.

Moreover, in the case of the external representations of Bhutan, Kaul (2021b) has revealed how imperial ethos has been either ignored or underplayed by critically analysing the “systematicity with which conventional accounts continued to be produced, the selectivity with which texts travelled forward in time, and the salience of positionality in how certain lesser privileged creators of such knowledge were omitted from memory, recognition, and reward” (p. 631). Thus, the critical interrogation of such external knowledge production is significant, as the conventional understanding of such knowledge as natural, innocent, or standard is

problematic. Instead, it is shown to consist of multiple layers of complexities produced to serve a specific purpose.

As in the case of my study, the popular culture of India and China espouse the process of othering that negates the norms of variations within the understanding of what it constitutes as Nepal or Nepali. In this way, the Indian and Chinese narratives or stereotypes of Nepal become normative and natural, which therefore calls for critical interrogation. The idea of popular culture is important in my study, as official government documents do not subscribe to those stereotyped or essentialised ideas or practices, and even though they are mitigated, they nevertheless play a significant role in shaping the perception of a country, as I have described in the later chapters.

The focus of this research is to understand the dominant discourses. Formal sources of knowledge, such as government sources, are not taken into consideration, except for certain clauses of treaties or agreements concluded by the government. It is important to note that due to their limited reach, accessibility and availability (and even confidentiality, in some cases), official narratives do not represent popular imaginings, and thus do not connect to widespread popular representations. Thus, despite having an authoritative legal influence, official narratives can hardly be considered dominant.

There is an explicit form of appropriation of the identity of Nepal and Nepalese by the Indian and Chinese discourses that I have highlighted through the way Nepal and Nepalese are represented within the popular cultures of these countries. This is based on a reading of existing news, images, newspaper articles, statements, reports, and studies produced by individuals and Indian and Chinese government personnel.

This is complemented by a critical reading of reports and other documents produced by the prominent think tanks or scholars who have been interested in Nepal, in order to extract the knowledge that resonates with the colonial project. This takes note of the narrative that largely shapes, supports, or normalises the interest of India and China over Nepal. I supplement this with the contemporary evidence of how such representation has been in effect, and regarding the way this has helped to shape the Indian and Chinese governmental attitude and practices towards Nepal.

Notably, there are the representational dimensions at sub-state level as well in Nepal. However, as my focus is on the state level, I have deliberately omitted these sources. Instead, I have intentionally attempted to include sources that focus on public perceptions, including organisational, rather than state documents. In light of my state-level analysis, it may appear contradictory not to take official documents into consideration. This approach is justified by the fact that knowledge production through popular culture is normally influenced by certain concepts of essentialisation and stereotypes, which are mitigated within or absent from the official documents. While the official documents disregard such norms, the way a (powerful) state pursues its interests is largely facilitated by them, which is also significant in terms of the way the construction of such representational practices are made and the way a productive impact is experienced by a (weaker) state.

This has been motivated by a desire to keep in mind the way such discourses are naturalised, universalised, and considered standard through the actuation of power, which is then problematised, aligning with the postcolonial approach to allow the space for Nepal. The textual sources range from primary sources such as archival articles and agreements to secondary literature. Moreover, out of the various methods of textual analysis (such as content analysis, semiotics, interactional analysis, and rhetorical criticism), I have selected content analysis based on a qualitative approach that “broadly deals with the assessment of material in a given text (whether it is merely counting occurrences or searching for deeper meaning)” (Mogashoa, 2014, p. 109).

Here, it is important to state that a careful reading of the studies of scholars including, Nitasha Kaul have influenced my insights on the writing strategies and framing. The common theme shared by these studies are that they are mainly focussed on small states or nations—Kashmir and Bhutan—which I found relevant in terms of being small polities like Nepal that share the same geographical situation, marginal if not irrelevant, of lying between the great powers in the Himalayan region, to reveal that Nepal does have an agency in international system. Through my intellectual positioning, I believe their works can serve as a milestone for furthering the hitherto subverted voices of the marginalised entities, including small states, within the Himalayan region and beyond.

Though my thesis introduces these foundational research questions, it is focussed specifically on geopolitics, hydro-politics, and border-politics and does not engage with other

issues including economy, culture and religion. As a person from Nepal, I have tried my best to remain mindful of my own positionality as a researcher who must be unbiased and critical about Nepali practices too.

Equally, it is important to underline that while discussing postcolonialism, the issue of othering is equally important, which has its origin in the representation of women as the ‘other’. As de Beauvoir (1949/53 in Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996, p. 1) highlights, “The concept of the Other has been developed predominantly in relation to Woman as Other...”. Moreover, the feminist approach, apart from favouring the voice and agency of women, also agitates for more just and inclusive societies. The significance of the feminist position has been highlighted by Riyal (2019, p. 83) as, “...feminist positions believe that focusing only on racial politics is bound to ignore the ‘double colonization’ (both racial and gender) situation of women under imperialist conditions” leaving them as dual victims.

I accept the fact that the feminist position could have also been helpful in my study not only to gain insights into the nuanced analysis of what constitutes the ‘people’ of a country, but also to reveal or acknowledge the status of the people whose voices have been historically subverted, limiting them as the ‘object’ of knowledge within patriarchal discourses. For instance, as will be discussed in chapter 3, representation of Nepalese as warriors or ‘fighting machines’, for the recruitment in the Indian and British Armies historically being a gendered process, cannot be deemed authoritative and inclusive in terms of what constitutes a Nepali. In other words, it exclusively utilises masculinity as a qualifier for the representation project, which itself is problematic, whereby the voice of women of a third world small state is consciously ignored. However, despite acknowledging the significance of feminist approaches, due to time and resource constraints, this study has not engaged with this approach in depth. Thus, while my endeavour is just an initial attempt to deconstruct the hegemonic imaginative constructions largely informed by the norms of othering and offering a space for a small state, it equally leaves space for future research that might undertake the feminist approach in this and in other similar cases both within and outside Nepal.

### **C. Chapter outline**

Acknowledging the inadequacy of the mainstream and critical IR to deal with the contemporary challenges of powerful states’ functional emulation of colonial practices like power asymmetry, this thesis intends to adopt a postcolonial approach, mainly from the vantage point

of a small state. I analyse the key aspects of the relationship, like representation, geopolitics, hydro-politics and border through the postcolonial lens to reveal the hitherto marginalised dimension of Nepal's relationship vis-à-vis India and China.

Chapter 1 provides a cursory background to Nepal's emergence as an independent state and how it is considered to be small. This attribute of smallness has been the defining terminology in its relationship with its neighbours India and China; the encounters can be termed asymmetrical. I argue that while this has constrained the foreign policy choices of Nepal, it has adopted the policy of neutrality and non-alignment, situating nationalism at its core to counter the hegemony of its neighbours.

In Chapter 2, I first outline the limitations of conventional IR in the study of small states and then highlight the case for postcolonial IR for small states that focusses on power asymmetry, representation and possibility for resistance. I argue that, in providing a platform for a dynamic and diverse field of two-way intellectual inquiry by unravelling the ways power have been sustained, postcolonialism can assist to reveal that small states are not mere victims and thus has more to offer. This is achieved by revealing the dimensions of Nepal's relationships with India and China. Notably, I demonstrate how the Indian and Chinese hegemony is equally apparent in the various affairs, including representation, geopolitics, hydro-politics and border, that have had a profound impact on Nepal's relationship with India and China. Framing these ideas within a common understanding of an alternative angle through the interdisciplinary approach is the driving force behind the thesis.

Chapter 3 provides new insights into themes of dominant representation and identity of Nepal as practised by India and China and the way Nepal has negotiated. This chapter primarily draws on the essence of 'orientalism' as initiated by Edward Said (1978). Here, I have identified the dominant representational practices of Nepal (buffer state, not an independent state, younger brother/infant) and Nepali (fighting machine and watchman) to locate the gravity of the impact upon Nepal and how Nepal has negotiated this.

Historically, the geopolitical positioning of Nepal has largely constrained Nepal's ability to exercise its position as an independent state and maintain its autonomous status. In this context, Chapter 4 lays out the overall picture of the geopolitical dynamism of the relationship of Nepal with its neighbours through the postcolonial lens. Here, by analysing the changing trend of Nepal's historical and hegemonic relations with its neighbours, the idea is



not to provide an exhaustive and descriptive list of historical events but to articulate that Nepal has maintained the policy of equidistance as a viable policy to remain independent, as bolstered by the sensibility of nationalism. This is to underscore that the foreign policy of Nepal can be described as a series of decisions intended to maintain the policy of equidistance to counter Indian and Chinese hegemony.

In the next two chapters, 5 and 6, I analyse how hegemonic practices have been imposed on Nepal and how it has negotiated them. Typically, Chapter 5 deals with the aspect of hydro-politics, whereby the ‘politics’ within ‘hydro-politics’ has been gaining increasing currency. In this context, the focus will be on the persisting hydrohegemonic practices of India and China and the significance of knowledge production and resource nationalism as an effective form of resistance; a rationale way to maintain integrative water flow and productively address Nepal’s own prospect of deriving the benefit from its water resources.

Chapter 6 deals with the overall territorial affairs of Nepal vis-à-vis India and China. This chapter critically focuses on the narrative on the other side of the border, which has been ignored and eschewed in the political, social and economic arena and directly influences the wide spectrum of Nepal’s sovereignty and independence. Combining the concepts of power, hegemony and resistance in the border interaction, this chapter attempts to develop a single framework of border-hegemony to facilitate the analysis of the border interactions illustrating the border issues of Nepal with India and China. The proposed framework provides an analytical paradigm of the overall border interaction and how the domination could be challenged whereby a shift could be made towards cooperation.

Finally, Chapter 7 sums up the arguments made in the preceding chapters, highlighting that postcolonial IR has more to offer the discipline in understanding the changing relational dimension of Nepal with India and China. As such, influenced by the postcolonial approach, this singular case as highlighted by each chapter affirms that small states are not mere victims but instead have an agency that cannot be denied or muted. Thus, I argue that the postcolonial approach to IR can provide more insights in the case of Nepal’s relationship with India and China than the mainstream approaches.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis represents the fulfilment of a dream I have nurtured for decades. I also see it as the first step toward the contribution towards a better society and future that I aspire to make.

I would like to thank the University of Westminster for providing this opportunity. I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Nitasha Kaul and Dr. Dibyesh Anand for mentoring me and always inspiring me. Their detailed feedback has led the project to this phase. I would also like to thank Dr. Claudio Lanza, Dr. Anna Menon, Emmanuel, Francisco for their direct and indirect support and encouragement during the course. I also would like to remember my friends Kabita Karki, Bhuwan Dhakal, Rajana Maharjan for their continuous support.

My late grandfathers Surya Bahadur Tandan and Karna Bahadur Khadka, grandmothers Gayatri Khadka and late Mankumari Tandan and, mother Shila Devi Tandan, brother Prabin Tandan, sister in law Neeru Bohora and wife Susmita Khatri are all sources of inspiration and encouragement for me. I also wish to thank my father-in-law Mohan Khatri, mother-in-law Kamala Khatri, sister Asmita Khatri, brother Ashiq Khatri, Anup Oli, Ganesh Khadka, uncle Bijay Bikram Khadka, Narayan Khadka, Ganesh Khadka, Anup Oli, uncle Ganesh KC, Durga Tandan, Krishna Thapa, aunties Asha KC and Mina Thapa and more of my relatives whose names could not be included due to space limit, without whose continuous encouragement I would not even have been able to dream about the project.

The list of those to whom I am grateful could go on for a long time. In fact, I would not like to forget the contribution of many persons, places, events or things who have instilled the inspiration to me knowingly and unknowingly. The country where I was born, the way my grandfathers and my parents encouraged me to undertake the journey even before I had completed my master's degree in Nepal, my thoughts about the future contributions that I could make: all those emotions overwhelm my heart. We are social creatures, and our contribution is something each individual gives to society, the difference is only in the extent. This thesis aligns with the approach of contributing for the larger cause.

**Declaration**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part to another university or institution in support of the application for the award of any other degree.

Name: Promod Tandan

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Nepal, located between the rising powers India and China that comprise two of the world's most significant geopolitical communities, is a geostrategic setting that is critically important for each of the latter's security, defence and stability.<sup>3</sup> As a state that remained independent even during the colonial period, the emergence and consolidation of Nepal as a modern nation-state can thus be marked as an important international political event.

Some scholars contend that it was the contrast between the increasing threat from the expansion of British-India and the internally divided princely states in Nepal that led the then Gorkha king Prithvi N. Shah (1723–1775) to unify Nepal in 1743 (Nepal, 1993; Dasgupta & Mukhopadhyay, 2015). This unification was then later effectively carried forward by his successors such as his younger son, Prince Bahadur Shah, as the *de facto* ruler of Nepal, which culminated in forming 'Greater Nepal'.<sup>4</sup> The continued process of state-building<sup>5</sup> under the leadership of the monarchy halted when it intersected with Britain's colonial expansion, with the Treaty of Sugauli marking the end of the two-year long Anglo–Nepal War on March 4, 1816. While it lost the war, Nepal's resistance against the British Empire posed a significant challenge to the latter's goal of advancing towards Tibet and China. This not only established Nepal as an independent (modern) state but also marked the evolution of the Nepal–Britain relationship. The internal political discontent that followed the war was tactically utilised by Jung B. Rana (1817–1877) to inaugurate the authoritarian Rana oligarchy in Nepal in 1846, constraining the monarchy as the titular head. This dispensation lasted for 103 years. During that period, the Nepal–Britain relationship entered a new phase through the former's adoption of a pro-British policy, as evident in Nepal's support for the 1857 uprising<sup>6</sup> and two great wars that have largely shaped its geopolitical identity.

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3 For Nepal's geopolitical vulnerability, King Prithvi had used the analogy of the 'Yam between two boulders'; subject to be offensive only under the condition of defence (Karki, 2013; See also Bhattarai, 2005).

4 'Greater Nepal' is a term used to signify the territory of Nepal before the Sugauli Treaty (1816), when Nepal possessed an additional 105,000 sq. km of territory. See Annex I.

5 State-building is a political process that leads to the "establishment of state institutions capable enough to maintain the *raison d'être* of the state, enhance state-society relations and expand its authority/outreach internally and externally", as Bhatta (2013, p. 170) remarks.

6 In 1857, an anti-colonial movement emerged in 1857 in India. Despite requests for assistance from both parties (independence fighters and British-India), Nepal decided to send its 15,000 troops along with some financial assistance to support British India. After the victory of Britain on July 1859, it entered into a bilateral agreement with Nepal in 1860, whereby it retrieved four districts—Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur—to Nepal (total area: 9,207 sq. Km.), referred to as *Naya muluk* or new territory (see Dahal, 2011; Adhikari, 2015) and that has become the hallmark of Nepal's present territorial identity.

The wave of the changing global and regional political environment, such as the end of WWII, the independence of India (1947) and the formation of People's Republic of China (1949), imposed a direct impact upon the internal politics of Nepal, whereby the armed revolution led by Nepali congress against the Rana oligarchy resulted in the establishment of a democratic system in Nepal.<sup>7</sup> While this marked a new phase for Nepal characterised by the emergence of political parties as the new state actors, the presence of the external actor (India) as the new stakeholder has been the constitutive feature of Nepal's state-building process.

As a developing country, amid the fight to address the issues of rights and representation in a just and equitable manner, Nepal's struggle to devise a unified approach within its diversified economic, cultural, social and political strata has been a characterising feature of the past 70 years. This has not only created internal social and political discontent<sup>8</sup> but has also caused frequent changes in the nation's governing system, as observed in 1951, 1990 and 2006, meaning it has experienced an ongoing form of state-building.<sup>9</sup> During the process, the involvement of external actors became incorporated in development studies and development policy alongside the agenda of good governance focusing on the enhancement of the capacities and structure of Nepal.

After 2006, the state-building process of Nepal solicited new external actors apart from India, such as international agencies, institutions and INGOs, mainly the UN, EU and the great powers like US. This added a new challenge for Nepal in terms of balancing its internal and external interests.<sup>10</sup> While external actors play some role in fostering a conducive environment

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7 During the armed revolution, then King Tribhuvan took refuge with his family on 6 November 1950 in the Indian embassy in Kathmandu before being flown to New Delhi, where a tripartite agreement (verbal) was made among the Ranas, Nepali congress party and King Tribhuvan that formed the basis of the establishment of the democratic system in Nepal on 18 February 1951. See Singh (2004). To make the text readable, instead of the word 'prime minister', 'PM' has been used throughout this thesis.

8 For instance, the K.P. Bhattarai government signed the Nepal-India Joint Communiqué in New Delhi, ending all the previous ad-hoc arrangements by promising "common rivers, common security, common people, common currency, etc." (Dahal, 2011, p. 45). Furthermore, the policy of rampant privatisation of Chinese- and Russian-funded industries adopted by the post-1990s government along with the removing of agricultural subsidies have not only resulted in the closure of those industries, leaving many people jobless (Khadka, 2010), but have also impeded the overall national economic performance, including the export rate, thus contributing towards the internal discontent.

9 Notably, after the period of democracy's (re) establishment in 1960 that dismantled the absolute monarchical system inception in 1960, Nepal experienced a series of political developments. These included the incitement of violent activity by the Nepal communist party (Maoist), the royal massacre of Birendra with his family in 2001, and the complete control of power gained by then King Gyanendra in February 2005. This provided the platform for the 12-point agreement between the then seven-party alliance and the CPN Maoist party under the mediation of India in New Delhi. This led to the signing of the comprehensive agreement between the Government of Nepal and the Maoists, with the UN as an arbiter, which established the democratic system in Nepal and eventually dismantled the monarchical system in 2008 (Destradi, 2012; Bhatta, 2013).

10 For instance, after 2006, the issue of identity surfaced in Nepal mainly regarding ethnicity and class, as Dahal (2011, p. 72) highlights. Moreover, the problem has been aggravated by the political parties' and external actors'

for establishing and adapting social and political change, reducing Nepal's dependency of India, these actors' perception towards Nepal is problematic, representing the nation as if it were only recently discovered or independent. The nominal and controversial role rather than the contributing role played by the UN,<sup>11</sup> EU and India<sup>12</sup> has been a sustained debatable issue in Nepal.

Here, the problem lies with the external actors' view of state building as a simple transferal of the external (or Western) values, institutions and norms to a geographical locality (Nepal) without assessing the local needs and expectations. This illustrates some degree of misalignment between local expectation and the external initiatives and prescriptions that Lemay-Hérbert (2011 in Bhatta, 2013, p. 172) terms a "bifurcation of the two worlds", which fails to bring a tangible result.

Moreover, the external actors' approach of viewing state-building as occurring both through the institutional and the legitimacy dimension is problematic.<sup>13</sup> In this context, it is relevant to cite the remark of Marquette and Beswick (2011, p. 1703, 1706) that state-building is firmly entrenched in a study of international relations (IR) that focuses more on ownership and legitimacy (who is doing the state-building) than what is being built (institutions, politics and nature of political settlement). Such external perceptions, rather than being an unbiased viewpoint, are attempting to establish their rational presence in imposing their interests into the state-building process of Nepal.

Thus, the contour of the historiography of Nepal shows that its state-building before 1951 was intended to safeguard the independent identity and core national interest of Nepal.<sup>14</sup> However, after 1951, with the increasing involvement of external actors, Nepal's state-building process raised various scales of controversies regarding its core national interests. As such, a lack of internal political stability and a coherent nationalist ideology, plus a weak political

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strategy of manipulating the difference in regional identity as survival-oriented strategies, which has worsened the intolerant political ideologies and created further ethnic and geographic fault lines, as discussed in chapter 3.

11 For instance, some scholars like Bhatta (2013, p. 172, 173) argue that despite playing a role in building up trust between the Nepalese Army and Maoist combatants, the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) (2007-2011) received criticism from the Nepali government and its people for consolidating the Maoist agendas during the registration process of Maoist ex-combatants.

12 The controversial role of India is discussed in chapter 3 in detail.

13 Bhatta (2013, p. 171) argues that rather than the external actors per se being problematic, it is the approach, and the common features that they share that is an issue, such as their lack of appreciation of local values and political dynamics, non-neutrality and impartiality, and marginalisation of the national priorities.

14 The interests of Nepal have shifted over time; the focus on survival by defending itself from external attacks at one time changed over time to the vital interest of the state being responsible for nation-building, which has again shifted to a major interest in seeking optimal resource utilisation through cooperation, as Dahal (2011) argues.

stance, have led to debilitated norms of internal values, interests and self-definitions, with a direct effect upon the state-building process. I describe this as the ‘outward in’ or ‘centripetal form’ of state-building that conceded to the ascendance of external interests over national interests; it contrasts with the ‘inward-out’ or ‘centrifugal form’ of state-building that prioritises the national interests.<sup>15</sup>

A state’s overall configuration, structure and foreign policy are the direct product of the historical process within a geographical setting that subsequently guides the state apparatus, performances and perceptions. As Moisio et al. (2011) rightly point out, geopolitical history implicates the changing mode of political engagement that engrains the nationalistic approach and internal process of state-building. Within the ‘inward-out’ form of state-building, as compared to the ‘outward-in’ form, there is unambiguity about the delivery of the effective notion of the inward-out form of knowledge production aligned with a sense of nationalism. For instance, protecting its cultural heritage from the British Empire (mainly) and China and keeping its independence was the decisive element for the consolidation of the nationalistic sentiment in Nepal that led the domestic actors (the monarchy and civil societies) in Nepal to effectively resist the British occupation.

However, since 1951, the domestic actors (monarchy, political parties, intellectuals and civil societies) have struggled to devise a coherent narrative that boosts nationalism, which has directly affected the norms of (re) creating state institutions and processes, local ownership that separates institutions from society and the legitimacy of the state as a citizen responsive state. This, in turn, has led the external actors to consider Nepal as a weak state fraught with internal discontent that lack any forms of agency. Unsurprisingly, the tendency of external actors to prioritise their interests at the cost of Nepal’s interests, manifesting in the practice of universalising their ‘top-down’ norms, terms and values through various means, including the appropriation of modernisation as a tool, can be considered a form of the neo-colonial project, as will be discussed later.

Such external actors’ temptation to consolidate their (Western) interests in Nepal has imposed a productive impact not only on the overall state performance of Nepal and its foreign policy, but also in regard to the concern of India and China (see Bhatta, 2013, p. 173), thus

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<sup>15</sup> Earlier, Manandhar (1988 in Khatri, 2011) used the categories of centripetal forces (the size and shape of a state) and (internal) centrifugal forces (trade flow, people, ideas and resources), which are the features of a state’s geopolitics.

affecting its relationships with its neighbours. It is important to note that in the two centuries of its emergence as a modern nation-state, Nepal's route has consisted of multiple paths and obstacles in its relationships, ranging from representational practices to water resources and territorial affairs. In the majority, if not all, of these relationships, the norms of smallness and othering (as described in later chapters) are apparent, generated due to the existing power asymmetry. As such, before moving towards a discussion of the formation of those asymmetrical power relations, it is worth explaining what a small state is and why Nepal is one.

## **1.2. Nepal's status as a small state**

This section reviews the literature of small states to highlight Nepal's status in this regard. This is important for various reasons. Firstly, despite the relativity and contextuality of the term 'smallness', a cursory look at the varying forms of definitional criteria is important when considering the term 'small state' and its significance in the international system. Secondly, this sets the stage for considering the 'encounter' as an important marker in the small state classification, whereby an existing power asymmetry is apparent. Thirdly, it helps to pinpoint that the dominant small states literature tends to victimise such states and thus falls short of encompassing an alternative mode of perceiving small states, a gap that I aim to address partly through the postcolonial approach, as will be discussed in the later chapters.

Despite increasing globalisation and liberalisation of the international market and the emergence of different institutions, states remain prominent actors influencing the international system (as discussed in Chapter 6). Nevertheless, due to the varied forms of differences between the states, they are subject to categorisations ranging from large to medium and small. It is important to note that there is a global consensus that most of the states in the world are small (over two-thirds of UN members are small), and the majority of the global population resides in such states (Gleason et al. 2007; Thorhallsson, 2012).

The early literature on small states in the 19th and up to the mid-20th century mainly focused on the concept of (structural) weakness (lack of power) rather than some permanent geographical characteristics that occupy a distinct position in the international structure (Kurečić et al. 2017). Those studies mostly differentiated small states on the basis of their material capabilities (power), focusing on their ability to sustain as sovereign actors in the international system. The changing global geopolitical orders in the 1970s, including



decolonisation and the increasing trend of recognising small states as the members of international organisations, congruently gave rise to the literature on small states.

In general, small states have been defined in both quantitative or tangible and qualitative terms. In terms of *quantitative* characteristics, the factors include territorial size, population size,<sup>16</sup> economic power (Gross National Product, Gross Domestic Product and per capita income) and military resources (Olafsson, 1998). Later, realising the relativity of the term ‘small’ or ‘big’, scholars began to define small states by combining various types of criteria (qualitative, intangible and relational) that included power, influence, self-image, physical and geographical characteristics of small states, their degree of insularity and vulnerability, and the perceptions of leaders, intellectuals and other states (Nugent, 2006).

In addition, there are also various definitional criteria<sup>17</sup> that include openness, resilience, enclaveness, weakness, dependence, the scale of their operation and perceived vulnerability (see Katzenstein, 2003), which collectively act as the determinant factors in the overall engagement of the small states in the international system. Equally, there are also the relative considerations that define small states in direct contrast to their larger counterparts, most prominently, their lack of internal capacities that enable the larger states to be sovereign actors in the international structure (Baldachhino, 2010). In a similar fashion, the significance of smallness is most often equated with the lack of power (and power is typically equated with capabilities and abilities), levels of development and the nature of the international system (Goetschel, 2000, p. 3; Browning 2006; World Bank, 2019).

These definitions largely share the common attribute of resources and capabilities that are determinants of power and influence. Nevertheless, in reality, the question of size is relative. A small state in one sphere may be a great power in a different context due to possessing (significant) influence and dealing with geopolitical limitations beyond the simplistic resilience norms that equip it to play a prominent role in regional and global contexts. Thus, due to various forms of (conflicting) reasonings such as ‘smallness’ depending on the context and relativity, its poor definition (including terms like ‘weakness’, ‘power’ and ‘size’: large, small, micro, mini) (see Baldachhino, 2010) within a different temporal and spatial

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16 Varied forms of ‘Population figures’ have been used to set definitional criteria for small states like: “under 1.5 million” (World Bank (2019) & Commonwealth secretariat (Crossley & Parker, 2011); “from 1.5 to 5 million” (like Bacchus, 2008) and “up to 30 million” population (like Crowards, 2002).

17 For instance, Selwyn (1980), argues that there are seven key characteristics of small states, viz. dependence on foreign trade; narrow natural resource base; heavy dependence on foreign corporations; dependence on foreign institutions; diseconomies of scale; and constraints in the use of import substitution policies. See also East (1973).

context, the attempt of creating a categorisation of a small (and also middle, great and super) power is considered to be a complex effort in IR (see Henrikson, 2001; Maass, 2009).

Overall, the scholarship shares a common theme in its approach, influenced through mainstream IR schools, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. This commonality is the perception of small states as economically weak, culturally and politically less represented and perpetually prone to any form of foreign intervention. Furthermore, they are considered as ill-equipped or even unable to effectively resist to protect their sovereignty and international legal rights from the regional and global powers. However, such approaches are misleading and risk serving the interests of great powers, which tend to use the representation of small states as a geopolitical tool, as is applicable in the case of Nepal.

Some scholars (Kurečić et al., 2017) argue that Nepal doesn't fit in the small state category. However, there are other scholars (Dabhade & Pant, 2004) who argue that because, geographically, Nepal lies between two bigger and powerful neighbours, and its autonomy is subject to a perpetual challenge from many external factors and forces, it can be considered as a small state. Similarly, Bhattarai (2005) has remarked that Nepal can be considered a small state due to its geopolitical positioning and its vulnerability of being hostage to several external factors and forces.

Though, in terms of its economy and scale, size of the population, its asymmetry in relation to its neighbours, Nepal can be considered as a small state, such conventional narratives that focus on the India-China framing that considers Nepal as a victim denying its agency is inadequate to address the dynamics of the affairs surrounding Nepal that are equally salient in the regional dimension. As I will discuss later and in the following chapters, Nepal has managed to offset the disadvantage regarding the absolute power through the internal management of domestic politics, notwithstanding the internal political instability, bolstered by the norms of nationalism and external pursuance of accommodative space through various forms.

### **1.3. Nepal's asymmetrical relations with India and China**

This section provides an outline of the formation of Nepal's asymmetrical relations with India and China, which will be discussed in Chapter 4 in detail. The unevenness and inequalities existing within and between the post-colonial states have been largely shaped by the enduring

legacies of colonialism,<sup>18</sup> whereby the post-colonial nation-states have adopted and (re)presented the Western values, culture and thinking in a way that emulates or reproduces the (colonial) Western *modus operandi*. As Doty (1996, p. 8) elaborates, the present national identity is shaped by the hegemony's<sup>19</sup> unilateral construction of representational labels and practices existing in the open and in the process of the nature of discourses, to the extent that it clearly reflects a history of colonialism.

Such types of interactions sustaining colonial legacies reinforce or sustain the uneven development, thus feeding the neo-colonial project characterised by hierarchical relations between the centre-periphery or top-down. Rather than the colonial method of direct military control (imperialism) or indirect political control (hegemony), neo-colonialism results in a relationship based on (economic) dependence that derives dominance with an undue level of political control, functionally imitating the colonial project (Oseni, 2017). Exercised through the drive of economic interest and external policy influence, neo-colonialism has been a de-centred and de-territorialising apparatus of rule that progressively becomes incorporated into various realms within its open, expanding frontiers.

While Nepal's relations with the British Empire were limited to territorial affairs, its post-colonial relations became diversified with the inclusion of a new strand of the relationship, i.e. water resources. Nevertheless, the Gorkha recruitment project is an exception to this trend, and a significant factor in the relationship of Nepal with Britain and India, whereby currently about 3,000 Gorkha armies are serving in the British army and more than 40,000 are serving in the Indian army (see Bhattarai, 2020c).

Contemporarily, Nepal and India's relations form part of the latter's plan to bolster its regional and global position. As mentioned earlier and further covered in Chapter 4, Nepal's evolution as a modern state itself is a function of its geopolitical setting and its relationship with Britain (mostly) and China, as shaped by an existing power asymmetry. As part India and

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18 As Kaul (2021c, p. 116) states, "...colonialism whether formally or informally enacted carries within it an assumed moral superiority and economic rationality.". Kaul further adds, "Coloniality is about reinforcing asymmetrical power relations and denial of agency to the colonised in how they are governed" (p. 117).

19 The colonial rule was based on domination and coercion rather than consent. The function of hegemony depends on the leadership or dominance on control and consent whereby various forms of power are mobilised through the processes of authority and consent. As Schmidt (2018) notes, the overwhelming power and the ability to use this power to dominate others (subjugative) can be termed 'hegemony'. The concept of hegemony is key to this thesis as it discusses whose interest is being served by dominant ideas along with the contexts and subsequent effects of this dominance. Regarding my approach to postcolonialism, as discussed in later chapters, the hegemony concept provides insights on dominance and consent along with the possibility for locating change and recognising agency. Thus, the legitimacy and sustenance of the hegemony depends on the power of geopolitical representation and the capacity to effectively negotiate such practices.

China's manoeuvring of the power asymmetry in their race to become a regional power, they tended to treat Nepal as less than an equal partner.

Against this backdrop, with the inception of democracy in 1951,<sup>20</sup> while Nepal's relationship with India and China has been prioritised in its foreign relations and policies, relationships with other states have equally been pivotal in how Nepal's state actors constructed a sense of state identity, nationhood and nationalism. As the last Rana prime minister, Mohan Shamsher, declared in May 1948:

In modern times it is neither possible nor desirable for any state to keep itself in isolation from world affairs. It shall be our policy, therefore to enter into diplomatic relations with all such countries that seek our friendship...We hope we shall obtain such needful assistance and co-operation from our neighbouring and friendly countries (Atique, 1983, p. 99).

Accordingly, Nepal raised the British legation to embassy status (1947) and commenced diplomatic relations with various countries like India (1947), the US (1948; ambassadorial representation in 1951), France (1949), China (1955), Russian Federation (1956), Japan (1956) and Switzerland (1956); by 2021, it had reached over 169 countries (MOFA, 2021) while maintaining its policy of equidistance with both neighbours.

The political process engendered in its relationship with its neighbours has stemmed as an outcome of the geopolitical setting of Nepal, the existing power asymmetry and the keenness of the state actors to retain Nepal as an independent state. Due to its geographical location surrounded by India on three of its four borders and the open border provisions, Nepal and India share many cultural, linguistic and ethnic similarities. While these similarities have shaped mutual dependence, the asymmetry in size, economy and other factors have led to interactions influenced by a power asymmetry that provides leverage to India. This has a direct bearing upon the overall geopolitical identity of Nepal, resonating with the British colonial relation of asymmetry, considered as guarantor of otherness in its relationship with Nepal. As discussed in Chapter 3, Indian narratives consider Nepal to be dependent on India for economic activities and the developmental process, which the former considers as a tool to have assertiveness over the latter. Here, it is important to highlight what Oseni (2017) infers, that

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20 Historically, the 1857 uprising in India marked the beginning of Nepal's pro-British foreign policy that lasted until the democratic inception in 1951, after which it remained almost isolated in its foreign affairs.

the dependency theory which envisions resource extraction of the weak peripheral state for the economic benefit of powerful central states, is tantamount to economic neo-colonialism.

Despite avoiding direct military confrontation with China since its defeat in the 1962 war (Dahal, 2019, p. 73), India has objectivised Nepal as a ‘buffer zone’ against China and a threat to its influence in South Asia. As will be outlined in later chapters, this power asymmetry has become visible in every strand of Nepal’s relationship with India, ranging from the installation of an Indian security post in Nepal, to controversial hydropolitical interactions and border encroachments, which has been a source of internal political discontent turning the popular discourses in Nepal towards an ‘anti-Indian’ sentiment. However, the state actors seem equally conscious of the ways such a sentiment against India deepens the Indian hegemony; as King Mahendra stated, “there are no Himalayas between Nepal and India” (Thapa 1971, p. 80). This statement reflects concerns surrounding the need for amicability rather than hostility, whereby any disagreements with India are subject to misconceptions not reality.

To minimise Nepal’s vulnerability due to its geopolitical setting, the state actors pursued policies to convert this vulnerability into the possibility for accommodation by maintaining neutrality and equidistance with both neighbours. Since the formation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, which marked the victory of the Mao’s Red Army over the Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces, Nepal has shared the norms of mutuality with China. This was evident during Nepal’s recognition of PRC on 1 August 1955, whereby both countries signed the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, and Nepal’s active lobbying for the UN membership for China. In this context, whilst Nepal’s relationship towards China has also aimed to minimise Indian hegemony, Chinese border conflict with India, culminating in war in 1962, constituted a new form of Sino-Nepal relationship as made apparent by Chinese support for infrastructural development in Nepal. Despite this, the Sino-Nepal relationship has been characterised by the dual factors featuring the Indian concern and the asymmetrical form of the relationship per se, as discussed in the later chapters.

India and China’s<sup>21</sup> increasing regional and global influence and their attitude and behaviour towards small states (such as the occupation of Kashmir and Tibet and annexation of Sikkim) has been clear. Their desire to impose their will, domination, influence and hegemony, negating the dignity and agency of small states like Nepal, is illustrative of their

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21 For their hegemonic attitude and behaviour, Anand (2012) has referred to India and China as “Postcolonial informal empires (PIEs)”.

engagement without responsibility, exploitation without redress and subjugation without sentiment, which can be defined as neo-colonial relationships.

Here, it is important to mention Doty's (1996) 'imperial encounter's, through which the Eurocentric disposition of mainstream IR was emphasised; it analyses the productivity of North-South Relationship discourses to get insights on the role of representation in forming power dynamics and the issues of agency. According to Doty, power and knowledge intersect to produce an identity based on unequal geographies, which has the material implications of the repressive and naturalised labelling as 'North' and 'South'. The constructed and political dimensions of knowledge acted as a guiding factor to the North's colonial policies and development practices in the South typified by the denial of the latter's agency.

Drawing upon the work of Doty (1996), I argue that the interaction between an emerging or powerful and poor and unstable small state ultimately leads to a form of interaction that can be depicted as an '*imperial encounter*'. The latter is a term that conveys the notion of 'asymmetrical encounters', entailing two basic features: one entity is able to construct 'realities', which are taken seriously and acted upon, while the other entity is denied equal degrees or kinds of agency. Here, Gleason et al.'s (2007, p. 1) views are relevant: "States are not so much powerful because of the absolute capacities that they command, but rather by virtue of the way they relate to one another".

Power, knowledge and representation lie at the heart of 'imperial encounter's engendering the elements of discourses and representational practices. According to Agnew (2007, p. 146), "knowledge is made as it circulates; it is never made completely in one place and then simply consumed as is elsewhere". In fact, the gap between the knowledge produced about real geographical space and imagined geography with the differentiated 'self' and 'other', when facilitated by power, is where the actuation of the geopolitical manipulation takes place. Anand (2002, p. 44) highlights the significance of representation in this context:

Representation is a crucial dynamic of international politics and this is increasingly being recognised within international studies...International relations are inextricably bound up with discursive practices that put into circulation representations that are then taken as truth. The modes of representation abet the widely orchestrated form of domination by making it acceptable and coherent within the ethos that constructs selves and exotic/barbaric Others.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, Indian and Chinese representational practices in terms of Nepal play a key role in domination and subjugation that has not only perpetuated the representational inequalities but also furthered the restriction of the counter-representational practices that hold certain meanings for challenging such asymmetry. The interpretation of the ways power and knowledge meet to construct particular political ideologies and unequal geographies helps in understanding the productive impact of these labels. Indian and Chinese narratives that accompany their encounters with Nepal have been capable of constructing realities, which have been taken as real and acted upon, denying equal kinds of agency to Nepal, rendering these interactions as ‘imperial encounter’s.

Notably, the ‘imperial encounter’ does not occur between active (Western or non-Western) states against supine, inert states that lack the inherent aptitude, but there has always been some form of resistance.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that there is a space for small state agencies to respond, defend and strategise empowerment and resistance. Here, the ‘imperial encounter’s concept is useful as it allows for relationality in the historical and contemporary encounter. Here, I have used the relative encounter as a criterion; as has been noted earlier, some scholars do not consider Nepal as a small state. In other words, it allows for the relational<sup>23</sup> dimension of Nepal with India and China, whereby a certain power dynamic has been created through persistent representational practices, as evident in various aspects, including geopolitics, hydro-politics and border (as discussed later). Due to this power asymmetry, Nepal has been constrained to adopt limited forms of foreign policy approaches and practices.

#### **1.4. Limits in the foreign policy choices of Nepal**

It is noteworthy to mention that the foreign policy of a state is the product of multiple factors, including geography, history, economy and ruling regime. More often, geopolitical realities play a significant role in shaping a states’ perception and practices towards other states. Amid the continuing internal political instability and neighbouring power-plays, pursuing the goal of promoting development in an equitable and just manner while keeping its sovereignty intact has been one of the major foreign policy imperatives of Nepal. This section highlights that, despite several inconsistencies and double standards, as a small state, Nepal has attempted to

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22 Said (1994, p. xii) discusses resistance, stating that, “...Never was it the case that the ‘imperial encounter’ pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; there was always some form of active resistance, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out...”. Further, McGee (2016) has remarked, “...Resistance, like these contemporary understandings of empowerment, is also a process of agency and structuration...”. See also Gopal (2019).

23 In this thesis, by the term ‘interaction’, I mean to infer a bilateral interaction unless stated otherwise.

maintain its foreign policy based on the norms of nationalism and neutrality, specifically in its engagement with its two neighbours.

For small states, their prospects for survival are directly related to access to economic goods that, in turn, make them vulnerable in terms of sovereignty<sup>24</sup> (Bailes et al., 2016 in Thies et al., 2017). This constrains them to pander to domestic interests, but at the expense of foreign policy, leading them towards exercising a limited range of foreign policy options, particularised in nature: they can either stay neutral, adopt the policy of band wagoning (align with the most powerful or threatening actors), balancing (align with weaker actors against powerful or threatening actors) or alliances (give means to allies to access resources to reduce defence burdens) as foreign policy imperatives (see Thies et al., 2017 for detail). For a small state, the maintenance of independence lies within the essence of how well it can utilise its geopolitical vulnerability, including the limited foreign policy choices, but without antagonising its neighbours.

India and China have used their own hegemonic terms and connotations to define their policy towards Nepal (For details see Garver, 1991; Bhusal & Singh, 2011; Chhetri, 2013; Baral, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2010; Gurung, 2014; KC & Bhattarai, 2018). India considers Nepal a buffer zone and natural tranquilliser against China, presuming that Nepal lies within its sphere of influence. In comparison, China considers Nepal strategically significant due to its proximity to the sensitive Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), a vital part of China's inner security ring that plays a crucial role in China's South Asia policy. Their perceptions have a direct bearing on their methods of intervention, whereby as compared to the overt form of Indian influence, China seeks to camouflage its overt presence to avoid Indian concern about Nepal. Thus, their interest, coupled with their increasing strategic rivalry, has increased the geopolitical vulnerability of Nepal,<sup>25</sup> posing significant impact on its foreign policy choices.

In this context, the external challenges and the internal political condition of Nepal are eventually reflected in the foreign policy of Nepal that centralises the management of China and India's increasing foreign and security challenges (Karki, 2013, p. 405). Historically, the initial policy of the 'yam between two boulders' during the period of unification, was intended to keep Nepal safe, protect its independence, promote economic development and maintain a

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24 Small states behaviour of subordinating under hierarchy as a means to obtain order (Lakes, 2009 in Thies, et al. 2017) risks of outweighing the sovereignty cost (Thies et al., 2017).

25 The geopolitical vulnerability can be defined in terms of territorial size, population, relative strength, level and development and other factors (Khadka, 2010, p. 137).



balanced form of relationship with both neighbours. For Nepal, balance means both “to minimize the restrictions imposed on Nepal’s freedom of action and to contribute to that country’s internal and external security” (Rose and Dial, 1969 in Dahal, 2011). This has been the continuing ethics of the foreign policy of Nepal, except during the Rana regime, when it adopted a pro-British policy.

A state’s geopolitical position has a direct bearing over its foreign policy objectives and options. Thus, maintaining its independence and neutrality and preserving the security and core national interests<sup>26</sup> aroused due to power asymmetry, including evading the existing geopolitical climate-induced structural scarcity, have been the guiding factors for Nepal’s foreign policy. While Nepal’s relation with India is considered special (as discussed in Chapter 3), to maintain a balanced relationship with its both neighbours, it has adopted the policy of neutrality and non-alignment by diversifying its diplomatic contacts. ‘Neutrality’ is considered to be one of the viable strategies available to a small state for national security and integrity to counteract the state’s vulnerability in a way that acknowledges their neighbours’ national interests, security and overall geopolitical balance. Neutrality is the policy of fairness that prevents “from giving unbalanced support to one belligerent at the expense of another” (Petrie, 1995 in Gurung, 2014).

Nepal has maintained its *de facto* regional neutrality with various policies of appeasement and adhered to the norms of nationalism by supporting both neighbours rather than engaging in their power-play strategies. Nepal’s proclivity towards this policy of neutrality and equidistance can be observed in its effort to establish diplomatic relations with India since the ‘Treaty of Peace and Friendship’ in 1950 (hereafter ‘the 1950 Treaty’) and with China since the ‘Treaty of Peace and Friendship’ in 1960<sup>27</sup> (ratified in 1961) (Annex 1.1 & 1.2), inferring the replacement of its traditional policy of isolationism with a policy of ‘equidistance’ with both neighbours. To be more specific, it has adopted the political stance of ‘passive neutralism,’ equally regarding a cooperative political attitude towards India and China with no-favouritism (Gurung, 2014, p. 20). In the words of Dahal (2011, p. 43), “Nepal had also utilized its strategic position to squeeze concessions from the communist and democratic

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26 According to Dahal (2011, p. 34), there are various forms of national interests: survival interest (non-negotiable); vital interests (grounded in core national value); major interests (management of vital resources); and peripheral interests (includes workers, refugees and others).

27 Nepal and China’s relations began to normalise with the signing of the agreement by India and China on trade and intercourse between Tibet and India in 1954 (Khadka, 2010).

countries to augment its independent position through mixed economy, linguistic, educational and cultural Nepalization and active foreign policy”.

Along with neutrality, Nepal has also adopted a policy of non-alignment as its foreign policy imperative. Atquit (1983) describes non-alignment as a global strategy of the prioritisation of a nation's independence, identity, modernisation, development and peace. Accordingly, as a pragmatic and eclectic doctrine, Nepal has adopted the principle of non-alignment and non-interference in others' internal affairs and has implemented respect for mutual equality as a contemporary approach to its foreign policy. Nepal's foreign policy is steered by an abiding faith in the UN and a policy of non-alignment, mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, respect for mutual equality, non-aggression and peaceful settlement of disputes and cooperation for mutual benefit (Shrestha, 2018).

As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal states, “The fundamental objective of Nepal's foreign policy is to enhance the dignity of the nation by safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and promoting economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nepal...also aimed at contributing to global peace, harmony and security” (MOFA, 2020). It is important to consider that Neutrality is normally broadened by including phrases like ‘non-alignment’, ‘independent policy’ and ‘nationalism’; as Lyon (1969) remarks, “Neutralism is usually nourished by nationalism”. According to Kolossov & O'Loughlin (1998), in the emerging new world orders, the increasing prominence of nationalism implies self-empowerment and peaceful realisation of identities. In this manner, nationalism, a collective belief or ideology entailing various social, cultural and political factors, acts as a pre-emptive condition for counter-hegemony. Nationalism in Nepal has emerged from the realisation of the objective differences between (British) India and China, and their interaction, to protect its national sovereignty and cultural heritage.

As Bhandari rightly remarks, “The association of nationalism with national existence has been the leitmotif in the narrative of Nepali nationalism” (Bhandari, 2017, p. 426), implying that national existence has been the essence of the narrative of Nepali nationalism. As underlined earlier, Nepal's nationalist discourses are constructed with the inward-out form of state-building to consolidate national identity as a tool for foreign policy approaches. In this circumstance, to maintain its independence, Nepal has adopted the policy and practices of facilitating to fulfil the respective strategic interests of its neighbours but without antagonising them and exhibiting (some) forms of resistance against any external intervention.

Since the unification, nationalism in Nepal, with monarchy as the central axis,<sup>28</sup> has been a function of the internal securitisation and protection of national sovereignty. As will be discussed in chapters 2 and 4, there were various historical junctures, like the Sino-India War in 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan War in 1965 and 1971, when Nepal successfully illustrated its position as a neutral non-aligned state bolstered by the sentiment of nationalism. Equally, the recognition of the right to existence of Israel, peaceful settlement of the Gulf crisis, non-interference in Cambodia and adherence to disarmament (Dahal, 2011, p. 44) are some of the events during which Nepal affirmed its positioning.

The way the state represents itself in the international arena has a direct implication over its state formation. However, despite its adoption of the policy of preference to reflect its policy autonomy through the diversification of dependence, evidently there have been times when this has been derailed by an apparent inclination towards India (as discussed later). Briefly, mainly after 1951, Nepal has normally adopted the policy of equidistance, neutrality and non-alignment favoured by the norm of nationalism that has provided the leverage for Nepal to maintain an independent and sovereign position.

However, despite these factors, there is speculation that the sense of nationalism in Nepal frayed after 1990 (and mainly after 2006) when exogenous factors or external engagement led Nepal to be entangled in the “polycentric regime of governance” marked by the blurred line between political leaders and institutional interests, which conceived clientelism (Bhandari et al. 2009, p. 7, 8, 17). This has been furthered by the domestic actors’ weak performances in supported the formation of a vicious circle by creating additional pathways for the external influence and its *raison d’être*. This can be linked with the weak endogenous factors in Nepal, marked by the lack of effective central political authority and institutions that impeded the effective state (re) building process, creating a gap in foreign policy in theory and practice. Such a lack or debilitation of the centripetal force and institutions has affected the functioning of the foreign policy, unravelling Nepal’s nationalist sentiment and sovereignty.

In this context, Nepal’s stability and progress rest on its capacity to manage the vital interest of its neighbours without compromising its own core interests. Here, the discourses of politicisation and depoliticisation, as employed by India and China, carry a special significance

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28 During the monarchical system, rational foreign policies were pursued based on the national interest (Dahal, 2019, p. 77).

on account of the way they are manipulated in sustaining their hegemony. In this respect, this thesis foregrounds the constitutive role of the main factors concerning Nepal's relationship with India and China, such as representation, geopolitics, water resources and border.<sup>29</sup> There is a saying that 'where you stand is what you see'. The normative value of the produced knowledge, including the way representational practices, hydropolitical interactions and territorial affairs are conducted through the facilitation of power, has been the subject of critical inquiry in the literature. This necessitates an endeavour that celebrates the critical inquiry of power, advocating for the linkage of colonialism with the contemporary context. As such, I adopt the postcolonial approach to these dimensions to unearth the hitherto marginalised issues surrounding the resistance of Nepal.

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<sup>29</sup> It is important to highlight that, due to the higher level of Nepal's interactions in every aspect of social, cultural, economic and political life with India as compared to with China, Indo-Nepal interactions are discussed in more detail in this thesis.

## Chapter 2: Postcolonialism and Nepal

In this chapter, I provide the theoretical framework for the study and how postcolonialism offers a nuanced view on the relational dimension of Nepal with India and China. Mainstream<sup>30</sup> IR scholarship has a predilection for great power politics (Compaoré & Nadège, 2018) that revolve around the central concept of (great) power, security, interest and domination. These theories perceive small states as no more than mere ‘victims’ or ‘survivors’ in the international system, negating any space that confirms their agency. Though various critical theories have challenged the dominant IR paradigms on ontological, epistemological and methodological grounds, geographical parochialism has remained as a sustained problem. This study adopts the postcolonial theoretical position within IR, that while engaging with it also interrogates the discipline, arguing that postcolonial international theory has something more to offer in the context of Nepal’s relationship with India and China than existing research approaches.

The themes of sovereignty, national identity, representation, nationalism and imperialism are the key attributes by which to define the norms of Nepal’s relationship with its neighbours. These are dependent on various factors, including but not limited to economic dependence, water resources and territorial affairs. While Nepal plays a significant role in the overall regional order due to its geopolitical positioning, it has not gained adequate scholarly attention in the field of IR. The few studies on Nepal’s relationship with its neighbours have been dominated by the mainstream strands of IR theory, like realism, that overlook the history and politics of imperialism—assuming it as a sole privilege of imperial history—and its effect on the modern states. Therefore, much of the prior research is incapable of engaging with the state’s overall performance in the international system, including the issues surrounding Nepal’s relational approach vis-à-vis India and China.

For instance, as mentioned in Chapter 1, in the mainstream IR approach to Nepal, it is mostly seen within the ideological frame of its significance in the India-China relationship; its role is merely evaluated as amicable or contentious, effectively denying the subjectivities of

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30 In referring to the conventional or mainstream IR, I mainly include the variants of realism. Despite the globalisation, interconnection and increasing debates about the state (as discussed in Chapter 6), states remain a significant territorial entity in locating causal patterns in international system. It is relevant to cite Steve Smith’s (2000, in Anand, 2002, p. 28) point that the wider IR discipline “is far more realist, far more state-centric and far more unquestioning of the dominance of realism and positivism that is the case within IR theory”. Unsurprisingly, India and China have their own set of interests in Nepal. In this context, as will be discussed later, the dominant tradition of realism is inadequate to address the issues surrounding small states like Nepal.

(Nepal and) Nepali themselves. However, such an approach replicates the problematic British imperial trope of Nepal in which the nation is seen as a ‘buffer state’ between British-India and China or as an ‘issue’ to bargain over. In this context, while critical IR theories can provide inquiry on the themes of sovereignty, nationalism and representation, they remain silent on the norms of imperialism and resistance. The postcolonial theory has more to offer, mainly on the issues related to imperialism, representation, power asymmetry and resistance from the perspective of a small state, Nepal.

Postcolonial international theories are necessary to address the issues surrounding colonial legacies, mainly in the non-Western world, including the old themes of power and hegemony, from an alternative perspective to conventional IR theories. Postcolonialism offers a way of critiquing the existing power asymmetry that naturalises the hierarchy, reproducing the status quo through the affirmation of agency resultant from the increased sensitivity to the ‘self’ specificity. As Chowdhry & Nair (2002, p. 11-12) state, “the postcolonial has relevance for the study of IR because it provides insight into the ways in which the imperial juncture is implicated in the construction of contemporary relations of power, hierarchy, and domination”. Thus, this engagement with postcolonialism is an effort to draw upon the significance of South-South neo-colonial interaction in the case of a small (er) and big (er) states’ interaction, a call for dialogue between the interacting states and for the representation of hitherto marginalised small states voices, and to deterritorialise the (fixated) positioning of the small states as set up by conventional IR.

As highlighted earlier in Chapter 1, ‘imperial encounter’s (Doty, 1996) that are characterised by the notion of asymmetry are equally subject to incessant forms of resistance, illustrating how a weaker state manages to overcome its vulnerability despite its structural constraints. This means that rather than uniformly denying the agency of the small state, a considerable space needs to be allocated to them in a specific, contextual condition. Thus, the point of departure for this chapter is to unearth the agency of a small state, Nepal, by enumerating the empirical ways in which it has managed to overcome vulnerability by underlining the embedded power asymmetry and the resistance.

This chapter primarily reviews the literature and conventional IR definitions on small states. Subsequently, I locate my stance on postcolonial theory and arguing for a shift regarding the engagement of postcolonialism in the case of small states. In the third section, I examine the relevance of studying Nepal through the postcolonial lens. Finally, focusing on the main features of Nepal’s foreign policy as a small state, I illustrate that how Nepal has managed to

maintain its influential presence through norm advocacy that overruns its vulnerability. This chapter, therefore, contends that the postcolonial approach is suited to providing a contextual and pragmatic understanding of the scenario of a small state like Nepal.

## **2.1. IR and small states**

After introducing the small state concept in Chapter 1, in this section I highlight how mainstream IR analysis falls short in describing the issues they face. The mainstream IR discipline has remained preoccupied with the broad issues of power (and its exercise), order, security, influence and interest. As Gleason et al. (2007, p.1) put it, “for the realist the basic currency of international affairs is power”; that is, relational. The structure of relations among states imagined by realism constrains the state’s behaviour as it not only reifies the norms of mistrust and conflict between and among the states through the pursuance of the unilateral interest but also ignores or marginalises the other dimension of power, i.e. ‘experience’.

More importantly, realists’ tendency of “seeking to gain power” as the only viable option compels them to focus on great powers and define small states as powerless, having limited resources and possibilities, thus relegating them as entities without any form of agency (Gleason et al. 2007, p. 3). In line with this, neo-realists, through their theoretical understanding of the logic of anarchy and the balance of power, believe that all the states ought to act in similar ways to ensure their security in a self-help world, due to which small states are categorised within a separate denomination for their interests and identities (Elman, 1995, p. 174–175; Browning, 2006, p. 671).

However, though these approaches consider all states as sovereign and legally equal, they tend to consider small states as a playground in which the rivalries of powerful countries are played out, and when they defy, the theoretical rationality, authority or supremacy of IR is imposed. For instance, such accounts have presented “small states as isolated variables in a sea of anarchy, being buffeted by the powerful waves of others’ actions.” (Browning, 2006, p. 670). Furthermore, Long (2017a) states that, as small states are afflicted by ‘geographical injustice’, they become victims of power asymmetry in their interactions with the bigger states: the bigger party being the ‘preponderant power’ and the smaller one (comparably deficit in specified and relevant resources) being the ‘hypo-power’—a power in a lower degree (not necessarily being subordinated). Thus, due to their overwhelming emphasis on the historical assertiveness, intervention and structural form of decolonisation, realists have objectivised small states and defined them within the frame of geographical determinism, i.e. as a victim.

Moreover, this undermines them as subjects, as they consider small states to be structurally constrained with very few options, leaving them at the mercy of the greater powers or international institutions that realists disregard.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the mainstream IR literature offers privilege for the bigger/powerful states for the exploitation of the small/weaker states; an ‘imperial encounter’ whereby the concept of centre and periphery is reproduced with the exhibition of subordination under a hierarchy (of the centre) as a means to obtain an order. Here the order is forged to maintain the security and set standards of conduct by outweighing the sensibility of the small states. As these scholars argue, small states, due to their being more consumers than producers of security (as compared to their large counterparts) and their greater reliance on international organisations, have consequently been positioned and treated more as vassals than as equal players (Vandenbosch, 1964; Bailes et al. 2016). Likewise, these scholars generally view small states as buffer zones, diplomatic mediators, barrier states, geopolitical gateways or peripheries that are on the receiving end of power politics or act as an idealist antithesis to great power politics because they lack the necessary means and resources, which affects the circumstances in which they find themselves (Browning, 2006; Kamrava, 2015).

In addition, scholars (such as Hey, 2003 in Thies et al. 2017; Thies et al., 2017) affirm that due to their relative lack of margin of time and error, small states are always on the verge of existential uncertainty and this compels them to follow and respond to structural incentives. Their lack of structural power, when coupled with the lack of buffer against the threats and exacerbated by their inability to develop issue-specific power, ultimately leaves them in a vulnerable condition.

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31 In line with the realist’s assumption, classical geopolitics (as will be discussed in chapter 4) suggest that as the international system is a competitive arena, great powers can play disproportionate roles in terms of security, resources, position and influence, leaving the small states within the notion of encirclement and counter-encirclement (Dueck, 2013). As such, various strands of research approaches like critical analysis of ‘small-state geopolitics’ have emerged since the end of the Cold War, including some critical historiography of geopolitical traditions pointing in a similar direction (Sharp, 2013). Discussion on the geopolitical sensibility from the vantage point of a small state celebrate the significance of small state geopolitics. As Hatt (in Larsen, 2011) rightly points out, small state geopolitics implies the narration of world politics from the vantage point of the small state with few territorial ambitions. In this context, the geopolitical world view on account of a small state engenders two conditions within the interactions: a (small) state is keen to maximise their power (including the territorial power) or resist hegemonic considerations. The former can be considered as the metonym of the realist paradigm, which focuses on the limited peripheral influence that small states can make (Kristjansson, 2000) or through small-great power relations towards the possible multi-polar order in the future (Pethiyagoda, 2015). In other words, in their tendency to consider the state as a homogenous political unit, they tend to ignore a state’s (internal) structure and view through the conventional dimension of geopolitics, locating a weak link between geopolitics and small states. The latter can be considered a feature of postcolonialism, as discussed in the next section.



In such accounts, small states are generally presented as vulnerable, with less capability and influence, dependent on the larger powers, and therefore obliged to adopt foreign policies defined by the interests of the great powers. As Browning (2006, p. 669) affirms, “In the international relations literature and in world politics size has generally been connected to capability and influence. Whilst being big is correlated with power, being small has been viewed as a handicap to state action, and even state survival.” These considerations define small states as inactive and incapacitated to interact and negotiate effectively, thus affirming their weak positioning regarding the issues ranging from the protection of their natural resources to the maintenance of territorial integrity and sovereignty. Therefore, the interpretation of smallness as the “particular distribution of power (material resources) across the system (the balance of power)” (Browning, 2006, p. 670), subsequently delimits the space of potential agency for small states. Such approaches of treating small states as a ‘single category’ manifests the presumption of homogenous composition of a state, undermining the internal state characteristics that constitute the state-building process, internal politics, culture, history and social aspect of a state.

These versions’ overwhelming focus on big powers leaves small states in a vicious circle of competition and security, relegating them to disadvantaged, reactive and peripheral<sup>32</sup> status, with limited functional capabilities in the international system. Such a perception impels small states to follow the structural incentives that provide them a space to (at least, theoretically) adopt policies<sup>33</sup> to address the structural changes in the balance of power between the great powers. They can either seek external shelter (in various forms; remoteness may itself provide security shelter), balance, a bandwagon<sup>34</sup>, alliances (bilateral or multilateral or global/regional security system), neutrality<sup>35</sup> or adoption of the policy of hedging (see Walt, 1987; Kamrava, 2013; Bailes et al., 2016).

However, such analysis of power in terms of ‘strategy’ and ‘exercise’ rather than ‘experience’ is problematic as it ignores the possibility of two-way interaction. Instead, as Anand (2007) writes, it dehumanises and depersonalises the discipline, detracting the notions

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32 In this context, mainly non-Western small states are considered as ‘periphery’ in two senses: first from the perspective of the West and second from the perspective of the larger states in the non-Western region.

33 Due to their own limitations, small states cannot be treated within the norms of reciprocity by the larger ones for their requirement of more privileges, even via bilateral treaties and agreements.

<sup>34</sup> Some neo-realists assume that small states favour ‘anti-balance of power behaviour’, called ‘band wagoning’, whereby their compliance with the demand of a powerful state determines their behaviour, as a way of appeasement due to their weak status or when allies are not available (Walt, 1987).

<sup>35</sup> As noted in chapter 1, Nepal has adopted the policy of neutrality.

of colonialism, neo-colonialism, culture, identity and representation. In addition, viewing small states as victims of external pressures and tactics without having any agency themselves is not an unbiased form of knowledge production. Rather, it is the function of the existing power asymmetry that reproduces the colonial vocabulary that ridicules, devalues, subdues, intimidates and silences or debilitates critiques, pronouncing hierarchisation and peripherality as normal and standard. Thus, such deterministic envisioning falls short in defining a wider form of international system, for the focus on narrowly-defined big questions largely ignores the issues that are central to the everyday life of the minorities in the international system (Darby & Paolini, 1994; Anand, 2007).

Hence, such analysis about the policy options of the large states creates a tone of otherness and devises a set of categories ascribed to a hierarchy that considers states as abstract factors without recognising role of representation, identity, power asymmetry and other issues that are integral to the inter-state relationships. Thus, this approach does not fit well in the case of small states, typically if the state lies between the two giant rising powers in the global South. In this context, an open and engaging view of small states is necessary to promote a geopolitical vision of hope and inclusion.

Increasingly, voices of authority are challenged by voices of dissent. Various critical international theories have significantly challenged mainstream theories of IR to widen the discipline's self-definition. Critical theories like critical social constructivism, feminism, postmodernism and poststructuralism have exposed IR as a discursive process, allowing for the contestation of different possibilities of being international (Sabaratnam, 2011). However, in critical IR, in terms of identity politics, representation has been limited to the constitutive function for generating and substantiating particular policy regimes of the representer (Doty, 1996).

In addition, poststructuralism negates the probability of overarching theories and the neutral form of knowledge, emphasising deconstruction, whereas postmodernism tends to subsume the norms of resistance, thwarting the agency of small states and their peoples. Both post-modern and conventional IR share a sense of remoteness from the phenomenon under analysis that not only ignores the (high) consideration of ethics and intention but also fails to pursue consequence in human terms, restricting the politicising potentiality of post-modern IR (Darby, 1997). Moreover, despite the role of colonialism in the bigger powers' domination of internationalism and nationalism, the English school holds the fictitious presumption that formal decolonisation has ended European power dominance, forming a new non-

discriminatory community featuring a horizontal form in international relations rather than a hierarchical one, essentialising the culture that runs against the norms of sustenance of the colonial legacy (Foneseca & Jerrems, 2012). It is important to note that the world order is a social process involving dominant power and resistance that espouses production and destruction, rather than simply a relation between the states (Gill, 2008, p. xviii).

In this context, the mainstream IR theories and critical theories operate within a worldview containing epistemological and ontological limitations that are Eurocentric. The post-colonial/formal independence era did not address issues related to the major aspects of colonialism and colonial masters but new forms of domination emerged in which colonialism was reproduced and perpetuated as neo-colonialism in different forms (Tepeciklioglu, 2012). Various colonial and imperial ideas still pervade the ways in which the contemporary world is understood and represented, as Anand (2007) notes. Thus, the negation of colonial scripts and experiences risks the skewing of the dynamism of world politics.

Thus, in light of the new world order, there is a necessity for a theoretical approach that enunciates a novel decolonial language by offering an epistemological and alternative subject of inquiry, featuring a two-way mode of interaction. Furthermore, this could challenge and deconstruct the Eurocentric knowledge and celebrate a shift from the perception of power taken for granted, addressing a complex entanglement of the existing power asymmetry, the role of representation and the notion of resistance within the neo-colonial context. Here, a decolonial epistemology can provide a space that includes (rather than excludes) differences, and the ontological idea drawn from this epistemology can provide a more nuanced and holistic worldview through unearthing binaries and reductionism. As such, by proposing an alternative, the postcolonial approaches emphasises the notion of difference over the totalising tendencies present in most IR theories, creating a non-Western school of thought featuring decolonial epistemology and ontology, as discussed in the next section.

## **2.2. The case for postcolonial IR for the study of small states**

On the basis of the arguments for the engagement of a postcolonial perspective, this section intends to provide an insight into the case for postcolonial IR when studying small states. Such an approach reveals that the state relationships have been characterised by an asymmetry of power that replicates the colonial practices, highlighting the role of representations—which are the product of stereotypes and essentialism—and the resistance of small states to counter the asymmetry.

Emerging in the late 1970s as a new decolonial language, postcolonial theory provides alternative critiques of the power hierarchies and relations and marked a significant theoretical shift in IR, in which postcolonial perspectives have increasingly since gained currency (Ashcroft et al., 2007). Rather than signifying the end of colonialism, postcolonial study tends to engage with the continuity and persistence of European colonialism in ideology and practices within structures, institutions and governance, including knowledge and discourses of the post-colonial world. Postcolonialism emphasises disrupting and deconstructing the colonial and neo-colonial languages, as Darby & Paolini (1994, p. 375, 385) rightly point out, and rather than focusing on power as in conventional IR, it instead concentrates on the relations of domination and resistance and the effect on identity through and beyond colonial encounters.

Postcolonialism is a historical, multifaceted and complex phenomenon with various interpretations<sup>36</sup> and meanings associated with the observation, consideration and interrogation of philosophical orientations, praxis and effects of colonialism (Olatunjr, 2005). Viewing dominant IR theories through a critical lens, postcolonialism challenges the prevailing Eurocentric concepts of classical IR theory (Tepeciklioglu, 2012, p.1), previously considered as universal, by exploring and recognising the temporal emphasis and spatial diversity of world politics. Thus, by reflecting on historical events in a way that challenges the concept of universalisation and power relations flowing from the top down and from the centre to the periphery, postcolonialism helps to unearth the historically marginalised voices. Thus, the postcolonial approach is crucial to rethinking disciplinary categories and intellectual formations for just and equitable contemporary relations, underscoring the norms of agency subsumed within the hegemonic considerations.

This is equally significant in the case of small states, as mainstream IR theories like realists focus on power and therefore tend to reproduce the status quo, taking for granted the historical contours of the modern state. By contrast, postcolonialism offers a more complex view by making a critical inquiry into a world order dominated by the powerful actors and their interests. From an empirical perspective, one can surmise that the postcolonial approach interrogates the images and discourses of the powerful states and unpacks the issues related to small states' strategies to cultivate inclusive and cooperative relationships. As will also be

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36 Whilst "Postcolonial approaches are committed to critique, expose, deconstruct, counter and (in some claims) to transcend, the cultural and broader ideological legacies and presences of imperialism", they are not immune from shortcomings (Sidaway, 2000, p. 594). There are instances when the mapping of postcolonialism becomes contradictory or problematic: most prominent of them being the impulse within the postcolonial approach to invert, expose, transcend or deconstruct knowledge and practise related to colonialism, mainly related to objectification, classification and the desire to chart or map (ibid., p. 592).

discussed in Chapter 4, thus, the point of departure for the small states is to shift from the acceptance of the material superiority of the hegemon towards a belief in the historical alternative that safeguards their interests. The relationship between a small and big(ger) power can be better understood through the concepts of power asymmetry, representation and resistance. In the following discussion, I highlight the case for postcolonial IR for small states that focusses on power asymmetry, representation and possibility for resistance.

### *Power asymmetry*

As mentioned in Chapter 1, because power, knowledge and representation lie at the heart of the ‘imperial encounter’, colonial asymmetries of power have re-emerged in the form of neo-colonialism, signifying the importance of discourses and representational practices. Power asymmetry has been the determinant factor to reinvigorate the norms of real and imaginary geography in shaping the majority, if not most, of present state formations and their interactions. The great powers actively utilise their authority for restructuring and dominance to emphasise the notion of identity difference or otherness (Said, 1978). Thus, “The study of power in international relations has been central to the organisation and production of knowledge in the discipline” (Chowdhry & Nair, 2002, p. 3).

As such, within the study of IR, which is dominated by realists, power has remained a key and contested term, whereby anarchy, interest and order have been constituent elements to the functioning of IR (Long, 2017b, p. 187). These strands consider power as disaggregated, instrumental and as an end in itself, whereby state property is measured in terms of capabilities and resources that emerge through interaction. However, the “brute quantifications of resources are an inadequate metric for many issues in world politics” (Long, 2017b, p. 186). Thus, such a structuralist, universalist, (hegemonic) rationalist view is preoccupied with the broad issues of power, order, security and unilateral interest, influences that undermine history (erasure of certain history and memory), while ideology is subject to critical interrogation to situate IR on account of the historical, political context. Despite the realist consideration that all states are equal in status, the overwhelming focus on great power constrains the role of small states, situating them within the deterministic positioning of more powerful ones.

In this context, considering power relationships as one of its central themes, postcolonialism reveals the way the colonial legacies are perpetuated in power relations<sup>37</sup> and

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<sup>37</sup> Here, it is important to cite Said (1978, p. 15), who considered the way power asymmetry “transmit[s] or reproduce[s] itself from one epoch to another”. Ashcroft et al. (2001, p. 7) further added to this, considering that

contribute to the formation of power asymmetry and resistance by employing a multiplicity of interpretations and approaches to questions of power (see Ashcroft et al. 2001; Chowdhry and Nair, 2002). It is important to underline that asymmetric relationships are normally characterised not only by a disparity of resources but also by the mutual, if sometimes implicit, acknowledgement of autonomy (Womack, 2001, p. 125). An asymmetrical focus has an advantage over absoluteness (small or big) as it directly engages with IR debates about power and influence based on a dyadic relationship between a larger power and a weaker state. It offers critical insights into the rubric of hierarchy by providing new space for the examination of the issues surrounding small states. Moreover, the focus on power asymmetry explores the way power variations influence the interests of the interacting states in terms of control and the structure of their relationship.

There is consensus among scholars that power and influence may manifest in ways that are not always readily observable and apparent; instead, they may be exercised less noticeably, stemming from the combination of resources and opportunities accrued over time (Kamrava, 2013, p. 67). Henceforth, the consideration of power asymmetry, apart from highlighting the multifaceted and variegated nature of power in international politics, is equally helpful for examine the limits and possibilities of the agency of the small states. The relations of colonial dominations persist in the way identity is perceived and accordingly represented, implying a strong impact on the way the representation is made, for this representation cannot be separated from the power asymmetry as it is not a zero-sum game.

### *Representation*

As compared to the critical theories, whereby cultural representations that sustain power relations are not problematised, “a key theme to postcolonialism is that Western perceptions of the non-West are the result of the legacies of the European colonisation and imperialism” (Nair, 2017, p. 69). Through his landmark book, ‘orientalism’, Said (1978) has demonstrated how the West, by utilising the privilege of positional power, has succeeded in creating a distorted knowledge featuring binary opposition between the superior self (West) and inferior other (East) to achieve political objectives. Such orientalist discourses (the specific ideas about the ‘orient’ were attached to negative attributes) are still visible in contemporary Western and non-Western representations.

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power asymmetry may be re-emerging “in different political and cultural circumstances” than in the colonial period.

Postcolonialism “highlights the impact colonial and imperial histories still have in shaping a colonial way of thinking about the world and how Western forms of knowledge and power marginalise the non-western world”, as Nair (2017, p. 69) states. Postcolonialism views key issues as “constituting discourses of power”, whereby the:

notion of a discourse allows scholars to utilise a frame of reference for thinking about the world and its problems that does not merely reside in the empirically verifiable and ‘fact’-based inquiry that drives traditional IR theories such as realism and liberalism (ibid., p. 70).

Realising that the Eurocentric understanding of the world and rationality is problematic, postcolonial approaches introduce a novel type of IR that is attentive to differences, that provincialises Europe and its universalist claim by shifting ontological focus to everyday life or new concepts emerging in non-Western thinking. For postcolonialists, perception and representation are significant as they articulate the things to be viewed as normal or sensible, and therefore question why certain discourses, images, etc., are considered or appear as normal. This is significant for small states because, as mentioned earlier, the conventional view on small states is not an unbiased form of knowledge production but rather it serves a particular interest.

Postcolonialism is very geographical<sup>38</sup> (a geographical version of postcolonialism) in that it deals with the language about spaces, centres, peripheries and borders by suggesting coherency in the concept that transcends these differences (Sharp, 2009, p. 5). Postcolonialism challenges how such binary opposites, that directly impact the contemporary world, are constructed as different or opposite, moving past the obsession with completeness and coherence, and revealing exploitation, domination and oppression and resistance. Thus, postcolonialism helps to shed biases, addressing the structural factors in a way that intends to recognise the agency of a weaker entity—here, a small state—by providing distinct voice and critique.

### *Resistance*

It is important to note that the realist’s view of “seeking to gain power” as the only viable option compels them to focus on great powers and define small states as powerless, with limited resources and possibilities, thus relegating them to a position lacking any form of agency

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<sup>38</sup> Postcolonialism can be understood as “geographically dispersed contestation of colonial power and knowledge” (Blunt & McEwan, 2002 in Sidaway, 2000).

(Gleason et al. 2007, p. 3). However, scholars are increasingly arguing that the excessive focus on the metric of size—large or small—as the determinant variable risks falling victim to what Dahl has referred to as the ‘lump of power fallacy’ (in Baldwin, 1980, p. 497). Here, small states are defined as ‘lump of weakness’ that is limited to a particular issue, geography and relationship. Due to this, scholarly attention is shifting towards the ‘resilience’ of small states that is a product of agency and strategy dissociated from the conventional notion of structural conditions, like vulnerability<sup>39</sup> (Lefebvre, 2010).

As compared to postmodernists that argue for the disappearance of the grand narrative, postcolonialists open the space for resisting the dominant discourses of power and representation through ‘counter-narratives’ (Chowdhry & Nair, 2002). Postcolonialism contributes to changing IR into ‘a discourse of empowering criticality’ (Anand, 2002, p. i). Moreover, postcolonial theory is attentive to the imperial historical junctures and relates that history to the question of resistance and agency (Chowdhry & Nair, 2002, p. 25). As Ashcroft et al. (2007, p. 50) highlight, “The concept of counter-discourse within post-colonialism thus also raises the issue of the subversion of canonical texts and their inevitable reinscription in this process of subversion”. Thus, the postcolonial epistemological concern about knowledge as a representative act forwarding certain interests can be applied in IR theory that encourages pluralistic of voices and their potential to be heard.

From the vantage point of the postcolonial scholars, revealing oppressions and shifting one’s gaze towards hegemonic practices implies resistance that moves beyond simple deconstruction. According to Jefferess (2003, p.7), resistance is, “a primary framework for the critical project of postcolonialism; in many ways, the subject of postcolonial criticism is ‘resistance’ and postcolonialism is a project of ‘resistance’ itself”. Jefferess (2003, p. iii) has defined resistance as any opposition to, or subversion of, colonial authority. Here, resistance through the small state perspective means that it is necessary to rethink our understanding of the material structure of hegemony and small states’ agency, and redescribe it against their sufferings.<sup>40</sup>

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39 According to Lee (2016, p. 25), the comparative structural vulnerability of small states can be linked to the impact on their foreign policy, concerns on the global agenda and security of sovereignty against any form of external influences.

40 Here it is important to note that having some norms of opposition in resistance does not mean that it can be reduced solely to opposition, and resistance itself means that the hegemonic narratives are ‘re-written’ or counter narratives are produced that are not essentialised, as they are something that postcolonialism resists.



In this context, postcolonialists affirm that though small states are considered to be constrained, there is always a space for the possibility for resistance for small states, and thus they are able to maintain their independent position. In other words, small states cannot be categorised as powerless, nor can they be objectivised; rather, they do have some forms of agency. Postcolonialism recognises small states as important agents in local, regional and even global political processes instead of as victims, as is proposed in mainstream IR. Thus, through the postcolonial approach, one can seek to deconstruct binarism in hegemonic knowledge and analyse the accommodative space that a small state seeks in its interaction with a bigger state in the international system. The next section focusses on why it is important to study Nepal through this postcolonial lens.

### **2.3. Postcolonialism and Nepal**

This section explores the importance of studying Nepal through a postcolonial lens that considers power asymmetry and the role of representation to explain away the power asymmetry, and highlights the small state's resistance or accommodation strategies. As noted earlier, 'imperial encounter's are fraught with issues stemming from the disparity of power. Within the South-South (state) interaction, there is not only the inheritance of the concepts (administrative, legal and academic) of the former colonies but also the conceptualisation that has made modern states such a quintessentially European phenomenon (Ashcroft et al. 2007; Buzan & Little, 2000). By using their capability and resources, great powers normally get their way over the geopolitically weak and small states that are subordinated due to chronic instability and lack of significant leverage vis-à-vis resources<sup>41</sup> (Darby & Paolini, 1994, p. 386).

As mentioned earlier, the structure of power that marks continuing legacies of colonialism, and featuring Said's (1978) orientalism, has been the significant attribute of Nepal's relationship with India and China. For instance, Indian and Chinese discourses have produced and reproduced the colonial modes of power and hegemony, neglecting the agency of Nepal, which has inflicted a strong impact on Nepal in terms of its resistance. However, despite this, these issues have not gained enough scholarly attention. In this context, postcolonialism as a politico-aesthetic category that can engage with the South-South interlinks and cultural exchanges through the notion of alternative periodisation (Darby & Paolini, 1994,

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<sup>41</sup> According to Said (1994, p. 8), the root for a drive for power not only rationalises the domination over less powerful groups but also adheres to the ideology that such groups need domination.

p.393), is equally significant in terms of Nepal's relationship with its neighbours in terms of unearthing its voices.

It is important to highlight that postcolonialism is not a geographical concept and does not refer only to the countries that have been previously colonised. Nevertheless, though Nepal was never colonised, its history is deeply intertwined with colonial histories and South Asian politics (Crews, 2006, p.1). It largely shares similar problems and characteristics to many post-colonial states, including legacies of discrimination, obstructionist bureaucracies and long-term external dependencies on aid and international development. To describe such scenarios, Des Chene (2007) refers to the term "non-postcolonial state".

Against this backdrop, extraordinarily, the geopolitical narrativities within which the relationships with Nepal are imagined and practised share the norms of power asymmetry, subsequently undermining the norms of resistance and mutual respect. The epistemological disruptions and ontological interventions of postcolonial analysis make it possible to understand the neo-colonial underpinning of India and China and critically view the neutral form of knowledge production, narratives and discourses that have been produced and reproduced. Nepal's newly formed trajectory of state-building and international affairs can be traced in the changing, contentious regional and global political climate that risks Nepal becoming a playground of the major powers like the US, India and China. The geographical inequality existing between Nepal with India and China has placed their interactions within the new imperialistic context of political domination.

However, the limited scholarship available on Nepal has been keen to follow mainly the descriptive factors situated within the paradigm of conventional IR. From this lens, Nepal is mostly seen through the frame of its neighbours, such as in terms of its peripheral role in Sino-Western or Sino-Indian relations or as a potential site that could be used to gain regional influence (for instance, Khadka, 1997; Dabhade & Pant, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2010; Bhatnagar & Ahmed, 2020). These vantage points exhibit the existing power asymmetry and share the theme of hegemonic and neo-colonial exchanges that negates the experience of Nepal and denies its (and its people's) subjectivities within those hegemonic and neo-colonial exchanges. More importantly, even if there are efforts to challenge the hegemonic considerations of India and China, they are classified as normal or order creators by portraying Nepal as a survivor, buffer zone or weak. Accordingly, the critical analysis of such geopolitical conditions necessitates an alternative field of inquiry to the mainstream IR theories.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the elements of representation, geopolitics, hydro-politics and border constitute the key affairs of Nepal's relationship vis-a vis India and China. However, conventional IR is less interested in analysing the border and geopolitics, and their role in the construction of power or the way power asymmetry manifests. In other words, they tend to naturalise these relations, reinforcing the status quo where the voices of small states like Nepal are subdued or peripheralised. In this context, postcolonial theory is important in its focus on the existing power asymmetry in the geopolitical, hydropolitical and border affairs between the bigger (India/China) and the small state (Nepal), whereby the sources and operations of power are problematised for the resistive space.

Postcolonialism allows us to rethink and redescribe such relations against the state's sufferings, including those caused by knowledge production. As Kaul (2002, p. 710) remarks, identifying the representational practices is significant because "A recognition of the representational practices which shape the cartographies of power carries within it the possibility of resistance and resignification...it encourages critical self-reflexivity, an awareness of history, and warns against decontextualised universalistic theoretical exercises.". Here, the postcolonial critique is important for Nepal to disrupt the knowledge produced by the powerful states (mainly its neighbours) about the other and exhibit the possibility for resistance through non-confrontational ideology and practices, looking beyond the norms of those in power to find any colonial legacies, and their representation, and thus to disrupt these discourses.

Here, understanding representation is crucial to gain insight into the power-knowledge nexus. Postcolonial scholars argue that certain concepts like modernisation or civilisation, rather than being rational concepts, are in fact are the manifestations of representational practices that are intended to serve a purpose. Nepal's experience of the hegemonic projects of India and China, masqueraded as securitisation and development of Nepal, manifest the continuation of historical inequalities, ingrained prejudices and discrimination. Such 'Power over' and 'power to' poses a Foucauldian-based distinction whereby the former is related to a state of domination with an agent able to exert an impinging and moulding influence over another agent. In contrast, the latter is related to the ability to resist the influence of another that can be seen in the emergence of collective actions and the impact of social movement (see Slater, 2004, p.17).

In this context, the postcolonial studies are relevant to Nepal because they serve the multipurpose of analysing, explaining and responding to the cultural legacy of the colonialism

observed (and re-emerged) in the form of neo-colonialism, with existing power disparities representing the effect of encounters and exchanges, and the hidden reactions to them. Nevertheless, it is an attempt to seek the political subjectivity model to challenge the perpetual dominant geopolitics that does not rely on otherness.

Thus, in the case of this South-South interaction, I intend to construct the postcolonial concept by focusing on Nepal in each following chapters, highlighting the notion of the representational practices, its asymmetrical power relation with India and China and the resistance to such a power asymmetry, which has been the defining framework for the inter-state relationships. Here, the relevance of resistance constitutes the historical analysis and the process of resistance against domination.

As outlined by the mainstream IR scholarship, it is not that Nepal lacks any forms of agency, but rather it is the parochial approach of such scholarship that denies any space for Nepal. This is equally true in the case of the foreign policy approaches, whereby there is lack of multidimensional understanding of Nepal's foreign policy, which does not attribute solely to the external actors. While mainstream IR focuses on limiting foreign policy purview within the pursuance of 'self' interest (i.e. power), postcolonialism helps to unravel the hitherto marginalised dimensions that recognise the space for small states. Thus, the next section—analysing the main features of Nepal's foreign policy as a small state—intends to focus on Nepal's agency as a norm entrepreneur.

#### **2.4. Main features of Nepal's foreign policy as a small state**

As partly explained in Chapter 1, though Nepal has prioritised its relationship with its two neighbours, its urge to increase the diversification in its relations is equally important. Thus, a significant focus of Nepal's relations is to challenge the hegemony, decrease its (over) dependencies and diversify its economic realm and policy compulsions, fixing nationalism at the core of its foreign policy to negotiate in terms of 'imperial encounter'(s). Notably, Norms and institutions are significant for the survival of a small state, as "legal norms of sovereign equality give small states a voice in many international organizations" (Long, 2017b. p. 185). Small states can act as norm entrepreneurs in different areas and such norms against unilateral performances are significant means by which to express their voice and rights. In this section, I argue that by utilising its geopolitical positioning, Nepal has managed to maintain bilateral relations with its neighbouring countries and confirm its influential presence through norm entrepreneurship that counteracts its vulnerability by demonstrating itself as a (true) neutral

and non-aligned state that is collaborating and actively participating in various international organisations.

#### *Foreign policy focused on bilateral relations*

Remaining neutral and non-aligned and maintaining a balanced form of relationship with its both neighbours to maintain its independence have been the prime strategy of Nepal's contemporary foreign policy while pursuing multilateralism. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, it is this policy of equidistance with both India and China that has provided Nepal with geopolitical leverage.

It seems apparent that Nepal's authorities have realised the significance of the geopolitical reality in its foreign policy, considering the non-alignment policy as a step beyond the short-term imperatives to follow a pragmatic foreign policy. Nepal conducts an independent foreign policy based on the UN charter, non-alignment principles, principles of *Panchsheel*,<sup>42</sup> to safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest and independence. Since the Asian conference in Bandung in April 1955 that embraced the principles of *Panchsheel*, Nepal has adopted the policy of non-alignment.<sup>43</sup> This has become the basic guideline of its foreign policy approaches, which has contributed to its harmonious bilateral and multilateral relations.

Nepal's membership in UNO in December 1955 reflected its intention to pursue this principle of non-alignment. As Bhattarai (2017) remarks, amid this, "Nepal was formally integrated in the Belgrade summit of the non-aligned countries in 1961 as the foundation of a peaceful world order, an alternative to military blocks and rivalries in international life", thus expressing its innate desire to safeguard its independence and freedom through its foreign policy.

However, even before this, Nepali PM B.P. Koirala, in his address to the 15<sup>th</sup> session of UN General Assembly on September 29, 1960 stated, "We have judged every international issue on its merit without consideration of anybody's fear or favour" (ibid.). The policy of non-alignment adopted in 1956 as "equal friendship for all" gradually became understood as equal friendship with India and China. This became a norm for Nepal's declaration of non-alignment as its foreign policy. The non-aligned policy offered Nepal the privilege of creating peaceful

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42 *Panchaseel* or the Five Principles constitutes mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. See Lama (2017).

43 It is important to note that King Mahendra is considered the main architect of the foreign policy of Nepal. He helped extend Nepal's foreign affairs by prioritising the relationship of equidistance with both neighbours.

development and a position within a dimension that evades conflict and war. Nevertheless, it was necessary for Nepal to adopt this policy to secure its independent identity, mainly during tussles between the major powers and during wars between its neighbours, such as the Sino-India War in 1962 (as will be discussed in Chapter 4), whereby it stayed non-aligned and neutral.

Thus, Nepal's desire to maintain independence and territorial integrity is not incongruent with Indian and Chinese security concerns. Its unity, integrity, political stability and economic development largely depends on these sound neighbour relationships. Historically, after WWII, it has been apparent that Nepal's neutral stance is not a contingent one but rather a firm policy that has been consistently evident at every historical juncture, including during the Sino-India War in 1962 and 1967 and the Indo-Pakistan War in 1965 and 1971. Thus, Nepal's neutral stance can be considered a norm that has assisted it to maintain its independent status and preserve bilateral relations.<sup>44</sup>

However, despite Nepal's attempt to focus its foreign policy on bilateral relations, there were instances when it experienced challenges to the policy of neutrality and equidistance, mainly from India. For instance, in the late 1960s, Nepal had requested from India the supply of arms and ammunition for its security forces, which India rejected, arguing that Nepal did not need anti-air missiles (Sakhuja, 2011). In response, adherent to the policy of equidistance, Nepal made a trade deal with China in 1970 (that was also followed in 2005), furthering the joint proactive military exchange programmes, including training and developments. India sustained such hegemonic practice in the case of the Trade and Transit Treaty<sup>45</sup> in the 1970s

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44 Crucially, though Nepal remained neutral in those wars, Nepali's contribution of Gorkha soldiers in those wars is something that cannot be unacknowledged, as discussed in chapter 3. During the Sino-India War in 1967 (11-14 September), Gorkha soldiers played an important role to claim victory at the point 15, 450 (that was lost in the 1962 war) in Nathu La pass that ended up claiming the lives of 400 Chinese soldiers as compared to less than a hundred on the Indian side (see THT, 2014; OutlookIndia, 2020). As Indian General V.K. Singh remarked, "a Gurkha unit..." ... "gave the Chinese side a 'bloody nose'... on that occasion, occupying a position after a brutal khukri assault" (Bhattarai, 2020c). This war played the dual role of firstly changing the Chinese perception towards India, when the former used to utilise assertive practices against India even in minor causes, and secondly in highlighting the significance of the geopolitical location of Nepal and the enhanced level of Indian confidence towards Nepal (and Nepali).

45 As a replacement of the treaty of trade and commerce between India and Nepal in July 1951, a treaty of trade and transit was signed between Nepal and India in September 1960 to expand the exchange of goods and encourage economic collaboration and development and facilitate trade with third countries. However, due to Nepal's stance on including the provision of freedom of transit, assuring unrestricted transit rights to and from the ocean for landlocked states, which varied from the Indian interest, the treaty (which was set to expire in 1971) could not be renewed on time. The Indian discontent was exhibited during the visit of Indian Minister of External Affairs, Y. B. Chavan, in Kathmandu in January 1976, when he warned Nepal that, "economic relations depended on political goodwill, not on natural rights" (Scholz, 1977).

as well. Nepal considered this as a challenge to the norm and sentiment of a small neutral state, and thus it made a separate agreement with Bangladesh.<sup>46</sup>

It is important to underline that, for Nepal, the policy of neutrality and non-alignment can be considered a survival strategy (see Bhattarai, 2021) and its priority in the bilateral relationship. However, the *exsitu* adoption of the strategy by Nepal illustrates that it is keen to demonstrate that it is a (true) neutral and non-threat to its neighbours and larger powers. For instance, the case of the ‘Zone of peace’ (ZOP) proposal can be considered a measure taken by Nepal to portray itself as a non-threat to its neighbours to win their confidence. During his coronation in 1975, King Birendra Shah of Nepal proposed Nepal be declared as a ‘Zone of Peace’ (ZOP) to safeguard Nepal from possible power-plays and to maintain its independent status, stating:

We adhere to the policy of non-alignment because we believe that it brightens the prospects of peace, we need peace for our national independence and we need peace for development..... it is only because our people genuinely desire peace for our country in our region and everywhere in the world.... we believe in having relations with our neighbours independently of one another....it is with this earnest desire to institutionalise peace that my country be declared a Zone of Peace (Atique, 1983, p. 104).

To maintain Nepal’s neutrality in external conflicts and ensure internal political stability, the thrust of the proposal was “Friendship with all, enmity with none”. While China<sup>47</sup> extended its support for the proposal, India tended to politicise it and hence showed reservations. Accordingly, to extend the outreach of the proposal, King Birendra paid a visit to the USSR in November 1976 to publicise the Nepalese demand for freedom of transit—amid the failing trade talks with India—and the ‘Zone of Peace’ proposal (Scholz, 1977).

In a similar manner, inside Nepal, the ZOP proposal met with varied responses that ranged from considering it as a ‘progressive strategy’ (Atique, 1983, p. 104) to an ‘escape

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46 On April 1976, Nepal signed a separate trade and transit treaty with Bangladesh that India considered a political issue, as reflected during Nepal’s PM Dr Giri’s visit to India, when Indian PM Mrs Indira Gandhi objected to Nepal’s action, stating that, “Nepal-India relations were un-like other international relations”. In response, Dr Giri clearly argued, “as an independent state, (for Nepal) it is not necessary to consult another state” (Scholz, 1977).

47 King Birendra of Nepal became the first foreign head to fly over the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau in 1976. The Chinese PM not only welcomed the King, describing the Sino-Nepal relation as ‘special’ but also actively supported the ZOP proposal, followed by Nepal’s effort to expel Taiwan from the IMF (Scholz, 1977). Moreover, former Chinese Premier, Mr Hua Guo Feng, speaking at a banquet held in Peking in honour of the then-Pakistan Prime Minister, affirmed, “We firmly support the just stand taken by His Majesty, the King of Nepal, in declaring a zone of peace, we are ready to assure appropriate commitments arising therefrom” (Atique, 1983, p. 105).

strategy' (Gurung, 2014). Due to the emphasis of the proposal on neutrality and peaceful co-existence, scholars like Baral (1986) and Subedi (2005) viewed the proposal as a necessity to free Nepal from the Indian sphere of influence and maintain its security, independence and development. However, the rapidly changing regional political environment, characterised by the advent of new political scenarios like the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, the emergence of Bangladesh as a new country and Sikkim annexation (1975) signalled a remarkable regional shift that represented a constrained space for neighbouring small states like Nepal, while having a direct impact on its state formation process and foreign policy approaches. In this context, the proposal was necessary to safeguard Nepal against the overarching regional power-play, denying any form of (sphere of) influence by disseminating a message that promoted its adherence to the policy of neutrality and peaceful co-existence.

Moreover, the proposal can also be viewed as an attempt to institutionalise the practicality of de facto conditions to ensure that no external powers could use Nepal for their power-plays. Through the proposal, Nepal intended to compensate for its weak aggregate structural power by seeking global recognition of its image as a neutral and peaceful state. As a small states and a norm entrepreneur, Nepal chose to build such norms to delegitimise the use of force, which India viewed as a challenge to its hegemony and thus placed a reservation on the proposal. Later, though it was supported by 114 of the world's nation-states, including the USA, the UK and France, the proposal was not endorsed due to the obstruction of India and thus remained inactive after the (re)inception of democracy in 1990 (Sharma, 2003), after which no significant attempts were made to revive the proposal. Thus, though the proposal cannot be considered as a major policy departure in the foreign policy of Nepal, it left an enduring impact through resisting Indian hegemonic practices such as the economic blockade in 1989 and increased overtures towards China so as to maintain a balanced relationship with both India and China.

#### *Efforts to retain multilateralism*

While small states, as the "structurally weakest members of the multilateral system", have been considered as incapable of influencing international organisations (Corbett et al. 2019. P. 647), and vulnerable due to the limited power accorded to international organisations such as the UN,<sup>48</sup> multilateralism can play a significant role in bolstering small states' influence. This is

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<sup>48</sup> At its 44th session, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 44/51: Protection and security of small states. This resolution appealed to relevant regional and international organisations. It vowed to provide 'assistance when requested by small states for the strengthening of their security in accordance with the purposes and principles of



the case because “[t]he increasing number, complexity and detail of international institutions have helped to level the playing field in international affairs by allowing small states a bigger voice and more platforms and arenas where to seek influence; but this development has also restricted their autonomy and applied more pressure on their limited and thinly-stretched diplomatic and administrative resources” (Baldacchino & Wivel, 2020, p. 2). A state’s active involvement in various multilateral organisations has a direct bearing upon the (better) management of its inter-state relationships and effective confrontation of emerging challenges. Specifically for small states, the multilateral order grants a diplomatic space to use strategies like niche diplomacy and coalition building that equip them to be resilient despite their vulnerability and strengthen their structural environment. As Keohane (1969, p. 296) rightly suggests, small states possess the capability to “promote international organisations quite rationally without believing that these institutions will promote their security in specific ways or restrain great powers from particular actions”. Thus, a highly institutionalised, cooperative and peaceful international system means heightens the prospects of cooperation as opposed to conflicts or competition, which is conducive to the interests of small states.<sup>49</sup>

Though Nepal has prioritised its neighbours in its foreign policy approaches, it has equally sought to incline towards multilateralism. Accordingly, realising the significance of the international organisations, Nepal has diversified its diplomatic, communication, trade and transit lines and taken a leading role in regional and international forums. At the end of WWII, Nepali officials and intellectuals began to highlight Nepal’s historical role as a channel of communication between the civilisations of South and East Asia (Rose, 1971, p. 218). Nepal initiated to exhibit its international presence by attending various international forums like the Asian Relations Conference (New Delhi, 1947), such that its international presence was acknowledged with its membership in UNO in 1955<sup>50</sup> (Atique, 1983). Nepal was among the 19 countries to participate in the Bandung conference in 1955, becoming a member of the Afro-Asian community.

Along with increasing its diplomatic relations, Nepal made its presence visible through various regional and international forums while playing an important role in forwarding norms

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the [UN] Charter ... [and invited the UN Secretary General to] explore ways and means within the UN and in accordance with the Charter of observing the security of small states’. Source: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/82442?ln=es>

49 The structure of international organisations and high representation of small states in the UN provides them with the leverage of information access and meaningful influence (Copper & Shaw, 2009).

50 Though it had initially applied for UNO membership in 1949, the question raised by the USSR delayed the process.

that support multilateralism without great powers. Notably, Nepal has been assertive in advancing small states' voices and rights to forward normative claims. For example, King Birendra, on August 17, 1976, addressing the Non-Aligned Summit Conference, stressed the independent status of the small and poor states:

Prosperity or security of a nation no longer depends upon living within the umbrella of a powerful nation. Nevertheless, there are moves and furtive stratagems, when a poor nation is made a hapless object of subjugation. It is ironic that some countries which themselves achieved independence out of long and bitter struggle should embark upon a course against the currents of their own history. Many countries are being prevented from exercising the freedom of action which is their natural right (Scholz, 1977, p. 202).

Here, King Birendra was seeking recognition from the international community of the fact that Nepal does not lie under the economic or defence umbrella of either of its neighbours (mainly India). His words were chosen to convey the clear message that Nepal is independent and eager to build a diversified form of foreign relations.

Nepal actively lobbied for China's admission to the UN and for international guarantees of unrestricted transit rights to and from the ocean for landlocked states, including at the UN conference on Laws of the Sea (Scholz, 1977, p. 202). Furthermore, to promote the mutual interests of small states, it has banded together with landlocked and small states in various international forums. Since 1955, Nepal has been an active participant in most UN peace operations, becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council twice (in the 1960s and 1970s) (Dahal, 2011, p. 42), and by 2021, it had positioned itself as the second-largest troop contributor to the UN's operations.<sup>51</sup>

In line with this, in 1985, Nepal took an active role in the establishment of the institutional arrangement for the South Asian Association for regional cooperation (SAARC)<sup>52</sup> (Atique, 1983). Furthermore, Nepal has become one of the preferred countries for conference diplomacy and multinational peacekeeping operations in the UN. Equally, Nepal has been the headquarters for various multinational organisations like the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, UN Disarmament Office for Asia and UNICEF-Regional Office for South Asia. Equally, it has been one of the most active members of the non-aligned movement, the World Trade

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51 Source: *The Himalayan Times* (2021), <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/nepal-becomes-2nd-largest-troops-contributor-to-un-peacekeeping-missions> (20/09/2021).

52 SAARC was initially conceptualised by Bangladesh president General Ziaur Rehman.

Organization and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Dahal, 2011). Nepal's initiations in these various institutions infer its eagerness to deliver a global message regarding the 'agency' of small states that stresses 'co-existence' rather than 'power interest'; a revival of the sentiment evident during its struggle with the (British) colonial ruler in the early 1800s.

As a small and landlocked state, Nepal has its own limitations in its attempts to counter India and China's hegemonic attitude and practices (as discussed in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). Here, it is important to note that to compensate for the nation's vulnerability, soft power<sup>53</sup> can be a viable strategy to attain the economic and diplomatic clout needed to further the national ethos, ideals, interests and foreign policy goals of Nepal. However, scholars agree that Nepal<sup>54</sup> is yet to fully realise and inculcate the soft-power strategy in this way to progress its national interest, protect its sovereignty and increase its international image and credibility (Karki & Dhungana, 2020, p. 172). Such a lack of effective soft-power strategy implies losing the opportunity to create a structure for meaningful resistance, which in turn becomes conducive to the sustenance of the external (hegemonic) considerations already affecting the state-building process.

Although there are persisting challenges, there are discourses that highlight Nepal's advantageous geographical location whereby its significant attributes could transform it into being a transit route<sup>55</sup> within a 'broader Asian framework' (see Sapkota 2016, 2017). In line with this, China has forwarded its projects of economic and infrastructural development in Tibet and "turning the old trade route from India to Tibet<sup>56</sup> via Kathmandu into the major link between Chinese and Indian road and rail systems" (KC & Bhattarai, 2018, p. 77). In the

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53 Soft power strategies are considered to be legitimate and non-aggressive foreign policies with strong moral authority and the power to manipulate political agendas (Gurung, 2014, p. 31).

54 Some suggest that Nepal needs to adopt soft power as a major foreign policy apparatus, such as the ideals of democracy, pluralism, the welfare state and human rights for strengthening its sovereignty, tourism, geography and religion (IOFA, 2012, p. 8). See also Chaulagain (2014) for suggestions on tourism diplomacy as a form of niche diplomacy.

55 Nathula pass, which was used as a trade route between India and China until 1962, has been reopened since 2006. However, due to its geographical nature—snowy, perilous and expensive—the pass is not operational year-round, thus making the route via Nepal as more viable (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). Realising Nepal's geopolitical positioning, in the 1970s, then-King Birendra conceptualised the idea of developing Nepal as a 'gateway' between South and Central Asia. This concept was reiterated later by then-King Gyanendra during his address to the Afro-Asian Summit in Jakarta in 2005, which affirmed Nepal's readiness to be "an economic transit point between the two Asian economic giants—India and China" (Source: <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/nepal/document/papers/05Aprking.htm>; Bhatta, 2013, p. 179).

56 Since the opening of the Xining-Lhasa railway between China and Nepal in 2006, Tibet has accounted for almost 9% of the trade of Nepal (Pudasaini, 2017 in KC & Bhattarai, 2018).

context of the Chinese BRI project (as discussed in Chapter 4), which envisions Nepal as an economic ‘bridge’ between China and South Asia (KC & Bhattarai, 2018, p. 90), provides for Nepal that potential to turn a geopolitical constraint into an opportunity.

Nepal’s adjoining border with Bihar (the 13th largest and third most populous state of India) illustrates the potential of putatively bridging South Asia with China (KC & Bhattarai, 2018, p. 78). According to Wang et al. (2015), the strategic location of Nepal is essential for China due to its narrow territory and multiple transit points that offer the best transit buffer for connecting Tibet with South Asia (including India) and East Asia. Accordingly, to align its national interest with the Chinese project, Nepal signed the Transit and Transportation agreement in 2016 and BRI in 2017 to open a new avenue for furthering Nepal’s potential to be a regional hub (more details are given in Chapter 4).

It is important to highlight that this is an attempt to illustrate the geographical position of Nepal as a ‘bridge’ between India and China rather than the conventional view that considers Nepal as a ‘yam’.<sup>57</sup> However, some argue that such illustrations are the manifestation of the attitude of being hostage to geography, severely limiting its prospects in the political, economic and diplomatic frontiers (Bhatta, 2013; KC & Bhattarai, 2018, p. 79). Thus, using either of the metaphors—‘yam’ or ‘bridge’—is an extrapolation of Nepal’s geopolitical reality at the opposite ends of a spectrum: depiction of Nepal as a bridge risks creating a euphoric dream that exaggerates the geopolitical reality, whereas depiction as a ‘yam’ risks misreading the sensitivity of the geopolitical situation. Stemming from a poorly-designed geopolitical move, either of these metaphors has effectively reduced Nepal to an object of manipulation. As such, any poor understanding or misreading of Nepal’s geopolitical reality<sup>58</sup> risks downsizing its opportunity to play a meaningful role.<sup>59</sup> In this context, it is important to identify common ground on which India, China and Nepal can prioritise economic policy that elevates the transnational trade and management of natural resources, if any, and mainly of Nepal.

Thus, with the change in the regional geopolitical climate, the conduct of Nepal’s foreign policy is becoming increasingly sensitive. With the emergence of China, re-emergence

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57 As underlined in chapter 1, since the unification, Nepal’s geography has been depicted within the metaphor of ‘yam’.

58 Here I am not in the position to outrightly challenge the metaphor of ‘Yam’, which was the demand of the then-colonial context. However, I argue that surmising it as an unwavering policy may not fit well within the contemporary geopolitical requirement and thus needs further discussion. Equally, with Nepal’s overtures for BRI, the potential of Nepal cannot be misread. Yet, in both cases, the geopolitical limitations of Nepal are equally a reality that cannot be overlooked.

59 As will be discussed in the later chapters, Nepal suffers even when India and China come closer or drift apart.

of Russia, formation of many US-led security, military and strategic alliances like NATO, Indo-Pacific Strategy (as discussed in Chapter 4) and QUAD (comprising US, India, Australia and Japan to work for the Indo-Pacific region), the regional and global politics are witnessing a new kind of polarisation. In this context, the policy of neutrality and non-alignment is an appropriate strategy for survival whereby Nepal can keep itself disengaged from any strategic alliances, while prioritising bilateral relationships with neighbours equally making efforts to retain multilateralism.

Here, the case of Nepal illustrates that small states can successfully attempt to resist and challenge the ‘peripheral’ or ‘marginalising’ notion engendered within the geopolitical performances of the neighbouring bigger states within the ‘imperial encounter’. The endeavour is partly an attempt to consider geopolitics from the postcolonial approach on account of a small state Nepal (detail in Chapter 4). Thus, the structural weakness can be compensated, and the hegemonic considerations can be countered through the effective adoption of the notion of nationalism. The voice, idea or experience of small states cannot be muted in historiography, but the realisation of their ‘agency’ by the small states per se is a point of departure for them. It is a progressive and sequential shift for a small state: from an initial stage of ‘denial of agency’ towards being an ‘agent of resistance’ and further towards being as an ‘agent of change’.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

The mainstream IR literature has relegated small states to the role of peripheral actors in international power politics with limited functional capabilities and accommodative strategies that seek protection from more powerful patrons (Kamrava, 2013, p. 47). Within these scholarly perceptions that prioritise the reaction of small states, an understanding of them framed in terms of their pro-activeness and their contribution to the specific type of agency are rarely acknowledged. Thus, to mark a shift from the conventional Eurocentric viewpoint of considering small states as hapless entities, it is necessary to analyse the possible alternative subjects of inquiry that offer a two-way mode of IR inquiry.

A broader concept of ‘vulnerability’, advanced in the late 1980s, has been slowly superseded by a focus on the small states’ (lack of) ‘resilience’ (Maass, 2009). The self-perception of smallness, the way it is managed and its expression have largely determined the position of small states in the international geopolitical theatre. As such, by making certain internal and foreign policy arrangements, small states can limit their vulnerabilities and

promote attitudes favourable to their survival by developing non-aligned international attitudes and dogmas. Therefore, rather than considering the historical assertiveness and intervention and a structurally truncated form of decolonisation, this chapter contends that the postcolonial approach has more to offer in revealing the dimensions of Nepal's relationships vis-à-vis India and China. The next section deals with the way India and China have utilised power to re-create the identity of Nepal and Nepali through the enactment of various representational practices and how they have been subject to resistance on account of Nepal.

### Chapter 3: Representation

The geopolitical positioning of a state is a composite function of geography, history, politics and knowledge construction. Geopolitical constructs are enacted through the idea and practice of representation and bear significance when power enters that process. It is important to note that due to the existing gap between intention and realisation, representation cannot be given a definitive meaning (Salazar, 2008, p. 172). However, representation can be considered as the process or medium through which values, associations and meanings are constructed and concretised (Hall, 1997 in Salazar, 2008). As Doty (1996, p.2) describes, representation is a realm of politics wherein the very identities of people, states and regions are constructed through representation practices. In light of this, by informing the critical inquiry with the representational practices employed by India and China to highlight the imaginary particularities of the identity of Nepal and Nepali,<sup>60</sup> this chapter adopts the postcolonial approach to consider the theme of power asymmetry and resistance. In this way, it reveals the hitherto marginalised relational dimensions.

From Fanon to Jan Mohamed to Bhabha, the common theme has been that Western representations construct meaning and reality through the incentives of progress, civilisation and modernism to powerfully shape the non-European world (Darby & Paolini, 1994, p.387). Through his 'Manichean Allegory', Jan Mohamad (1985, p.60) affirms that representation plays a crucial role in creating an image of the 'insider', starkly differentiating that identity from the 'other'. Thus, due to its affiliation with politics, representation implies a productive impact on the way state relationships are designed and practised. These forms of knowledge production, including those concerning identities of people, states and regions, are not unbiased but normative in nature, entailing the notion of the 'imperial encounter' (as discussed in earlier chapters).

In the first section of this chapter, I aim to offer a descriptive outline of representation and postcolonialism in the context of representational practices of India and China regarding Nepal. This sets the stage for the next section, in which I categorise and discuss how these are effectively enacted through the employment of power. Here, it is worth acknowledging that not all such representational practices are problematic, and Nepal itself also employs representational practices of its own.

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<sup>60</sup> In this thesis, I have interchangeably used Nepali and Nepalese.

Historically, all groups, cultures and states have had their own representational practices for perceiving the ones they considered as ‘other’. However, as Anand (2002) points out, it was only with modern European imperialism<sup>61</sup> that the capacity to convert these representational practices into ‘Truth’ on a systematic, orderly and mass scale emerged. Colonialism also brought about the notion of identity based on a fixed, autonomous idea of self (explicitly), that is different to others. This was facilitated by the power to reify that identity and gain relative access to those representational resources.

However, contrary to what was expected, the decolonisation process that followed became unable to relinquish those colonial representational ideologies and practices; rather, they were merely veiled, emulated, repackaged and reproduced. Such regimes of systematic knowledge production are operated within a self-serving system engendering the norms of othering that lay claim to objectivity, binarism, hierarchisation and universalisation. Thus, representational practices are significant due to their productive capacity. As will be discussed later, when power is employed, representational practices can have a direct impact upon the identity of those represented, feeding the dominant knowledge regimes and structures. The subjective impressions of Indians and Chinese about Nepal and Nepali that are internalised and taken as authoritative knowledge by Nepal constitute a major problem that requires critical analysis. To acknowledge the agency of the small state, the fourth section of this chapter analyses the way Nepal’s media, public and government authorities respond to, reproduce or challenge Indian and Chinese geopolitical agendas. To commence this chapter’s discussion, the next section deals with the intersection of representation and postcolonialism.

### **3.1. Representation and postcolonialism**

This section highlights the significance of representation through a postcolonial lens. Despite the end of colonialism, the power asymmetry has been reproduced in new and varied forms, including in the way the knowledge is produced about the ‘other’. Post-colonial relations are still inscribed in the relations of exploitation (between capital and labour), relations of domination (between metropolis and peripheral states), and in the production of subjectivities and knowledge, mainly in the form of representation (Grosfugel, 2011, p. 16). According to Salazar (2008, p. 173), “The act of unreflexively representing the other” in academia as well as popular great power discourses resonates with the colonial practice of domination.

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61 Here it is relevant to mention Doty’s (1996, p. 170) affirmation that colonisers had employed various representational practices that ranged from adopting politics of silence and neglect to constructing new threats to the North.



This has been further elaborated by Seth (2009), who argues that the legacy of ex-colonies has restructured the fundamental reliance and rejection that sustain the power relations, but in new colonial and exclusionary imaginaries featuring unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation. Such temptations of exclusion, subversion, deliverance, intervention, exploitation and universalisation (of self-ideology and practices) are attributes of the neo-colonial encounter. Despite this, meaningful interrogations of representation has historically been excluded from IR academia, which has sustained “dominant modes of making meaning and deferral of its responsibility and complicity in dominant representations.”(Doty, 1996, p. 171).

Mainstream IR considers that the ‘self’s’ authority or authenticity is established through creating reality based on binary opposition and subsequently dominating and usurping the voice of the ‘other’. This is significant, in that all produced knowledge, either real or imaginary, applied in the real world has real effects. In the words of Anand (2002, p. 44), “International relations are inextricably bound up with discursive practices that put into circulation representations that are then taken as truth”. This is because, according to Foucault (1980), knowledge and meaning are produced through discourse rather than language, where power plays a constitutive role. Such representation in the political, economic and social dimension goes together with the consideration of the ‘other’ as being without any forms of agency. In this context, the point of departure for a small state is to reveal how representational practices lie at the heart of the ‘imperial encounter’.

Against such a backdrop, critical exploration of the ways the representational practices are constituted, processed, performed and put into relations is necessary to interrogate the dominant regime of power, challenging its claims of objectivity for a better insight into global politics. Postcolonial study<sup>62</sup> bears significance in that by problematising such representation, it affirms that the construction of identity partly depends on the epistemological argument about the role of representation in forming realities. This has been rightly pointed by Anand (2002, p. 56), who contends, “The relation between representation and reality colours the discussions of representation in postcolonial studies”. The project of postcolonial theory interrogates to the presumption of the neutrality in (academic) knowledge or expertise and focuses on how the knowledge and representation of ‘self’ is neither a norm against which the identity of the ‘other’

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62 Said’s (1978) seminal work on *Orientalism*, which has been the leading text for postcolonial study, illustrated that it was the linear and unchallenged form of the construction of the representational practices of the Orient as ‘other’ that has not only paved the way for the oppression of the Orient by the colonisers but also largely shaped the very identity of the represented ‘Oriental’.

is constructed nor unbiased and based on reality. Instead, it implicates the will to power and calls for a decentred, multivocal interaction. This has been outlined well by Slater (2004), who suggests that postcolonialism allows for rethinking, particularly in terms of the way the world has been imagined, represented and categorised on the basis of the existing economic and power disparities.

The representation of global political space that helps to shape the expression of national identity, national interest and purpose, does not exist in a geographical and historical vacuum, but is expressed as a manifestation of power (Dodds, 2005, p.12). As such, considering knowledge as a critical resource within the exercise of political authority, postcolonialism affirms that the representation is shaped by the unequal power, unequal access to knowledge and its dissemination, and how agency is acknowledged. Postcolonialism focuses on the effect of (textual or other forms) representations or the weight of such representation (and the attached meanings) that is imposed upon the represented, rather than representations per se through the employment of power. Thus, the critique of representation through the postcolonial lens is enacted by the critique of identity thinking, and the associated norms such as immediacy, authenticity, expression and also internalisation.

However, the challenge to the normative model of the linear historical progress and hegemonic superiority upon which such a model depends does not mean to reject the value of representation. Instead, it allows the hitherto marginalised voices to be entertained. It is critical to stress what Anand (2002) affirms, which is that—when discussing hegemony—we should not ignore the resistance to it. Notably, “Postcolonial insight is important here in terms of the self-conscious endeavours and recognition of complicity with dominant political regimes...” (ibid., p. 58).<sup>63</sup> Thus, representation is not a zero-sum game, and there is always space for counterclaims. On these grounds, postcolonialism can offer a possibility for resistance.

Eagerly distinguishing between ‘self’ and ‘other’, representation gives access to identity and works through binary opposition, defining ‘self’ in positive or superior terms and ‘other’ in negative and inferior terms, which Ashcroft et al. (2003) have referred to as the ‘Manichean structure’ of imperial ideology. However, this conceptualisation as simply binary opposites obscures the identity and difference categories that feature the key notions of power asymmetry: power as exercise (representer) and power as ‘experience’ (represented). Hence,

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63 According to Anand (2002, p. 58), self-representation is significant in the postcolonial world, though it does not “contribute to a complete halt to representations of the Other but calls for extreme caution, reflexivity, and recognition of the historical baggage involved”.

the existing asymmetry of the productive power is a common trait shared by these encounters, affecting the impact level. For instance, from a postcolonial lens, both Nepal and India (and China) are the subjects of representation; the difference is that the latter(s) are not mere victims (as is the case with the former) but capable of exercising their agency. In addition, they do not have to construct their imaginative identity on the basis of the way Nepal represents them. In contrast, their representational practices have a (not only regional but also global) productive impact on the overall identity discourse of Nepal. This starkly illustrates the existing power asymmetry between them.

Various forms of representing Nepal—visuals (films, television, photographs, cartoon and so on) as well as textual (fiction, journalism, anthropology and international studies)—were and still are closely linked to the production of imperial and neo-colonial encounters. As noted in the earlier chapters, India is keen to continue the ‘British Himalayan frontier policy’ by keeping Nepal under its sphere of influence and considers Nepal as a ‘second frontier’ against China (Subedi, 1997, p. 220). Correspondingly, following the occupation of Tibet, China wants to increase its regional and global influence and accordingly views its neighbours (like Nepal) in terms of Tibet. Such structured narratives, rather than referring to ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ that is real and is something objectively discovered about Nepal, instead reveal the ways in which regimes of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ are produced and acted upon deliberately, denying agency, and thus, rendering it an ‘imperial encounter’.

The context of specific encounters and the issues relevant to this have been occasions for production, proliferation and circulation of various representational practices. In a way, emulates how those countries were represented during the colonial era.<sup>64</sup> India’s imperial mindset<sup>65</sup> blended with the legacy of its colonial ruler, has led it to operate with double standards characterised by hypocrisy, defining its relationship with (small states like) Nepal on the basis of othering and negation. For India, ‘others’ are China, America and Pakistan, while small states like Nepal are included within the historical empirical enterprise of ‘Bharatvarsh’, opposition to which means being an ‘anti-Indian’. Correspondingly, in the case of China, its occupational action on Tibet and attitudes towards (small states like) Nepal (as

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64 For instance, then British PM W. Churchill’s ignorance of the Indian subject, considering them as ‘breeding like rabbits’, led to the Bengal famine in 1943, costing the lives of about five million people (see Safi, 2019).

65 Aryal (2017, p.4) argues that the ‘Indian’ (Bharatiya) is a political and ideological construction than in fact arose as the product of power-play exercised over historically oppressed and politically distinct non-Bharatiyas. In the process, a whole series of realities were created through technologies of domination during which the non-Bharatiyas were considered as other, opposite and insignificant, such that those who refused to accept its control, authority and identity were labelled anti-Indians.

discussed later) elucidate its imperial mindset, opposition to which means being labelled as ‘anti-Chinese’.

Thus, such prejudicial conditioned production of meanings and identities—exhibited in the relations of China and India with Nepal to some extent—illustrates that the imperial ethos and actions are not the privilege of the West; rather, it is the nation-state that articulates the architecture of hegemonic assertiveness. This necessitates the need to constantly challenge the representation communicated in both the popular as well as academic discourses, despite acknowledging that the representation is not ‘real’. This leaves the entity (here, the state) at the receiving end of power, making it a victim in a dual manner. Primarily, it has to challenge the discourse that is not real to stress what ‘it is not’ rather than what ‘it is’. Secondly, as a result, it acquires a faded form of identity or representation that, due to its relative incapability to produce an effective and equal level of representation, in turn, is manipulated by a powerful entity.

Those (Indian and Chinese) narratives lay claim to an objective and systematic knowledge production, forming a self-serving system characterised by hierarchisation, centre-periphery and power asymmetry. This imposes a deleterious effect mainly on the small states, whereby the notion of ‘Eurocentrism’ functions as the loci in the way (global) politics is operated.<sup>66</sup> Given the usual context within which the representation of the ‘other’ is constructed, it invariably amounts to the consideration of the other as a less-than-equal subject and positions them as a victim (as discussed in the later sections). The problem is that due to the lack of critical analysis, the subjective impressions by Indian and Chinese about Nepal and Nepali are taken as authoritative and real. Such (mis/under) representation of its authority, identity, culture and history risks rationalising their paternalism by situating Nepal’s existence as at stake.

Cultural representation of the ‘other’ lies at the core of Indian and Chinese colonial and neo-colonial discourses. In this regard, the representation of Nepal ranges from pejorative to unmitigatedly idealistic, the prominent attributes of colonial language. During the process of representation, the subject formed is rendered and considered a knowable and visible object of disciplinary power by using the technique of surveillance and overpowering gaze<sup>67</sup> (Doty,

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66 For instance, global powers like the US view Nepal through the lens of India (see Giri, 2018), as evident in the Indo-Pacific strategy (as discussed in chapter 4).

67 According to Schroeder (1998 in Anand, 2007), the gaze, rather than being an innocent curiosity, signifies a psychologically superior relationship to power.

1996). The strategic cause of such narratives is the ‘perceived’ norms and impressions about Nepal and Nepali, which are the objects of their gaze. According to Anand (2007, p.30), with a series of steps inflicted on the object through surveillance, gaze and observation, the superiority, mastery and political dominance over the subject is subsequently established.

A critical political analysis of the Indian and Chinese imaginative constructs about Nepal involves recognition at two levels: the practices of essentialising and stereotyping.<sup>68</sup> The classificatory scheme of categorising Nepal and Nepalese as ‘other’ has naturalised and essentialised the position of India and China. To move ahead, in the next section, I aim to examine how various media, and government officials of India and China represent Nepal based on hegemonic considerations. This is to outline how those representational practices are problematic, if not paradoxical, and are followed by effects on Nepal and Nepal’s negotiating power.

### **3.2. Representation of Nepal by India and China**

In this section, I have identified and analysed the most important representational practices that characterise Indian and Chinese representation of Nepal. Here, I have categorised the representation on two levels, viz. representation of Nepal (state) and Nepalese (People). Due to the higher level of Indo-Nepal interaction, India’s representational practice is more prominent, and is discussed in more detail than that of China.

#### **3.2.3. Representation of state (Nepal)**

##### *As a natural frontier*

Within the imperial trajectory, the entire Himalayas, including Nepal, was constructed as a strategic geopolitical buffer; the ‘great game’ was a proto-cold war between countries jostling for prestige and influence (Kaul, 2010b, p.5). Notably, British-India adopted the ‘Ring Fence’ policy, whereby it considered independent Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan as Indian protectorates, and Tibet as an autonomous buffer state.<sup>69</sup> Later, realising the economic and moral rationality

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68 The practises of essentialising and stereotyping the ‘other’ provides the framework for various strategies of Indian and Chinese representations. Essentialism is the concept that some core meaning or identity is determinate and not subject to interpretation (Anand, 2007, p.25). Meanwhile, a stereotype is a one-sided description of a group/culture that views people as a pre-set image and ‘more of a formula than a human being’ (Seymour & Hardy, 1966, p.2 in Anand, 2007).

69 The policy of Ring Fence (1765-1813) allowed British-India to treat the native states as independent states to secure its commercial and strategic interests.

of stabilising and centralising the channel of power rather than direct control, it began to classify its subjects and followed the policy of ‘controlling the hills from the plains’.<sup>70</sup>

In the Kashmir context, Kaul (2010b) referred to this pattern as ‘Mandarin-Machiavelli interaction’; this has also been the characterising feature of the Indo-Nepal relationship.<sup>71</sup> Throughout 1950s, India adopted the policy of the ‘Himalayan doctrine’ that considered the small Himalayan states within its sphere of influence (Dawa, 2001). Indian PM Nehru recalled this sentiment during his visit to Nepal in 1959, when he considered the Himalayas as the northern border of Bharatvarsha<sup>72</sup> (with Nepal being an inseparable part of it). By positioning itself in a central and superior position, India presumes that it bears the authority to control its ‘periphery’ (Nepal) that it considers its natural frontier. As rightly remarked by Dabhade and Pant (2004), India, rather than considering Nepal as a sovereign and independent state, sees it as the principal land barrier and a buffer state between it and China, whose policy has a direct bearing on its security, political and economic interests.

This provides India with a perspective that affirms its position of controlling Nepal (hill) from the plain, which aligns with the temptation to have a reliable power base (or rival elite) at the periphery that supplements the strategic interest of the ‘centre’ through political manipulation of the ‘periphery.’ The norm of forming a reliable power base was evident in the records of the Maoist revolution in Nepal (1996-2006). Then-ex-Maoist leader Dr Baburam Bhattarai wrote a letter to then-PM of India, Mr A.B. Vajpayee, requesting Indian support (Hindustan Times, 2012). This claim has been further supported by the disclosures of different political leaders about their meetings with the Maoist leaders in India under the direct collaboration of the Indian authority during the conflict period (Sharma, 2013). As the event unfolded, it was under the direct mediation of India that the peace process was concluded (as

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70 Following the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-16), British-India avowed the policy of neutrality and non-interference in its affairs with Nepal (Vashistha, 2003). The policy of ‘neutrality and ‘controlling hills from plains’ may sound paradoxical. However, various factors had played a role in moulding the British-India policy towards Nepal, leading to the (irrevocable) withdrawal of its plan for direct control. These included: 1) the cost of the war with Nepal; and 2) Nepal’s support regarding the 1857 uprising (as described in Chapter 1), followed by its consistent pro-British policy. Subsequently, British-India opted to consider Nepal within its sphere of influence but were equally conscious of not intervening in the affairs of Nepal.

71 Despite the various forms of (and complex) surrounding political contexts, Kashmir and Nepal share many similarities, including their geographical size and proximity; (Jammu and) Kashmir area: 222,236 km<sup>2</sup> (of which India controls about 55%); Nepal: 147,181 km<sup>2</sup>). In the case of Kashmir, Kaul illustrates how the imperial cartography and postcolonial securitisation have converted a zone of interaction into a theatre of conflict. In this context, both Kashmir and Nepal are prone to the tug of war between centre and periphery that they struggle to overcome.

72 Contrary to the Indian presumption that Nepal lies within the unified cultural globe of ‘Bharatvarsha’, there is a belief in Nepal that it lies within the ‘Himavat Khanda’, which glorifies the uniqueness of Nepal as a sacred place. See Aryal (2017).

mentioned in Chapter 1), revealing the role of India in the conflict. India's strategy sets up a non-overlapping structure of power and responsibility that resonates with the 19th-century realpolitik, where the areas on the map were viewed in terms of strategic significance. According to Kaul (2010b, p. 5), such imaginative cartographic demarcation and defence of mountains as natural frontiers significantly undermine the feelings of 'belonging' of the inhabitants of 'such' places.

Nonetheless, in the case of China, though the concepts of 'hills' and 'plains' are not so relevant, the ideological notions of 'centre' and 'periphery' are still prevalent. Frequent reports (see Human Rights Watch, 2014; ICFT, 2017) have hinted towards the Chinese increasing influence and pressure towards Nepal, in the typical way a centre behaves with or dictates its periphery. Thus, such cartographic demarcation (that resonates with the colonial practice), and postcolonial securitisation, have converted a state like Nepal into a mere geographical zone of 'strategic calculus', with China and India regarding themselves as potential central administrators and policymakers, subsequently undermining the sentiment of (Nepal and) Nepali.

#### *Negation of independence*

As mentioned earlier, the consequence of the 'imperial encounter' has been the denial of the effective agency of the 'other'. One of the ways such denial occurs is through the process of *negation*, which constructs the 'other' as a vessel to be filled by its scripting, due to it being a place and people without history (Wolf, 1982). Such encounters are perceived with pre-given images, with the 'knowable' shaped by the notions of imperial prerogatives and pre-existing knowledge, rather than in a vacuum (Anand, 2007, p. 29). This can be related to the archive, which is a repository of stored memories, information, myths, rumours and legends (Derrida, 1995 in Anand, 2007).

The India-Nepal and China-Nepal encounter(s) widely involve the archive of pre-existing images and imaginaries and that of the new ones. Historically, the representation of Nepal was in practice even before the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-16), targeted against the ruler of Nepal. Such scripting was so extensive that Nepal was considered an inseparable part of India (Aryal, 2017), an idea that was later maintained by India. It was evident in the proposal of then-home minister Sardar B. Patel for annexing Nepal using military might during the early 1950s, which was later turned down (Khatry, 2015; Aryal 2017). Nevertheless, PM Nehru also seemed discontented with Nepal's independent foreign policy exercises, alleging such

practices as being a planned attempt to show that Nepal is fully independent (Sharma, 2018). Thus, though India enjoys a stronger position in Southeast Asia (excepting the threat from China) (Niazi, 2006, p. 3), its ‘self-centric’ attitude has been an impasse for the wider regional role.<sup>73</sup> Pradhan (2012, p. 196) accurately describes India’s attitude as follows: “India has yet not decided whether to treat Nepal as one of its neglected north-eastern states or a sovereign country”.

In alignment with that sensibility, Crews (2006) in *What about Postcolonial Politics in Nepal?*, has represented Nepal as a state that shares the attribute of the domination of the high hill castes (Pahadis) over the ‘internally colonised’ Terai people (Madhesi<sup>74</sup> and Tharu residing in the southern part of Indo-Nepal border). A step ahead, Crews has even asserted that Nepal did not possess the Terai/Madhes region,<sup>75</sup> referring to the ‘unification of Nepal’ as a hegemonic ‘expansion’ of the Gorkha kingdom. This has been supported by Indian scholars like Pandey (2016), who argued that for nearly two hundred years, Nepal has had been operating as a brutal, feudal-military state, with the hierarchic dominance of the hill, upper Hindu caste, historically marginalising the ‘Madhes’ region vis-à-vis economic and civic rights; resonating with the claim of ‘internal colonisation’.

However, such discourses have not only challenged Nepal’s territorial integrity and overall ‘unification’ process but also largely neglected the struggle and resistance of Nepal against British colonialism. The tendency to portray the Nepali rulers as ethno-centric, brutal, feudal and suppressive reflects an ignorance of Nepal’s history, representing it per se as a victim of a ‘Kathmandu-centric’ regime. In this sense, these statements reflect the neo-colonial

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73 During the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit, though India initially declined Nepal’s proposal to invite China as an observer, following Nepal’s veto against the membership of Afghanistan (later supported by Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), it stood back (Adhikari, 2012). According to Kakar (2018), this episode led K. Subrahmanyam to suggest India review its South Asian strategy and shift away from SAARC to seek an alternative without China and Pakistan.

74 Despite comprising one-third of the total population of Nepal (see *The New Humanitarian*, 2007; RRT Research Response), the term ‘Madhesi’ has not clearly been defined. In the Terai/Madhes region of Nepal, there are primarily three types of populations: 1) The original inhabitants, like Tharu, Maithili, etc. 2) The Indian immigrants (who arrived mostly after 1955 as workers and labour to Nepal and then settled); and 3) Hill-migrants (Pahadis). Whilst Madhesi narratives exclude those populations that migrated from the hills (see Miklian, 2009, p. 5), they include those that migrated from India. Within such ambiguity, some scholars like Hutt (2020, p. 383) have used it in both geographical terms—“Madhesi are explicitly not Pahadis”—and in political or experiential terms—“the people living in a particular region (the Terai or Madhes) who feel discriminated against by the Pahadi-dominated state”, excluding Tharus and Terai Muslims. See also Singh (2011) for the use of both geographical and cultural terms. Here, the ethno-geographic-power based definition of Hutt risks undermining the hierarchy within the Madhes per se, thus favouring the internal (Madhes) and external powerful actor. Thus, to create clarity (or a standard) rather than ambiguity, I suggest opting to use either ethnicity or geography as a qualifier for Madhesi to deaccelerate the political momentum of the term.

75 See also Qazi (2019); that runs contrary to the history of Anglo-Nepal war, as mentioned in chapter 1.



mindset that undermines the fact that, despite going through the democratic process of overthrowing the authoritarian and oligarchic regime of Ranas and Shahs (as mentioned in Chapter 1), Nepal has struggled to address the norms of economic, social and infrastructural developments and decentralisation.

Despite this, India's search for political space within the internal political, social or cultural juncture of Nepal was evident during the economic blockades on Nepal in 1989<sup>76</sup> and 2015,<sup>77</sup> when the internal political condition of Nepal was used as a bargaining position by India to negate its existence. According to Pandey (2016), the internal discontent in Nepal about the new constitution in 2015 was utilised by India as a perfect tool to exert its influence and to explicate its attitude towards Nepal as a client state. The strategy of the negation was equally observed in the Indian PM Narendra Modi's statement that Lord Buddha was born in India<sup>78</sup> (Exploring Nepal, 2015).

Nonetheless, historically, for its part, China also frequently ignored Nepal even after signing treaties such as that of 1856,<sup>79</sup> when it pursued various strategies, like curtailing the privileges and rights accorded to Nepalese traders by imposing restrictions on Nepali pilgrims. Further, in a note to the Government of British-India on 28 October 1910, China had to Nepal and Bhutan as its vassals. However, this note was starkly rejected by the then-Government of British-India when it referred to Nepal as wholly independent of China and warned against any interventions. Despite this, Nepal was depicted as an irredentist Chinese territory on several published maps and controversial statements by Chinese political leaders were apparent until the middle of the 20th century (Pokharna, 2009, p. 161). This sentiment was evident in the statement of Sun Yat-Sen in 1924 when he referred to Nepal as one of the lost territories of China (Yahuda, 2000, p. 27).

Furthermore, even Mao Tse-tung in 1939 wrote a statement inferring that imperialists had stolen much of the Chinese territory, including Nepal and Bhutan. Mao and the Communists in the 1940s planned to build a "Himalayan federation of Mongoloid People of

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76 As mentioned in the earlier chapters, India's prioritisation of its security has manifested in the trade and transit treaty that led it to impose the economic blockade in Nepal in 1989 (see Khadka, 1991, p.62).

77 Notably, Nepal's constitution (2015) has given equal rights to all citizens of Nepal irrespective of caste, ethnicity and religion with special government privileges for communities like Madhesi, Tharu and scheduled castes (Nagarik, 2015; Rawat, 2015).

78 Lumbini (in Nepal), the birthplace of Lord Buddha, was inscribed on the UNESCO Heritage List in 1997.

79 In 1856, the Treaty of Thapathali was signed in Kathmandu between the Tibetan government (then under the administrative rule of Qing dynasty) and the Kingdom of Nepal following the Nepalese-Tibetan War that provided special privileges to Nepal in lieu of the Tibetan territories it had gained (Source: <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties6.html>).

Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and India's Northeast Frontier Agency" (see Lama, 2017). Even after the annexation of Tibet in 1951, the Chinese stated Tibet as China's palm and Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh and the Northeast frontier agency of Assam (India) as its five fingers (Dawa, 2001). Soon after 1951, Chinese leaders began talking of liberating Nepal (without answering the question of 'from whom?') and forming a Himalayan federation of all Mongol people under Chinese leadership. Such Chinese perception, to some extent, had affected Nepal's relationship with China up to the signing of the Sino-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1960.

Notably, China and India have shared this attitude of negation even during their bilateral negotiations. For instance, during the Chinese Premier Zhou EnLai's visit to India in April 1960, both India and China referred to Nepal as an 'issue'. Likewise, in 2015, a bilateral trade agreement between India and China was made, including Nepal's 'Lipulekh' region as the trade route between them (i.e., considering it a part of India) (RSS, 2015; detail in Chapter 6). However, one crucial aspect unacknowledged by both India and China is that the independent status of Nepal and its geopolitical positioning has not only impeded British advancement to the north but also helped to maintain the vital link with (British) India's northern border (see Rose, 1971), and ultimately the maintenance of the British Raj itself. Thus, the strategy of negation employed by India and China is the manifestation of their neo-colonial mindset about Nepal that has largely debased by Nepal through asserting its historically independent and sovereign status and articulating its identity within the Indian and Chinese manipulative hegemonic behaviour.

#### *Younger brother/infant*

As the representational practices have been enacted prominently by India rather than by China, the Indian frame of perception will now be discussed in detail. Notably, to depict its relationship with Nepal, India has epitomised the trope of a 'special relationship' and '*Roti-beti* relation' (Food and daughter relation) that in itself are neither officially defined nor clearly conceptualised. As framed under the 1950 Treaty (detail in Chapter 4), the term 'special relationship' has been a common tool for political manipulation (Aryal, 2017). Indian scholars like Muni (1992) have highlighted that the treaty provides the framework for the 'special relationship' between the two countries, setting out various provisions to security, economic and commercial matters conducive to Indian interests. It is worth noting that the appropriation of the trope of 'special relationship' intends to bind Nepal within the mutual agreements, such

as the 1950 Treaty, which functions through the consideration of Nepal as a ‘younger brother’ or infant.

The ordering of the world into different binary oppositions (like civilised/uncivilised, modern/backward) is structured as a relation between adult and child, and the process of colonialism and neo-colonialism, in which such binary taxonomies are manifested in subtle and very unsubtle practices of infantilisation (Persaud & Walker, 2001). Accordingly, *infantilisation* is an important representational strategy through which the ‘other’ is presented as incapable of making a decision on itself (Anand, 2007, p. 38). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the Indian proposal for the establishment of its military check-posts in Nepal’s region adjoining China in the early 1950s, and its irrevocable assertion to coordinate and comply with its defence and foreign affairs (Silwal, 2012), exemplify the Indian attitude that considers Nepal as an infant. Moreover, as the evidence unfolded, Nepal’s frequent economic blockades were a gesture resembling the way an older brother treats an obstinate younger brother.

Cartoons can dictate the ways in which news and views are interpreted, with political cartoons and texts deployed as geopolitical texts that highlight or subvert specific political practices like foreign policy decision making. In addition, cartoons can also significantly interrogate and transgress dominant relations of knowledge, truth and power (Dodds, 2005, p. 95). For example, during the earthquake in 2015 in Nepal, a pervasive number of cartoons were drawn that depicted an ‘adult mother’ India holding an ‘infant’ Nepal (see ISRGKB, 2016, Annex. 3.). Such a sentiment was equally evident in the textual version, as in an article in *AlArabiya News* penned by Singh (2018), “China has been succeeded in ‘weaning’ Nepal away from India”. Such a temptation to infantilise Nepal is the product of the neo-colonial mindset of India that considers Nepal within its sphere of influence, carefully masked by the rhetoric of a ‘special relationship’. The veil of a ‘special relationship’ has allowed India to meet the dual objectives of rationalising its (hegemonic) activities and, instead, alleging or questioning Nepal on its position for the peaceful and harmonious relationship with India.

This was evident during the visit of Nepal’s PM Mr M. Adhikari to India in 1995, when in response to his proposal for revising the 1950 Treaty, his Indian counterpart Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao denied any necessity of the revision of the treaty, referring to it as a symbol of their special relationship, and instead accusing Nepal of eroding the vision of the treaty, stating, “Its spirit has been weakened, its content whittled away practically in every sphere of the Indo-Nepal relationship” (Baral, 2012). This is the enactment of India’s ideology of ‘brotherhood’ or

the politics of sameness that assigns the responsibility to the big brother to protect its younger brother, rationalising the dependency (in an economic and political context) and paternalism. To eschew such controversial positioning, Nepal opts for an ‘equal friendship’ rather than a ‘special relationship’.

India’s controversial attitudes and practices in its relationship with Nepal are not new. Whilst it uses statistics to represent Nepal as ‘inferior’ in terms of size, population and sovereignty, capitalising on a sensitivity to ‘smallness’, India also argues for the unconditional granting of citizenship for Indian migrants residing in Nepal (DanfeTV, 2018). Since 1990, citizenship<sup>80</sup> has been a prominent political issue, driven by contentious and complex political agendas, and translating the cultural differences to the discrimination between ‘hill migrants (Pahade) in Terai’ and ‘Terai people’(Madhesi) in and outside Nepal. India has used citizenship as an agenda to construct an ethnic and geographic rift, depicting Nepal’s deliberate refusal to recognize and honour<sup>81</sup> the citizenship rights of the Madhesi. Further, India’s interest in encouraging its populations’ influx into Nepal is not a new story. For instance, following the Sikkim integration in India through the Sikkimese referendum in May 1975, Indian PM Mrs. Indira Gandhi had made the statement in the Indian parliament that linked the Indian influx in Nepal as a factor promoting and supporting Indian interests (Danfe TV, 2018). However, in the context of its geopolitical positioning, including an open Indo-Nepal border, there is a challenge for Nepal to locate a balance between the safeguarding of its population from the (mainly Indian) migrants and ensuring that none of its citizens are deprived of the citizenship right.

In a significant manner, India has often presented itself as a paternal figure that safeguards Nepali from their autocratic and brutal leaders. For instance, Indian scholars like Muni (1977) have portrayed the monarchical institution of Nepal as anti-public, despotic, undemocratic and tyrannical. Needless to say, India has effectively and successfully manoeuvred this strategy<sup>82</sup> not only to overthrow the active monarchical system in 1990 but also to abolish the monarchical system ultimately in Nepal in 2006 (Khatry, 2015). Such

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80 Since 1951, and typically after 1990, the citizenship issue has earned political interest following every major political turn in Nepal. Data show that after 2006 alone, more than 2.6 million citizenships were distributed within a few months, with more than 90% distributed in the region adjoining India (see Bhandari, 2019).

<sup>81</sup> The Sikkim integration has created the rhetoric of ‘Sikkimisation’ that has haunted the mainstream public discourses and policy makers in Nepal regarding the Indian hegemony. In May 1975 then outgoing Nepali ambassador to India, Yadunath Khanal hoped that, “India would understand Nepalese nervousness in spite of Indian assurances that what happened in Sikkim would not happen in Nepal” (Mulmi, 2019).

<sup>82</sup> According to Khatry (2015), India had used the same strategy to construct rumours against monarchy in Sikkim to annex it in India.

discourses are founded on a sense of Indian affirmation of self-admiration with the presumed moral superiority that imagines Nepal as a service society for India.

Correspondingly, regarding China, on 19 September 2017, the Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece *Global Times* published a story titled, “Nepal risks missing chance with China”, penned by Xu Liang. It alleged that even though China has remained aloof in Indo-Nepal relations, India has shown an interfering attitude in Sino-Nepal relations. With assertions that run contradictory to Nepal’s pervasive perception that China is an unselfish and benign neighbour, the newspaper further added that the increasing Chinese investment in Nepal was a reward for its important role in guarding against Tibetan separatists. For instance, since 2008, the Sino-Nepal relations that underscore the increased norm of Chinese financial or other support has been checked by the Chinese’s expectation that Nepal would condemn, prevent or physically suppress ‘anti-Chinese’ activity in Nepal (ICFT, 2017); an expectation that mirrors those of an elder brother.

This illustrates the Chinese view towards Nepal as being based on its strategic imperative to maintain and enforce political stability in Tibet. As ICFT (2017) highlights, Chinese Communist Party officials have equated political stability in Tibet with the security of all of China. Such an approach has been extended to Nepal, with its close historical and cultural ties to Tibet, and its location as a gateway into exile for Tibetans. Due to this, there are instances when Chinese officials have warned Nepali officials on this matter, indirectly and even directly (Dawa, 2001). This, together with the reprehensive comments from the Chinese inferring Nepal is a fertile land for Tibetan activities that requires a sustained pressure and constant supervision, implies that China considers Nepal a younger brother. In this way, India and China have both utilised this powerful tool of ‘brotherhood’ and ‘infantilisation’ in every sphere of their partnership in economy and politics (as discussed in later chapters). This suggests that they tend to rationalise themselves as a saviour, protector, benevolent, authority and responsible guardian of their younger sibling to impose their will upon Nepal in the name of caring.

### **3.2.4. Representation of Nepalese**

#### *Fighting machine*

The British, Indian and even Chinese governments and academics have largely represented Nepalese as warriors or mercenaries.<sup>83</sup> For more than 200 years, in large numbers, mainly the

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<sup>83</sup> Inspired by the steadiness or bravery of the Nepali (Gorkhalis) during the Anglo-Nepal War, after decades of pursuance, Britain was successful in formally recruiting Nepali in its army from 1885 onward. Since then,

hill residents Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu and Chhetris and Thakuris have been recruited to the British army, Indian army and Singapore police.<sup>84</sup> However, these recruits, referred to as Gurkha,<sup>85</sup> are not considered privileged citizens of those countries, with equal pension remaining an outstanding issue mainly in the British army. The concern for Nepal is that these recruits have been used against the states with which Nepal has diplomatic relations.

For instance, India has used its Gorkha battalions in every instance of its wars against China (1962 & 1967) and Pakistan (1947, 1965, 1971, 1999), deploying them in one of the most sensitive and ‘conflict-prone’ zones (Kandangwa, 2008).<sup>86</sup> Moreover, there are instances when India has attempted to use the privilege of the Gorkha battalion to elevate its influential international role. For instance, Indian Vice President M. H. Ansari made an offer to provide Gorkha troops (including the retired soldiers from its own Gorkha Regiment) in 2016 to supplant the British Gorkha force in Brunei (though this did not materialise) without consulting Nepal<sup>87</sup> (Marszal & Farmer, 2016). Correspondingly, in the case of China, there have also been attempts to recruit Nepali to its army during the Mao regime (again, this did not materialise) (see also Gurung, 2015). Such representations of Nepali as a mere ‘fighting machine’ or mercenaries, signifying their use for war purposes only, severely debase, depersonalise and idealise Nepali by categorising and classifying them as ‘other’ than a human. Such representations reproduce the political and ideological condition of imperialist discourse, which dates back to centuries ago.

#### *Watchman (Chowkidar)*

Compared to the representation of Nepali as a fighting machine, in India they are often referred to and presented as a watchman ‘Chowkidar’ or ‘Bahadur’(brave) and even ‘foolish’. This has been prominently displayed specifically in Indian literature and cinema, for instance, *GharwaliBaharwali* (1998) and *Apna Sapna Money Money* (2006). Moreover, this

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Nepalese have been fighting for Britain, including in the two World Wars, whereby Nepal sent more than 4,50,000 of its citizens to different parts of the world, resulting in more than 32,000 casualties and thousands of maimed, wounded and lost. With the end of WW II, at the outset of Indian independence, there was a Tri-partite treaty in 1947 among Britain, India and Nepal to recruit Nepali citizens to the Indian and British armies. For details, see Kandwangwa (2008).

84 Then-army chief of India, Mr Sam Manikshaw, had once stated, “...he who says he doesn’t fear is either lying or he is a gorkha”. (see Gurung, 2015).

85 The term Gorkha originates from the Kingdom of Gorkha, from where the unification of Nepal was initiated, which was later (mis) spelt as Gurkha.

86 Similarly, Britain deployed the Gorkha battalion in the 1982 Falkland Islands War with Argentina by presenting them as cannibals to increase the wariness of their rivals (Osnos, 1983).

87 Remaining as a British protectorate for almost a century until its independence in 1984, Brunei has been paying to host a battalion of British Army Gorkhas. The Brunei Sultanate possesses a separate military that includes a reserve Gurkha unit, comprising mainly former Gurkhas.

perception is rampant even in the psyche of different Indian politicians, who consider Nepalese as a cheap and ‘not always welcome’ labour. This was evident during an Indian parliamentary meeting in 2019, when one of the members stated that they could order Chowkidar from Nepal (Bigulnews, 2019). In the same year, during the general election campaign in Gujarat, one of the Congress leaders, Mr Hardik Patel, responded to Narendra Modi’s self-proclaimed title of ‘Chowkidar’ by making a racist and disgraceful comment on Nepalese: “I don’t want a chowkidar, I want a Prime Minister. If I want a watchman I will go to Nepal”<sup>88</sup> (News18, 2019).

Equally, such representation of Nepalese as cheap, incompetent and unskilled labourers is even celebrated by various Indian scholars like Sood (2018), who has asserted that due to the (poor) economic condition of Nepal, its population moves to India for the purpose of study, employment, marriage, investment, and even pilgrimage. Such types of representation of Nepalese as cheap and uneducated labour that is culturally, intellectually, politically and technically backward and inferior has greatly debased, idealised, depersonalised and dehumanised their identity.

The seemingly opposite techniques of debasement (and its corollary negation) and idealisation (and its corollary affirmation) have similar rhetorical structures involving the process of de-contextualisation and othering. Therefore, these practices of India and China are intended to reduce the identity of Nepal and Nepali to view them within a self-defined essential terminology through the employment of essentialism, in a manner that reflects the ways they were represented by the former colonies to justify their paternalistic geopolitics. Having outlined the representational practices of India and China in this section, the next section deals with the effect of such ideology and practices in Nepal.

### **3.3. Representation: Effects in Nepal**

As mentioned earlier, the big powers maintain their dominance through the construction of particular knowledge that is considered as normal. This has been rightly stated by Flint (2006, p. 82), knowledge as the pillar for the ‘ideals’ has been in use to serve certain geopolitical

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<sup>88</sup> During the election campaign in 2019, PM Modi started a ‘Main bhi Chowkidar hoon’ (I am also watchman) campaign, referring to the idea that every person who serves the nation is a watchman (TTI, 2019). This may sound paradoxical given the way it is used to refer to Nepalese. However, notably, Modi’s appropriation of the term is intended to vindicate himself as a genuine politician, which does not include the politics of othering, but rather presents himself as a mere servant of his country India. In contrast, the statement of Mr Patel attempts to reflect his perception of self-superiority, as significantly different from the ‘other’ (here Nepali), who are no more than watchmen. However, the common theme shared by both cases is that the term ‘chowkidar’ was used politically to gain self-interest.

actions considered to be ‘common sense’. In addition, Arktong (2015) states, the construction of authoritative knowledge does not implicate a normal difference but implicates the manipulation in the identity performance with significant historical and contemporary formations, including colonialism. Thus, in this section I highlight the effect of the representation of geopolitics that manifests the personal and national behaviour embedded in the Indian and Chinese representation on Nepal.

Regarding India, scholars like Dixit (1998, p. 407) argue that it adheres to the belief that foreign policy has to predicate itself on *realpolitik*, rather than on purely moral considerations or an idealistic worldview. India’s overwhelming concern about its security has a direct bearing upon its self-perception of considering itself as a victim and viewing its neighbours sceptically. As mentioned earlier, India (and China, as discussed later) considers Nepal as a buffer state that is on the verge of imperilment due to the persisting internal security threats (including violence, poor governance and political instability), which could produce a spill-over effect, further compounded by the involvement of China<sup>89</sup> (see Bhattarai, 2005; Kumar, 2011). This is the manifestation of Indian discontent that, despite lying within its imaginative purview of *Bharatvarsha* as an obstinate brother, Nepal has been ignorant of Indian concerns in its bid to seek ‘security’ and the ‘right to exist’.

Nonetheless, amid the concerns about China in India, the latter’s attitude and practices in Nepal are dictated as part of India’s own historical fears that have made it cautious of Nepal and inclined to view its relationship with third countries like China as problematic. This is exhibited in various forms. with ‘China card’ being one of them (as discussed in Chapter 6). However, this, in turn, victimises Nepal as it is relegated to being a ‘less than equal’ political entity incapable of self-decision, whereby others’ interests or will could be imposed on it by utilising the leverage of power asymmetry. Moreover, contrary to the Indian presumption of containing China through Nepal, by ensuring its hegemonic presence in Nepal, such tropes instead have escalated the very same ‘anti-India’ sentiment in Nepal that it often complains about (see Malik, 2001; Lau, 2018).

India’s attitude of negating Nepal has been evident in several strands of its bilateral relationship with Nepal. For instance, Nepal has frequently expressed its reservations over the 1950 Treaty and pursued India for its revision, most recently during a parliamentary speech in Nepal in June 2018 by then-PM Mr Khadga, P.Oli (Power News TV, 2018). However, despite

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<sup>89</sup> Equally, India is sceptical about Nepal becoming a control centre of Pakistan Inter-services intelligence (see Katoch, 2018).



the formation of a bilateral group, like the EPG,<sup>90</sup> India has shown a lukewarm response to Nepal's recurrent calls to address bilateral issues, again reflecting its attitude of being an elder brother to Nepal.

Moreover, along with the ideology of brotherhood,<sup>91</sup> India also employs the colonial strategy of exclusion or differentiation, through the infusion of which the hegemony is reified. For instance, Indian scholars like Sood (2018) have pointed to Nepal as a country fraught with the issues of backwardness, poverty, passivity and incivility. While this projects India as a developed (economically, socially and politically) country and a responsible guardian of Nepal, it situates Nepal within its sphere of influence, which in turn has been counterproductive for both states.

For instance, the economic blockade imposed by India at the outset of the post-earthquake trauma in 2015 has not only worsened the humanitarian crisis in Nepal, but also signalled the failure of Indian political leaders in effectively using soft-power diplomacy. This posed a challenge to its image as a large democracy that tends to negate the existence of its neighbouring small state, concomitantly leaving Nepal with a sense of deep agitation and resentment against India, directly affecting the Indo-Nepal relationship. The agitation against India grew to the extent that, during the visit of then-Indian President Mr Pranab Mukherjee in 2016—a high-level visit that was only made possible after 18 years—a curfew had to be declared in Kathmandu (Himalayan Times, 2016).

The (deep) sense of resentment against India that consolidated in Nepal stirred a debate on *de facto* employment of the policy of equidistance (as discussed in Chapter 4) and economic diversification, subsequently (re) establishing the narrative of the Madhesi and discrimination. The issue of Madhesi in Nepal is the epitome of a gradual external translation of the 'difference' in identity into the politics of 'otherness' that defines Nepal to be entangled within the issue of internal vs external 'other'. Notably, Indian narratives about the exploitation and discrimination

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90 Despite the preparation of the draft report by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) formed in mutual consent of both countries in 2016 to update, adjust or amend any issues in the bilateral treaties, agreements and understanding, including the 1950 treaty. Amid Nepal's warm response, there are reports indicating Indian reservation regarding the provision of regulating the open border (GKToday, 2018; Xaviers, 2020).

91 In India's ideology of '*brotherhood*' (motivated by its big brother attitude), the politics of sameness is somewhat different from European colonialism, which treated their colonies as 'other' (Aryal, 2017, p.3), selectively also using the politics of 'other' or the differences. This was evident in the speech of Indian minister Mr V.P. Singh at the end of the 1980s, "...India thinks itself as benefactor and thus is not keen to seek for the reciprocity in its relation with Nepal..." (India abroad, 1990, as cited in Khadka, 1991).

of the Madhesi by upper-caste Pahadi migrants have aided in the ambiguity of the Madhesi identity.

Indian narratives have conveniently represented Madhesis as poor, helpless and historically marginalised by the authorities in Nepal (see Rawat, 2015; Budhathoki & Gelband, 2016; Baral, 2017), portraying Nepali rulers as brutal and authoritarian (see Pandey, 2016) while positioning itself as an emancipator of Madhesis. This was evident in the 2007 *Madhes Andolan* initiated by the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), when violence was initiated mainly against the hill migrants (see The New Humanitarian, 2007, a, b). However, despite this, the incident has been conveniently presented as a natural outcome of the historically neglected ethnic issue (see Miklian, 2009), rather than indiscriminate violence against the ethnic groups, whereby the controversial role played by India regarding the cross-border movement of those perpetrators has also often been neglected within scholarly research.<sup>92</sup>

As mentioned earlier—and as will be discussed in Chapter 6—Indian narratives have reinforced the colonial strategy of ‘demonising’ *Pahadis* by ‘victimising’ *Madhesis*, considering India as the sole defender of Madhes, through the close appreciation and incorporation of the colonial models. This is to portray India as an emancipator (of Madhesis) against the ‘repressive’ state of Nepal while normalising violence and dismissing any claims of the paternity of India. Equally, during the economic blockade by India in 2015, the violent events that occurred in the border region of Nepal was influenced through the anti-*Pahadi* sentiment, whereby the role of India (re) appeared in the limelight. Here, it is relevant to cite Kaul in the case of Kashmir (2021c, p. 127), who contends that violence has been an integral component of the colonial project, whereby violence is used to “...make examples of and to instil respect through fear”, which seems true in the case of Nepal.

Thus, by weaponising the victimhood of Madhesis, India has intended to politically construct (and even widen) the ethnic and geographical fault lines in Nepal and to create a rift between the ‘internal’ vs ‘external’ other to advance its political agenda, reinvigorating the narrative that the Terai/Madhes region is different from Nepal.<sup>93</sup> According to Nayak (2011, p.

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92 Notably, while officially India considers the Madhesi issue as an internal matter of Nepal, due to its involvement in the affairs related to Madhes, including Indian authorities’ eagerness to protect MJF and other armed groups during the violence in 2007, the discourses about its engagement in contributing to the violence in Terai/Madhes cannot be ignored (see Pathak, 2007; Nayak, 2011) and was equally evident during its economic blockade in 2015. Indian engagement partly reflects its urge to collectively punish the ‘Hill migrants’ who, according to India, have been involved in the historical marginalisation of Madhesis to establish its interests through fear in Nepal.

93 While India’s role in secessionist activity in Nepal is hard to establish, the recent political developments in the Terai region has been a concern for Nepal. The confession of an Indian (Research and Intelligence wing, RAW)

640), such attitudes and activities have dragged India into a controversy, whereby both Madhesi and Pahadi have been critical of the role of India regarding its security and economic interests, with multiple implications in Nepal.

Firstly, it risks a shift in and increase in the sympathisers for India regarding its ethnic-based rationale for intervening in Nepal. This project functions with a deep sense of ‘internal hierarchisation’ in Nepal rationalising the Indian presence, making exploitation and hegemony the main features of Nepal’s relationship with India. Secondly, the violence inflicted upon some communities, like Pahadis, has been either silenced or marginalised. This has been facilitated by the polarisation of society into a dichotomy of ‘Pahadi’ vs ‘Madhesi’ that has allowed the Madhesi leaders to reduce the diverse Madhesi community—that itself includes different castes, ethnicities and religions—into a monolithic community. It then vilifies ‘Pahadis’, declaring them responsible for all sorts of political, social and economic ills in the Terai region while simultaneously victimising Madhesis. This has generated a narrative that absolves the Madhesi leaders of their responsibilities towards their populations. Lastly, and not the least, the negation of conducting a judiciary inquiry for such violence by the state of Nepal, together with the scarce scholarly attention given to such atrocities, both nationally and internationally, leaves a space of scepticism for the recurrence of such violence, impeding the communal harmony.

As mentioned earlier, while Nepal shares many characteristics with post-colonial states, including legacies of discrimination and obstructionist bureaucracies, it is struggling to deliver a just and equitable state privilege to its citizens. In this context, the construction of ethnic or geographic differences through the political canvas and resorting to internal contestation is problematic, as it creates internal fault lines rather than addressing the real issues, and risks serving the external interests in internal division. Thus, the external victimisation of the geographical and ethnic groups like Madhesi is not an unbiased form of knowledge production; rather, it intends to portray Nepal as unable to manage its internal affairs, so as to justify external presence, stemming from the attitude of negating its existence as a state.

This is evident in the argument of Khorbragade (2016), who affirms that the blockade in 2015 was a result of the internal (Madhesi) crisis that was supported by India, confirming

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spy, Mr Kulbhusan Jadhav, in Pakistan in 2017 about his direct involvement in the secessionist activity in the Terai/Madhes region of Nepal (Yousaf, 2014) in some way supports the claim of the scholars like Dahal (2011) and Bhatta (2013) about India’s involvement in the sectarian movement in the Terai region to disintegrate Nepal’s collective sense of culture and geography.

its position as an ‘elder brother’ (without answering how) who had tried to play a constructive role during the constitution promulgation, and as a continuation of its partnership in investment, development and security of Nepal; within a space that India hesitates to share with other countries (mainly China). A step ahead, Vardarajan (2015) states, “...India’s de facto denial to the Nepalese of essential supplies of fuel has driven Kathmandu into the arms of China. A crippled, impoverished nation has been handed a lifeline by Beijing – gift-wrapped in New Delhi”. Here both scholars share a common frame of reference that due to the continual form of internal instability and underdeveloped status of Nepal, India is a potential and competent saviour and protector of Nepal, justifying the paternal geopolitics of India.

Moreover, the ‘Gorkha recruitment’ illustrates the ways through which the admixture of the economy and social caveat transforms in a way that serves the political motive of India. It is important to underline that India has selectively articulated and under-assessed the contribution of its Gorkha regiment to its national security and instead has appropriated it as a political tool to present itself as an economic emancipator of Nepal. While the Gorkha recruitment reaps some extent of the economic benefits for Nepal, it has left deep-seated effects in terms of social, economic, cultural and political costs to Nepal. The admiration for their bravery has been undermined by the recruitment being only for junior officers, carefully excluding Nepali from officer or commanding positions. This is intended to reflect the Indian superiority over Nepali, whereby the latter is relegated as a follower rather than a commander. Thus, the production of such knowledge about Gorkha as brave, a fighter and loyal has been appropriated under the Indian terms and conditions, thus subverting the voice of Nepal(i).

More importantly, due to its caste-based nature, the communities that have participated for generations are in an obvious and historical manner (self) excluded from the intellectual, political and social mainstream of Nepal. This creates a fault line between the so-called ‘Martial races’ and ‘non-Martial races’, which has precluded Nepal from harnessing the true potential of its human resources for its state-building and development goals. In turn, this makes Nepal a weak neighbour of India, emulating the British policy of leaving Nepal a weak neighbour unable to turn against them. In a way, for Nepal, the *Gorkha recruitment* has been a form of neo-colonial project, where certain knowledge is developed to feed the ‘self’ and accordingly, the human resources of a small country are recruited into a foreign army and used as a fighting machine.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> It is important to highlight that the use of the term ‘Gurkha’ instead of ‘Gorkha’ is itself the exhibition of ‘Anglicisation’.

In a similar manner, in the case of China, in alignment with its tendency to force adherence to its view of the world, it sees Nepal through the ‘Tibet lens’. As such, historically, it seems to have been concerned about the attitude of India towards Nepal and in response, it adopted the cautious approach of not crossing the imaginary ‘Red line’ as set by the Indian strategy on its affairs with Nepal. Remarkably, during the visit of Nepali PM BP Koirala to China in 1960, his Chinese counterpart Chou-En Lai stated that China’s calculated economic presence in Nepal was the product of its intention to eschew the contestation with India.<sup>95</sup> In this way, China’s (informal) acknowledgement of Indian supremacy in Nepal was the driving force behind Chinese foreign policy in Nepal until the Sino-India War in 1962.

With the Sino-India War in 1962 and the increasing internationalisation of the Tibet factor, China began to consider Nepal within the orbit of its security and acted in an outwardly considerate in its affairs with Nepal. As pointedly mentioned by Garver (2012), China has given exclusive leverage to smaller states like Nepal to choose any particular relation not available to India. As will be mentioned in Chapter 4, Mao’s statement during the construction of the Kodari Highway signifies the Chinese perception towards Nepal as a victim of Indian interventions.

As mentioned earlier, following Nepal’s increased overtures towards China, including the economic collaboration since 2015, China has begun to increase its influence in Nepal. This was apparent during the October 2019 visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Nepal, which was memorable for two reasons. Firstly, China was eager to make various agreements with Nepal, including those on an extradition treaty, defence and border road construction (The Economic Times, 2019). However, with the persisting fear that the treaty could be used against the Tibetans (in Nepal), Nepal somehow managed to shelve the proposal on those issues. Instead, it agreed to sign a pact on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters with China.

Secondly, during his address, President Xi issued a dire message, stating that, “Anyone who attempts to split any region from China will perish, with their bodies smashed and bones ground to powder” (NDTV, 2019). While it cannot conveniently be concluded that the message

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95 Nevertheless, there were also instances evident during the visit of Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai to India in 1954, when China, even stepping beyond the ‘Red Line’, had accepted Indian supremacy in Nepal. See Mohammed (2000); Acharya (2021). However, during that period, China seemed equally concerned about the Indian domination in Nepal (detail in Chapter 4). One might argue that this is a paradoxical policy towards Nepal. However, the crux of the issue lies in the aftershocks of the Sino-India War in 1962, which historically changed their perception towards each other, equally shaping their relational affairs with the neighbouring small states. Since then, China started to increase its economic investment in Nepal, slowly incorporating it into the political milieu (detail in Chapter 4).

was directed towards Nepal, owing to the circumstance of Nepal's reluctance about the extradition treaty, to some extent, it could be interpreted as a warning sign for Nepal to comply with the Chinese interest. In this way, China's eagerness and obsession to view and represent Nepal through the Tibet-centric lens, strategic calculus or India factor (as discussed in later chapters) delimits Nepal as a strategic object rather than an independent state, thereby justifying China's position of supervision and influence in Nepal.

Despite this, it is important to note that there are different strands of work on outsiders' representation of Nepal and not all of them are problematic. For instance, Michael Hutt (2007) wrote an influential article entitled: "A Nepalese Triangle: Monarchy, Maoists and Political Parties". Therein, Hutt concluded that the incessant struggle for democracy and the people's aspiration of being treated more as citizens than subjects has been a longstanding issue surrounding the democratisation, overall political stability and development of Nepal. Similarly, while acknowledging Nepal's remarkable shift towards the egalitarian from the hierarchical society, Gellner (2017) is sceptical about the prospect for Nepal in addressing the issues within the cultural, ethnic and political juncture compounded by its political instability. While those scholars to some extent portray the underlying cultural and political fragility of Nepal, due to their representational practices' lack of political motives—as compared to those of India and China—they are considered to be less problematic.

Thus, India and China's representational regime(s) at various representational levels have left an entrenched impact on the overall identity of Nepal and its people. Given the usual esteem within which 'self' is originated and constituted, differentiated norms through the employment of power involve the treatment of others as a less-than-equal subject within the hierarchical formation. Instead of appreciating the agency, this degrades, depersonalises and marginalises Nepal and Nepali. Here, the common theme shared by India and China is that, in contrast to the Western hegemonic powers, like US, "they see themselves as continuations of historical, great civilizational empires" (Anand, 2012, p. 73).

Moreover, they operate within the politics of self-denial, considering themselves as victims of Western imperialism, equating their hegemonic advancement as "shedding off of colonial legacy", in the words of Anand (2012, p. 74). This has a direct implication for Nepal, as considering the 'security' concerns of its neighbours, it has been constrained to enact 'self-censorship', restricting its exercise as an independent state. As such, the employment of binarism is problematic for Nepal, dislocating it from its real positioning. It is necessary,

therefore, to know how Nepal negotiates to deconstruct and redefine such hegemonic representational regimes to acknowledge its agency, as discussed in the next section.

### **3.4. Nepal's negotiation in the geopolitical context**

Imperial powers ensured that their relationships with colonies remained an internal matter, using the mask of objectivity to hide the relations of inequality and domination (Darby & Paolini, 1994; Anand, 2007). Emulating this, post-colonial states like India and China attempt to appropriate the strategy of 'internalising' the 'international' aspect of their relationship with small states, positioning their relations with small states as 'neo-imperial' rather than international relations. In this context, it is relevant to mention the case of North-South encounter by Doty (1996, p. 13), whereby "alternative representation did exist but they were either marginalised or silenced". By revealing the representational effect, postcolonialism is equally helpful to gain insight into the self-conscious efforts to deconstruct, rethink, redescribe and denaturalise the great power discourses, in turn highlighting the way they are problematic, in this case, for Nepal.

While it could be hyperbolic to expect the complete removal of those representational regimes amid the centrality of Indian and Chinese representational practices, there is a space for a small state like Nepal. In other words, to compensate for its geopolitical positioning and structural scarcity (deprived of its soft power, as explained in Chapter 2), there is scope for Nepal to solicit nationalism at the core of its geopolitical ideas and practices, so as to safeguard its national interest and build its international image and credibility. This section intends to (re)construct some of the key and exhaustive representational tropes employed by India and China that outline Nepal's negotiations in terms of the concepts of buffer state, special relationship and dependency.

As noted earlier, Nepal has often been represented using negative connotations, like as a strategic object, buffer, isolated or inaccessible, and circumscribed within its interactions with bigger powers, thus significantly subduing the sensitivity of Nepal and its people. While it is small and mountainous in geographical terms, this does not mean it is inaccessible, vulnerable, marginalised or homogenous. Rather, the data show that. due to its unique geographical features, Nepal encompasses the range from the sea level to the highest peak in the world, Mt. Everest (Sagarmatha in Nepali) stretched within the length of 250 km. This has made Nepal rich in terms of biodiversity.<sup>96</sup> With almost 30% of its land mass as forest, though

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<sup>96</sup> Source: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/np/np-nr-05-en.pdf>.

it occupies only 0.1 % of global area, Nepal harbours 3.2% and 1.1% of the world's flora and fauna, respectively, with 118 ecosystems in which 125 identified castes and ethnic groups reside. Moreover, renowned for the successful implementation of the community forestry programme through community forestry user groups, Nepal is often "seen as a global model for participatory natural resource governance" (Sharma & Nightingale, 2014, p. 518).

Moreover, the tendency of India and China to define the historical episodes within their geopolitical terminology is problematic, too. Indian scholars like Muni (1977) have argued the neutrality of Nepal during the Sino-India War was possible due to the mutual understanding of defence matters between Nepal and India. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, this not only runs contrary to the various historical records but also tends to negate the contributions of Gorkhali soldiers in the wars that India fought. More importantly, such assertions misconstrue the fact that it was through Nepal's foreign policy position (as a neutral state) that it served as an (informal) no-war zone, providing India (and also China) with a strategic space.

Moreover, the exhaustive trope of the special relationship employed within the Indo-Nepal friendship rests within the language of diplomacy, which contains historical, strategic and numerical terms all lacking any form of mutual commitment, transparency, and shared norms and practices (as will be discussed in later chapters). However, the Indian vocabulary and narrative of the Indo-Nepal friendship is selective in what it highlights and ignores. India has frequently neglected the concern of Nepal and Nepali, instead being interested in maintaining its hegemonic and utilitarian attitude and practices. As Dahal (2011, p. 40) rightly argues, Nepal feels that India's label of 'special relationship' has been a euphemism that limits Nepal's freedom and national sovereignty as coded in public international laws. As such, due to the lack of essence of the relationship within the trope, it has resonated with the neo-colonial context, making it an empty signifier.

Nevertheless, the norm of Nepal's dependency on India has been the hallmark of relations between the two countries, where the former is presented as unable to be (politically and economically) self-reliant and dependent on the latter<sup>97</sup>; illustrating India as an economic emancipator of Nepal. For instance, Indian scholars like Muni (1977; 1992) have depicted India as a mere sponsor and patron for Nepal. It is not surprising that the geopolitical positioning of Nepal has obliged it to import essential items like petroleum products, medicines and consumables mainly from India, as favoured by the open border. However, in terms of the basic

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97 The political manipulation of Nepal's dependency inspires India to frequently impose various obstructionist policies (including various protectionist policies and tariff barriers) on Nepalese products (Shrestha, 2018).



economic facts and figures, the Indian perception that Nepal is dependent on it is subject to challenge.

For instance, before 1990, Nepal used to import 60% of its necessary goods and products from India. With the internal political instability decreased, contemporarily, it faces a trade deficiency (with India) of more than 97%. The data show that, in 2017 alone, Nepal's trade deficit with India (the trade dependency with India alone contributed to 60% of the total trade) was around \$8 billion (Shrestha, 2018). Furthermore, a study conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2012 about the remittance of Nepal and India concluded that, out of the total remittances worth \$3.34 billion sent from Nepal (the GDP of Nepal in 2012 being \$18.85 billion), India alone had consumed \$3.22 billion, ranking Nepal as the seventh-largest country to send remittance to India (Myrepublica, 2015). These representative statistics challenge the portrayal of Nepal as dependent on India and deconstruct the Indian scripting that rationalises the Indian presence as an essential factor for the development of Nepal. In addition, these data testify that the 'constructed' knowledge is neither unbiased nor grounded on the pre-existing reality but implicated in the 'will' to power and the (neo)imperial agenda of India.

The consciousness about the resistance within civil society is equally important to deflect or neutralise hegemonic practices. This was evident in the case of the screening of *Gharwali Baharwali* in Nepal, whereby the public protests against the attempt to stereotype and belittle Nepal and Nepalese ultimately led to the prohibition of the movie (see Sarkar, 2009). Equally, the lack of internal consensus about an issue debilitates the effective resistance of the external representational practices. For instance, the Gorkha recruitment is not a sole product of the unilateral interest(s) of Britain and India; rather, it is also partly a product of the constructed representational form that has been internalised by Nepal.<sup>98</sup> In fact, its nature as a collective product of many complementary and contesting dynamics, such as the colonial legacy, Nepal's weak internal (including economic) condition and the prevailing power asymmetry,<sup>99</sup> has remained as an issue.

Nevertheless, similar to the representational practices of India and China, there are also Nepali portrayals of India and China that have remained inadequate due to their limited

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98 As mentioned earlier, due to its complex 'geographical' and 'ethnic' considerations, the Gorkha issue has not gained mileage in the Terai region, restricting its ability to gain momentum as a national issue.

99 Nevertheless, while discussing the resistance, it is important to outline the dissent against the popular and hegemonic Indian and Chinese way of representing Nepal. For instance, Basu (2021) penned an article 'What the India-Nepal Peace treaty is, and why Nepal has problems with it?' In the article, she concluded that, due to the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty not being compatible with the national self-respect of Nepal, it needs a revision to align with the interests of Nepal.

regional and global outreach. There are various representational practices adopted by the media, public, intellectual and authorities in Nepal that range from India being considered as a border hegemon and a threat to Nepal (see Shrestha, 2013; Khattry, 2015) to highlighting its role in the violence and political instability in Nepal (see Subedi, 2005). The status quo of India as a hegemon has invoked a unique sentiment in Nepal that equals ‘anti-India’ to ‘nationalist’, and ‘pro-India’ to ‘anti-nationalist’, thus marginalising any meaningful interactions that have been a concern for India, aggravated by Nepal’s increasing overtures to China.

Correspondingly, in the case of China, reports suggest its changing policy towards Nepal is embodied in its new policy of ‘Going Out’ and ‘Being Heard’ as partly consolidated in BRI, of which Nepal is a signatory (discussed in Chapter 4). However, this assertive policy of China has received little attention in Nepal. Contrary to the dominating India, Chinese visibility in political, economic and cultural spheres in Nepal is low, as most intellectuals, public, media and even political leaders perceive is as a disinterested, benign and benevolent power and a partner of Nepal<sup>100</sup> (see Sapkota, 2016, 2017; Tiwari, 2021).

Those considerations, while glorifying China, vilify India, ultimately situating Nepal in a position whereby it is always pursuing a (kind and good) neighbour (at the cost of the other) that Nepal could depend on. This leaves Nepal vulnerable to any threats emanating from China *and* India. More importantly, such understandings share a common fallacy, in that they misread only India and China as political entities and rising powers, thus limiting the legitimate inquiry into the bilateral affairs of Nepal with India and China.

Thus, the analysis of representation engenders various interrelated factors, including but not limited to: Nepal’s internal political status, its stance on the issue of nationalism, its access to representational resources, plus its global outreach and levels of bureaucratic and diplomatic agents. More importantly, the nature of representational forms in Nepal are rather more dispersed in nature (than in a unified form), sparsely represented by civil society, media and the government authorities, meaning some representations even go unnoticed.

Finally, as discussed in the earlier chapters, the Zone of Peace proposal, or Nepal’s firm stances on the issues of national interest, including the adoption of the politics of neutrality, are the manifestations of Nepal’s attempt to challenge the hegemonic attitude and practices of India and China through its efforts to build its credible international image. In January 2021,

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100 While such soft and positive considerations towards China are often equated with being considered as a nationalist, a soft position towards India is considered as ‘anti-Nepali’.

Nepal's PM K.P. Oli, in an interview with an Indian media outlet, remarked, "We are working to deepen ties with India based on sovereign equality...We want to remove all kind of inferiority complex from our Nepalese people and want our neighbours to not have any superiority complex" (WION, 2021). Thus, there have been attempts to resist against any form of hegemonic representational practices of India and China, signalling there are ways forward to challenge these and re (create) Nepal's own image aligned with the sentiment of the nation and its people. Thus, the use of the postcolonial approach is effective in revealing the hitherto marginalised representative issues of Nepal and explaining how it has negotiated.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

The process of knowledge production about the 'other' is symmetrical to the construction, articulation and affirmation of variation between the self and 'other' that constructs the identity politics between the representer and represented. India and China's hegemonic narratives that accompanied their encounters with Nepal have served as windows into more global systems of representation that render the 'imperial encounter'. Here, the shared common theme is that the cultural representation of the 'other' lies at the core of their colonial and neo-colonial discourses. It precludes the condition where the denial of the agency of the 'other' is prominent, thus resonating with the norms of neo-colonial relations.

Indian and Chinese representational practices, through the employment of power, have been able to define their versions, perceptions, activities and behaviour as the standard or norm, marginalising the voice of Nepal. The contemporary post-colonial encounter of Nepal with India and China underscores the ways in which Indian and Chinese representational practices attempt to fix Nepal (and Nepali) within a position that rationalises their paternalism through which the regulation, production and consumption of knowledge is made. Such geopolitical practices (as enacted for self-consumption) provide leverage to present these nations as caretakers, thus possessing the 'natural right' of intervention or assertion, and undermining Nepal's meaningful role in the regional arena. Thus, in this context, postcolonialism is important to reveal the hitherto marginalised representative issues of Nepal and how Nepal has negotiated. The next chapter explains how Nepal has negotiated an equidistant relationship with India and China.

## Chapter 4: Geopolitics

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed the key themes of Nepal's foreign policy, mainly non-alignment and neutrality as defined by its geopolitical positioning. Influenced by the postcolonial approach, I provided insights about the way Nepal, as a small state, is not just a victim of its geographical settings but can also maintain an influential position in the international system as norm entrepreneur focusing on the diversification of its relationship, notwithstanding the carefully balanced form of relationship with both of its neighbours. In this chapter, in outlining the contextual background of Nepal's historical relationship vis-à-vis its neighbours, I adopt the postcolonial lens, focusing on power asymmetry, representation and resistance, to explain how Nepal has negotiated an equidistant relationship with India and China.

Here, tracing the historical trajectory of the development of the relationship that has made survival possible, I aim to highlight the how Nepal has adopted the policy of equidistance as a foreign policy measure to respond to the existing hegemonic interests of India and China. This is important, as the interest of these countries actuated by their power have been decisive factor in forming a particular geopolitical disposition of Nepal. The main reason for this is to focus on the foreign policy measures of a small state, of which conventional IR is largely oblivious, and to highlight that the foreign policy can become a means of resistance against the hegemonic considerations of the great powers.

The domain of knowledge related to the state as a political-territorial entity is securely shelved within the universe of geopolitics (Söderström, 2010). Notably, geopolitics is an art and practice of statecraft that thrives on various geographical features like resources (O'Tuthail & Agnew, 1992; O'Tuthail, 1996) and the knowledge claim (mainly of an identity) that are infused with the relationship of power and space or geography. Thus, analysing the geopolitical issues by tracing the historical trend of a (small) state's relationship with its big neighbours is helpful in understanding how its foreign policy objectives and practices exhibit its various relational dimensions. Further, as mentioned in the earlier chapters, compared to mainstream IR, postcolonialism can effectively interrogate the great power considerations, allowing a more comprehensive picture of geopolitics. As has been pointed out by Mirahmadi (2017), the postcolonialist approach helps to reveal various forms of hidden geopolitical issues of a small state by analysing the intersection among geopolitical and geo-economics affairs, which is equally applicable in the case of Nepal.

As underlined in the earlier chapters, Nepal formalised its relationship with India and China through the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950 and The Treaty of Friendship and Trade in 1960, which have been the defining framework of its relationship with them. Acknowledging its geopolitical significance in holding strategic value crucial for the security, defence and stability, India considers Nepal's de facto status to be within its sphere of influence, ascribing it the desire to evade the China factor within the Indo-Nepal relationship (Singh, 2015). In comparison, China is keen to situate Nepal as independent and neutral to preserve it as a buffer to safeguard it from impending security threats and to contain India's rise (Dabhade & Pant, 2004). Against the backdrop of the increasing influence of India and China, Nepal has experienced pressure regarding its sovereignty limits and resource conflicts (ibid.), which has increased its risk of being a potential playground for its neighbours' power-plays.

In this context, instead of favouring one at the expense of another, Nepal has pursued an independent foreign policy based on the norms of neutrality by emphasising a balanced relationship with both neighbours. Key factors that underpin Nepal's foreign policy are sovereignty preservation, diversification, maintaining peace and fostering harmonious relationships, bolstered by the policy of 'equidistance'. It is this latter policy that Nepal has adopted most prominently as means to develop good relations with India and China, in a flexible and effective way, without infringing on its own identity, sovereignty and independence (Nayak, 2014).

Compared to the illustration of a descriptive and rational layout of the way a small state has managed to exist, tracing the historical trajectory of the development of the relationship that has made survival possible is important. This can help predict its performance as well as open up avenues for alternative interpretations. Such a historical trajectory is germane both in descriptive and analytic terms to gain an insight, in this case, into the overall Indian and Chinese interests in the way Nepal negotiates them. This focus marks a shift from the conventional IR definitions that consider Nepal as a passive and weak shareholder. Therefore, adopting a postcolonial approach, by locating the historical trajectory through an elucidation of the various phases of the relationship of Nepal with India and China, followed by their interests, the overall theme of this chapter explores the ways in which Nepal has negotiated an equidistant relationship with its two powerful neighbours. To begin with, it is relevant to provide an outline of how geopolitics can be postcolonised to move towards understanding India, China and Nepal's foreign policy in relation to each other.

#### 4.1. Geopolitics and postcolonialism

This section attempts to intersect further geopolitics and postcolonialism. Scholars agree that the initial geopolitical literature exclusively focused on powerful states to serve and promote their unilateral geopolitical and geo-economic priorities, prominently featuring their excessive influence on the geopolitical codes of other members of the system (O'Tuthail, 1996; Flint, 2006).

Notably, classical geopolitics<sup>101</sup> perceived the international system as a competitive arena, where “great powers play a disproportionate role, struggling for security, resources, position and influence”, with each state being fearful of encirclement and counter-encirclement (Dueck, 2013). Thus, classical geopolitics perceived the physical environment as a fixed stage where political events occur rather than a dynamic and shifting problem that affects world politics.

Classical geopolitics can be correlated with realism and neorealism, in that they emphasise accumulation of resources and controlling landmasses, which are considered to be key elements of global politics.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, proponents share the belief that access to and control of natural resources are integral to state power and national interests, considering dependency as strategic vulnerability.

Thus, the classical geopoliticians highlight the great power geopolitics, prioritising the role of geographical factors (like territorial location and or/ access to resources) in shaping national and international relations. In the process, geopolitical visions are constructed through the mobilisation of the concept of places, populations and the labelling of geographical space, which has a direct implication for international and or/representation of national identity (Dodds, 2005, p.1). According to Dodds, traditional or classical geopolitical theories are examples of ‘situated knowledge’, both social and geographical. They construct a world view that advocates the great powers’ foreign policies by identifying the sources, practices and representations legitimising the internal manipulation of a small state, including their identity, resources and territory.

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101 Classical geopolitics argues that “without the robust balance of power in the old world, the liberties of the new world cannot be maintained” (Dueck, 2013).

102 According to Dannreuther (2013), drawing from political geographical and geopolitical understandings, realism highlights the spatial dimension of state power and focused on the influence and control of critical geopolitical and geographical space.

As such, the initial geopolitical studies are accused of being associated with the imperialist, expansionist and great power policies that possessed the necessary intellectual and conceptual framework for viewing the world as an external and independent ‘object’ (Dodds, 2005; Sharp, 2013); it was even condemned as poisonous by some 1945 Anglo-American political geographers (Dodds, 2005).

Moreover, geopolitics includes constituents like geopolitical subjects<sup>103</sup> and geopolitical structures, for which the geopolitical explanation and vision are not unbiased but value-laden (Kearns, 2006, p. 173). Accordingly, as there is no neutral or value-free way of viewing the world, geopolitical theorisation cannot be separated from power-knowledge relations. In this context, the unconditional acknowledgement of the knowledge as natural risks a consideration of geopolitics as the sole discourse of power, rather than an argument or question about power.

In this way, the failure of classical geopolitics to disrupt the widespread ‘depoliticisation’ of human geography in the 1950s and 1960s provided a space for critical geopolitics. The emergence of critical geopolitics and the geopolitical economy in the 1980s marked a shift from an empiricist past towards a theoretically informed field of inquiry (O’ Tuathail, 1996). Ó Tuathail and Agnew’s influential 1992 article in *Political Geography* conceptualised critical geopolitics as “the study of the spatialisation of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states”. The reappearance of geopolitics in the form of critical geopolitics, compared to mainstream realist and liberal geopolitical (formal geopolitics) theories, affirm geopolitics as a series of problematic norms concerning power, knowledge, space and identity. However, despite this, critical geopolitical authors tend to distance themselves from the very notion of colonialism that has largely shaped contemporary geopolitics.

The colonial project was about the struggle for geography and power, whereby the orientalist discourses reduced human geography into a space of inequality and difference. Thus, as mentioned earlier, colonial history is a necessary constituent of the theoretical approaches to understanding the contemporary world politics and its negation risks marginalisation of the weaker entity (here, the small state) engaged within an interaction. Hence, the geopolitical

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103 The geopolitical subject is the “basic agent shaping global political and economic relations” (Kearns, 2006, p. 173), whereas races, people and classes are constitutive entities and the building blocks of geopolitical structures, which correspond to the society-shaping forces identified by Sack (1999 in Kearns, 2006), as nature, meaning and social relations, respectively.

consideration remains incomplete without a well-informed acknowledgement and understanding of colonial history and its relationship to contemporary post-colonial politics.

Moreover, geopolitical authors have been tempted to universalise or generalise the European (Western) context of theorisation and practices, neglecting the (political and) geographical locales outside the West. Darby's (2004, p. 6) view is relevant to mention here, stating that, "decolonisation of the international has barely begun". Thus, the geopolitical knowledge construction of the West is subject to critical interrogation, which is a part of struggle and resistance to the varieties of geopolitical ways of seeing the world, referred to as geopolitical visions.

In addition, geopolitics views power as always mediated by the modes of representation for those ways of seeing the world. However, despite its global gaze, less scholarly attention has been given to the politics of representation that celebrates the viewpoint of those who are marginalised in global politics, which testifies to the parochialism of political geography (Robinson, 2003; Sharp, 2011). As such, a geopolitical approach concentrating how rather than what we read may be a milestone with which we can imagine and construct new comparative perspectives for better insights into any states and communities, their characters, composition, development and interaction (Wang, 2013, p. 240). As Robinson (2003, p.279) remarks, a recasting of areas of regions could redraw the bounds of the regions considered as relevant based on geopolitical importance according to powerful nations.

Thus, with the altering of world politics, including the advent of globalisation, there is a need for a new logic and structure to address the contemporary geopolitical challenges. The postcolonial approach, with its engagement with the ways the backdrop of colonial power and its structure of relations are diffused throughout history, concomitantly reflecting comprehensive importance of geographical research about colonialism and post-colonialism, in past and present, can address these contemporary geopolitical issues (Sidaway, 2000). Compared to critical IR that negates:

colonial past and postcolonial present, a politics that accompanies the contestations surrounding global hierarchy.... postcolonial theory adds significantly to the critical IR literature by assisting in the interrogation of such a politics and addressing the ways in which historical processes are implicated in the production (Chowdhry & Nair, 2002, p. 2).



According to Flint (2006, p. 23), geopolitics can be used to describe the situation of marginalised and employed as an intellectual terrain, advocating for the change concerned with and influenced by the interaction of geography, knowledge, power and political and social association. In this context, the application of postcolonialism equips one to acknowledge that geopolitics is no longer the exclusive privilege of a powerful state, as employed to frame the policy and studies of great powers, and can instead be used to analyse the issues surrounding marginalisation and peripheralisation actuated through the employment of power.

Furthermore, the postcolonial notion in geopolitics offers a much more complex and varied spatial notion of power relations. Postcolonial geopolitics intends to avoid the pitfall in (conventional) geopolitics by featuring the historically and socially constructed power-laden structures and espousing the concept and practices that are the product of an immutable, self-contained and partial knowledge-producing system. It reveals how mainstream IR and state relationships emphasise the study of war, violence, balance of power and conflict, negating historical narratives that unearth the security and political domination of the great power with regard to the experiences and practices of a small state. In this context, the revival of non-Western regional studies (and associated works) and consideration of the geopolitical sensitivity of small states is an important first step towards linking postcolonialism with geopolitics. The next section highlights the historical trend of Nepal's relationship with India and China.

#### **4.2. India and China, and Nepal's foreign policy**

Since the Tibet occupation in 1950, China has considered Nepal to be a vital part of its inner security ring, a view that has been further compounded by the increasing Indian and global powers' (like the US) interest in Nepal, to counter against China. As such, China intends to neutralise those external powers' influence in Nepal (Garver, 2002, p. 3). In a similar fashion, India believes that any power proximities with Nepal (including China) will jeopardise its security and thus considers its prevention as a necessary security imperative<sup>104</sup> (Behuria et al., 2012).

Thus, for over half a century, India and China's relationships with Nepal have been the corollaries of one another, marking the shift in India's 'buffer' from Tibet to Nepal. India and China's contestation in Nepal have delimited it, placing it in a dilemma in which it is envisioned

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104 The hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC814 in 1999 from Kathmandu, undertaken by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, has reified the Indian scepticism towards Nepal (see Dabhade & Pant, 2004).

as a playground for the power-plays of others, which is often visible in the two powers' competition in a lopsided manner on similar projects, including development aid and infrastructural development in Nepal (see Rajagopalan, 2018). Summarising such dilemmas of small states, Thies et al. (2017) affirm that, due to their tendency to pander to domestic interests at the expense of the foreign policy, small states are left with a limited range of foreign policy options, particularised in nature. Thus, their leverage lies within the essence of how well it can utilise its geopolitical vulnerability without antagonising its neighbours.

Though Nepal has already established a diplomatic relationship with more than 155 nation-states (MOFA, 2021), due to its geographical, cultural and social proximity with India and China, the relationship with them is comparatively broader, more dynamic and even more vulnerable, which has been an important constituent of the foreign policy imperatives of Nepal. As Karki (2013 p. 405) highlights, in light of increasing vulnerability vis-a-vis India and China, management of Nepal's foreign and security challenges has been at the core of its foreign policy. As stated in Chapter 1 and 2, Nepal has adopted a policy of neutrality, non-alignment and non-interference as a pragmatic and eclectic doctrine and an appropriate strategy. This forms a contemporary approach to its foreign policy that espouses nationalism whereby maintaining equidistance with both neighbours has been set as a norm.

This section is divided into different sub-sections to highlight the key stages in the development of Nepal's relationship with India and China. The aim here is not to chart the historical events, but to focus on those that were decisive in the relationship status of Nepal with its neighbours. It is important to point out that the adoption of the policy of equidistance has provided Nepal with a 'region of comfort' that has not only kept it alienated from the strategic rivalry of its neighbours but also helped to maintain its autonomous and independent position. The next section deals with the historical trend of the relationship of Nepal with India, followed by that of China, leading to conclusions about how Nepal has been able to maintain equidistance with both of its neighbours.

#### **4.2.2. Historical trend of Indo-Nepal relationship**

This part discusses the relationship between Nepal and India, categorised mainly into three phases after India's independence: a) Phase I (WWII-1960): Assertiveness/Domination; b) Phase II (1960-1989): Anxiety; and c) Phase III (1990-present): Interference. The discussion commences with the relationship before Indian independence.

## **Before Indian Independence**

During the 19th century, Nepal's geopolitical location had immense economic and political implications for the British Raj's trans-Himalayan trade with Tibet and China and was considered a measure of countenancing possible Russian advances. As mentioned earlier, Nepal's geopolitical location had met the dual objectives of the British Raj: as a vital link in India's northern border and as a support in maintaining British rule in India. Economically, Britain had a near-monopoly over Nepal's trade and foreign relations, resulting in the latter's isolation and retardation in all spheres of activity and thought (Thapa, 1971, p. 81). Accordingly, British-India had followed the policy of isolation and exclusion of foreigners coupled with power politics towards Nepal. Before 1951, Nepal's relationship with India was based on the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli (Britain thus being the first country to make diplomatic relations with Nepal) and the 1923<sup>105</sup> Treaty of Peace and Friendship, concluded with British East-India company and Great Britain, respectively. Nonetheless, the Gorkha connection, discussed in Chapter 3, still stood as a hallmark of strengthening the bilateral relationship between Britain and Nepal.

### **Phase I (WWII-1960): Assertiveness/domination**

Inheriting the British legacy, India initially attempted to follow the British policy towards Nepal, but realising the myopic vision or excessive idealistic structure, it opted for Britain's approach of having a treaty-based relationship with Nepal instead (Dawa, 2001; Rajan, 2018). Accordingly, with the entry of the Chinese army in Tibet, India protested the Chinese action and made a series of defence treaties with its neighbours, like Bhutan (August 1949), Nepal (July 1950) and Sikkim (December 1950; annexed in 1975 in India). Even still, Nepal's relation with India was subject to suspicion due to India's assertive and dominative attitude and practices towards Nepal. This was because, throughout the 1950s, India had followed the strategy of the Himalayan doctrine that considered the small Himalayan states obligatorily under the Indian sphere of influence (Dawa, 2001).

Following the democratic establishment in Nepal that ensued after the internal political instability in 1951 under India's support, the latter enjoyed the leverage to exert its assertive and dominative practices in Nepal. India not only became successful in appointing the Indian personal secretary for the King and involving its representative in the cabinet meetings of

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105 In 1923, Britain and Nepal had signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which was regarded as the first formal acknowledgement by Britain of Nepal as an independent state, recorded in the League of Nations in 1925 (Husain, 1970, p.280).

Nepal, but it also managed to send its troops to even minor internal revolts in Nepal such as the one led by K.I. Singh in 1952. However, the most prominent example was India's installation of its security posts in the region adjoining China during the premiership of M.P. Koirala in Nepal from June 1952 (remained till 1969) (Silwal, 2012), posing a serious challenge to Nepal's equidistance policy and *de facto* stance as a neutral power.

India's assertive attitude is elucidated in various state-level visits and hundreds of letters sent by Indian PM Nehru to then-King Tribhuvan and PM Matrika P. Koirala of Nepal, mainly after 1951 (Sharma, 2018). Those letters conveyed the Indian PM Nehru's suggestions, which ranged from the management of Nepal's internal policies, including its economic expenditures, to a consistent lobby for the coordination of Indo-Nepal defence and foreign affairs in accordance with the 1950 Treaty. It is important to stress that the treaty (see Annex II) neither includes any such agreements nor provisions that confirm any commitments from the Nepalese side.

Equally, India seemed to be conscious of Nepal's diplomatic relations with other states. This was evident in the late 1950s when Nehru ordered the Indian ambassador to Nepal, C.P.N. Singh, to lobby against the opening of the diplomatic missions of China, Afghanistan, Burma and the USSR in Nepal.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, India even alleged such an "exercise of Nepal's independent foreign policy" as the "duly planned attempt to show that Nepal is fully independent" (September 2, 1956, letter). The Indian interference continued during this phase until a new scenario developed, including the inception of an active monarchical regime in Nepal and the Sino-India War in 1962.

## **Phase II (1960-1989): Anxiety**

Tensions in Nepal-India relations escalated when King Mahendra introduced a party-less 'Panchayat' system in Nepal by dismissing the multiparty democracy in 1960. During the Panchayat system, making an overture towards China (as discussed later), Nepal was not only able to initiate economic development but was also able to maintain its policy of neutrality and equidistance effectively. This became evident through its neutral stance during the Sino-

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<sup>106</sup> Amid the increasing Sino-India contention in the 1950s, PM Nehru considered Nepal's diplomatic overtures towards China and other states as a threat to India and its presumed 'sphere of influence'. Accordingly, he not only actively used his diplomatic channels to convince those states, citing various reasons, like Nepal's unwillingness, but also frequently warned Nepal on this.

India War in 1962 and in its successful evacuation of the Indian security posts from Nepal in 1969.

Thus, due to Nepal's active pursuance of its national interest, rather than that of India's—except for a few years in the mid-1960s through the 1970s—Nepal's relations with India were relatively cold and anxious. The Indian discontent so far accumulated ultimately culminated in 1989, during the separate Trade and Transit Treaty renewal (that was initially signed in 1978, to be renewed every five years). At the lapse of the treaty, on 23 March 1989, the Rajiv Gandhi government of India closed 13 of its 15 border points, signalling its acrimonious and strained relation with Nepal (Khadka, 1991). The economic blockade created widespread chaos that was capitalised on by both the pro-democratic forces and India through the dismantling of the Panchayat system in 1990 when India (re) paved its way for intervention in Nepal.

### **Phase III (1990-present): Interference**

With the inception of the democratic system in Nepal in 1990, Indian engagement in the internal affairs of Nepal subsequently heightened. India restored the Status quo ante as of 23 March 1989 with additional modifications (Khadka, 1991). Correspondingly, the new democratic government of Nepal stood back from the various provisions that aligned with Nepal's national interests, like the work permit system for Indians, additional duty charges on Indian goods, purchase of Chinese weapons and informal withdrawal of the Zone of Peace proposal. In addition, India's involvement in the internal conflict in Nepal and the peace agreement in 2005 and 2006 (as discussed in Chapter 3), plus the water resources agreements with Nepal (as discussed in Chapter 5), clearly marked the extent of increasing Indian interference in Nepal.

There were even claims about India's intention to incorporate Nepal within its foreign and defence purview within this period. It was alleged by the ex-dept PM Mr Amik Sherchan in an interview in 2018 that, after abolishing the monarchy in 2008 in Nepal, India had made this informal proposal to the political leaders of Nepal (that did not materialise) (MountainTV, 2018). In a significant manner, India's attitude and practices of interfering in Nepal's internal affairs culminated in 2015 in the form of an economic blockade, which created pathways towards the new form of Nepal's economic, social and political relationship with China.

#### **4.2.3. Historical trend of Sino-Nepal relationship**

To highlight the dimensions of Sino-Nepal interactions, mainly after the 1950s, these dynamics are categorised<sup>107</sup> into four phases: a) Phase I (WWII-1960): Tibetan identity issue; b) Phase II (1960-1989): Infrastructure Development; c) Phase III (1990-2005): Transactional/interest-based relations; and d) Phase IV (2006-present): Post-monarchy. The discussion begins with the historic relationship before WWII.

#### **Historic Relationship before WWII**

Historically, due to its geographical proximity to Tibet, Nepal (via Tibet) has maintained deep cultural, economic, social and political ties with China. Though scholars claim a range of starting dates, dating from the early fifth century (Tenzing, 1982) to the early seventh century (Dhungel, 1999, p.184), there is a consensus that there was a significant increase in Tibet-Nepal commercial relations from around the ninth century. Remarkably, during the Tang dynasty in China and the Lichhavi dynasty in Nepal (around 630-698 AD), Srongbtsan-Sgam-Po became the emperor of Tibet. He married the daughter of the Lichhavi King Amsuvarma, Bhrikuti, who later became the key figure to change the course of Himalayan history by introducing Buddhism to Tibet from Nepal (Koon, 2015).

This largely enhanced the socio-cultural institution and cultural formation and helped to maintain close ties between Tibet and Nepal. During the Malla regime until 1779 (before the formal unification of Nepal), Lhasa was considered a vibrant point for trade and contact points among China, Tibet and Nepal (Acharya, 2015). As a main route of Tibet to the outside world, these practices fulfilled Nepal's domestic needs through the entrepôt trade. Such Nepal-Tibet immediacy flourished until the Chinese takeover of Tibet, notwithstanding some disturbances that ensured the success of the Younghusband mission (of British-India in Tibet in 1903-4), leading to the opening of an alternate (Darjeeling) route, henceforth diminishing the trade with Nepal (Shangderpa, 2003).

From the seventh to the early half of the 14th century, the Nepal-Tibet relationship experienced a phase of disrupted diplomatic communications. In the 13th century, Nepali artist Araniko led a delegation of 80 artisans to Tibet and then to China, where he introduced the

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107 Earlier, Kumar (2011) listed three phases of the Sino-Nepal relationship: a) Phase I (1955-1989) as characterised by infrastructural construction; b) Phase II (1989-1995), featuring the end of Nepal's overdependence on India; and c) Phase III (1995-2011) marked by an aggressive Chinese posture for a weakening Indian hold on Nepal.

trans-Himalayan artistic tradition. Thus, leaving aside frequent disruptions and border disputes, Nepal maintained a harmonious relationship with Tibet.

During the Nepal-Tibet War (1778-1792)—which was initially generated by the border conflict—upon the request of Tibet, China came in to support Tibet. The conflict eventually ended with the signing of the Betrawati Treaty between Nepal and Tibet in 1792, which started the Quinquennial tribute mission from Nepal to China, conducted every 12 years until 1906 (Adhikari, 2010, as cited in Lama, 2017). The treaty initiated formal diplomatic relations between Nepal, Tibet and China that remained a structure for a future relationship until 1854. Later, following the Nepal-Tibet War (1855), the Thapathali Treaty was signed by the two countries under the mediation of China in 1856.

The Thapathali Treaty, espousing the provisions for maintaining mutual ties on trade and commerce and a harmonious relationship, remained the basis of Nepal's relationship with Tibet and China for the next century (Kotcher, 2013). Retrospectively, from the 14th century until 1911, Sino-Nepal relations were active and largely remained influenced by the Tibet factor. For instance, being cautious of the Chinese alignment with Britain in 1912, Nepal even warned the Chinese representative in Lhasa that Nepal would help Tibet attain independence.

Overall, after the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1911, Sino-Nepal relations remained passive and in a standstill position until the Sino-India agreement on trade and intercourse in 1954 (Khadka, 2010). With increasing regional and global connectivity, the Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao, at the first large-scale Asian–African Conference in Bandung in 1955, expressed his will to restore China's relationship with its neighbours and to establish normal relations with Afro-Asian countries, based on the principles of *Panchsheel*, as discussed in Chapter 2. The Chinese urge to diversify its relationships spawned from the Tibet factor and is equally applicable in its relationship with Nepal.

### **Phase I (WWII–1960): Tibetan identity issue**

During this era, scholars argue that China was primarily interested in nullifying the Tibetan anti-Chinese activities in Nepal and controlling the regular flow of Tibetan refugees into Nepal (Kumar, 2011, p. 80). From 1951 until the bilateral agreement with Nepal in 1960, China seemed to be anxious and suspicious of the Tibetan activities, protests and uprising in and outside Tibet, to the extent that it even pursued the politics of appeasement. This was elucidated during the Chinese premier Zhou En Lao's visit to Nepal in 1957 when he referred to the

relationship with Nepal as ‘blood tied’, outrightly rejecting India’s presumption that Nepal was within its own sphere of influence.

At the end of March 1959, following the uprising in the Tibet region<sup>108</sup> that dissolved Tibet and Tibetan social structures, the Dalai Lama, with his followers, fled into exile to India. Then, following pressure from Chinese authorities, Nepal placed various restrictions on travel within the region of 25 miles of the Nepal-China border and began to take a firm stance against any anti-Chinese activity on its soil.<sup>109</sup>

After gaining control over Tibet, China became interested in enhancing and formalising Tibet-Nepal relations; even until 1960, the bilateral trade was mainly between Nepal and Tibet (Muni, 1973, p.70). Thus, to alleviate any possible threats regarding the Chinese position in Tibet via Nepal—and influenced by the desire for lasting peace and close amity—China adopted two policy measures: persuading Nepal to sign a treaty of friendship and constructing a road connecting Kathmandu with Lhasa. Accordingly, China and Nepal signed the PRC-Nepal Agreement on 20 September 1956 to maintain friendly relations and trade intercourse (Lama, 2017).

### **Phase II (1960-1989): Infrastructure development**

This phase was characterised by the inception of the infrastructural and construction projects in Nepal that are considered landmarks not only in terms of economic development but also in nullifying the Indian interference in Nepal that has acted as a cornerstone informing the Chinese perception in Nepal that still persists today. With the inception of the non-party system by King Mahendra in 1960, Nepal’s interest in diversifying its economy and China’s interest in increasing its visible presence in Nepal (to check anti-Chinese activities) effectively intersected, accommodating a harmonious Sino-Nepal interaction. Accordingly, since the 1960s, Nepal has received substantial development aid from China, as evident in the form of infrastructural build-ups, roads and highways, power, import-substituting types of industries and community service centres, which still serve as the backbones of Nepal-China land routes.

The Araniko highway (length: 71 miles; completed in 1960), connecting Kathmandu to Kodari of Tibet, has been a milestone not only in its linkage between Tibet and South Asia in

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108 On 10 March 1959, a revolt erupted in Lhasa for social reform, claiming the lives of appx. 2,000 on the Chinese side and more than 80,000 on the Tibetan side. This incident led the Chinese authority to execute and arrest thousands of monks and destroy monasteries and Temples in Tibet (Jian, 1959).

109 Nepal’s alignment with non-interference in its internal affairs was even acknowledged by Chen Yi, Vice-premier of China in 1962, when he referred to it as significant support for China (Survey of China’s mainland press as cited in Khadka, 1999).



general but also specifically in marking a shift from the traditional Indo-centric economic (and political) relationship of Nepal. As the then-Chinese premier Mao correctly opined during the Nepali delegation visit in 1964, the project holds the potential to change the Indian (hegemonic) attitude towards Nepal<sup>110</sup> (Singh, 2003). Similarly, the Prithvi Highway, connecting Kathmandu with Pokhara and Narayangad-Mugling Road, is another significant project aided by China, which serve as the backbone of the East-West Highway (length: 625 miles), often referred to as the ‘lifeline’ of Nepal.

More importantly, along with the economic ties, the political relations were gaining equal momentum. China invited King Birendra to Tibet, and he became the first foreign head of state to visit, which reinforced the Sino-Nepal economic ties and bilateral tourism and trade. Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng underscored that this visit had historically opened “the direct air passage building an air bridge of China-Nepal friendship over the ‘Roof of the world’” (Rising Nepal, 1973 in Khadka, 1999).

Thus, Chinese aid<sup>111</sup> and projects have largely fostered Nepal’s developmental goals, helped to create job opportunities and increased economic performance, concomitantly decreasing its Indian dependency.<sup>112</sup> In the words of Muni (1992), with the diversification of its political and economic relations, Nepal was able to shift away from a policy of ‘special relationship with India’ to an ‘equal relationship with both China and India’, subsequently reducing the Indian leverage in Nepal. However, the Sino-Nepal economic formation altered with the inception of democracy in 1990.

### **Phase III (1989-2005): Transactional/interest-based relations**

Since 1990, following the democratic transition of Nepal under the support of India, China remained comparatively passive in its affairs with Nepal. Thus, this phase is characterised by

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110 Amid the increased level of Nepal-Tibet (and mainland China) border trade, the highway, ironically, has left Nepal in a disadvantaged position in terms of trade balance. For instance, in 1981, Nepal’s export to China was about US\$ 4 million, which increased to US \$ 5 million in 1989, with a nominal import of US\$ 11 million to US\$ 30 million during the same period (Khadka, 1999).

111 China has had been providing commodities under China-Nepal aid agreements since October 7, 1956. From 1956 till 1989, Chinese aid amounted for around US\$ 13 million for 40 different projects. Such projects included leather, brick and kiln, cement, paper mill and cigarette factories. Further, the Kathmandu trolley bus and various other small scale road projects linking urban and rural roadways were also constructed through the support of China (Fox News, 2005, as cited in Kumar, 2011).

112 However, there are arguments that China had used both trade and aid as strategies to counter the increasing trade presence of US, UK, USSR and India in Nepal. This became apparent when Chinese support also entered the sectors often considered ‘sensitive’ by India. For instance, during the construction of the East-West Highway, China had shown interest in constructing the entire project, which was later built jointly by China, USSR, US, India and Nepal. The case of the Kamala irrigation project is similar: that was initially agreed to be constructed by the Sino-Nepal collaboration, causing India to encourage Nepal to abort it (Khadka, 1999, p.10, 17).

the transactional-based relation between Nepal and China. However, a number of high-level political visits were significant during this phase. There was a special visit by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Nepal (for a few hours) in the late 1990s. Furthermore, China granted about US \$ 5 million to mark the silver jubilee of King Birendra's accession to the throne in 2000 (Adhikari, 2012). In 2001, Chinese defence minister Gen. ChiHao Tian visited Nepal, which was followed by the signing of an agreement between Nepal and China on trade and other matters regarding Tibet. Significantly, this coincided with China's 'Open up the West campaign', focusing on massive economic development in the Tibet region.

In the same year, Chinese PM Zhu Rongji visited Nepal and pledged to assist in constructing a hospital, technical institute and Rasuwa-Syaprubesi road connecting Nepal to Tibet, followed by the visit of the Chinese delegations (Lama, 2017, p.4). During the visit of Chinese delegations in Nepal, their concern for maintaining stability in Tibet and curbing anti-Chinese activities in Nepal was apparent. In 2005, intending to diversify its dependency on India, Nepal made a significant switch in its weapons procurement policy towards China (Ranade, 2013). Amid the developing political spectrum in Nepal by 2005-2006, China keenly watched and moderated its stance on the political parties of Nepal and the pro-democratic forces. There were signals that China was keen to prioritise its policies towards (immediate neighbours like) Nepal through diplomatic and political means.

#### **Phase IV (2006-present): Post-monarchy**

It is important to underline that, since the peace process in 2006, and mainly after the abolishment of the monarchy in 2008, there have been signs that China has increased its engagement in Nepal. This involvement takes various forms, including economic, investment aid, infrastructural development, military assistance, diplomatic exchanges, and cultural and educational initiatives (Nayak, 2017, p.32). The parallel formation of increasing Chinese interest in Nepal and Nepal's reciprocal inclination towards China is often considered to be a strategy of 'encircling India' (Sapkota, 2017). This has left Nepal in a dilemma regarding identifying an empirical and balanced position within Chinese development projects, Nepal's national interest and its neighbour's interest.

Since the Pan Tibetan protests in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)<sup>113</sup> in 2008 (months before the Beijing Olympics), China has become concerned about the spill-over of Tibetan

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113 The 2008 Tibetan protests were a series of riots, protests and demonstrations (inside and outside of Tibet) that initially began in Lhasa and emerged as an annual observance of Tibetan uprising day, claiming hundreds of lives (CTA, 2008).

activities on the exiled Tibetan populations and thus began to exert extensive pressure on Nepal to curb Tibetan refugees' activities. In response, the Nepali authorities, labelling any Tibetan activities as 'anti-Chinese', have begun to exhibit (more) stifling treatment towards Tibetans. Accordingly, several Tibetan functions have been prohibited, including the birthday celebration of the Dalai Lama and the right to vote for their government in exile in Nepal (Lama, 2017). Further, the body of a Tibetan monk who self-immolated during a protest on 13 February 2013, in Kathmandu, was not handed to the Tibetan authorities by Nepal. In a similar fashion, the increased surveillance by both China and Nepal within the border area indicates that, with the growing Chinese state apparatus in Nepal, the latter is indulging in similar practices towards Tibetans to those practised by China in Tibet.

As discussed in the earlier chapters, in response to the Indian economic blockade in 2015, Nepal had signed up to the BRI project.<sup>114</sup> Scholars argue that Nepal's main interest and willingness lies in the Trans-Himalayan Economic corridor, which could connect it with China's highways and railways, enhance economic interaction between India and China, and assist in seeking alternate of the Indian economic corridor (see Chand, 2017). In line with this, China's warm response in allowing Nepal to use four of its seaports and three dry ports and roads to these facilities, together with the bilateral agreement to open six border points (Humla, Korola, Rasuwagadhi,<sup>115</sup> Tatopani, Olangchunggola and Kimangthanka) that could be used to get (nearest) access to those ports, has led scholars to conclude that there is potential for increasing North-South connectivity (Bhanubhakta, 2018). However, as will be discussed, this increasing Chinese influence in the name of economic development is problematic for Nepal and in its relationship with India.

Against the backdrop of its neighbours exhibiting increasing interests and influences, highlighting how power asymmetry has operated within Nepal's relations regarding its neighbours and the policy adoption of Nepal as a form of resistance, it is vital to allow space for Nepal within any relational analysis. Yet this has rarely been addressed by previous IR studies influenced by conventional geopolitics. In this context, the postcolonial approach is

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114 In 2013, China put forward an ambitious plan, OBOR (referred to as One Belt One Road, later referred to as Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI)), intended to revive the ancient Silk Road (dated back to around the fifth century) and undertake massive infrastructural and interconnecting activities to integrate Eurasia as a trading area to strengthen politico-strategic ties (Sapkota, 2016), of which Nepal became signatory on May 12, 2017 (Sapkota, 2017).

115 Rasuwagadhi-Kerung Road has been in operation since 2014. Along with roadways, China and Nepal have agreed to the construction of the Kerung (Gyiron)-Kathmandu railway (80 km) (MyRepublica, 2018), whose funding modality is under discussion at time of writing.

particular important to identify how foreign relations and foreign policy practices are influenced by geopolitical positioning that gives rise to the power relations of domination and subjugation. Thus, by adopting the postcolonial approach in the following sections, I aim to demonstrate how power asymmetry has functioned in Nepal's relationship with India and China and how Nepal has been able to negotiate and counter this asymmetry through the maintenance of the policy of equidistance. The next section analyses the dimensions of the Indian hegemonic interest, followed by the Chinese interests in Nepal, on the basis of the existing power asymmetry.

### **4.3. Renewed Indian interest in Nepal**

Given the various phases of the Indo-Nepal relationship, while various factors, including economic,<sup>116</sup> cultural, security and political factors, have dictated Indian policy, its eagerness to deploy military aid (including army engineers) for constructing projects—even before the development assistance—illustrates the impetus behind its economic interest in Nepal. Evidently, it has entailed different political objectives during different historical junctures.

For instance, in the early 1950s and 1960s, India's aid was strategically motivated to counter US influence, which was later transformed into countering Chinese influence in Nepal; a manifestation of its desire to establish a partial fortification and pave the way for diplomacy. Since the 1990s, by comparison, Indian aid has been focused on grass-root level projects with broad coverage in Nepal (Adhikari, 2008, p.8). Notably, since its umbrella agreement with Nepal in 2003, India can make direct disbursement of a sum of US\$ 0.26 million worth of grants conditional on sending information on them to Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (Sharma, 2013).

It is important to note that Indian aid and trade,<sup>117</sup> contrary to simply being a support to Nepal, have caused wide-scale social, cultural, ideological and—more importantly—political ramifications in Nepal. For instance, the data illustrates that Indian trade, accounting for over two-thirds of Nepal's merchandise trade, about one-third of trade in services, 46% of FDI and almost 100% of petroleum supplies, has significantly lubricated Nepal's economic structure

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116 Indian aid to Nepal began in January 1952. From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, it was the biggest donor, before Japan overtook its position; today, India is still one of the top donors to Nepal (Adhikari, 2014).

117 Notably, since 1951 and 1989, Indian aid has been focussed (comprising 85% of the total funds) on infrastructural projects like roads, airports, irrigation, power and communication (Lama, 1995; Khadka, 1997). From 1951 to 2017, more than 551 large, intermediate and small-scale projects amounting to the US \$ 660 million have been implemented across Nepal (Sigdel, 2018). Of the two most prominent projects constructed by Indian aid, while the Tribhuvan International Airport is still in use, the roadway linking Kathmandu to Raxaul ('Byroad') is in less use due to the poor engineering design and construction of the Prithvi Highway.

(Adhikari, 2014, p.4). Significantly, compared to Nepal's trade deficit with India, Indian aid sounds minuscule. For instance, in 2010-11, Nepal's trade deficit with India was US \$3.09 billion, while in the same fiscal year, Nepal received Indian aid of only US \$ 50.7 million.<sup>118</sup>

In addition, those funds were allocated to high-valued projects, including small-scale projects like drinking water, education and health programmes, concentrated only across the hilly regions, where the (retired) Indian Gorkha soldiers reside (Price, 2005). The hesitancy of India to offer aid to the Far-Western and Mid-Western regions, which are considered to be the poorest regions of Nepal, conspicuously renders the Indian strategic interest behind the economic aid. Accordingly, some scholars argue there is a direct correlation between India's strategic interest and economic aid. For instance, Khadka (1997) claims that though India was initially reluctant about the construction of the East-West project, following China's involvement, it later worked with urgency to complete its (assigned) part. Thus, India's threat perception does not directly arise from Nepal per se, but rather from the possible Chinese advancement to India using the open Indo-Nepal border offered by the 1950 Treaty (see Murthy, 1999).

#### **4.3.1. Indian security concern vis-à-vis China**

For India, the rapidly changing regional political developments in the 1950s and 1960s, including the Tibet occupation and the war with China in 1962, caused a huge shock to its long-held consideration of the Himalayan region as impregnable. Thus, India's policy in the early 1950s was geared towards controlling Nepal's affinity with other states, including China. India's interest in Nepal was to such an extent that, during its negotiation regarding the 1954 Sino-India agreement, it sought explicit Chinese recognition that Nepal lies within its sphere of influence (Dabhade & Pant, 2004, p.35).

After 1959, following the Dalai Lama's entry into India—Nepal being the convenient passage root for the Tibetan refugees to India—and the looming Sino-India border issues, Sino-India relations began to mould Nepal's relationship with China. Specifically, following the Sino-India War in 1962, India became conscious and even apprehensive about any Chinese engagements in Nepal. This was evident during the construction process of the Kathmandu-Lhasa Highway in the late 1950s, when Indian PM Nehru expressed his concern about the

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<sup>118</sup> Source: Department of customs, Online available at: [https://customs.gov.np/storage/files/1/FTS/Annual\\_FTS\\_pdf.pdf](https://customs.gov.np/storage/files/1/FTS/Annual_FTS_pdf.pdf) (12/02/2021).

possible Chinese influences and advancements in Nepal<sup>119</sup> (Dabhade & Pant, 2004). In response, then-King Mahendra even stated that “Communism doesn’t travel to Nepal in a taxi” (Chitrakar, 2019). As such, India’s concerns about Nepal, made fraught by its security interest, were checked by Nepal through its overtures to China. Thus, it can be affirmed that partly it was the Indian concern about increasing Sino-Nepal ties that made India conscious of the sentiment of Nepal, when it agreed to withdraw its Military Liaison Group and the military checkpoints from Nepal in 1969.

Regarding the Gorkha soldiers, India and Nepal agreed to set up recruitment camps and Indian Soldier boards/pension camps (currently numbered as 22) in Nepal to be operated under the Defence Wing, Embassy of India (MyRepublica, 2017). However, India’s proposal to increase its pension camps in Nepal, including in the strategically significant Jitgadhi region,<sup>120</sup> has denied Nepal space to testify that the proposal does not contain any security interests. This reflects the Indian security concerns in Nepal and its tendency to view its relationship with Nepal mainly through the ‘Sino-phobic’ aperture, compared to Nepal’s bilateral view of the Indo-Nepal relationship, obscuring further meaningful interactions. Accordingly, India intends to bind Nepal within a framework that links economic and security provisions (to develop soft economic power to meet its security needs) that it believes is offered by the 1950 Treaty.

#### **4.3.2. The controversies of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship**

Due to its controversial provisions and protocols, Nepal considers the 1950 Treaty as an expansion of the 1923 Treaty that sustains the British legacy, serving as a tool to attain the Indian security objectives in Nepal. Thus, though the treaty provided Nepal with relief from 104 years of Rana oligarchy, the controversial provisions have limited the treaty, whereby Nepal’s landlocked position and trade dependency (with India) have been used as a bargaining position by India. Despite this, there are foreign policy narratives inside both Nepal (see Baral, 2012) and India (see Nayak, 2014) that argue that the revision of the treaty risks opening a Pandora’s box that could threaten the norms of the special relationship.

Unsurprisingly, these discourses feed the interests of India in objectivising Nepal and micromanaging its internal affairs; a situation that has been identified and even criticised by a

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<sup>119</sup> In the earlier 60s, remarking on the increasing Sino-Nepal engagement, then Indian ambassador to Nepal, Mr. M.K. Rasgotra had even warned Nepal, “if Nepal wished a closer relationship with China, India would not object but it could not then expect the past special relationship to continue unchanged” (Mulmi, 2019).

<sup>120</sup> Notably, it was the Jitgadhi region where the Nepalese army defeated the British-Indian army, leading to the formal inauguration of the Anglo-Nepal War in 1814.

circle of predominantly Nepalese scholars such as Subedi (2005), Baral (1986), Basnet (2013) and Koirala (2017) and even Indian scholars like Sikri (2009). In fact, Nepal's changing regional and international position, including its pursuance of diversified economic and diplomatic relationships, largely reflect the necessity for the revision of the 1950 Treaty. However, as discussed in Chapter 3 (and also in Chapter 6), India's reluctance to find a point of cooperation exemplifies its intention to sustain its hegemonic position over Nepal. Overall, in both cases—India's security concern regarding China and its tendency of maintain the 1950 Treaty—demonstrate how Indian foreign policy narratives have been fraught with the neo-colonial tendencies of domination and subjugation that marginalise Nepal.

#### **4.4. Chinese interest in Nepal**

While India has been ignorant or even critical of Nepal's foreign policy approach of remaining neutral and non-aligned, due to its understanding of Nepal as lying within its sphere of influence, on the other hand, China followed a modest policy towards Nepal until 2008, as shaped by the specific strategic, political and economic components of that relation. In the conundrum of its search for the most favourable political system and institutions in Nepal, China figured that the monarchy could best serve its interests. Accordingly, China adopted two policy measures: it supported Nepal during phases of uneasy Indo-Nepal relations and reconciled with the royal regime (Atique, 1983).

Historically, Nepal's relationship with China forms a part of the latter's pursuance of status as a regional and global leader. Relations between India and China were warm during the mid-1950s, but deteriorated by the late-1950s, ultimately culminating in the Sino-India War in 1962. Nepal's frustration towards Indian hegemony and the Chinese's increasing enmity towards India intersected in the form of Sino-Nepal Agreement in 1960. As such, Chinese aid, similar to Indian, is not free from any agenda. For example, China's initiation of construction of Kathmandu-Lhasa as a strategic road<sup>121</sup> and its increasing infrastructural development assistance, reflects Chinese concerns about localised economic aid and infrastructural construction rather than about the national politics of Nepal (see Murton et al. 2016). Such projects were intended to meet its strategic objectives of accessing the Indian economy via Nepal, and accordingly, to check the Indian presence in Nepal.

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<sup>121</sup> The construction of the Kathmandu-Lhasa Road marks a phase during which Nepal overcame its dependency on and consensus with India.

The political aim of China's foreign policy lays the foundation upon which its ideological and regional interest in Nepal is intended to counter Indian influence. Similarly, the economic component's offshoots include the intention of using trade as an apparatus of foreign policy by furthering the economic links between China and Tibet and simultaneously maintaining the traditional Tibet-Nepal trade linkages (Khadka, 1997). The synopsis of the history of Sino-Nepal relationship suggests that their ties have primarily been shaped by the Tibet affair and US and Indian interests in Nepal.

#### **4.4.1. Tibet**

Nepal's formal contact with China did not emerge through Tibet per se but rather through China's desire for Buddhist texts, artefacts and codes. External actors like Britain had conceptualised Tibet as a critical region of imperial importance and a commercial prize that provided lucrative opportunities in the Western Chinese markets (Upadhaya, 2012, p.18). Whereas Nepal, due to its geographical attributes, was considered one of the safest transit routes and the home to thousands of Tibetan refugees until recent decades. However, though Nepal has recognised and registered several Tibetans crossing the border as refugees since 1959, with the increased Chinese pressure and the unstable political climate in Nepal since 1989, it has stopped granting permanent settlement status to Tibetans, concomitantly curtailing the specially granted privileges. Despite this, Nepal has still been permitting Tibetans to enter on their way to India, based on an informal agreement and without seriously antagonising China (Shen, 2012).

However, in recent decades, with the increasingly unstable political condition in Nepal, including the dismantling of the monarchical system, it seems that China has become sceptical towards Nepal. Events such as the Nangpa La<sup>122</sup> shooting incident in 2006, the Tibet uprising in 2008 and the increasing foreign presence in Nepal has led China to be more assertive towards Nepal regarding the Tibetan populations in Nepal. This has had a direct impact upon the annual Tibetan exile number entering Nepal, which has dropped severely to just a few hundred. In addition, following Chinese pressure, in 2008 Nepal signed a security and intelligence-sharing agreement with China that is unfavourable to the Tibetans.

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122 The Nangpa La shooting incident occurred on Sept. 30, 2006, when a group of unarmed Tibetan refugees—attempting to flee Tibet via Nangpa La Pass—were fired by the Chinese border guards, resulting in the deaths of several Tibetans. This incident, together with the 2008 Tibet uprising, increased historical pressure from China (for strictly curbing Tibetan activities) and the US (to maintain humanitarian norms) in Nepal in terms of Tibetan refugees (Ranade, 2013).



This is an indication that China has steadily been increasing its involvement in Nepal, which is even visible in the form of various training programmes for Nepali police border guards and China study centres (Economic times, 2010 as cited in Lama, 2017) to curb Tibetan activities in Nepal and to portray its positive image. Despite China's controversial position on human rights violations of Tibetans, Nepal has remained adherent to its 'One China' policy, silencing the voice of Tibetans. This illustrates the Chinese ability to influence Nepal's policy, whereby the increasing pace of its micro-management in Nepal has come at the expense of the sentiment of Nepal and Nepali, as has been apparent on several fronts of its relationship with Nepal.

#### **4.4.2. Security Interest (US, Russia and India)**

Notably, Nepal's geopolitical positioning (between India and China) has been an equally central attraction to other external actors such as the US and EU, mainly in light of increasing Chinese influence. Historically, after WWII, Chinese foreign policy in Nepal was proportional to the US and the Soviet Union (USSR) interests and influences in Nepal that were primarily intended to counter them. In the early 1960s, however, with the widening ideological disputes, competition to intervene in vulnerable developing countries largely dictated China's (and also the USSR's) policy. By the early 1970s, the rapprochement in Sino-US relations and the decreasing rate of US interest in Nepal was corollary to a subsequent decline in Chinese interest in Nepal (Khadka, 1999). In this way, the Chinese perception of USSR aid and foreign policy objectives vis-à-vis India and other third world countries had a direct bearing on its view of Soviet policy in Nepal.

Moreover, the increasing EU and US concerns and activities alongside the border region of Nepal (with both India and China) have largely increased China's attitudes to Nepal (Wang et al., 2015). The Chinese scepticism about US engagement in Nepal has become reified since the Khampa rebellion, backed by the US, fought for the independence of Tibet in the late 1960s and 1970s (Lama, 2017). China raised serious concerns with the US and Nepal over the establishment of a base by the Khampa rebels in the Mustang region (near the Sino-Nepal border). Later, against the backdrop of rapprochements between the US and China due to the latter's halting of financial aid from the CIA to Khampa during US president Nixon's visit to China in 1972, Nepal eventually ended the rebellion in 1974.<sup>123</sup> Thus, the Tibet factor has

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123 Tom Grunfeld has alleged the US has a double role in the case of Tibet because, officially, it recognises Tibet as an inseparable part of China, yet, in contrast, it encourages the campaigns for Tibet independence (Bajoria, 2008).

played a crucial role in Nepal's relationship with China and US albeit marked by their differing interests. For instance, the US emphasises the strict implementation of a 'gentleman's agreement',<sup>124</sup> while China emphasises the strict implementation of the 'One China' policy.

In the decades following 9/11, the US has changed its regional and global policy to safeguard its national interest and security, specifically vis-à-vis authoritarian states like China (and USSR). The US has designed various global alliances and strategic ventures, the most prominent being the Indo-Pacific Strategy—intended to encircle China (and Russia)—of which India is a part.<sup>125</sup> As a part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, US has designed a project, the Millennium Challenge Corporation<sup>126</sup> (MCC), that was ratified by the parliament of Nepal on 27 February 2022.<sup>127</sup>

This is a concern for both Nepal and China because, earlier, the US had unilaterally included Nepal as a 'partner country'<sup>128</sup> of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, which runs contrary to Nepal's non-aligned and neutral foreign policy. In this context, the Nepali government has not only opted for the higher opportunity cost<sup>129</sup> but also heightened the level of Chinese concern about Nepal. The Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece, the *Global Times*, published an article<sup>130</sup> on the same day of the ratification of MCC cautioning opposition against Chinese interests, stating:

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124 This 'gentleman's agreement' is an informal, unwritten agreement of Nepal that ensures the human rights of Tibetans in Nepal. In line with this, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has agreed to permit the safe passage of Tibetan refugees from Tibet to India.

125 In February 2018, realising its decreasing global influence with the looming presence of (rising) China, North Korea and Russia, the US approved a strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific that provided overarching strategic guidance for implementing the 2017 National Security Strategy within the region adjoining China. Accordingly, the US has developed a bilateral alliance system to fill the gap in regional security cooperation, with India, Japan and Australia as the core partners, often referred to as the Quad (Source: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF> (10/01/2021)).

126 US officials have already admitted that the Corporation is part of their country's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/01/17/us-embassy-attempts-to-clear-the-air-on-mcc> (01/01/2021). \ Initially agreed by Nepal in 2017, the MCC is a US \$500 million grant for five years, to which Nepal ought to finance US\$130 million as designated for infrastructural development, of which a major share (almost 80%) of the proposed cost is allocated to a 400KV electricity transmission line running through Kathmandu-Hetauda-Butwal (Source: <https://www.mcc.gov/where-we-work/program/nepal-compact> (01/02/2021)).

127 Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/27/nepal-passes-contentious-us-grant-amid-protests>.

128 Source: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf> (01/01/2021).

129 There are data about the cost-effectiveness of the transmission project in the case of it being constructed solely by Nepal. Source: [https://www.nea.org.np/admin/assets/uploads/annual\\_publications/Grid\\_2076.pdf](https://www.nea.org.np/admin/assets/uploads/annual_publications/Grid_2076.pdf).

130 Online available: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1253492.shtml>

...the ratification of the MCC pact between the US and Nepal doesn't necessarily mean that Nepal will be on a fast track for social development, but it does mean that the South Asian nation will face more risks of becoming a front of potential geopolitical tensions.

This, together with the increasing Sino-India border contention and the controversial positioning of India in Tibet affairs, has risked Nepal becoming the playground for geopolitical power-plays. Due to the Chinese support in response to the hardships in Nepal in 2015,<sup>131</sup> BRI has been considered as a marker in Nepal's economic diversification, linkages and developments (see Sapkota, 2016, 17, Shrestha, 2021).

However, the nature of the BRI,<sup>132</sup> conceptualised as grand projects of China, marks a shift in Chinese policy from the Tibetan and Indian issues towards a proactive means of engendering its broader vision of enclosing South Asian (and even wider) strategy to position China at the centre of international politics. Moreover, the significance of the BRI for Sino-Nepal relationships has been explained in a selective manner through the Chinese government-controlled institutions and media like the *Global Times*<sup>133</sup> and *China Daily*.<sup>134</sup> These and many other articles represent the Sino-centric discourses curated to build a positive image of China, portray China as a benign neighbour to Nepal and argue for this importance of the Sino-Nepal relationship in making a new regional order marked by the latter's consent over the former's terms and conditions that side-line India.

However, Chinese interest in Nepal appears to be moving beyond the economic sphere, as evident through the increasing number of China study centres in Nepal (see Dahal, 2018). The possibility that those institutions may have a political agenda to portray a kinder and more benevolent image of China cannot be ignored. This is a potential use of soft power, a legitimate and non-aggressive foreign policy that helps to manipulate a state's political agendas. Thus, akin to Indian foreign policy narratives, Chinese narratives tend to give exclusive focus to its security concerns, marginalising the sentiment of Nepal(i). They both share a common theme, in that their regional influence ought to be prioritised but at the cost of the neighbouring small states like Nepal, which resonates with the neo-colonial attitude. Thus, against such a backdrop,

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131 Chinese support during the earthquake in Nepal in 2015 has been praised as one of the greatest ever humanitarian efforts (on foreign soil). That was followed during the Indian economic blockade in the same year in its effort to address the 'energy emergency' in Nepal (see Khatri, 2015).

132 Out of the nine identified projects under BRI (see Annex 4), the Kerung-Kathmandu railway (170 km), is a much sought-after development, whose pre-feasibility study has already been completed.

133 Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201907/1158906.shtml>

134 Source: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201809/01/WS5b89da68a310add14f388fae.html>

the challenge for Nepal has been to negotiate effectively to maintain its policy of equidistance vis-à-vis both neighbours.

#### **4.5. Nepal's negotiation with India and China**

The sustaining of unquestionable and unverified knowledge regarding a state's geopolitical position, strength and interests is the product of the specific foreign policy stance towards specific countries (Flint, 2006). In light of the discussion of the chronology of the relations' evolution above, it is apparent that the ideological directives of Nepal's foreign policy are embedded within its desire to maintain its geographical integrity, sovereignty, national interest and security, non-alignment, neutrality and a diplomatic balance<sup>135</sup> between India and China. Amid the dominance of its neighbours (mainly India), the state actors of Nepal realised the significance of the policy of equidistance as a viable policy imperative for Nepal. Thus, this section highlights how Nepal has been able to maintain equidistance with both of its neighbours with a focus on the norms of representation and resistance.

Historically, since the unification (except in the 17th and 18th centuries), Nepal has employed the policy of defensive resistance (active defence or offensive foreign policy) and economic mercantilism against threats from both British-India and China (Atique, 1983). Such emphasis on the geography (settings) and economy later changed to a defensive one after the Sugauli Treaty in 1816. After that, Britain had a monopoly on the diplomatic relationship with Nepal, whereby Britain was exclusively allowed to maintain a Residency in Kathmandu till 1934 with the exchange of ambassadors (MacAlister, 1971, p.662). As mentioned in earlier chapters, the Rana regime's pro-British approach left Nepal isolated from the international arena, limiting its position as an entrepôt, which continued for some time even after the independence of India. Correspondingly, Nepal's relationship with China was at a standstill after 1913 and did not normalise until 1954. Against this backdrop, to make meaningful gains in its geopolitical positioning, Nepal adopted the policy of avoiding conflicts and reflecting its strong interest in policy autonomy through the diversification of its dependence.

Notably, since the inception of the democratic system in Nepal in 1951, it began to receive foreign aid, which was then analogous to modernisation and development,<sup>136</sup> even

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135 The strategy of equidistance vis-à-vis India and China has been the main underpinning of Nepal's foreign policy (Singh & Crow, 2018).

136 Since introducing the first five-year plan in 1956, the political leaders of Nepal have prioritised projects that strengthen its capability and right to govern, with foreign-aid dependent infrastructural development as a pathway for economic development (see MOPIT, 2016, EKantipur, 2016).

before the conceptualisation of economic development in the first five-year plan in 1956 (Pandey, 2011, p.67). India, with its proximity to the political parties of Nepal, began to offer aid but showed a tendency to link development aid, through gaps in the planning process and modalities, with its political interests, which led to some uneasy Indo-Nepal relations, often expressed in the form of anti-India sentiment in Nepal (Adhikari, 2014).

As such, foreign aid's implication for the development policy and hegemonic establishment of Nepal's neighbours has been subject to resistance by the nation through the maintenance of the policy of equidistance, out of many policies options. In this context, though the framing that Nepal lies between India and China is geopolitically correct, such imaginary structures, as underlined in Chapter 3, have been problematic in terms of the motives and effects that are naturalised through the external discourses this framing imposes.

Nepal's propensity towards the policy of equidistance has been manifested in many ways, perhaps more strikingly so since the Treaty of 1960, when after a decade of the establishment of its formal relationship with India, it established a formal relationship with China, signalling a policy of its diplomatic balancing. This sense of equidistance had been highlighted by the rulers of Nepal, even before the agreement with China, as King Mahendra stated in 1959 during the Tibet movement:

Nepal is a test case as to whether a small country situated between two big countries (India and China) can in the realities of power relations in the mid-twentieth century would preserve its independence, freedom and sovereignty in its own way and manner (Kant, 1971 in Chand, 2018).

Notably, mainly after 1960, Nepal maintained its non-aligned policy by effectively disengaging its neighbours in its internal affairs, with occasional friction due to the lack of balance between Nepal's rational pursuit of independence and the neighbours' security interests. 1960 saw the introduction of the Panchayat system, which was met with varied responses from both India and China: India considered the royal takeover as a 'set back to democracy', whereas China remained silent (Atique, 1983, p. 96). However, despite its silence, the increase in Chinese economic aid to Nepal indicated its support for the royals, which later forced India to comply with the royal control as well (until the discord in 1989), favouring Nepal to maintain the policy of equidistance.

Amid the increasing Sino-India contention, culminating in the 1962 war, their strained relationship was clearly reflected in their relationships with Nepal, which acted as an acid test

for Nepal's (true) maintenance of a policy of equidistance. With the seismic effect rippling through the looming shocks of the war, Nepal met with various forms of expectations from India and China: India had expected military support<sup>137</sup> from Nepal that China was apprehensive about.

Indian foreign policy narratives analysed Nepal's stance on the 1962 war through a realist India-centric perspective, exhibiting how India's interests were hampered, and subsequently negating the suffering of Nepal amid the war between its neighbours, including the public concern during the conflict (with its Gorkha soldiers fighting) and in the aftermath (regarding border encroachment). Chinese appreciation of Nepal's neutrality, on the other hand, was exhibited in the increasing Chinese aid that marked it as a new economic and political partner for Nepal in the post-war period, correspondingly side-lining the (advancing) Indian presence in the nation. Retrospectively, it became evident that China had linked the 'India factor' in its relationship with Nepal, as expressed by the Chinese vice premier Chen Yi: "any power attack to Nepal, the Chinese government and people together with all other countries and people who maintain justice would forever stand in Nepal's side" (Khadka, 1999, p. 8).

The victory of China in the 1962 war and Nepal's stance compelled India to (re) think the purview of its sphere of influence (that included Nepal). That is to say, Nepal acquired a 'space of accommodation' from the Indian hegemony that provided will to the then-rulers to ask for the unconditional withdrawal of the Indian security posts and liaison groups in 1969.<sup>138</sup> Here, it was India's recognition of Nepal's equidistance policy that allowed it finally to agree to withdraw its armies from Nepal's territories (except from the Kalapani region) on 20 April 1969 (Silwal, 2012) that had been stationed there as a manifestation of neo-colonial practices. Moreover, the withdrawal can be considered a reflection of the understanding of the prevailing geopolitical sensitivity and a display of the systematic and coherent realisation of the 'agency' of Nepal by its rulers at the time (King Mahendra and his associates, like PM

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137 India believed that Nepal was bound by the 1950 treaty to support it, so Nepal's neutral stance led it to impose an economic blockade in 1962 (Atquit, 1983, p. 100). India's discontent led to its dismissal of its territorial encroachment in Nepal, as discussed in chapter 6.

138 In an interview published in *The Rising Nepal* on June 25, 1969, Nepal's PM Kirtinidhi Bista questioned the presence of Indian army posts in Nepal. The government stayed firm in its stance that, due to India's unilateral move in the war without consulting Nepal, the commitments regarding the mutual security based on the 1950 treaty had thus fallen into disuse and were no longer binding on either party (Cowan, 2015).

Bista<sup>139</sup>). Needless to refer, this was a cause for self-congratulation for Nepal and an illustration of the privilege the maintenance of an appropriate foreign policy like equidistance could offer a small state.

The rapidly changing regional political climate in the 1970s, including the partition of Pakistan, emergence of Bangladesh and the annexation of Sikkim by India left a profound implication in Nepal's internal and external policy. Those events led Nepal to reconsider its policy vis-à-vis China and India (Atquit, 1983, p. 103), causing it to design and adopt a counter-hegemonic strategy to maintain a viable distance from both neighbours. Accordingly, Nepal boldly criticised the Sikkim annexation, alleging the Indian action as an intervention to the 'right to exist' norms of the small states, followed by the proposal of the 'zone of peace' in 1975 (as discussed in Chapter 2).

During this period, the 'Indo-phobic' narratives were the driving factor in the relationship of Nepal with both India and China, nurtured by its overwhelming (economic) dependency on India. Accordingly, realising the diversification of trade and other regimes, affairs, or dealings as a prerequisite for reducing this dependency, Nepal began to buy anti-aircraft guns, missiles, assault rifles and other weapons from China. However, India saw this as a challenge to its hegemony and, reflecting its neo-colonial practices, imposed an economic blockade in 1989 in Nepal. In the meantime, there were increasing calls for and protests regarding the inception of the democratic system in Nepal. India, by favouring the pro-democratic forces in Nepal, gave two options to then-King Birendra: reinstate democracy or address Indian defence and security interests (Khadka, 1991, p.22). Notably, King Birendra favoured the former option to prevent the norms of equidistance—that is, not aligning with India—from getting disfigured.<sup>140</sup>

Lately, South-Asian regional geopolitics seem to be taking a new path of increasing connectivity, as characterised by India in the form of its 'neighbourhood first policy' and China in the form of BRI, thus marking an overall regional shift from 'isolation' towards 'connectivity'. Framed by Indian PM Narendra Modi, the 'neighbourhood first' policy exhibits India's commitment to prioritising neighbours and economic integration to gain their strategic confidence (Chand, 2017). However, on the contrary, notable incidents like the economic

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139 PM K. Bista made a statement in June 1969 affirming that, "It is not possible for Nepal to compromise its sovereignty or accept what may be called limited sovereignty for India's so-called security" (Khanal, 2019, p. 99).

140 Some scholars like Baral (2018a) argue that mainly, after 1990s policy of equi-proximity was adopted to justify the intimacy and balanced form of relationship with both neighbours.

blockade (in Nepal) and border disputes with Nepal have posed a question over Indian intentions in Nepal. In a way, these events have primarily undone the strategic gains of India in Nepal, heightened anti-India sentiment, disconnected India from its neighbours and derailed the Modi governments ‘neighbourhood first’ policy, thus effectively denoting a significant departure in relation to the Indo-Nepal relationship. Moreover, such activities of India have impelled Nepal to realise the importance of economic diversification to subsidise India’s significant share; that is, the significance of equidistance in terms of the economic milieu.

As mentioned earlier, there is a narrative that the Chinese<sup>141</sup> interest in economic cooperation and infrastructural development is compatible with Nepal’s vision of development, equally addressing the security concern.<sup>142</sup> Nepal has pursued economic linkages with China, as exhibited by the signing of the Sino-Nepal Agreement of Trade and Transit in 2016 and BRI in 2017. Nepal’s keenness to diversify its economic and diplomatic linkage, including increased Chinese assistance in infrastructural projects, shifts the centre of gravity away from the hitherto Indo-centric dimension, with implications for its intention to maintain a balanced form of relationship with both neighbours, and the increased agency of Nepal itself.

However, as mentioned earlier, BRI is eulogized as a milestone for Nepal’s access to transport and transit facilities that could enhance its economic advancement through economic linkages with China and its geopolitical dimension of regionalism. While the benefits and costs of BRI have been a subject of continuous debate, the primary concern has been about the lack of studies regarding the possible goods market and its geographical focus and linkages exclusively privileging the northern region of Nepal. As such, it is not surprising that frequent protests have been observed in the southern region, including a recent one led by the Loktantirk Socialist Party, who consider themselves excluded in the imagined new form of Sino-Nepal relationship.

These protests stem from the narratives that claim that with the implementation of BRI, there are threats of unsustainable development in Nepal, Chinese debt, Nepal’s increased dependency on China, which could provide leverage China to gain control over strategic

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141 In 2017, China donated more than \$ 8 billion in investment in Nepal, overtaking India as the biggest donor three years ago (Rajagopalan, 2018).

142 Nepal seeks to attain the vision of security and shared prosperity via development through an assemblage of new and ongoing projects as invested by China (including the hydropower and transportation infrastructure) (MOF, 2016). Scholars (like Murton et al. 2016) argue that the allocation of \$1.9 billion amount to construct railroad project to Tibet-Nepal border planned to extend to Kathmandu, inauguration of Kyirong- Rasuwa highway and Rasuwagadhi border crossing signals new course in Sino-Nepal trade relations and signifies Nepal’s potentiality of becoming ‘transit’ trade route between India and China. In the words of Murton et al. (2016), this indicates the Chinese shift from ‘Going West’ campaign (*xibu da kaifa*) into ‘going out’ strategy.



sectors in Nepal significant for its security, including territorial encroachments (see Shrestha, 2021; Kaul, 2022). This largely reflects a fear over the extension of Chinese use of economic imperatives to advance its interests at the expense of countries like Nepal, whereby the colonial norms of othering are seemingly embedded in China's policy approaches. Thus, while there is a great interest in BRI's economic impact and associated issues, it cannot be ignored that BRI can be another tool of hegemony, risking Chinese economic aid to Nepal being used as an excuse for its political intervention there, which has been subject to little resistance. Notably, Nepali authorities and intellectuals seem to be in a dilemma about furthering the (BRI) project, akin to MCC,<sup>143</sup> which has debilitated Nepal's effort to come up with a unified approach.

In addition, Nepal's pursuance of infrastructural development also intersects with the Chinese concern about its state security and control over anti-Chinese and Tibetan activities, which comprise some of the latter's political concern in Nepal. This development agenda has been underwritten by the notions of security (mainly energy for Nepal) and Tibetan concern for hydropower and trade, which have been perceived as a viable avenue for addressing the common interests (Sharma, 2014). These constituents collectively produce a complex equation of power, which becomes an effective expression of Sino-Nepal relations, where China remains dominant, as evident in the Chinese president's statement in 2019 during his visit to Nepal. In response, Nepal has had to frequently reassure China about its independent foreign policy based on neutrality and non-alignment that tends to annihilate any activities against its neighbours (see Ranade, 2013).

In recent years, there have been increasing signals indicating that both China and India are supportive of Nepal's relationship with other states, even in terms of Nepal's important if not large role in promoting tri-lateral trade partnerships, which could substantially contribute to regional peace, stability and development. For instance, during Chinese Prime minister M. Wen's visit to Nepal in 2012, Chinese leaders appreciated Nepal's warm and friendly ties with India (Raja Mohan, 2012 as cited in Schmidt & Thapa, 2012). In the same year, during Nepal's deputy prime minister. M. Bijay. K. Gachhadar's visit to India, Indian PM Manmohan Singh positively expressed Nepal's ties with China (Giri and Acharya, 2012 as cited in Schmidt and Thapa, 2012). More importantly, in January 2013, there was a tri-lateral meeting among Nepal-

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143 Notably, as a top-down approach and a pre-emptive foreign policy, MCC reflects that US values and rules are the most desirable and just in the world, which need to be codified in the South, thus allowing no room for non-alignment with the US's war on terrorism, whereby others are considered as passive and incapacitated. Thus, the gap lies within Nepal's endeavour for an honest assessment of finding a meeting point that addresses its developmental needs and foreign policy, equally frustrating anti-Chinese activities in Nepal.

China-India to enhance tri-lateral cooperation focusing on the transboundary sectors like energy and power trade agreements aimed at the free trade of electricity with the help of regional grid connections (Kotcher, 2013).

However, the increasingly changing regional (and global) geopolitical climate, including the Sino-India contentions, have crafted a different regional geopolitical formation. Following India and China's race to become the main regional power, compared to the colonial period of integration, regional politics has been prominently featured fragmentation towards 'disconnectivity' as the default state affairs. Therefore, for both India and China, the theme of 'connectivity' shares a similarity that promotes economic, cultural and political presence in Nepal as a pre-emptive measure to side-line the influence of the other, which is intended to resuscitate their historical centrality as a civilisational power. This has largely changed the Himalayan region's geopolitical course, turning the bilateral interaction into an inescapable tri-lateral interaction, positioning small states at the receiving end. While Nepal needs a sustainable plan for its economic future, the pinning of hopes on either China or India is problematic as that denies its agency.

In this context, the extent of the challenge for Nepal depends on the way it can negotiate with its neighbours to resist their hegemonic exercise, simultaneously maintaining the equidistance policy with them, of which the recent overture towards China forms a part. However, not surprisingly, Nepal's overtures towards China have been a subject of criticism in India. Indian scholars like Jaiswal (2011) have condemned Nepal for frequently playing the 'China card' at the expense of India.<sup>144</sup> However, as will also be discussed in Chapter 6, such appropriation of phrases like 'China card',<sup>145</sup> rather than valid, are instead an imaginative production that signifies Nepal's approach towards the 'Red line' as set by India, denouncing any forms of Sino-Nepal engagements. In Nepal, too, such terminologies have been refuted frequently, as shown by Nepal's then-PM Khadga P. Oli's statement in the parliament of Nepal in June 2018 that, "Nepal is playing neither 'China card' nor 'India card' against any of its

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144 Scholars like Singh & Shah (2018, p. 50) have argued that since the Oli government, Nepal's balancing policy appeared to be shifted "with a greater tilt towards China", whereby China began to increase its economic, political and strategic engagement in Nepal.

145 Following this spirit, Indian scholars such as Malik (2001, p. 88) have even recounted the victory of the Indian supported democratic movement in Nepal in 1990 and its acceptance of Indian terms and conditions as a significant blow to Chinese influence in Nepal.

neighbours and the plans, projects will be based on our national interests”<sup>146</sup> (Power News TV, 2018).

Nevertheless, Nepal’s neutral stance in the Doklam stand-off in 2017 (discussed in Chapter 6) is a recent testament that the maintenance of equidistance has been the *modus operandi* of Nepal’s foreign policy. Moreover, Nepal’s desire to maintain equidistance was equally evident when PM Oli agreed with India to connect Indian rail to Nepal. During the state visit of India, in correspondence to the railway linkage project through BRI, Prime Minister Oli and Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed on railway linkages (Joint Statement, Nepal and India, 12 May 2018). Moreover, despite a close military-to-military relationship (both military heads are honoured as military heads), Nepal has always rejected the establishment of military bases or joint exercises with Indian troops (Singh, 2009 in Singh & Shah, 2018). Equally, Nepal’s continued pursuance of a review of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship reveals its impulse toward the discursive rejection of its alignment with the Indian hegemonic project.

Notwithstanding internal discontent<sup>147</sup> and frequent unevenness in its relationship with its neighbours amid their increasing influences, Nepal has made efforts to prioritise its neighbours without antagonising them through the policy of equidistance, as guided by its interest of sovereignty preservation. As Rajagopalan (2018) affirms, despite the changes in the internal politics and regional geopolitical dynamics, concomitantly, there have been no significant changes in Nepal’s foreign policy, as the perseverance of national interest has been at its core.

Here, it is relevant to refer to Khanal (2019, p. 100), who states that the adoption of the balance relationship has been a geopolitical urgency that is about the relative rather than the absolute balance that was understood as equidistance and later as equal proximity.

Nepal’s foreign policy has therefore been co-constructed due to the set of texts that provides a platform through which Nepal’s relationship with India and China is provided a voice. This means on the one hand, it emphasises the neighbours’ dominant role with regard to

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146 PM Oli gave a speech on foreign policy introducing ‘Neighbourhood Policy’ featuring balanced form of relationship with both neighbours. Here, balancing does not mean to form an alliance, as in realist thought, but to maintain equidistance with both neighbours.

147 For instance, there are some scholars who argue that equidistance is a fantasy, like Paudyal (2017), who suggests that Nepal needs to avoid playing the ‘equidistance game’. Unsurprisingly, such narratives lack any in depth analysis and the claim itself seems to be swayed by emotion rather than facts and lack any concrete way ahead.

their relations with Nepal, whereas on the other, it highlights how the discourses in foreign policy enable the production of a narrative that favours the adoption of a policy that reflects the geopolitical disposition of Nepal.

Thus, the case of Nepal's relationship with India and China is important in view of how the latter(s) share common attributes featuring neo-colonial political and economic practices in their race to become a regional power in Nepal. Yet, as noted earlier, the Indian and Chinese foreign policy discourses, influenced by mainstream IR, have exclusively prioritised their security interests while characterising Nepal as vulnerable to their power-plays, thus rationalising their paternal geopolitics. This calls for a postcolonial approach to unearth the multiple aspects that surround Nepal's foreign policy and to take into account the existing power asymmetry and representational practices, while not being oblivious to the resistance of Nepal in order to explain away the asymmetry that continues to shape Nepal's relationship vis-à-vis its neighbours.

Here, my analysis moves away from asking why a particular foreign policy is adopted, which frames the issue from the perspective of the pursuance of (unilateral) interest, towards asking how policy makers adopt and maintain certain policy decisions to make such decisions possible for hitherto marginalised voices. Here, Nepal's policy—based on maintaining the norms of equidistance—acts as a means by which to gain the confidence of both neighbours. It aims to ensure them that, as an independent state, Nepal is not against any of its neighbours, and it committed only to maintain its security and integrity to overcome its vulnerability. Hence, the foreign policy of Nepal can be described as a series of decisions intended to maintain the policy of equidistance to counter Indian and Chinese hegemony. Thus, Nepal has been able to negotiate with consideration of the policy of equidistance vis-à-vis India and China, positioning nationalism at the core of its foreign policy, which illustrates Nepal's discursive rejection of alignment with either of its neighbours.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The series of remarkable events that occurred at the end of WWII, mainly India's independence and the emergence of China as a communist state, marked a significant alteration in the regional (and global) geopolitical dynamics, with multiple implications for small states like Nepal. Nepal's relations with India and China have witnessed various historical events, stages and periods involving the social, economic and political milieu, each indicating the changing form of the relationships from linear and straightforward to complex. Against this backdrop, Nepal

signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship' with India (1950) and of Peace and Friendship with China (1960; ratified in 1961) that signified the replacement of its traditional policy of isolationism with the policy of 'equidistance'.

Historical connections, geopolitical conditions, its sensitive borderland with Nepal and China's internal problems have made Nepal strategically important for China (Chand, 2017). India, meanwhile, has believed that Nepal, due to its geopolitical position, needs to acknowledge Indian security threats. China has subsequently adopted a strategy of capitalising on a growing rift between Nepal and India by strengthening economic ties with Nepal. Here, the Indian and Chinese forms of economic engagements in Nepal manifest their desire to reject the ideology that Nepal lies within the 'sphere of influence' of the other. Thus, at various historical junctures, India and China have tried to expand their relative influence in Nepal at each other's expense, in ways that extend to neo-colonial attitude and practices, which has put Nepal at risk of falling victim to their power-plays.

Despite such geopolitical realities, for Nepal, the major foreign policy goal vis-à-vis India and China has been to safeguard its sovereignty and exercise its freedom as an independent state in domestic and foreign policy matters. The search for equidistance has principally centred on the hegemony of India and China and the necessity of negotiating to such hegemony. In this context, I adopt a postcolonial approach to reveal that by historically removing itself from any form of alignment towards any of its neighbours—appraising this as one of the most challenging foreign policy imperatives—Nepal has been able to negotiate an equidistant relationship with its two powerful neighbours. The next chapter deals with the hydropolitical relations of Nepal with India and China.

## Chapter 5: Hydro-politics

Water is a non-substitutable resource due to its uneven geographical distribution across various states, and emerging climate change issues and globally rising water demand have not only highlighted water security as the most prominent resource-based challenge facing the world<sup>148</sup> but has also increasingly been gaining currency within the discourses of inter-state relational affairs. However, the scholarship on water politics (referred to as hydro-politics) has overwhelmingly been focused on the issues surrounding water access and control, considering the water-related discourses as the privilege of great power. Against this backdrop, I intend to offer a postcolonial approach to understand the role of power asymmetry, representation and possibilities for resistance in shaping the vibrant hydro-politics of Nepal regarding India and China.

In this chapter I have focussed primarily on the bilateral water agreements or treaties that Nepal has concluded as the source for exploring hydro-politics to reveal how power asymmetry has been the decisive factor in the hydropolitical relation of Nepal with India and China, and how Nepal has negotiated. This is important because, as will be discussed later, these water resource agreements are the basis of the way the water resources are defined and discussed with respect to international attitude, behaviour and practices. Moreover, the existing power asymmetries are replicated within the water resource treaties, risking the prioritisation of the interest of the powerful states.

Data show that there are 276 international transboundary river basins globally, which cover 45.3% of Earth's land surface and 80% of the global river flows, affecting 40% of the world's population (TFDD, 2012). However, the disproportionate global distribution of water has led to attempts to control the water-rich territories, meaning water plays a constitutive role in shaping geopolitical boundaries and carries strategic and political significance (Elhance, 2000; Isaac, 2009). The potential of water resources to influence the economy, society, politics and international relations has made power asymmetry a determinant factor in transboundary water resource management in recent decades. Against such backdrop, the study of hydro-politics is significant as it equips geopolitical institutions to manage the (shared) water resources in a politically sustainable manner, i.e., without tensions or conflict between political entities. The term "hydro-politics" (coined by Waterbury, 1979 in Zeitoun & Warner, 2006)

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<sup>148</sup> Mollinga (2008, p. 8) argues that water resource management is inherently political, whereas the rise of (good) governance has brought politics to water.

has emerged to address the dual purpose of providing the indicators for potential (distributive) conflict or (integrative) cooperation for sustainable water resource management.

Environmental issues are increasingly being embraced within the broadening definition of the term ‘security’.<sup>149</sup> However, in contrast to the general celebration of environmental issues as being of a transnational disposition, water attainment is directly linked to the theory of absolute territorial sovereignty, advocating for the right of a state to utilise water resources within its political jurisdiction (Bremmer and Johnston 2009). The political tradition in water studies emphasises the politics that permeate social relations of control over access to the water resources, framing the modes of water management as politically, materially and discursively driven rather than a question about distribution (see Butler, 2016, p. 29). Thus, in this way, water politics (hydro-politics), transcending the discipline of geography, environment, political and social science, has been considered as an environmental, strategic, diplomatic and political tool, and concomitantly (and often) acknowledged within the realm of high politics.

The first section of this chapter provides a short background on hydro-politics through a survey of the literature, conducted mainly through the conventional theoretical framework of realism and liberalism limited around the dimension of conflict and cooperation. Hydropolitical interactions, normally framed through some form of treaties or agreements, have largely been impacted by the existing power asymmetry between (or among) the interacting states. The existing (power) inequalities are successively replicated within the (water) treaties in a way that complies with the hydrohegemon’s (as will be described later) interest, and in another way that effectively provides opportunities to use utilitarian mechanisms or soft power for attaining weaker riparian’s compliance (Zeitoun and Warner 2006). Understanding the overall picture of the (bilateral) hydropolitical interaction is only possible if the sensibility of a weaker and small state is taken into consideration beyond the conventional dichotomy of conflict and cooperation. Accordingly, in the second section of this chapter, I offer the postcolonial perspective to hydro-politics.

Therefore, the postcolonial approach aims to elucidate the parochial character of hydro-politics, call for dialogue between interacting states and offer the voice of small states to develop a more inclusive hydro-politics. The water issue is central to Nepal’s ideological,

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149 “The earliest references to national security included concerns about economic issues, the strength of domestic industry, and the proper correlation of all measures of foreign and domestic policy”, whereas now environmental or ecological security has been a significant element in international security (Gleick, 1993, p.81). See also Norman 1996; Frohlich, 2012; Kehl, 2010.

economic and geopolitical considerations, playing a significant role in its relationship with its neighbours India and China. Thus, it can be construed that the hydropolitical interactions of Nepal with India and China are the result of the infusion of the elements of geopolitics, internal state politics of Nepal and the power asymmetry. The third section intends to shed light on representative water resource agreements of Nepal with India and China to outline the notion of hydro-hegemony as exercised upon Nepal. Finally, in the fourth chapter, Nepal's response to such hydrohegemony is considered, focusing on the notion of knowledge (re) construction and resource nationalism.<sup>150</sup>

### **5.1. Hydro-politics: The conventional dynamics of conflict-cooperation**

The negative correlation between the rising water demand and uneven and dwindling water reserves have historically induced concern over access, usage and control over water resources, with a direct bearing on the norms of hydropolitical relations vis-à-vis security, water-fuelled diplomacy and inter-state relationships. However, throughout the history, water resources have often been mismanaged, misallocated, undervalued and squandered by many societies (Warner & Zeitoun, 2008; Zeitoun et al. 2010, Mirumachi, 2015; Shrestha, 2016; Nagheeby & Warner, 2018).

The trajectory of the scholarship on water politics suggests that hydro-politics has gained currency since the late 1980s when water gained attention as one of the major elements for conflict, social and economic disruptions (Mollinga, 2008; Morrisette & Borer, 2013). The pioneering studies on hydro-politics have primarily been focused on the critical inquiry into the riparian state relationships sharing a transboundary watershed dominated by the narratives of conflict and cooperation (Gleick 1993; Dinar, 2002).

Scholars have categorised various factors responsible for the stimulation of conflictual interaction. There is a consensus that the likelihood of conflict is compounded by the scarcity, location and construction of dams, plus historical and existing political, national and religious tensions in the region (Mollinga, 2008; Waslekar, 2011). In line with this, transboundary water interactions have also been defined within the discourse of scarcity and abundance. In the former case, the interaction is expected to be based on the competition over greater flow volume. Whereas in the latter, the interaction is presumably focused on the control of the flow of hydropower and the control for flood management purposes; the control for flood management is often associated with the attainment of politically linked non-water goals.

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<sup>150</sup> See Annex. 5.1.



However, in either case, the priority is given towards fulfilling the powerful riparian state's interests, concluding the conflictual interaction.

In the context of increasing concern about water scarcity and the subsequent prevalence of 'water stress' (coined by Falkenmark, 1989 in Wolf, 1998), there is speculation regarding the transformation of occasional intense political instability (toward a small scale) into the form of acute violence between tribes, interest groups and states (Wolf, 1998, p. 251, 252). Accordingly, amid the global water scarcity and the subsequent conflict, there is growing trepidation about the possibility of 'water wars'. However, the discourses of water war are problematic due to their excessive focus on the notion of purely political tensions or stability rather than on water warfare that objectivises water as a tool, target or victim of armed conflict.

Furthermore, the utilisation of water can neither easily nor quickly be converted into power, as despite numerous water disputes (and conflicts) at the local and regional level, war over water is neither strategically rational, hydrographically effective nor economically viable (Wolf 1998; Barnaby 2009). Mahlakeng (2019), overlapping with Homer-Dixon's Environmental Scarcity and Regime theory, affirms the indispensable role of environmental quantity and quality for the prevention of a conflict. To achieve this we need to envision a change in the hydropolitical system, which is inextricably linked to the institutional capacity to absorb such change.

In recent decades, cooperation over transboundary water resources has increasingly gained scholarly attention within the discourse of hydro-politics. Needless to say, amid the rising debate on the discourse related to transboundary environmental issues and conflicts, cooperation in water resources can be considered as the most sustainable option. For convenient referencing, Yoffe et al. (2003) have provided an index that considers conflict and cooperation on a single continuum, which is widely appreciated. Referencing studies from 1948 to 1999, Yoffe et al. (2003)<sup>151</sup> conclude that the majority of transboundary agreements were cooperative in nature, and water quantity and quality, joint management and hydropower<sup>152</sup> have played a major role in this. In line with this, scholars have argued that joint management and technical cooperation largely enhance the prospect of cooperation. Taking it

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151 Yoffe et al. (2003) studied 1,831 instances of transboundary freshwater interactions (including unofficial verbal exchange to economic agreement and military action) and accordingly listed those water interactions as: cooperation (67%), conflictive (28%) and neutral or insignificant (5%) with no interactions with a formal declaration of war over water.

152 As water and energy share inextricable and highly interdependent relations, the choices made in one domain may have direct and indirect consequences on the other, positive or negative (Das, 2016, p.9).

as a reference point, Renner (2009)<sup>153</sup> has affirmed that attitude plays a determinant role in either escalating conflict or enhancing collaboration.

Fears surrounding the riparian rights, resource control, management and governance of scarce water resources, and economic conditions have collectively added strategic significance to the volatility of water (Morrisette & Borer, 2013). Therefore, the significance of water (mainly rivers) is compounded by its transformation into a competitive strategic element; that is, a translation into a political organisation.

In brief, the literature on hydro-politics varies, ranging from considering (irrational individual) conflict and (rational collective) cooperation within a single continuum (like Yoffe et al. 2003) to the co-existence of conflict and cooperation with the prescription of the robust political economy necessary for transboundary water management (like Mirumachi & Allan, 2007; Mirumachi, 2015). A cursory look at the literature of hydro-politics allows their attribution to mainly three schools of IR: they either invoke the norms of realism (in conflictual terms); or liberalism (in cooperative terms); or both the English school or liberal realism (co-existence of conflict and cooperation).

Evidently, the majority of the studies have been conducted through the framework of realism, focusing on the unchallenged power exercise of a hydrohegemon and its ability to mediate conflict, maintain stability and cooperation, and direct the hydropolitical outcome as a leader (see Zeitoun & Allan, 2008; Zeitoun et al. 2010; Mirumachi, 2015). Moreover, those studies affirm that cooperation may fail when a state's main concerns like sovereignty, security and territorial integrity are challenged. Even when leaving aside conflict and considering only cooperation, the scholarly endeavour on this topic lacks the viewpoint of a small state. This is because, as I will discuss, the discourse on conflict and cooperation is the stark elucidation of the mere 'outcome' of the overall hydropolitical interaction.

Considered as the 'third pole', the Himalayan region is not only a source of freshwater after the two main poles but is also regarded as one of the world's largest freshwater suppliers, sustaining millions of people's lives (see Pant, 2012). Lying within the Himalayan region, Nepal accommodates more than 6,000 stream, rivers and rivulets, and its four large rivers (Koshi, Gandaki, Karnali and Mahakali) and five medium rivers contribute 75% of the flow

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<sup>153</sup> Renner (2009) affirms that mutual suspicions and reluctance to cooperate between riparians may impair timely approaches to the collective action to the problems regarding water conflict.

into the Ganges<sup>154</sup> (Pun, 2008). Notably, the persisting Sino-India conflicts have impaired the timely and collective regional action on water-related issues, which has been further exacerbated by the polarisation in the water issue generally (Renner, 2009). In the words of Holslag (2011), for India and China, their lack of an amicable attitude towards each other, in particular, has influenced the Indian scepticism towards (water-related) megaprojects developed by China. India accuses China of ravenous exploitation of the Himalayan rivers, whereas China accuses India of exaggerating the unreasonable Chinese threat. Within the existing conflicts over water-related issues, their interests share a common theme that enshrines Nepal as a potential hub that could fulfil their (mainly India's) water-related interests.

In this context, the consideration of hydro-politics within the parochial continuum of conflict and cooperation in the case of Nepal reflects a part of the dynamism of hydro-politics that risks assigning a narrow description and reasoning regarding how water becomes political. Equally, the tendency to (abruptly) label relations as conflict or cooperation absolves a hydropolitical interaction from the norms of regional common interest and integrative flow of water (river) resources and severely downplays the aspiration of water allocation in an equitable and beneficial sharing arrangement. Finally, such consideration makes it difficult to represent the hydropolitical dynamics of relations over time and the changed political context, creating a deterministic rhetoric that (all) 'conflict is bad' and (all) 'cooperation is inherently good'.

For instance, considering the transboundary water projects of Nepal with India, Shrestha (2016) reveals that India has been successful in irrigating about 12,200,000 acres of land, mitigating flood hazards and subsequently receiving other intangible benefits.<sup>155</sup> On the contrary, Nepal is able to irrigate only 160,000 acres of irrigation facility (that accounts for only 1.3% of total irrigation benefits), leaving aside the social, ecological and economic impacts (though they were constructed within the territory of Nepal). This reflects the effect of the existing power asymmetry within the hydropolitical interaction that re-inflicts the colonial norms of unilateral exploitation.

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154 The Ganges or Ganga is a transboundary river of Asia that flows through India and Bangladesh. The 2,525 mi. river rises in the western Himalayas in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, flowing south and east through the Gangetic plain of India and Bangladesh, eventually emptying into the Bay of Bengal (Shrestha, 2017).

155 For example, in the Koshi barrage project, India was successful in providing irrigation benefits to 2,400,000 acres of its land, whereas Nepal was able to irrigate only 60,000 acres of land area. Moreover, for the dam lying on the Nepali side, huge tracts of fertile land and settlement were lost and the victims were left without any compensation (see Shrestha, 2016).

However, contrary to such grounded reality, scholars like Hanasz (2014) argue that Nepal's problematic projects with India were entered into with consent rather than coercion. In line with this, citing an uncompleted project with China, Mirumachi (2015) indicates that the water resource projects of Nepal and India have been cooperative. Selby<sup>156</sup> (2003) fears that, in this way, the much-lauded focus on 'cooperation' might actually be the repackaging of the existing patron-client relationship into an ongoing domination within the water arena.

Dombrowski (2003, in Zeitoun & Mirumachi, 2008) used the description the 'disguise of cooperation', which is applicable in the case of Nepal too. Further, Jägerskog and Zeitoun (2009, p.7) have argued that, as some cooperation can be coercive, it is necessary to view cooperation from the perspective of attaining the goals of riparians to ensure equal participation and decision-making power rather than the goal in itself. In fact, the word 'cooperation' (and conflict), rather than implying objective and absolute meaning, is subjected to dynamic interpretations. For Nepal, cooperation has posed a discursive platform that underplays the space for alternative water management practices or policies, instead entrapping it within the rhetoric of cooperation, peace and breakthrough but subsequently subverting the notions of benefit-sharing and the integrative flow of water, masking the negative effect of power asymmetries. However, cooperation does not simply mean the absence of any sort of resistance or the continuous interaction against such power asymmetry to retain water rights.

In her study on the UKHP project, though Butler (2016) comments on Nepal's long-running tensions with India, she remained silent on the topic of Nepal's resistance. Likewise, scholars like Shah et al. (2007), Oza (2014) and Linkha (2020), though they highlighted the negative effects of the SHDMP project and the local level of resistance, neglected to explore Nepal's resistance in its hydropolitical affairs with its neighbours. In studies that do consider this aspect, resistance has largely been reduced to mutual distrust and local environmental effects (see Saurabh, 2012). In this context, it is necessary to de-parochialise hydro-politics to evade the conventional discourse of conflict and cooperation and elucidate the existing power asymmetry and resistance to counter such asymmetry. The postcolonial approach is therefore crucial to provide meaningful insights regarding the experience of Nepal vis-à-vis hydropolitical interactions with India and China as discussed in the next section.

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<sup>156</sup> According to Selby (2003, p. 137), cooperation, rather than being a pragmatic and material set of solutions and antithesis of 'domination', refers to the discursive condition that arises and exists as the basis of single tacit rule leaving the space for the stipulation that rotates around the power asymmetry.

## 5.2. Postcolonial approach to understanding hydro-politics

It is important to note that post-colonial societies, in their approaches to addressing the issues surrounding water security, share attributes of water access and control that resonate with the colonial project. In this context, a postcolonial study is significant as it employs diverse theoretical and political resources to interrogate the power asymmetry, imbalances, hegemony, formal and informal structure of domination and the effect of the contemporary neo-colonialism agenda, as Slater (2004) states. As such, I intend to use the postcolonial approach to understanding hydro-politics in a way that acknowledges not only the asymmetry of power but also semicolonial relations plus the extensive role of representation and resistance to explain away that asymmetry, in order to reveal the experiences of small states like Nepal.

Notably, any meaningful understanding of existing water inequalities and increasing hydropolitical issues requires knowledge of existing power asymmetries, which are a leftover of colonialism. Power has been considered as the major influential factor on (transboundary) water interactions, in that it not only determines the ‘control’ of the water resources (Hanasz, 2014, p.98) but also dictates the potential outcome through the political process (Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Cascão 2009); as Swyngedouw (2009, p.58) puts it, “when two equal rights meet, power decides”. The constitutive role of power is further highlighted by Zeitoun and Warner (2006, p. 436, 442), who highlight that even the upstream/downstream dynamic is predicated on power; “those upstream use water to get more power, and those downstream use power to get more water”.

Moreover, due to the lack of the rule of law at the international level, power asymmetry has been the determinant factor in seeking measures and strategies for gaining water access and control. A state’s ability to assert power over other riparians in a decisive manner is referred to as hydro-hegemony, which is defined as the “hegemony at the river basin level, achieved through water resource control strategies<sup>157</sup> such as resource capture, integration and containment”<sup>158</sup> (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006, p. 435). Hydro-hegemony maintains a hierarchical

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157 Mechanisms of coercion can utilise military force, covert action or direct pressure. Importantly, rather than using brute strength (or war), hydrohegemon instead focuses on the attainment of self-serving objectives, controlling water resources using a suite of power-related tactics and strategies (like military, economic or political isolation) termed as the ‘resource capture strategy’ for the ‘claim over [a] resource’ (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006; Hanasz, 2014, p. 97). The control is achieved through consent and compliance using soft power while having a self-serving ideology (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006, p.443). Notably, norms like soft power, security, and the creation of a sanctioned discourse, are all forms of ideological mechanisms (Zeitoun et al. 2010).

158 There being a hydrohegemon can lead to two types of interactions: positive (when the hydrohegemon directs in an integrated manner) and negative (when the hydrohegemon pursues unilateral strategies of resource capturing) (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006).

position resting on three pillars: power (political, economic, military), the riparian position and the potential for water resource exploitation (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006, p. 451-452). Here, the only constant pillar of hydro-hegemony is the riparian position, implying that the power asymmetry plays a constitutive role in terms of the origin and outcome of a hydropolitical interaction. Furthermore, Gleick (1993, p. 84) has identified four factors to be determinants of a transboundary water interaction: degree of scarcity, the extent of water shared by states/region, relative power and ease of access to alternative water sources. Here, compared to other constant factors focusing on resource availability, the only variable factor is the power disparity, which signifies its imperative role to steer the hydropolitical configuration rather than the resource itself.

In this context, Hydro-hegemony is an analytical tool to study how power, hegemony and power asymmetry influence transboundary water politics. In asymmetric power structures, hydrohegemons have the option to opt for the approach that suits their best interests, in alignment with the realist consideration that the presence of hegemony ensures stability, as noted earlier. Hydrohegemons comparatively have access to a full range of strategic and compliance-generating mechanisms that bolster their capability to shape the water flow regime.

This can be observed in the water treaties, where there are obligations for small states to comply with the interests of the hydrohegemon, which facilitates the employment of utilitarian mechanisms or soft power to attain such compliance (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006), a scenario that is applicable to the hydropolitical interactions of Nepal with India and China, as discussed later. It is a manifestation of the great power predilection for resource control, whereby the non-hegemons are presumed to follow the guidelines as set by the former, as they tend to avoid conflict and can rarely move away from cooperation. As such, considerations on controlling and serving the interest of great power negate the norms of experience or acceptance that do not comply with the interests of the non-hegemons.

Notably, power asymmetry is equally important in constructing knowledge, providing order and leadership, which is at the expense of the weaker entity (Zeitoun & Allan, 2008, p. 3). In this way, the asymmetry of power is a common trait shared by the interacting states. While a hydrohegemon is able to exercise power even if it lies downstream, a non-hydrohegemon becomes subjected to the process. Thus, hydro-hegemony is not an inherent and incessant privilege offered by the geopolitical disposition but a function of the power asymmetry between the interacting states. Hydropolitical interactions are not unbiased and natural but instead the manifestation of the hydrohegemon's willpower and its agenda.

As a small state, Nepal's weak internal political condition and its engagement in hydropolitical interactions with India and China are effectively utilised by the latter(s) to frame any hydropolitical project (or issue) within the aperture of their national interest to pre-empt any possible dissent against them. Nepal, as an upper riparian, ought to enjoy inherent geopolitical leverage over India. However, due to the existing power asymmetry, Nepal has been a victim in a dual manner. Firstly, it is on the verge of external exploitation of its water resources. Secondly, owing to its water resources, it experiences pressure from India to construct various infrastructural projects, like dams and embankments, on its territory. Further, though Nepal's water is of less concern to China than to India due to geographical reasons, as discussed later, its unilateral tendency has been equally problematic for Nepal.

Unilateral approaches like this have been termed by Allouche (2019) as a form of infrastructure violence, whereby the contestation of a state's hydraulic mission and infrastructural violence leads to political complexities. Such a scenario risks Nepal falling victim to the increasing internal discord via the manipulation of dissent by India and China to fuel their geopolitical interests. India and China's temptation to inject the political layer into 'hydro-politics' has projected water resources as a mere political object, constructing the ideological grounds on which to treat water within the frame of power, and subsequently marginalising and peripheralising Nepal from its water-related schema.

Thus, in post-colonial states, this tendency for unilateral designs on water-related projects that strategise for the physical control and commodification of water resources indicates the persistence of the colonial forms, subsequently undermining the ecosystem-centred, adaptive and participatory approaches (For details, see Isaac (2009); Gibbs (2009)). This is an inappropriate and destructive form of water governance, which according to Gibbs (2009, p. 2964), is the agenda of the colonial ideology<sup>159</sup> that mutes or excludes the weaker stakeholder(s).

As described in Chapter 1, in the context of Nepals' hydropolitical interactions with India and China, it is relevant to follow Doty's (1996) notion of 'imperial encounter' that conveys the idea of an 'asymmetrical encounter', entailing two basic features, that one entity

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159 Here, it is important to note that Britain had transformed many of the South Asian floodplains by constructing permanent infrastructures "realigning land and water in new sets of social, political and ecological relationships" (D'Souza, 2006, p. 625), which can be considered as a 'colonial resource regime' for the control of society and nature (in D'Souza, 2006).

is not only able to construct ‘realities’, be taken seriously and acted upon but also holds the potential for resource control, while the other entity is denied equal degrees or kinds of agency and is prone to losing control and authority over its resources. As a political process, transboundary water interaction is beleaguered by interest, security and power games that inherently draw on the notion of power asymmetry. While strong counter-hegemonic opposition can manifest itself at multiple levels, hegemon and non-hegemon more routinely appear to negotiate the terms of hegemony continuously.

The employment of representation, as mentioned in Chapter 3 and in later discussions, is equally problematic in its effects on Nepal as a tool for maintaining hydro-hegemony. In this context, the mainstream IR approach that focused on power and the conflict and cooperation dimension is parochial and insufficient to reveal the dynamism of hydro-politics surrounding the issue of a small state like Nepal.

In this context, the postcolonial approach to understanding hydro-politics equips one to analyse the situation through an alternate viewpoint, mainly from the small state perspective. This is achieved via analysis of the existing power asymmetry but also through semicolonial relations and the role of representation to explain away the asymmetry. Moreover, this promotes moving away from the parochial conflict-cooperation approach, and to a mode of analyses whereby the origin, action and outcome of a hydropolitical interaction is recognised. This helps to challenge the structural advantages that the hegemonic states build that is (willingly or unwillingly) accepted by the weaker states. This empowers small states to interrogate the practices of the hydrohegemon even while acknowledging that the hydro-hegemony is problematic.

### **5.3. Hydro-politics around Nepal-China-India**

As mentioned earlier, concerns regarding climate change, the global population, adoption of the neo-Malthusian view and increasing conflict of state interests and fears about scarcity, control and security of water resources have made hydro-politics a prominent issue within international relationships, including those of Nepal with India and China. In the case of Nepal, it is believed that its hydropower potential—theoretically 83,000 MW (Shrestha, 2017)—could generate large-scale hydropower and storage projects to address the water issues of its and India’s Ganges plain population. While Nepal’s geography can play a constitutive role in its hydropolitical interaction with India and China, the physical geography of the basin (that



separates it from China) and the intensifying (post-Cold War) Sino-India relationship have significantly constrained its strategic leverage (Elhance, 2000, p. 206).

To address the water scarcity in their arid regions and fulfil their increasing power demand, China<sup>160</sup> (at a national level) and India<sup>161</sup> (at international level) have designed multi-purpose large-scale projects. Due to various factors like its relatively riverine nature, Nepal's river flow contribution to the Ganges and higher potential (because of its gradient nature), India considers Nepal a viable water resource for its megaprojects of dam and electricity generation to a greater extent than China. In addition, compared to the Chinese (national) project, India's river-linking project, that intends to transfer surplus water from the east of the country to the west, would not function as effectively without the water resources of Nepal (Pant, 2012, p.7). Thus, Nepalese hydropolitical (and related) discontents derive from the vested political interest-based attitudes and practices framed within its existing power relations vis-à-vis India and China. Consequently, the water-resource treaties that Nepal has entered with both India and China have been problematic.

The hydropolitical interactions of Nepal with India and China exhibit the attributes of 'imperial encounter's; instead of being homogenous, they are heterogeneous in nature because of the varied forms of structural compositions and practices typical of an interaction. Here, the structural composition mainly includes the geopolitical setting, extent of scarcity and abundance, knowledge construction, common interests, internal state politics, integrative flow of water, resource nationalism, unequal regional water distribution, value, relative (easy) accessibility and, more importantly, the existing power asymmetry.

Domestic politics, including the state-building process, has a bearing on international outcomes and vice versa. The collective action in hydropolitical affairs is most affected by the state-building process enrooted within the set of interactions of the colonial enterprise. As Allouche (2019, p.1) describes, the state-building processes intensifies the sense of national appropriation of water and shapes how water bodies, landscapes and infrastructures become an integral part of national identity. In other words, hydropolitical interactions—as a function of

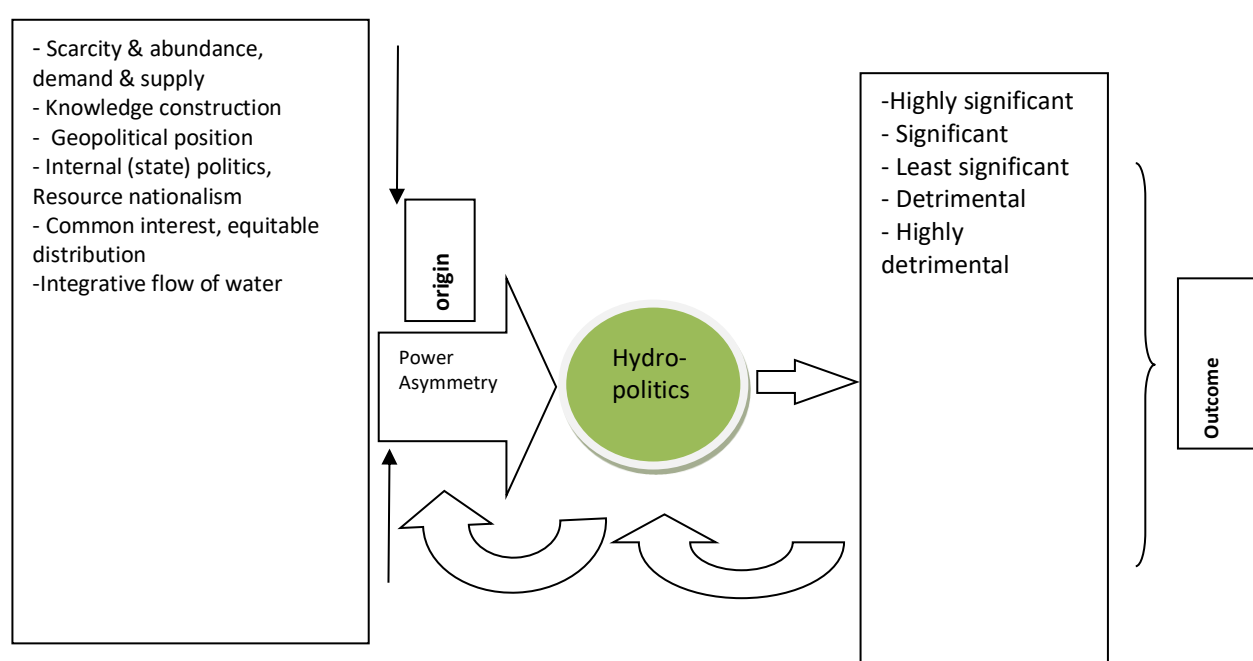
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160 Since 1950, China (estimated budget of around US\$62 billion) has started the construction of a massive project to divert the Yangtze River in southern China to the arid industrialised region of the north through three canal systems (eastern, central and western). For details, see Wong (2011).

161 Seemingly inspired by China's diversion project, India has designed its trans-national Rivers Inter-link project, which is intended to address its water resources scarcity by linking Indian rivers (and Nepali—but without Nepal's consent) with a network of reservoirs and canals, split into three parts: a northern Himalayan rivers inter-link component (14 projects), a southern Peninsular component starting from 2005 (16 projects) and an intrastate river linking component (37 projects). For details, see Pun (2008).

the geopolitical nature of the basin and the state that shapes the overall use, utility, utilisation, conservation and exploitation of the river—are heterogeneous in nature. Because the homogeneity, rather than being grounded in reality, upholds the perceptions and practices of the hydrohegemons that are installed as ‘standard’ versions, this subsequently marginalises all other variants (see Zeitoun & Allan, 2008).

Thus, the contour of hydro-politics in Nepal is neither an abrupt formation, nor exists in a vacuum. As such, I argue that a hydropolitical interaction is the ultimate product of various phases, including origin, action/interaction/rules of engagement and the outcome. These are also the determining factors on account of the exertion of hydro-hegemony or resistance to it (as discussed later). As I contend, knowledge of the overall configuration, including the origin (not only outcome), equips one with better control of the outcome. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The configuration of hydro-politics (Source: Author)**

Figure 1 illustrates that the external interest is directly related to the intention of controlling a water resource based on a cost-benefit analysis (For details, see Kehl, 2010) and relative power. This figure aims to illustrate the constitutive factors responsible for the origin of the hydropolitical interactions through the reference point of a small state (here, Nepal). As it suggests, a hydropolitical configuration depends on various factors, including its geopolitical

positioning, external water-related interests, domestic needs, the internal political and social context, and constructed knowledge. Here, I have reiterated geopolitical positioning as one of the crucial factors because, in the case of Nepal, almost all of its hydropolitical relations with India and China have related to water resources lying within its political territory.

The hydropolitical interactions of Nepal with India and China depict an example of how a ‘national water reserve’ is transformed into a transboundary hydropolitical interaction. This highlights that the hydropolitical interactions of Nepal are not the products of its ‘obligations’ but rather the products of its ‘options’, as largely influenced by the power asymmetry between it and its neighbours. Given the origin of such encounters, an outcome that is conciliatory to small states will be discussed later, on the basis of their significance.

The origin of almost all of the water resource agreements of Nepal with India (and China) can be traced back to the period when Nepal was experiencing political instability, particularly since 1990 (except the Koshi and Gandaki agreements), manifesting the direct relationship between internal state politics and hydropolitical relations. India’s keenness to achieve its strategic direction vis-à-vis Nepal’s water was visible in its diplomatic proposal submitted to Nepal after 1990, in which it considered the rivers of Nepal as ‘common rivers’, disregarding any form of third-party involvement, including the UN or China.<sup>162</sup> Correspondingly, though being a more recent party in this dynamic, Chinese engagement in the hydropolitical interaction of Nepal exhibits the assertive and dominative nature of its approach.

In this context, to fulfil the research objective, I aim to provide representative examples of some of the key projects that Nepal has collaborated on with India (Koshi, Mahakali, Arun-III, Upper Karnali [UKHP] and Sapta Koshi-High dam [SHDMP]) and China (West Seti and Budhigandaki hydropower project).<sup>163</sup> Here, considering the history and extent of their hydropolitical interactions, the Indo-Nepal context has been discussed in more detail. The next section will deal with how India is a hydrohegemon, followed by exploration of the same regarding China.

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162 The draft proposal stated, “The two Contracting Parties being equally desirous of attending complete and satisfactory utilisation of the waters of the commonly shared rivers, undertake to (i) plan new uses or projects subject to the protection of the existing uses on the rivers...” (Article III of part VI in Gyawali & Dixit, 1999, p.5).  
163 Project details in Annex. 5.2.

### 5.3.1. India and China as hydrohegemons and Nepal

As mentioned earlier, I do not intend to engage simply with the outcome—either conflict or cooperation—to assess a hydrohegemon's capability to direct an overall hydropolitical interaction. Rather, I will focus on the problematisation of the interaction via the employment of power that absolves the hydrohegemon of its responsibility for other parties, i.e. the small state. Force and consent, along with the imposition of dominant ideas and discourses, are useful concepts for understanding water allocation and use than other factors like international water law, riparian position or water-sharing ethics (Zeitoun & Allan, 2008, p. 10). Drawing from the literature, hydro-hegemony is leadership buttressed by authority, carries hegemonic strategy based on cohesion and compliance, sustained by attraction than intimidation, and this is where the representational regime come into play.

In this section, I establish how India and China are hydrohegmons. Here, I outline how they have intended to acquire control over Nepal's water resources by unilaterally designing water agreements and treaties with Nepal that are later labelled under the rubric of development. This indicates their orientation towards politicising water issues to bolster their (political) dominance vis-à-vis river basin management, at the cost of Nepal. By synthesising the themes emerging from these water resources agreements with Nepal, in this section, I demonstrate that India and China are hydrohegemons.

Along with other aspects of the Indo-Nepal relationship, the signing of Koshi agreement (1954) marked a new phase in the relationships between the two. The agreement is the epitome of how India acts as a hegemon in the water resources of Nepal according to the dominant public discourse in Nepal. The agreement not only manifested India's tendency and practices of making unilateral design and construction decisions regarding infrastructure like dams and barrages inside the territory of Nepal when there was political instability there but also highlighted the ignorance of India on the issue of compensation, whereby the compensation provided was even labelled as goodwill on their part (see Gyawali, 2013a; Prasai, 2013). In addition, the issues of claim and counterclaim regarding dry season, flow control, river training, condition, maintenance, security and other lingering issues of inundation claims, as raised by Nepal, have been left unaddressed by India.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> The bilateral committee on the Koshi and Gandak projects (JCKGP) set up to resolve the outstanding issue has stalled due to India's hegemonic attitude.

Since 1993, Nepal has experienced the progressive hydropolitical advancement of India, including the unilateral construction of the Tanakpur irrigation and power project in the border River Mahakali, violating ‘The Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers’ (Shrestha, 2016). By the time of the Mahakali Treaty (1996), India was able to step up its position by gaining control of the riverine rights of Nepal.

For instance, in the Mahakali Treaty, the phrase ‘existing uses on the rivers’ was extensively articulated by India as part of a ‘prior-right issue’ to be restored during the ‘package deal’ on the treaty (Gyawali & Dixit, 1999, p.5). Moreover, despite the agreement in the treaty regarding the creation of an integrated hydrological infrastructure system, the preparation of a Detailed Project Report (DPR) was neglected (For details see Gyawali, 2009). Equally, India has tended to assert a unilateral attitude about sharing project details with Nepal, including project design and construction, claiming it as an Indian project, complicating the border issue between the two countries (detail in Chapter 6).

To date, projects that were designed and constructed by India that assigned some space for Nepal were upgraded—in the case of UKHP and SHDMP—to a form of exceptionalism. Conversely, the projects that were solely conceptualised, designed and developed to control the water resources of Nepal are considered as an inalienable part of India’s river linking project, as discussed earlier.

Crucially, the UKHP (see Pun, 2014) holds the potential to shape the fate of the Karnali region, which is one of the least developed regions of Nepal. The geographical nature suggests a dam-based rather than Run of river (ROR) model, which not only can address the water requirements and power shortages but also can support the overall development paradigm of Nepal. Despite this, through the application of various strategies of cohesion and compliance and even attraction, as will be discussed later, India has not only been able to downsize the project capacity from 4,180 to 900 MW but has also bound Nepal (upstream) to seek the prior approval of the developer (India, downstream) for any (other) project constructions, privileging India with the ‘resource rights’ or the ‘prior water rights’ to the river upstream of the project. Unsurprisingly, Nepal’s weak stance on this has led to the cancellation of project plans (as designed by Nepal decades ago) like Rajapur and Suryapatuwa irrigation projects.

Equally, in the case of SHDMP (see Shah et al. 2007; Oza, 2014; Shrestha, 2016, 2017), whose genealogy can be traced back to the British-India era in the early 20th century, India began to lobby for remodification of the project in the 1990s. As its (colonial) design and nature

intended to fulfil (British) India's water requirements, the plausible project impact upon Nepal is more or less apparent. The project requires a dam construction that is estimated to inundate appx. 11777 ha. of arable plain, displacing 10,000 people (and their cultures) in over 80 villages (more details unknown yet) straddled nine districts. More importantly, the dam is to be constructed within the Siwalik region, which is one of the most tectonically dynamic zones, vulnerable to various forms of slope failure, landslide and debris flow (Linkha, 2020, p. 169).

More importantly, on the part of Nepal in such sensitive project, there seems a lack of detailed studies within the frame of cost-benefit analysis and the repercussive effects on Nepal, including but not limited to product deficiency, sedimentation, flood and the loss of regional biodiversity and ecosystem and, more importantly, the project significance per se. The SHDMP exemplifies the way the fragile political condition of Nepal is utilised by India, which proposed its DPR during the visit of Nepali PM Mr S.B. Deuba to Delhi, India in September 2017 when Nepal's general election was imminent (Thapa, 2019a).

The SHDMP project is subject to interrogation at the local as well as international level. For instance, if the SHDMP is implemented, it will mean the cancellation of various other projects designed in the national interest of Nepal, like the Sunkoshi-Kamala Diversion Multipurpose project intended to irrigate Nepal's Southern (Terai) region enclosed between Saptakoshi and Bagmati rivers (with two power plants) on a year-round basis, leaving Nepal with the less significant Sunkoshi-Marin diversion project. Further, due to the dam-based nature of the project, a guideline for impact assessment and environmental aspects introduced by international institutions and the World Commission on dams (Petheram, 2010) needs to be followed, which has not been the case. With controversies about the efficacy of dams occurring globally, the project's relevancy is a question in itself, and compensation has remained as an outstanding issue.<sup>165</sup>

The issues surrounding UKHP and SHDMP account for only a part of the larger ambiguities, obliviousness and dilemmas that have historically and deeply percolated the intellectual, social and political narratives in relation to the hydropolitical awakening in Nepal. During the visit of Nepali PM Mr G.P. Koirala to India from 5-10 December 1991, his Indian counterpart Mr P.V.N. Rao proposed a last-minute set of agreements that, aside from including trade and transit and development issues, also involved plans to develop major high dams in the Nepal Himalaya. Without analysing the needs, significance and potential losses, Nepal

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<sup>165</sup> Though the locals have been demanding 5 million USD as compensation, India claims that the payment has been already made (ANI, 2019).

signed the controversial agreement. The government of Nepal did not make this public via the official Nepal gazette until 24 December 1991, when it was forced by internal calls and protests (Gorkhapatra, 1993).

It seems that Nepal's ignorance of its hydrological resources has dislodged it from its privileged hydropolitical position, instead conceding it to India. This indicates the Indian concern towards 'exploitation' and 'control' of Nepal's (untapped) water resources, undermining the norms of 'utilise' and 'share'. Undoubtedly, it reflects India's position whereby it considers Nepal as within its sphere of influence and as a buffer, rather than, in the words of Adhikari (2019), as a 'hydropolitical trading partner'. Notwithstanding the formation of an umbrella mechanism—headed by each state's water resource secretary—to implement various agreements and understandings and promote high-level coordination in doing so (Chellaney, 2013, p. 284), Nepal's hydropolitical relations with India have been characterised by Indian dominance.

The abovementioned cases of the Mahakali, UKHP and (ongoing) SHDMP clearly indicate that since 1990, India has succeeded in increasingly asserting the principle of existing prior consumptive use by challenging Nepal's right over those rivers. Specifically, in the case of the UKHP and SHDMP, their status as a bargaining point against Nepal cannot be denied. Despite this, in the face of Nepal's concurrent calls for the amendment and/or update to those treaties, India has shown an indifferent response that reveals India's messaging promoting development and cooperation as empty signifiers.

Moreover, the issue of the change in the integrative water flow, impact on the basin, project design, cost and benefit ratio, flood and other water-related risks, joint management and cooperation, data sharing and joint investigation have been left unaddressed. In fact, in almost all of these projects, the norms of equitable share, integrative water flow, benefit-sharing and sovereignty of Nepal have been seriously challenged, thus reflecting the neo-colonial agenda. These issues largely establish India as a hydrohegemon, leading to questioning on the issue of the projects' significance to Nepal, as discussed later.

More importantly, India's hydrohegemonic attitude has resulted in detrimental effects on Nepal's plans, including to 'export' (hydro) electricity to third countries like Bangladesh.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> India and Nepal signed the Power Trade Agreement in 2014, aimed at easing cross-border electricity flow. However, it has not been effective due to the lack of policy framework and the reversed position of India. Furthermore, the agreement regarding the transmission of 500 MW (out of 900 MW of UKHP) made between Nepal and Bangladesh has stalled due to the controversial position of India. For details, see Adhikari, 2019.

Due to India's geographical location (lying between Nepal and Bangladesh), Nepal is obliged to seek Indian consent for any power purchase affairs with the third country, which is obviously extremely problematic in terms of Nepal's ability to achieve its interests. This has frequently transformed the bilateral issue into a tri-lateral one.

India has often swayed other parties to its interests on this matter as well. India's controversial position and the subsequent uncertain power-purchase status, including the less domestic power demand (Bhattarai, 2005), has ultimately led foreign investors to abandon hydropower projects in Nepal. For instance, in early 2016, Norwegian energy producer Statkraft discarded plans to develop the 650 MW Tamakoshi III hydropower project in Dolakha (eastern) Nepal. Later, the same project was included in the set of agreements between a Nepalese company (TBI holdings) and China's YEIG Intl. & Shanghai investigation. This occurred with a redesign that involved downsizing the project to 200 MW in July 2019, which the reasoning offered being the lack of a market (Adhikari, 2019). As such, Nepal's weak hydropolitical positioning has led to its decreasing its bargaining power, thus damaging its internal political condition.<sup>167</sup>

Thus, Indo-Nepal hydropolitical interactions suggest that Nepal is on the verge of losing its grip on its water resources. Furthermore, by fraying cooperation regarding the utility, management and conservation of water resources, it instead has rationalised the presence of the hydrohegemon(s). The unfair treatment in past agreements and increasing anti-India constituency have pushed Nepal to explore Chinese finance and collaboration to develop its water resources. However, Nepal's experience of hydropolitical relations with China, though of a lesser extent, has not been as successful as it expected.

For instance, in the case of the Budhigandaki project, amid the insurmountable related issues, Nepal's then-PM Prachanda handed the project to a Chinese company in 2017. However, within a few months, turning down the earlier government's decision, his successor Mr Sher B. Deuba unilaterally cancelled the project. It took another intriguing turn, when again, following persistent Chinese lobbying and pressure, even this decision was overturned, finally passing the project to the Chinese company Gezhouba in 2018. It is important to note that despite these steps taken by Nepal, including the investment of around US\$360 million (of

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<sup>167</sup> There have been various forms of internal opposition in Nepal against the UKHP project, including a reported bombing of the project office by a splinter Maoist party (Adhikari, 2019).



compensation in the DPR), the investment modalities are yet to be finalised (Ghimire, 2020) due to the lack of response by China to the issues raised by Nepal.

In addition, emerging rumours about the project being downsized, altering of project modalities and Chinese neglect of the negotiation table (similar to the Indian attitude) have collectively pushed the project's future to the horizon of uncertainty. Significantly, a third party, India, seems keen to project the uncertainty surrounding this project through a political lens. This was evident during Nepal's initial decision of unilateral cancellation of the project, when Indian scholars like Bagchi and Dasgupta (2017)<sup>168</sup> labelled this event as a setback to Chinese regional connectivity, implying a triumph of Indian influence. Hence, China's lack of engagement with Nepal on the project details has risked turning this bilateral project into a tri-lateral one.

The case of the West Seti hydropower project is similar. In 2018, China's CWE investment (a subsidiary of China Three Gorges) cancelled the agreement to build a 750 MW West Seti hydropower project in Western Nepal, arguing concern about the unclear 'purchaser' (Adhikari, 2019), for which later Nepal revoked the granted license.<sup>169</sup> Interestingly, despite holding the license for seven years, the company has not taken any initiatives to begin project construction, but there have been reports suggesting it had attempted to downsize the project capacity to 600 MW (from 750 MW) (Ghimire, 2020).<sup>170</sup>

Overall, unsurprisingly, on account of their design, based upon Indian and Chinese interests, hardly bear significance or consideration for Nepal's needs (in relation to Figure 1) and thus, exhibit the neocolonial practices of India and China. Moreover, the statuses of these projects are not only the result of the contingent undertakings; rather, they are the collective result of the investment modality, including the detailed construction schedule, the hegemonic hydropolitical structure acknowledged by India, China and even Nepal, and bolstered by the negation of attempts to prioritise the projects' significance to Nepal. The latter will be discussed in the next section, which details how Nepal has responded to the hydrohegemony.

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168 Bagchi and Dasgupta, being optimistic about Indo-Pacific connectivity for Nepal (as discussed in Chapter 4), consider the Chinese setback as a subsequent gain to India.

169 The Chinese company, China Gezhouba Group Corporation, has proposed an E.P.C.F model. Within this model, companies bear the technical and economic liabilities, and the investment collected by the company is paid in instalments by Nepal, including interest amounts (Ghimire, 2020).

<sup>170</sup> It is important to mention that in June 2022, the Government of Nepal decided to hand over the "responsibility of building the 750 MW West Seti Hydropower Project and 308 MW SR6 Storage Hydroelectric Project to NHPC, a company under the Indian Government." Source: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/indian-company-to-build-west-seti-hydropower-project/>

#### 5.4. Nepal's response to the hydrohegmons

As mentioned earlier, Nepal has not merely accepted the status-quo of the hydro-hegemony. Rather, it has responded in a few ways. Given the decisive role of the knowledge gap in permitting the hegemon to reinforce power in policy and decision-making (Cascao, 2008, p. 25), the employment of a counter-hegemonic strategy infers the realisation, construction, interpretation and dissemination of the discourses that challenge the hegemonic ideas and knowledge. In this section, I intend to outline the ways Nepal has been responding against the hydro-hegemony of India and China in light of the notion of resource nationalism and knowledge construction.

As the transboundary water system lacks an integrated basin or aquifer management system, national sovereignty comes to the forefront (Waslekar, 2011). A nation-state's presumed right over the ownership and control of water resources lying within its political jurisdiction subsequently implies the significance of resource nationalism (see also Annex-I) as one of the viable practices for countering (hydro) hegemony. Resource nationalism<sup>171</sup> is the tendency of people or government to proclaim control over natural resources within their territory, shifting the political and economic control of the resource from foreign/private interests to domestic and state-controlled ones (Bremmer & Johnston, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, the annals of Nepal's hydropolitical interactions with India (with China being a more recent partner) illustrate the significant change in the contour of the hydropolitical interaction mainly after 1990, marked by the change in Nepal's political system that created unstable internal political conditions. Moreover, evidence shows that Nepali authorities have been oblivious or have adopted a misinformed approach towards the importance and development of water resources. For instance, after the democratic movement in 1990, the interim PM of Nepal, Mr Krishna P. Bhattarai (from the Nepali Congress Party), paid a visit to India on June 10, 1990. He, together with his Indian counterpart Mr V.P. Singh, released a joint statement that included the phrase 'common rivers' in referring to the issue of river development of Nepal, which later sparked widespread criticism in Nepal (as will be discussed later).

The Mahakali Treaty, as another example, can be recollected in terms of the extent of the influence made regarding the weak nationalistic stance of Nepal (including policymakers,

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<sup>171</sup> Sikri (2010) adds that resource nationalism, due to its colonial experience and sensitivity towards sovereignty, has acquired an anti-Western character.

scholars, journalists and others), especially in setting a benchmark for ceding the right of Nepal over its water resources and eschewing its development plan. More importantly, the treaty highlights the extent to which the hydropolitical issue is linked to border affairs. In the context of the Mahakali River demarcating the Indo-Nepal (Western) border, the treaty has complicated the border issue of Nepal with India (discussed in Chapter 6).

However, it seems that instead of honestly (re) evaluating its past projects with India, Nepal has instead opted to become enmeshed in new projects, some of which are not only insignificant but even detrimental to Nepal. This is apparent in the case of the UKHP project. As Butler (2016) has noticed, Nepali authorities have been relatively silent about India's (undiplomatic) lobbying for the renewal of the project with GMR. Whereas, in the case of the ongoing SHDMP, despite the increasing debate about dam construction,<sup>172</sup> Nepali authorities seemwilling to proceed exclusively to fulfil India's interests. The issue surrounding 'equal rights' in Mahakali became elevated to the 'unilateral interest of India' in UKHP that became the 'exclusively on Indian interest' in SHDMP at the cost of Nepal's interest. Equally, various factors like lack of internal political consensus, lack of knowledge, a controversial Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and the obligation of tax or pay<sup>173</sup> have played a constitutive role in weakening Nepal's resource nationalism and subsequent resistance.

As such, within the period of two decades, the state actors of Nepal (political leaders) have largely debilitated the norms of resource nationalism. The unsettling or instability of the territorialised system of state power can be observed in the transboundary water flow that allows biophysical permeability to the geopolitical border, restricting the privileges of the state to assert permanent sovereignty exercise over its hydrological resources (see also Iyer, 2013; Lama, 2019). It therefore seems that Nepal's lack of converting the resource opportunity for its national benefit has led its neighbours (mainly India) to include security imperatives within their hydropolitical interactions in the name of so-called cooperation.<sup>174</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the hydropolitical realm of Nepal with India and China features the issue of management prominently. Highlighting the norms of governance, Mollinga (2008,

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172 Iyer (2013) has suggested Nepal avoid any dam-related projects and scrap the controversial old treaties.

173 In this system, when making agreements with foreign companies, Nepal has to purchase the energy produced or pay if it is not purchased, referred to as 'tax or pay'.

174 For instance, during the Koshi flood in 2008 that claimed the lives of hundreds and displacement of thousands, India set up a field office in Biratnagar that was unilaterally upgraded as a Consulate General office that only after the consistent pursuance of Nepal was closed in May 2018 (Shaha, 2018).

p. 8) has affirmed that it is concerned with the theme of (good) governance,<sup>175</sup> which has brought politics into the mainstream water resources in an organised, rather than in a dispersed field, in clusters defined according to region and sector. The politics of water is linked to the issues of resource management<sup>176</sup> that encases the holistic sense of the ecosystem of watershed management, including the issues surrounding scarcity, equitable distribution and the maintenance of the integrative water flow, minimising the norms of exploitation and control (For details, see Renner, 2009, p. 2; Rai et al. 2017, p. 791). This seems to be missing in the case of Nepal, which reflects the direct bearing of the weak internal political condition of Nepal, marked by the decreasing rate of bargaining power and weak resource nationalism, which is a product of the knowledge constructed about the water resource abundance in Nepal.

The ‘myth of abundance’ has been enrooted in the popular discourses of Nepal since the study of Hari M. Shrestha (1966), *Cadastre of Potential Water Power Resources of Less Studied High Mountainous Regions, with Special Reference to Nepal*. Over time, this hydropower potential was infused with the norms of water abundance, energy production, national development, foreign interest and export abundance, germinating three schools of thought: 1) water resource is not subject to any foreign agreement, for the electricity generated is not for export; 2) Due to the inverse relation between its water (and hydropower potential) abundance and (weak) political, technical and financial position, the electricity export needs to be prioritised; and 3) Nepal holds the capability to develop some hydroelectric projects, from which the surplus electricity can be exported.

Here, compared to the first and second schools of thought, the third school of thought can address the endeavour of hydropolitical development equally, acknowledging the norms of utility, conservation and management. Meanwhile, the second school of thought carries an array of interwoven complexities, including regarding planning and development, that being the driver factor of the hydropolitical realm, has reified the elusive myth of ‘getting rich by exporting electricity.’<sup>177</sup> Ironically, this is the attitude of commodifying water that perceives water as a tool or an object subject to exportation. Furthermore, this negates the equation

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175 The process and relations of the governance (good or bad), and related ideas like accountability, transparency and legitimacy have political dimensions (Mollinga, 2008, p.8).

176 Proper water management is based on the principles of low-cost options, short gestation period, contractual reliability, national capacity and balance of equity (Gyawali & Dixit, 1999, p.20). According to Mollinga (2008, p. 7-8), ‘management’ is used in the broadest sense of water use like allocation, distribution, governance, regulation, policy. See also Iyer (2013); Lama (2019).

177 Owing to the persistent rhetoric of abundant water resources, ‘facing poverty with hydropower potential’ has been the political truism in Nepal (Dixit & Gyawali, 2010; Gyawali, 2013a).

between the domestic needs and production potential that could effectively address and balance the norms of water availability, national industrialisation and development, upstream-downstream linkages and (hydropower) export, treating water as something extraneous.

Though the postulation of the hydropower potential of Nepal as 83,000 MW is not incorrect, the issue has emerged within the knowledge gap between the ‘popularised’ and the ‘real’ potential. Scholars agree that out of the theoretical but ‘popularised’ 83,000 MW hydroelectricity potential, only 42,000 MW is technically feasible in Nepal. Additionally, if the high dam storage projects are kept aside by considering only Run-of River (ROR) and small storage schemes and projects, the potential is further reduced to 20,000 MW; at 90% exceedance, the hydropower potential is even less, at just 12,000 MW (Shrestha, 2016; Shrestha, 2017).

However, despite such realities, Nepal’s present hydropower engagement and production tell a different story. Data show that until now, Nepal has hardly been able to harness even 1% of its total potential, whereas imports from India comprise a sizeable amount (almost half) of Nepal’s electricity demand<sup>178</sup> (1480 MW) (For details, see Bhattarai, 2019; Kumar, 2021). Despite the projection of a total generation of 2,300 MW by early 2022, the demand-supply trajectory indicates that the demand won’t exceed 1,500 MW, thus leaving the electricity spillage of about 800 MW.

However, some optimistic (and equally realistic) figures underlining Nepal’s (economic) developmental goals through hydroelectricity projects predict Nepal would be able to consume around 15,000 MW in the next 25 years;<sup>179</sup> almost reaching a balance between the electricity demand and supply. Moreover, Nepal (according to the Indo-Nepal construction agreement) completed the 400 KV Dhalkevar-Mujaffarpur transboundary transmission line in 2012, followed by the electricity trade agreement in 2014 with India. However, as mentioned earlier, due to India’s lukewarm response to such agreement(s), the agreements on the cross-border electricity guideline and conduct of business rule (CBR) have stalled. Furthermore, India has delayed or stalled further collaborative projects, like the concept of ‘energy banking’ (exporting the energy during monsoon and import during the dry season).<sup>180</sup> Plus, the cost of

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178 Nepal has faced electricity shortages of up to 18 hours a day.

179 The Nepal government’s white paper on the energy, water resources and irrigation sector aims to increase the production capacity to 15,000 MW. For details, see Bhattarai (2019).

180 In Nepal, there is low demand for electricity during the winter season and high demand in the dry season; the opposite is the case in India. Through the concept of energy banking, Nepal could sell electricity at a higher price during winter and import at a lower price during the wet season, but this has been delayed due to India’s reluctance to appoint a nodal agency.

electricity is not only lower in India and Bangladesh than in Nepal but also these nations are increasingly adopting efficient and cost-effective renewable energy generation technologies (Bhattarai, 2019). Finally, and not least, the (higher) cost of transboundary electricity transmission and (high) internal pilferage have collectively challenged Nepal's prospects and plans for electricity export.

However, running contrary to these pieces of evidence, data reveal that in its race to exploit its 'abundant' water resources,<sup>181</sup> aggravated by its intention of cutting off the takeover of the hydroelectricity generated by Bhutan, Nepal has been heavily engaged in hydropolitical interactions. The data show that the Nepal Electricity Authority has already doled out 5,157 MW (85.6% of total license) of the hydropower license to Indian companies (Shrestha, 2016, p.14). The result is that Nepal itself has been left without any cost-effective hydropower projects at hand for immediate development. These points suggest that the discourse that Nepal has abundant water resources is subject to repudiation. This has not only repelled external investment but also has affected the effective resistance against the hydro-hegemony of India and China, further aggravated by the lack of unified discourses that align with Nepal's national interest. Nepal's response, as part of the wider postcolonial international relations it has with India and China, is discussed in the next section in more detail.

### **5.5. Nepal's response as part of the wider postcolonial international relations**

The earlier sections outlined India and China's hegemonic status and how Nepal has responded. In this section, I explain how Nepal's response to hydro-hegemony forms a wider part of the postcolonial relationship of Nepal with India and China, focusing on the themes of the existing power asymmetry, representation and possibility for resistance. As mentioned earlier, the productive engagement of postcolonialism in the water resources issue implies the disclosure of the water resource struggle, its accessibility and the voice of the interacting small state, including in the form of resistance through knowledge (re) construction and resource nationalism. This discussion aims to offer new modes of resource enquiry to revitalise and reorient the methodological and pedagogical practices, by taking an alternative approach.

The existing pedagogical formation is articulated using a certain form of knowledge produced and facilitated by the power over ideas, which is the most effective and common

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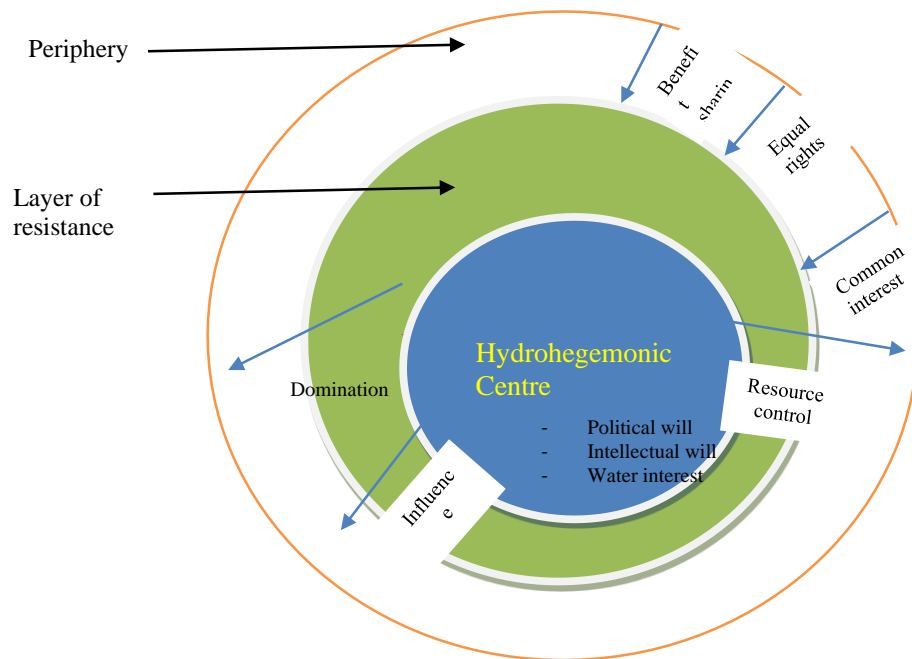
For details, see Kumar, R. (2021); Electricity in monsoon and dry season, Online Available at: <https://www.himalkhabar.com/news/122174?fbclid=IwAR08f7DCx4OwOqAEK8FnkZI2VC8eKK1EHBmyOobKNiF6s-xGIJs-YradE1M%20internal%20status%20vs> (In Nep.) (15/02/2021).

181 The extent of the myth of abundance among Nepali political leaders was evident in the 1990s when Nepal's former PM, Mr G.P. Koirala, said, "...no more than waste water' (Pant, 2012, p. 67).

form of power that exists through discourse, moving from the conscious world of bargaining to the subconscious world of predetermined outcomes (Zeitoun et al. 2010, p.164). In this context, meaningful inquiry into hegemonic activity implies moving away from the tendency to privilege hegemony as a 'self-correcting and maintaining device' so as to allow space for the weaker states to counter their resource subjection.

As noted earlier, to locate the hydropolitical position of Nepal within the Indian and Chinese neo-colonial form of resource subjection, the notions of 'centre' and 'periphery' are applicable; the former is pushed to the periphery by the latter. I have termed such hydropolitical interaction constituting the centre and periphery as the 'hydropolitical field'. Here, compared to the periphery, the centre is characterised by its possession of a disproportionate level of political and intellectual influence and agency that is keen to seek control over the resource present within (or in a transboundary water basin of) the weaker states. Meanwhile, the periphery is characterised by its bearing of experience of power exerted by the centre and the resistance to it to maintain the norms of benefit sharing, equal rights, common interest and the integrative flow of water.

The centre possesses a resilient and stubborn immunity consolidated to form a 'layer of resistance' that effectively safeguards it from the peripheral resistance and sustains the political and intellectual hegemony and the resource subjection. In other words, the hydropolitical field, rather than being a static interaction posits an incessant interaction between the centre and periphery. This interaction is characterised by the continuous radiation of the influence/ domination from the centre that is subject to the resistance from the periphery; it is a two-way form of interaction. The phenomenon continues until the 'critical limit' is achieved, beyond which the status quo is changed, subsequently leading to either the alteration of the hydropolitical interaction or termination of the interaction, as displayed in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Hydropolitical field (source: Author)**

Referring to Figure 2, within the hydropolitical realm, the political and intellectual production of knowledge is the product of the existing power disparity and the extent of internalisation (by Nepal). Here, the peripheral locality of Nepal is subject to the multifaceted factors that comprehensively includes both the external (India and China) and internal factors. The domination and influence generated from the hydrohegemon ‘centre’ attempts to peripheralise the weaker entity, marginalising the norms of benefit sharing, equal rights and common interests, which being against the interest of the weaker entity, thus is subject to resistance dependent on the political will, intellectual will and water interest of the weaker entity.

Here, it is important to note that there are discourses that unilaterally feed the Indian (mainly) and Chinese interests through the employment of the trope of development and modernisation as a signifier. For instance, scholars (see Hanasz, 2014; Mirumachi, 2015) have labelled the water resource projects of Nepal with India as functioning in a cooperative manner. However, such approaches tend to be eager to label and define any projects within the parochial consideration of conflict or cooperation, which reflects only a part of the overall hydropolitical configurations, subsequently negating or downplaying the overall configuration of hydro-politics (as in Figure 1).



Moreover, scholars like Hanasz (2014, p. 97) have pointed to the presence of a hydrohegemon as an assurance for regional stability and as a patronage for weaker states. Similarly, some scholars like Butler (2016) and Chellaney (2013) have rationalised the presence of the external actors as necessary given Nepal's weak economic and proficiency status, so as to develop and manage water resource projects like hydropower generation and flood control. However, the case of UKHP tells a different story. The UKHP project agreement was made with GMR in such a way that the subsidies and privileges offered by Nepal were equal to the total project construction cost (around \$700 million) (Pun 2014). More importantly, the agreement violated article 156<sup>182</sup> of the interim constitution of Nepal (2007) that necessitates parliamentary ratification. Despite such privileges, GMR<sup>183</sup> has still been unable to set up a construction date and attract an investor, for which Nepal is renewing the annual license.

Thus, for Nepal, the representation of development through hydropolitical interaction is problematic, if not paradoxical, given the significance of the project to Nepal. It is also a manifestation of constructing a process of otherness, whereby Nepal is distinct from India or China. The case studies abundantly demonstrate that the hydropolitical interactions of Nepal with India and China exhibit a representation of control, conflict or discontent rather than cooperation or development. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the Indian discourses about the Sino-Nepal hydropolitical interaction, rather than being grounded in reality, reflect their own intention of creating concern about the issue of security and the threat that India experiences from China. Such considerations manifest their paternal geopolitics, revealing that hydro-politics has been used as a geopolitical tool.

This suggests that the rhetoric of water resource development, rather than being an abstraction as derived from development or emancipation, or that is a homogenous intellectual formation, is real and constructed to serve the neo-colonial agendas of India and China in advocating for their unchallenged form of centrality. Thus, it is important to discuss how well Nepal acknowledges or internalises the discourse of its hydropolitical disposition.

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182 "Article 156, Ratification of, accession to, acceptance of or approval of, treaties or agreements: .....(2) Any law to be made pursuant...shall, inter alia, require that the ratification of, accession to, acceptance of, or approval of, treaties or agreements on the following subjects must be made, by a two-thirds majority of the total number of the then members of the Legislature-Parliament..... (d) Natural resources, and the distribution of their uses". (Source; Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007, Available: <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/np/np006en.pdf> (07/01/2020).

183 Scholars like Shrestha (2017, p. 4) have even called the UKHP agreement with GMR 'suicidal' for Nepal.

As mentioned earlier, overly positive and perhaps exaggerated projections regarding the hydrological potential of Nepal has played a major, if not the most important, role in disseminating the narrative of ‘abundance of water in Nepal’, which has been the defining factor of the nation’s hydropolitical interactions. Such notions are responsible for Nepal’s thwarted and perceived lack of agency in this matter. The case of Nepal illustrates that a lack of internal consent has a direct impact upon the way a water resource project is approached, in this case affecting the way Nepal responds to hydro-hegemony.

There have been differing levels of response via Nepali government actions regarding hydropolitical projects with India and China. On account of the previous discussion and Figure 2, in the case of India, it seems apparent that Nepal has kept itself aloof from exerting a high degree of resistance that could reach the critical limit (and even transverse) against the Indian influence and domination of its water resources. For instance, as mentioned earlier, the Bhattarai government’s 1990 joint statement with India’s inclusion of the phrase of ‘common rivers’ was met with widespread public outrage, whereby there were allegations that the Bhattarai government had attempted to ‘sell out’ the water resources of Nepal, to the extent the matter later even became an agenda item for the 1991 general election<sup>184</sup> (Shrestha, 2017).

Evidently, for Nepal, the agreement for common rivers has proven to be counterproductive in its facilitation of the external exploitation of its water resources, subsequently ceding its rights to its resources. This suggests that its high level of political, social, cultural and economic interaction with Nepal has provided India (rather than China) with leverage to remain immune to any resistance of Nepal through the construction of a stronger layer of disinterest, thus establishing itself (India) as the (sole) benefactor. In the case of China, conversely, as evident in the case of the Budhigandaki project, Nepal seems to have enjoyed some sort of leverage, whereby the discontent of Nepal was manifested in the form of (unilateral) cancellation of the project. This elucidates that in the case of a higher level of peripheral resistance than the central influence, the condition can be created whereby a weaker state steers the overall hydropolitical interaction: either by proceeding or terminating.

However, the challenge of devising a unified approach has been a continuing process in Nepal, as evident in the case of the Arun III project. The Arun-III hydropower project (900

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184 India has succeeded in reifying the norm of a ‘common river’ through the inclusion of the provision of a ‘common river’ within the agreement of the Mahakali Treaty in 1996 that helped India to step up in each of its agreements with Nepal.

MW) was initially designed as export-oriented, which was labelled as anti-environmental, ultimately leading to its cancellation in 1996. The pervasive internal discontent characterised by the incongruence among the development, environmental and external funding interests ultimately caused Nepal to lose the project. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the varied form of emerging arguments, including the populist rhetoric of ‘return of Arun-3 at all costs’ (not the ‘right cost’) (Gyawali, 2013a) finally ended up with the Arun- 3 agreement made with India in 2014.

Within the dichotomy of nationalism and conservation, Nepal has ultimately ended up (like in Arun-III) losing both—neither the conservation was maintained, nor was Nepal able to build the project according to its national interest. The projection of development and conservation as binary opposites, including the alleged (high) project cost, was effectively utilised by those promoting a narrative of conservation, which changed the discourse against the project per se, obscuring any meaningful interaction. As Gyawali (2013a, p. 178) contends, addressing rational sanity without marginalising social, environmental and developmental sanity has been a major challenge for Nepal.

In this context, there is a fear that Nepal is on its way towards losing both the cheaper (hydro) energy source and the attractive foreign investment to fulfil its ideal dream of ‘economic development by electricity export’, stemming from the myth of water abundance in Nepal, with the potential to generate regional influence. Moreover, such discourses lack an approach inclined to resource nationalism, which has not only served the interests of hydrohegemony but also thwarted the agency of Nepal; that is, to resist or accommodate. Thus, the ruling planners, politicians, decision-makers and public need to unlearn and deconstruct the concept of the abundance of water potential in Nepal. Thus, by exemplifying the evolving (or devolving) hydropolitical reality, it can be concluded that resource degeneration not only exacerbates the internal political aspects of Nepal but also boosts the impact of conflict and neo-colonialism. This has favoured the negative perception in Nepal towards its neighbours (mainly India) and thus has hindered any harmonious discussion on common hydropolitical interests.

Here, I refer to Figure 1, as the level of significance is important to note. Rather than portraying this as an index, I aim to present it in the way that interrogates the discourses that conclude the Indo-Nepal hydropolitical interaction as cooperative. For instance, following the above discussion, it can be affirmed that those interactions (the one with China remaining incomplete) are of less significance to Nepal, with some projects like UHKP being

‘detrimental’ and SHDMP being even more so. In this context, a crucial part of Nepal’s undeclared counter-hegemony strategy includes the mechanisms for the construction, collection, interpretation and dissemination of the knowledge that could improve its international status, negotiation and decision-making process. This could favour the optimal utilisation of its resources, including social, environmental, economic and political sustainable policies within the framework of resource nationalism (Figures 1 and 2).

Therefore, despite its capability for development and construction without antagonising its neighbours,<sup>185</sup> that is, to construct projects (like UKHP) or avoid projects (like SHDMP), Nepal seems to enter into transboundary agreements, as though suffering historical amnesia, whereby past unjust and inequitable interactions are ignored. This seems to be the combined product of the ‘will’ of Nepal and its internal political status aggravated by its misperception about the water abundance in the country, which has strongly affected its overall resistance. This has imposed a direct influence upon its relationship with its neighbours, further exploiting or worsening the already-existing inequalities. Thus, the challenge for Nepal has been to effectively resist and counter the hydro-hegemony of India and China that illustrates the neo-colonial practices of the resource subjection.

In this context, the adoption of the postcolonial approach is essential to uncovering various hydropolitical issues hitherto underrepresented within the scholarly endeavour. Firstly, the approach equips us to reveal how post-colonial states like India and China have utilised the leverage of power asymmetry by emulating the colonial ideologies and practices to impose upon their weaker neighbours. Secondly, it enables more inclusive hydropolitical interactions through the allocation of discourses that explain these beyond the parochial dimension of conflict and cooperation. This is because, as illustrated, the words ‘conflict’ or ‘cooperation’, rather than implying objective and absolute meaning, may serve as a tool to sustain the hydro-hegemony that rationalises the presence of India (and China) as a means for self-congratulation.

Thirdly, it helps to reveal that the utilisation of the representational tropes like development and modernisation may be problematic in terms of their significance for a small state like Nepal. Lastly, but not least, it assists to highlight the experience or voice of Nepal, hitherto underrepresented, in terms of the way it has accommodated or resisted the hydro-hegemony of its neighbours. Thus, a postcolonial approach to hydro-politics is useful in

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<sup>185</sup> Nepal’s Hydropower Act of 2001 states that “all hydropower schemes must release at least 10% of the river’s flow during operation- no scheme can impede more than 90% of a river’s flow at any time”. See Butler (2016).

revealing key water-related concerns of Nepal regarding India and China by examining the power asymmetry and the colonial legacies via the roles of representation and resistance.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

With the growing concern about future access to and control over water resources, water security is emerging globally as a compelling resource-based challenge due to the increasing population and rising demand (Kaniaru, 2015, p.381). Rivers are often discussed in political corridors, transforming water reserves into a competitive resource, which leads to a dynamic form of hydropolitical interaction that shapes current world politics (Rai et al. 2017, p. 791). This is true in the case of Nepal, as water development has been a premise and even a stratagem by which India and China can secure their geopolitical interests. On Nepal's part, there seems to be a lack of confidence in its hydropolitical relations with India and China, as the hydropolitical projects so far agreed upon appear to share a common theme: power asymmetry as one of the decisive factors.

Accordingly, I have suggested considering the hydropolitical configuration to allow a two-way interaction for a small state like Nepal. Thus, the sharing of data and joint management needs to occur at every stage of negotiation, inception, design, execution and management of any project to be constructed in Nepal. With its limited manoeuvrability, Nepal needs to address the internal discontent and develop effective resistance against any form of hydrohegemonic interaction by adhering to the notion of knowledge production and resource nationalism to secure better opportunities. Thus, a postcolonial approach in hydro-politics is helpful in revealing the vital water-related issues of Nepal in relation to India and China by interrogating the power asymmetry and the colonial legacies through exploring the roles of representation and resistance. The next chapter analyses the territorial affairs of Nepal vis-a vis its neighbours through the postcolonial approach.

## Chapter 6: Border

Differentiating between the ‘self’ and ‘other’, boundaries play a constitutive role in the geographical space delineation process and setting, whereby the international political boundaries discernibly manifest the large-scale link between politics and geography (Paasi, 1996; Newman & Paasi, 1998, 186). Despite the ongoing debates over the relevance of nation-states, states are still considered the most important territorial divider, as basic units and key actors in the international system (Van Houtum, 2005, p. 674). However, prominent scholars in this discipline have treated border studies within the dichotomy of a ‘borderless world’ and the ‘instrumentalisation of power’ onto borders, leaving a marginal space for a more critical form of inquiry. As such, I intend to implement the postcolonial approach to develop a nuanced understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of border<sup>186</sup> studies through the existing power asymmetry, the role of representation and the underlying resistance that shape the vibrant border identity of Nepal vis a vis India and China.

In this chapter, I focus on bilateral and trilateral border identity and issues as the basis for exploring border-politics to reveal the way the power asymmetry has been a decisive factor in how Nepal has negotiated. This is important because not all of the border affairs take the form of border issues, which I have further denoted through the design of the framework of border-hegemony to locate the way the small state responds to the border-hegemony of its neighbours. The framework of border-hegemony thus provides a means of representing and thus acknowledging the indispensable constituents of the border interaction.

First, I provide an outline of the literature of border studies. There is a consensus among scholars that the (state) borders, boundaries and frontiers,<sup>187</sup> considered to be interfaces and overlapping spaces, are the key elements in a state’s power and sovereignty. More importantly, the nature of border relationships and interactions are crucial to determine inter-state relationships (Henrikson, 2001). This is because borders actively signify limits or discontinuities and differences in the process of marking space related to the norms of (national) identity and power; to which the social, political, economic and human dimensions are attached (Popescu, 2010, p.293; Murton, 2017, p.243). Notably, power relations are involved in the construction of territoriality, symbolisation and the manifestation of various

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186 In this thesis, I follow the de jure case of boundaries as borders (designated political and administrative lines that are both institutional and symbolic) than the de facto case of boundaries as frontiers (more ambiguous and flexible spaces conditioned by ethnic, cultural and linguistic factors). For details see Kolossov & O’Loughlin (1998).

187 Borders, boundaries, and frontiers though bear different meanings, I use them interchangeably in this thesis.

spatial scales (Paasi, 1996, p. 17). In this context, attempts to define the territoriality in terms of (big) power or in terms of the universalisation of the concept of a borderless world or obsolescence of the territorial state per se (see Agnew, 1994) lull one into a parochial view that is slanted towards the great powers' consideration of the small states as nugatory.

The looming power contention between the two Himalayan giants, China and India, can largely be attributed to their territorial affairs that have generated shock waves to their neighbouring small states like Nepal. I intend to apply the postcolonial lens from the perspective of a small state to this issue, which is the theme of the discussion in the second section. Here, the adoption of the postcolonial endeavour is an attempt to consider the political sense of border, plus a call for a two-way interaction between the interacting entities as well as to provide the space for the hitherto marginalised or muted voices of a small state like Nepal.

The adoption of the realist frame regarding borders within the postcolonial approach may sound paradoxical. Nonetheless, it is important to note that (national) identity per se does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is a function of the difference constructed between the self and other through the means of some form of boundaries. It is through the demarcation of the border that the simultaneous ascription of the essence of inclusion and exclusion is enacted to draw upon a sense of collective or national identity that establishes the state as a fixed unit of sovereign space. This has aptly been summarised by Ashcroft et al. (2007, p. 25), who contends that the nature and construction of borders are equally crucial to postcolonial studies.

Generally, the outcome of the border-interaction is typically in favour of the powerful state that is often naturalised as a norm or a standard. I have described this as 'border-hegemony', which is achieved through the various strategies of border manipulation like border encroachments and the unilateral activities or practices in the border region. Here, among the various practices, border encroachment can be considered a discernible and significant form of border-hegemony. However, the process of border encroachment is not an instant product; rather, it is a composite function of incessant, sequential and variable interactions occurring between influence or domination plus resistance between a powerful and a weaker state. Moreover, the state borders share a unique and complex attribute, that they are inward-oriented, meaning "They are closely related to the ideological state apparatus, ideological practices such as nationalism (and related national identity narratives) and the material basis of such practices, which manifests itself in territoriality" (Paasi, 2011).

The territory generates a certain and collective sense of ideology or belongings within the members demarcated by that territory, the most important of them being the sense of nationalism. As scholars like Anderson (1988 in Paasi, 2011) agree, the most important territorial form of ideology is nationalism, which gains ideological power from the discourse and practices that construct the difference between the collective self and others. Notably, nationalism acts as an important element for accommodating the space for resistance.

I offer a framework of border-hegemony that constitutes hegemony, power and resistance, actively creating a linkage between the (big) power and (small state) resistance on account of Nepal's territorial affairs with India and China. Here, the norm of resistance rests upon the ideological foundation of the norms of knowledge (re) construction that buttresses the collective sentiment of nationalism. The framework of border-hegemony presented herein attempts to represent and thus acknowledge the indispensable constituents of the border interaction. Accordingly, the border-hegemony of India (focusing on open Indo-Nepal border and border encroachment) and China (focusing on border manipulation and encroachment) are discussed in the third section, followed by the way Nepal negotiates this in the fourth section. To begin with, the next section provides a short literature review on border studies.

### **6.1. Border studies**

Due to the changing international geopolitical environment, political borders have gained scholarly currency during recent decades and thus become a highly salient research object. There is a consensus among scholars that borders exhibit a multifaceted nature, such as performing as institutions that are established by political decisions and regulated by legal texts (Paasi, 1996). That no rule-bound economic, social or political life in complex societies could be organised without them acts as a testimony to the performance of borders as a basic political institution.

Border studies, espousing the norms of geographical representation, images and narratives, have enacted the politics of alterity that marks the physical and psychological separation of the self from the other. With the changing inclination of geography towards a positivist agenda, more weight has been attributed to models and generalisations, paving the way for the political geographer to assess the functional roles of borders and attempt generalisations (Minghi, 1963). Traditionally, political geography has considered borders as concrete and constitutive of the empirical phenomena, making generalisations as complex processes (Prescot, 1987).



Thus, border studies have largely shared a common theme attributed to their parochial nature of non-inclusivity and the objectivity towards their worldview approach. Prominently, those studies share the norms of the mainstream IR scholarship, mainly realism, which rather than acknowledging the state (spatial) system as characterised by more or less exclusive boundaries, perceives boundaries and territories as the functioning and compartmentalisation of the political organisation of the world (Johnston, 1995 in Newman & Paasi, 1998).

Needless to say, these studies, due to their exclusive concentration on the exercise of unchallenged power, portray the powerful actor as a leader in its ability to separate, mediate conflict, maintain stability and direct the overall system of the interaction. However, this has a productive impact on the overall consideration of the border interaction. It leaves the effect of collective ignorance of the complex nature of borders, upholding the paternal posture of the powerful state while marginalising or subverting the norms of mutual respect.

In a remarkable manner, the 1990s witnessed significant and rapid global and regional political and economic changes, including the end of the Cold War, accelerating globalisation, the increasing emergence of transnational organisations like the EU, and the looming political and economic significance of Asia. This, together with changing geopolitical discourses, set up a new trajectory of (regional) border studies. Accordingly, new studies—highlighting the processes of shaping borders, symbols and institutions referred to as the institutionalisation of territories—began to focus on the inexplicable contribution of the border as an element to the development of the states they enclose (Paasi, 1996).

Thus, the traditional border studies' parochial approach was increasingly subject to challenge by critical geopolitics or postmodern IR theory, including globalisation (Newman, 2003; Dodds, 2005; O'Dowd, 2010; Johnson et al. 2011). This also included initiating (new) efforts in border studies to draw on post-structuralist and ethnographic standpoints (Newman & Paasi, 1998). More importantly, postmodernists were inspired by the notion of transforming socio-spatial organisation into post-modern hyperspace, accompanied by the loss of boundaries. Notably, focusing on boundary-producing practices and questions of identity, they challenged the particularity of places, borders, and territoriality, striving to deconstruct the self-evident traits related to the territories (Newman & Paasi, 1998; Van Houtam, 2005).

However, those agendas share a common fallacy: in moving away from the 'conventional' norm, they tend to ignore the multidimensionality of boundary, including its spatial, thematic and disciplinary norms. For instance, the transformation of borders from

barriers to active spaces like in the EU produced a ripple effect that led to the ubiquitous form of dismantling the 'rigid' consideration of the border per se towards considering it as more than a simple rigid line on the map and ground. As Johnson et al. (2011) specifically outline, within the changing and re-shaped meaning of boundaries, new vocabularies were triggered, including keywords such as cross-border regions, regional states or city regions. In this context, the endeavour to generalise the vocabulary of the European specificity is subject to critical repudiation.

Moreover, crucially, the hard territorial lines of inter-state boundaries still engender a great deal of conflict that is as discernibly about identity and historical construction of "homeland" spaces as it is about positional and resource disputes (Dzurek, 2005; Newman, 2003). For the international community, the significance of a territorial dispute does not relate to the sufferings and violence it inflicts; as (Dzurek, 2005, p.263) highlights, the "raw magnitude of an international problem does not correlate with the response of the international community". As such, conventional accounts, like realist accounts, focus on competition within the international system and undermine such norms of differentiations and otherings.

However, the looming discourses and practices of the borderless world (and the decreasing significance of boundaries) do not fit well within the norms of individual state territoriality and state sovereignty. This is because the state governments are reluctant to relinquish border control unless there is a challenge from globalisation (outside) or below (localisation) (Newman, 2003). Furthermore, states (still) are the significant actors, even the sole ones in some cases, in the international system. Rising inter-state tensions (though mainly in developing societies) regarding resources and territory are not extraneous to border studies.

In this context, the concept of a borderless world not only undercuts the functioning nature of the international system, including the exclusively state-related issues, but also risks (re) appropriating or universalising Western norms and practices, without analysing the native disposition that we endeavour to eschew. More importantly, as an imperial reckoning, it risks locating the hegemonic view at the centre of the discourses that positions border studies as a privilege of a stronger state (or region), leaving the weaker states within the dilemma located between the imperial cartography and the post-colonial maintenance of the colonial ideology. The critical theories ignore the basic norm that the contemporary border identity is the function of the colonial enterprise of the past. This claim is further cemented by Agnew (1994), who argues that the loss of sovereignty is directly correlated with the loss of territoriality because the regionalisation observed at both the pan-state and intra-state levels is the regaining of a new

form of territorial organisations of power and new contours of borders; this suggests permeability rather than the actual existence of a border.<sup>188</sup>

Due to the permeable nature of the border and the preponderance of power there, it is a manifesting factor to define regions, their boundaries and their consequent representation, a situation which has been a challenge for border studies (Paasi, 1996, p.17). Therefore, the oversimplified and exaggerative definition and debate on boundaries risks downplaying the apparent “qualitative transformation of the functions and practices of states and nations, territoriality and sovereignty.” (Anderson, 1996 in Paasi, 1996). As the territorial organisation is the function of power, it can be concrete and tangible phenomena in the geopolitical landscape, which only gains a holistic form when a space could be safeguarded for a weaker entity.

However, there is scant literature focusing on the border sensibilities of a small state facing a tripod of geopolitical positioning, the interests of external actors and the effects of the existing power configuration. Evidently, the negation of the sensibility of a small state is suggestive of the parochial consideration of the border affairs that fixates it on the periphery of the border interaction. As discussed earlier in this thesis, Nepal’s limited role within the traditional IR framework as a peripheral actor has caused the deliberate denial of its sensibilities, including in terms of its border affairs. Accordingly, postcolonialism offers a different approach, as explored in the next section.

## **6.2. Border-hegemony and postcolonialism**

In this section, I aim to describe border-hegemony while taking account of the territorial affairs of Nepal with India and China through the combination of power, hegemony and resistance (as noted in the earlier chapters), followed by an explanation of how this approach is postcolonial. Unlike the other forms of interactions (like water interaction) discussed in this thesis, border interactions are inherent, obligatory and non-replaceable, whereby the act of domination is performed beyond the norms of leading.

As mentioned earlier, post-colonial relations are characterised by the asymmetry of power. As Mahmud (2011, p. 26) suggests, the suppression of difference has “become the primary preoccupations of the postcolonial states”. The powerful states utilise the privilege of

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<sup>188</sup> According to Agnew, boundary management is related to how boundaries are demarcated and delimited, determining the nature of the transboundary interactions that range from closed and sealed to permeable and porous borders enabling freedom.

the power asymmetry to manipulate the dependency of the weaker state, mimicking the policy of resource exploitation and territorial expansion and encroachment of the(ir) colonial ruler. Cooper (2002 in Newman, 2003) describes this as a “new kind of imperialism with double standards”—a form of economic imperialism that is observable, characterised by the coercion, pre-emptive attack, deception and even the practices of border encroachment.

The construction of the territorial processes and narrative—territory being part of the formation of the narrative—do not arise in *Vacuo*, but rather is “political in action and is part of the distribution of social power in society” (Newman & Paasi, 1998, p. 195). Border affairs bear a special significance in the neo-colonial discourses to the extent that the issue has been considered as a ‘zero-sum game’, with mainstream IR scholars granting the preponderant right to the great power, consciously narrowing the space for the cooperative approach. Thus, borders are largely shaped by colonial encounters and the inherited legacies that code proxies for power, whereby the colonial systems and practices are reproduced and represented.

Border-hegemony relates to border power politics. It is a loosely-used term that is a convenient epithet to instantiate the border-interaction<sup>189</sup> as the site of engagement where the ‘imperial encounter’ is apparent. Border-hegemony can be defined as hegemony at the border between two states (this is emphasised) achieved through various strategies and modes of operationalisation and management of the (inter-state) border. These strategies are executed through an array of tactics like coercion, pressure, treaties and knowledge construction via the active employment of power. The border hegemon generally resorts to persuasion by enforcing ideological beliefs and knowledge construction, forms of compliance-producing mechanisms.<sup>190</sup>

The territorial affairs of India and China have largely steered the geopolitical dynamics of Himalayan region, including in their relationship with neighbouring small states like Nepal. They have maintained their present territorial identity partly following the colonial heritage and partly constructing their territorial claim over the neighbouring small states and their territories, as in Kashmir and Tibet. Mapping the world-system through the (Western) hegemonic viewpoint, India and China, to thwart their own set of post-colonial securitisation and relations, strive to expand their territory by dealing with their border affairs through

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189 Here, it is relevant to consider Martinez’s (1994 in Kladiwo et al. 2012) categorisation of the borderland interactions: alienated borderland (no routine cross-border interaction, less permeability); co-existent borderlands (slightly opened with limited cross-border interaction); interdependent borderlands (social relationship across the border); and integrated borderlands (no barriers exist in cross-border trade and human movement).

190 For a compliance-producing mechanism, see Lustick (2002).

coercive rather than cooperative measures, of which their neighbouring small states (like Nepal) are left on the receiving end.

In this context, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is important to consider Doty's (1996) depiction of 'imperial encounter' in the context of border affairs. The adjoining border between a developed, emerging or powerful state and a weaker, poor and unstable small state ultimately leads to a form of interaction that can be depicted as an 'imperial encounter'. For this, it must involve an asymmetrical encounter entailing two basic features: 1) one entity is not only able to construct realities, that are taken seriously and acted upon, but also holds the potential for border encroachment and/or unilateral manipulation of the border while 2) the other entity is denied equal degrees or types of agency, leaving it vulnerable to losing control and authority over its territory.

In the light of their increasing territorial focus, India and China are equally concerned about limiting each other's in neighbouring states like Nepal (Garver, 2012). As mentioned in Chapter 1, though Nepal was not colonised, its present border identity is the ultimate product of the colonial enterprise. Notably, power asymmetry, which affects the empirical statehood of the interacting entities, infers different meanings and experiences for the hegemons (here, India and China) and non-hegemon (Nepal). This means that both the hegemon and non-hegemon are subjects of the border interaction, where the former is keen to exert its influence and hegemony over the latter.

As power has been the prime determinant of Nepal's territorial relations with India and China, it is necessary to study the way the existing power asymmetry of Nepal with these two neighbours shapes its border identity. There is a constant need to interrogate the ideology of the border-hegemony despite acknowledging that the border-hegemony is problematic. The functional relation of the border-hegemony has largely sustained the colonial legacy that features the notions of domination, subjugation and marginalisation. Thus, the role territory plays within the regimes of knowledge production specifically in the neo-colonial account is worthy of further examination.

However, research into the extension of neo-colonial practices related to borders is lacking in mainstream border studies. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, mainstream IR, like realism, tends to undermine a state's endogenous factors or the (internal) political structure. In addition, the international community's preoccupation with the great powers and their idealised and self-interested abstraction has made border issues more significant for small states. Thus,

against the backdrop of the marginalisation of the issues of the small states in the international system, mainstream IR's consideration of power as an 'exercise' that disguises conflict<sup>191</sup> needs to be avoided to (re) centralise the status of a small weak state. The significance of postcolonial analysis is thus highly relevant to this topic.

Postcolonialism plays a constitutive role in challenging power and understanding space and place as demarcated through the politics of alterity. Davies and Jardine (2003) rightly point out that, within the theatre of post-colonial settings, postcolonial narrativity can effectively address the issues surrounding the incorporation of states and power. Notably, when discussing power, we cannot isolate resistance, an attribute of power, as it has self-existence that dissociates existing power relations and challenges the prevailing power structure (Gill, 2008; Gopal, 2019), which is also affirmed by the postcolonial take. This implies that the weaker states can use the tools of dominant discourse (see Daoudy, 2005b in Zeitoun & Warner, 2006) to resist the persisting border-hegemony and appropriate the dominant structure and discursive forms to interpolate such experiences into the dominant modes of representation. Thus, the adoption of a postcolonial approach to border studies equips one also to consider whether the agency of a small state, to resist or accommodate, is properly acknowledged.

Here, it is important to note that borders are built with the fusion of geography, cartography, norms of sovereignty and the existing constellations of power that demarcate between political insiders and outsiders. However, the transformation of the border demarcation between adjoining states into the politics of othering through knowledge construction as facilitated by power is problematic. The construction of difference by the bordering process is not unbiased. In such a process, an order is created whereby the others are expected to respect the rights of the self (Newman, 2003, p. 15). More importantly, within the ideology, language and practice of determining this difference, the problem does not stem from the rules of (all) belonging (to an interaction) but from the arbitrary marshalling of power. Thus, the border-hegemony actively employs the process of othering that intersects with the postcolonial interpretation. This is because the process of othering has been actively employed in postcolonial studies (Said, 1978) and scrutinised in many IR and geographic studies (Paasi, 1996).

In this context, the call for postcolonial analysis is significant in some key ways. Firstly, it illustrates the existing power asymmetry that resonates the colonial legacy. Secondly, it

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191 In the words of Frey, conflict exists "when one actor attempts to exert power over another to overcome that actor's perceived blockage of the first actor's goal and faces significant resistance" (Frey, 1993, p. 57).

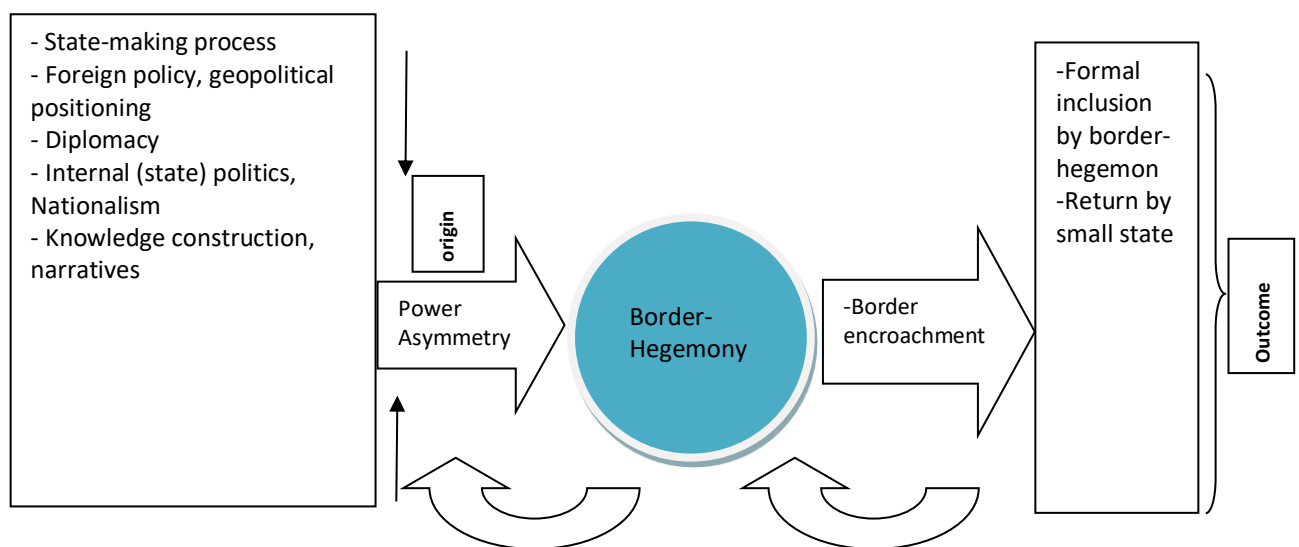
functions through the enactment of the representational practices that sustain the border-hegemony. Thirdly, due to the unalienated nature of power and resistance, the space for the weaker entity needs to be acknowledged, in the way they have reacted or responded. Here, the aim is to offer a two-way form of border interaction, unravelling the sensibility of a small state that can be better described through the framework of border-hegemony.

Combining the concepts of power, hegemony and resistance in the border interaction, I intend to develop a single framework of border-hegemony to facilitate the scrutinisation of the border interaction, to analyse: 1) What is the nature and content of border-hegemony?; 2) What are the factors that maintain border-hegemony?; and 3) How can the border-hegemony effectively be challenged? Here my intention is to contribute to the contemporary trends of postcolonial (bilateral, unless stated otherwise) border affairs through the vantage point of a small state.

From this, some obvious questions thus arise: How can we ensure a space for a small state and is the outcome of the border interaction reversible? This is what the framework of border-hegemony intends to answer, using the reference case of Nepal's territorial affairs with India and China. I seek to elucidate the answer partly through Figure 3, which intends to observe the border interaction through the perspective of a small state, locating the point of intersection between the existing power disparity and (small state) territorial sovereignty, which forms the basis for the framework of the border-hegemony illustrated later.

According to Dzurek (2005, p. 263), the factors influencing a territorial dispute encompass both "tangible properties (area in dispute, populations, resources, number killed) and intangible factors (historical animosity, cultural differences, third-party involvement)". Thus, the territoriality acts as a locus for the overall process of forming a state because, as Dzurek (2005) points out, a state's historical, social and cultural construction of homeland spaces directly influences the state's territoriality and border issues. Thus, a state's internal political structure is salient in terms of the overall formation, shaping and functioning of a state's relational affairs, including its territorial affairs, which is also affirmed by postcolonialism. As mentioned earlier, the exogenous factors, like the geopolitical positioning and the neighbouring powers' interests, and the endogenous factors, like the internal political status, the foreign policy, the effective utilisation of soft power and diplomacy, have largely defined the border affairs of Nepal.

As such, I suggest that the border-hegemony does not exist in a vacuum; though neither is it an instant process and product. Rather, it is a sequential, incessant and orderly process engendering the configuration of three phases: 1) origin and 2) formation of border-hegemony and 3) outcome, dependent on the various (primarily exogenous and endogenous) factors, as in Figure 3. Here, the former includes external influences (India and China), whereas the latter includes various factors like state-building, foreign policy, diplomacy, the ideology of nationalism and knowledge construction. To gain an insight into the border-hegemony, it is necessary to understand its overall configuration, as knowledge of the origin infers better control over the outcome, as outlined in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: The configuration of the border-interaction (source: Author).**

As Figure 3 illustrates, the impact of the border-hegemony rests on various endogenous factors effectively bolstered by the power asymmetry. When there is power asymmetry, then small states tend to resist the dominative order of the border hegemon, leaving two outcomes: 1) formal inclusion of the territory or 2) return by the small state, which is defined based on the extent of resistance employed (as discussed through the framework of border-hegemony) as dependent on the endogenous factors.

As also noted in Chapter 1, state formation and its processes are typically characterised by the nature, configuration and possession of the specific demarcated territorial compartment that is reflected in the foreign policy. It is through such compartmentalisation that the common function and attributes of inclusion or exclusion are actively shared, providing a productive meaning for a definite collective (state) identity. Moreover, the capability of territory to speak more directly and convincingly to the conception of national identity and social bonding has



been highlighted by Tir (2010, p. 413); compared to other issues (like trade, humanitarian intervention), territorial issues have a better capacity to elicit feelings of threat and unity.

Crucially, the internal political condition directly influences the overall state performance and sovereignty dependent on the inextricable relation between state identity and boundary; boundary creates identity, and identity creates boundaries (Kolossoff & O'Loughlin, 1998; Newman & Paasi, 1998). Thus, the concept of territorialisation meaningfully embeds the notions of identity, relations, interactions and nationalism.<sup>192</sup> Here, nationalism, contrary to the notion of neo-colonialism, which is to dominate others, views inward to unify its constituent territory by reifying the sense of division with the other lying outside the territory. Compared to the hegemon—that risks erasing the line between nationalism and chauvinism—for small states like Nepal, nationalism is one of the most powerful forces to foster resilience. However, amid the changing geopolitical landscape, nationalist ideology, centralised leadership and internal political conditions, Nepal's lack of soft power has direct bearing upon its attempt to employ (proactive) diplomacy.<sup>193</sup>

Later, I outline how border-hegemony is manifested in various forms like border encroachment, treaty, control and unilateral border closure onto the defined territory of a weaker state that runs contrary to the norms, codes, practices, agreements between those states. Here, I have considered the border encroachment as the constitutive element of the framework of border-hegemony. In the normative sense, the ideas, attempts and practices to encroach and control a small state's territory are the manifestation of exerting the regimes of political, economic control and exploitation over small states, which is further discussed within the framework of border-hegemony.

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192 According to Tickner (1995 in Newman & Paasi, 1998), due to boundaries acting as a zone of uncertainty, security is tied to the nationalist political identities represented as the basis of the construction of boundaries with the Other.

193 According to MacAlister, 1971, p.662), diplomacy is normally considered a technique of persuasion and negotiation within the framework of international law, custom and protocol. In the case of Nepal, among various types of diplomacy, notwithstanding economic diplomacy, regarding the natural resource extraction performed under the premise of power asymmetry can be considered a form of neo-colonial project for Nepal (see Subedi, 2020).

### **6.2.1. Framework of Border-hegemony**

In this section, I seek to provide a general framework for the exercise of the border-hegemony through coercive and power-related tactics and strategies—and, pivotally, the resistance by the non-hegemon.

The concept of border-hegemony has not been thoroughly conceptualised and systematically theorised, as it eschews the norms of the dialectic form of interaction constituting power and resistance. Within the hegemonic imaginations, the structural problem has remained as a vexed issue. Many of those structures share the attributes of a colonial and ‘imperial encounter’, which is better defined within the framework of border-hegemony to highlight the diverse features of power, hegemony and resistance.

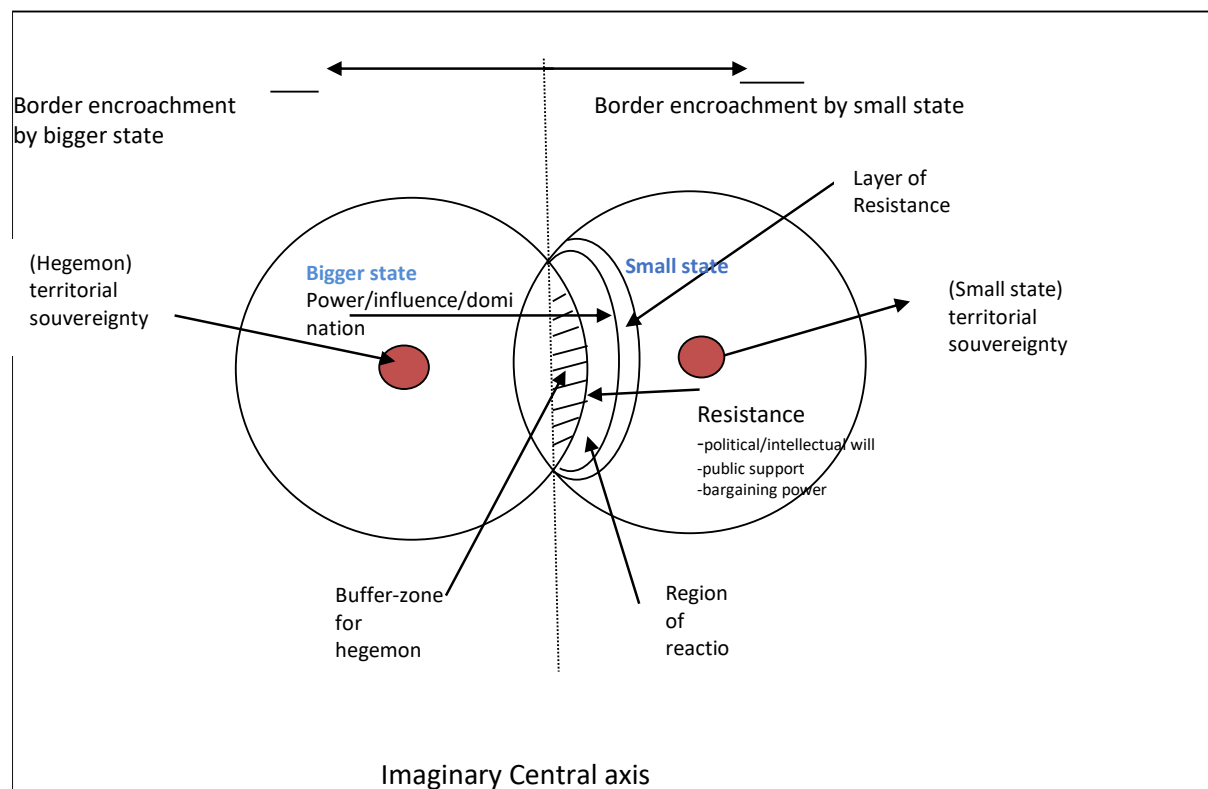
Firstly, this framework stresses the dynamism of border-hegemony that is exercised more as a process than as a way to predict its occurrence. Secondly, this framework provides an alternative explanation to the way border encroachment has been described. As mentioned earlier, conventional IR scholarship defines boundaries as a geopolitical tool of the hegemon, negating the space for small states. Through its examination of Nepal’s border interaction with its neighbours India and China, this framework demonstrates that the border-hegemony is subject to resistance. Thus, here the action of the non-hegemon is highlighted, moving away from the domination. This is also a critical inquiry that goes beyond the mainstream consideration of border interaction as competitive and characterised by incessant struggle to instead portray border interaction as an issue of ‘experience’ of the hegemony.

Here, I am conscious that given diverse nature of border and border studies in terms of geographic and spatial scales (from global to local) and types of borders (from hard geographic to social/cultural; from concrete visible to perceived and imagined boundaries), the construction of a single explanatory framework may not be adequate. Thus, I have especially focused on border encroachment when designing the conceptual framework as there is consensus among scholars that it contributes to a significant portion of territorial affairs between (and among) adjoining states (see Pattanaik, 1998; Dzurek, 2005; Amgain, 2016; Baral, 2018b).

In this context, the proposed model is based on the shifting and overlapping nature of borders and concentrates on the ‘region for resistance’ (as described later) located between the space of the hegemon’s ‘exercise for authority’ and the non-hegemon’s ‘will for acceptance’ that defines the resistance. Here I intend to critically attend to the dominative form of border-

hegemony exhibited through the unilateral consideration of ideas, practices, principles or sovereignty observed within the small state's territory, resulting in some form of discontent and/or conflict.

As mentioned earlier, within the 'imperial encounter', there is always some form of resistance; a space for challenging, deconstructing and problematising the question of continuity that ushers in the potential for a change to the (hegemonic) status-quo. The schema can be used to locate the extent of the border-hegemony exhibited by a bilateral interaction between a powerful and a weaker state, where the former tends to maximise its influence, whereas the latter tends to neutralise or resist the hegemony. Figure 4 describes the border interaction within the framework of border-hegemony (typically encroachment) in the context of Nepal's territorial affairs with India and China.



**Figure 4: The framework of border-hegemony.**

In Figure 4, each of the interacting entities (states) are represented by a circle constituting the territorial sovereignty at the centre. The 'imaginary central axis' is the standard or the normal form of the border status; the post-colonial territorial status, the traverse of which

infers the border encroachment. In its advancement towards the territorial region of a small state, initially, the hegemon attains the layer or ground of encroachment (also referred to as the 'buffer zone' or the 'zone of influence/domination'), signifying that the interaction has become contentious. In other words, for the border-hegemon, it is the exercise of power, but for a small state, it is the issue of maintaining their territorial integrity and sovereignty.

In a progressive manner, when the hegemon traverses the buffer zone, it enters a zone or 'Region of reaction', where conflict occurs. This region is shielded by the 'Layer of Resistance' that entails the 'Tipping point', 'Threshold line' or critical limit dependent on the strategic positioning, vulnerability and geopolitical significance of the (small) state. The critical limit indicates whether the power becomes dominant, or the resistance is maintained. It is at the critical limit that small states lose their bearing capacity and instead express their discontent over the influence/domination of the border-hegemon, mainly in the form of knowledge (re) construction. This is emblematic of the shift from the acceptance of the material superiority of the (regional/global) hegemony to a belief in the alterative mode of performances.

Here, through concomitant consideration of power asymmetries and resistance, the focus is to highlight that the small state is not a passive player in the border interaction revealing the border-hegemony, instead undertaking representational practices and enduring counter-hegemonic practices and behaviours. Thus, the framework of border-hegemony manifests the postcolonial approach due to various reasons. The impetus for the framework of border-hegemony is to provide a comprehensive picture of the border interaction (focusing on border encroachment), call for a two-way interaction between the interacting states and calibrate the underlying experience of a small state through the general index of shifting resistance. Here, the notion of resistance involves deploying active, efficient and able subjects in a fluid and transparent manner against the exploitation, subordination and/or decimation of another entity within an entity. As such, in an interaction, a weaker state is not only a victim, but it is also able to exercise its agency through creative negotiations.

Here, the aim is to acknowledge the problems of the border-hegemony that tends to deny subjectivity, leading to disproportionate impacts. Moreover, this approach removes the hierarchies, redressing the historical and contemporary border manipulation. This exhibits the norms of 'belonging'—rather than 'exclusion' and related representational practices that tend to minimise the role of a small state—making for an inclusive and just form of interaction by opening space for two-way interaction. This is also a rejection of compliance towards the interests of a hegemon, including territorial control, that is considered as a norm as per realists'

considerations. As with the exogenous factors that the conventional studies rely on, the endogenous factors are equally determinant of the extent of the impact of hegemony, bolstered by the tendency to adopt and internalise the hegemonic values, beliefs and norms.

For Nepal, countering the (Indian and Chinese) border-hegemony, altering the(ir) epistemological (border) structures and exhibiting resistance have been challenging tasks. Due to the formal border agreement between Nepal and China, there are relatively less complex border issues with it than with India (Shrestha, 2006; Murton, 2017, p. 244); therefore, herein, Indo-Nepal border disputes are discussed in more detail. In the next section, the dimensions of the contemporary border issues are discussed in terms of Chinese border-hegemony and Nepal followed by the Indian border-hegemony and Nepal and lastly the tri-border identity and Nepal.

### **6.3. Chinese border-hegemony and Nepal**

This section is divided into two sub-sections. The first establishes how China is a border hegemon in terms of its unilateral approaches, activities and practices and border encroachment followed by the second, which examines how Nepal reacts to this. As noted earlier, it was the Chinese occupation of Tibet that made it sceptical towards its neighbours like Nepal and accordingly begin to increase its security mobilisation within the Sino-Nepal border region. The Chinese were so concerned that they even sought permission to conduct a (limited) military operation on Nepali territory during the visit of then-Nepali PM B.P. Koirala to Beijing in March 1960, which was declined by Nepal (see Fravel, 2015).

The Chinese security concern vis-à-vis Nepal and the ambiguity of the ‘traditional line’ (the boundary line between China and Nepal) became agglomerated during the Mustang incident in June 1960 (Murton, 2017, p.244). On 28 June, Chinese security officials shot dead one Nepali official and imprisoned 15 others in the Mustang region of Nepal. Nepal considered this a condemnatory act of China, and PM Koirala wrote<sup>194</sup> to his Chinese counterpart, PM Chou En-Lai, seeking an apology and reparations. Though the issue was resolved following a series of dialogues and with the Chinese compensation, apology and release of the detained Nepali prisoners, acknowledging that its forces had trespassed onto the Nepali side, Chinese attitudes and practices thereafter manifested its border-hegemony over Nepal in a way that resonated with the colonial practices of othering.

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194 In a letter dated 24 July 1960, PM Koirala wrote to Chinese PM Zhou, stating, “...I want to place on record however that nothing has given His Majesty’s Government reason to change their stand that the incident took place on Nepalese territory.” (Jha, 2012).

The Mustang incident triggered the need to officially delimitate and demarcate the entire 1,111 kms of the Nepal-China border, for which a series of agreements, treaties and protocols were negotiated. Accordingly, Nepal and China signed a border treaty that recognised the ‘traditional customary line’ in March 1960 that created a joint boundary commission to delimit a more precise border. As a follow-up, Nepal and China signed the ‘Final Boundary Treaty’ on 5 October 1961 followed by the border demarcation on the ground via erecting pillars and then the signing of final protocols on 23 January 1963,<sup>195</sup> marking the settlement of the boundary issue between the two countries (Jha, 2012; Cowan, 2015).

Through the Boundary Treaty of 1961, Nepal acquired 2139 sq. kms of land from China while conceding 1,836.25 sq. kms of its existing territory to China, resulting in a net gain of 302.75 sq. kms, including half of Mt. Everest and most of the grazing land and passes<sup>196</sup> (China receiving only 6% of the disputed territory) (Fravel, 2015; Nayak, 2020a). Moreover, after the agreement to demilitarise 20 kms on both sides of the border, a relatively low level of border tensions were experienced, leading to reduced military costs and maintenance of a stable (compared with India) form of border interaction (Jha, 2012). This can be attributed to the Chinese leadership and the pragmatic resistive approach of Nepal.<sup>197</sup>

However, in recent decades, due to Nepal’s (unstable) internal condition, China seems keen to paint their economic relationship through political interests, as evident in the case of the unilateral form of border closure and border encroachments. For instance, since the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, China has frequently indulged in practices of unilateral closure of the checkpoints like Tatopani,<sup>198</sup> which is considered a major checkpoint between China and Nepal, becoming less responsive to Nepali concerns, and citing various and inconsistent reasons like the earthquake or COVID-19 pandemic (Khabarhub, 2020). Equally, there are some reports claiming that Chinese encroachment into the territory of Nepal has extended over seven districts, viz. Dolakha, Gorkha, Darchula, Humla, Sindhupalchowk, Sankhuwasa and

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195 Initial institutionalisation and solidification of the border began in 1962 with the construction of 79 border markers across the 1,111-km-long border (Murton, 2017).

196 Initially, Nepal and China identified 32 disputed areas, including Mt. Everest and Gaurishankar, and the dispute was successfully concluded by agreeing to establish a 25-km demilitarised zone (Shrestha, 2013; Timalisina, 2019, p. 124). The Mt. Everest dispute was settled through a prime-ministerial level meeting in 1960, reaching an agreement to divide the mountain into the Northern side (to remain under Chinese occupation) and the Southern side (to remain under Nepali occupation) (Jha, 2012). Later, Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-Lai declared in 1960, “Mount Everest belongs to Nepal” (Nayak, 2020b).

197 Nepal’s ‘stable’ form of border interaction with China, compared to that with India, is the product of the willingness of China (and Nepal) to engage in an open and two-way interaction to cede some of its lands for an agreement in the spirit of mutual accommodation. However, the Chinese initiation in this matter was not an exclusive privilege it gave to Nepal that could otherwise be misread (as discussed in the next section).

198 Tatopani, Rasuwagadhi and Kerung are considered to be the major checkpoints between Nepal and China.

Rasuwa. Of them, the most notable is the border marker no. 57 with 6 ha. of land on Lapchigaun in the Lamabagar area of Dolakha district and pillar numbers 37, 37 and 38 in Gorkha district and no. 62 in Nampa Bhanjyang of Solukhumbu district, with reports of Nepali officials being threatened (Nayak, 2020a). Some scholars allege that China intends to control the territory of Nepal by taking advantages of its geographical features and the lack of Nepali presence within the Sino-Nepal border region.<sup>199</sup>

Equally, Chinese border-hegemony is apparent in the form of knowledge production regarding Nepal within its agenda of appropriation of the ‘India card’. Chinese government-controlled media like the *Global Times* (2020c) alleges the opposition party, Nepali-congress, is “a pro-India force”. Earlier, the same newspaper, on 27 September 2020, referring to the ambassador to Nepal, Mr Mahendra. B. Pandey, published an article penned by X. Wenting and B. Yunji, titled, “China-Nepal relations robust despite fake Indian media reports: Nepalese Ambassador”, alleging India was stirring the border dispute.

However, significantly, those articles remained silent on the issue of the missing border pillars and the fact that both states had agreed to locate them. Instead, on 16 October 2020, the *Global Times* published an article by B. Yunyi titled “Exclusive: Buildings ‘occupying Nepalese land’ fall within Chinese territory, repeated surveying shows”. Defending the Nepalese (informal) allegation of the construction of the buildings being between pillar 11 and 12, it remarked, “The borderline was drawn according to the trend of the mountains, so it is very erratic and easy for non-professional surveyors to make mistakes”, further adding that “it is likely that the Nepalese surveying team made a technical error”. In this context, the way Nepal has had responded is important, as discussed in the next section.

### **6.3.1. Nepal’s reaction in the border dispute with China**

China’s compromising moves or behaviours in border disputes with its neighbouring states, including in Burma, India and Nepal (Jha, 2012), are the direct manifestations of the revolution in Tibet in 1959. Thus, it can be argued that China’s (border) policy towards Nepal has been a ‘policy of appeasement’ rather than revealing a ‘sense of sentiment’ towards Nepal. It is intended to effectively elude any potential border dispute and to create a ‘pro-China’ environment to pacify any pro-Tibetan movement in Nepal. In this context, Nepal’s resistance to the border-hegemony of China acts partly as a qualifier of the regional geopolitical identity.

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<sup>199</sup> Almost 90% of Nepal’s border with China runs through uninhabited altitudes characterised by rocks and snow, glaciers and ice fields (Jha, 2012).

In other words, amid its increasing territorial contention with India, Nepal's territorial identity with China forms a part of the larger picture of Chinese intention to increase its economic and political overtures towards its neighbouring small states.

In this context, as a small state, Nepal has agency to resist or accommodate China. Notably, Nepal's rejection of the Chinese proposal to conduct a military operation in March 1960, together with its objection against the Chinese incursion in June of that year, has largely contributed to reifying its independent and nationalistic stance against any forms of external (Chinese) domination. Moreover, Nepal's resistance to Mustang incident exhibits an approach illustrated in Figure 4, whereby Nepal's strong resistance through its diplomatic clout to the matter, within the 'layer of encroachment', led China to seek the diplomatic route that harmoniously resolved the issue. Here, the resistance of Nepal produced a productive impact in that the border agreement with China was possible in 1961, signifying China's acknowledgement of Nepal's agency.

However, Nepal has reacted unexpectedly to its recent border issues with China. In 2020, the foreign ministry of Nepal hastily issued a statement clarifying that there is no border dispute with China, without the home ministry submitting a ground report to that effect, instead stating (Mulmi, 2020):

The Department of Survey, Government of Nepal, based on the official records, reports of the joint field inspection and boundary maps, has verified and confirmed that the said buildings are not located within the Nepali territory...Nepal and China have always maintained close communication on border matters.

Mulmi suggests this was intended to defend and shield China from criticism, exemplifying Nepal's approach of dealing Sino-Nepal relations more through a partisan agenda than cohesive national interest. It may be partly because, due to its increasing economic ties with China, Nepal seems to inter-mix the economy with the notion of territoriality. Equally, this move of Nepal can also be viewed as cautious, aware that, due to the lack of a detailed field report, it may prove counterproductive to project an 'allegation' as an 'issue'.

In reference to Figure 4, one can infer that due to the relatively controlled or stable form of border system, Nepal is not ready to acknowledge that China has traversed the 'imaginary central axis'; that is, to label the border affairs as 'disputed'. In other words, presumably, Nepal believes that the Chinese hegemony (if any, in the case of border encroachment) lies within the buffer zone and has yet not traversed to the zone of reaction. More, importantly, it can also be



considered as a manifestation of the Nepali authority's tendency to ignore or partly mute the border issue with China amid its ongoing border dispute with India, avoiding antagonising both neighbours simultaneously.

#### **6.4. Indian border-hegemony and Nepal**

In this section, I establish India as a hegemon in the territorial affairs forged by the infusion of such an attitude with the China factor and enacted through the deliberate maintenance of the 1950 Treaty (Annex.1.1) and border encroachment, followed by an explanation of how Nepal reacts to such hegemony.

##### *Open-Indo Nepal border and Indian border-hegemony*

The demarcation of Nepal's border with India can be traced back to the Sugauli treaty and the Indian independence movement in 1857.<sup>200</sup> However, due to the lack of formal border agreement between India and Nepal, the 1950s Treaty of Peace and Friendship that maintains the open border provision—in operation since the 1816 Treaty—has been the foundational treaty between India and Nepal (Jha, 2012; Forester, 2014). As mentioned in earlier chapters, it would not be hyperbolic to argue that India has used the unstable internal political condition of Nepal through the 1950 Treaty as a containment strategy. For Nepal, the problem persists mainly in the way the open border is appropriated and (mis)utilised, tacitly masking the marshalling of various forms of Indian hegemonic ideas, language and practices.

For instance, in the late 1970s, there was a violent 'Sons of Soil' movement in the bordering Indian states that led to the expulsion of a massive number of the Indian population, but of Nepali origin, from their land, who later sought shelter in Nepal as refugees (Singh, 2012). Nonetheless, the case of the Bhutanese refugees shares a similar story in the 1990s. Although Bhutan and Nepal do not share a border, Indian facilitation ushered the refugees towards Nepal, where they were settled as refugees and later resettled to different Western countries.<sup>201</sup> Notably, both of these cases were facilitated by the open Indo-Nepal border provision.

Moreover, the provision has been problematic for Nepal due to its direct relationship with the internal political stability in Nepal. Equally, this provision led Nepal to experience the

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200 After the Sugauli treaty, both British-India and Nepal made efforts to promote cartographic representation of their boundary. Accordingly, efforts were made in 1817-20, 1859-60, 1880-83 and 1940-41, with strip maps made at a distance of every 5-7 miles along with the erection of subsidiary and minor pillars on the unsmooth border (Timalsina, 2019, p. 124).

201 For details: see <https://www.resettlement.eu/page/bhutanese-refugees-nepal>.

‘Madhes Andolan’ often referred to as the ‘Pahadi bhagau’ campaign (expulsion of hill migrants) from the regions adjoining India in 2008.<sup>202</sup> As the name suggests, and also discussed in Chapter 3, this was a xenophobic campaign targeted against the hill migrants, some of whom had been there for generations. MJF’s anti-government protest took the shape of indiscriminate violence, abduction, looting, physical violence, rape and even genocide, killing more than 60 people, with an unaccounted-for number of displacements, challenging the transition from a decade-long insurgency in Nepal<sup>203</sup> (see The New Humanitarian, 2007). Major incidents have been reported mainly from eight of the region’s 20 districts: Siraha, Dhanusha, Morang, Sarlahi, Bara, Saptari, Mohattari and Rautahat. As a result, reports estimate that about 35% (even 70% in some districts) of the hill migrants were displaced from the districts like Janakpur, Rajbiraj and Siraha (see RRT Research Response, 2008; Gyawali, 2013b). Though the Terai commission was set up to address this issue, its effort went futile.

Furthermore, as mentioned in earlier chapters, the increasing number of Indian settlements in Nepal, the drastic change in Nepal’s lowland demographic character, social composition, land use and economic development (Gurung, 1989), plus economic blockades and separatist movements are the repercussions<sup>204</sup> of the open border provision, all issues that India has ignored. In fact, India tends to negate and even refute the experience of Nepal within such border interactions, instead preferring to utilise the open border provision as a medium to exert its hegemony, replicating the colonial practices.

### *Territorial encroachment and Indian border-hegemony*

The machination of border encroachment is propelled by the twin rotors of the representational practices to unilaterally disapprove the demarcated boundary markers and the subsequent

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202 The Madhesi identity—that was politically visible since 1997—was politically re-invented when the United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) was formed in 2007. Though it claimed to demand the autonomy of Madhes, they intended “to transform the Terai into a single autonomous province of Madhes” (Miklian, 2009, p. 2). The Madhes violence escalated in February 2007, whereby the new definition of the ‘Madhesi’ as ‘non-Pahadis’ (see RRT Research Response) was incorporated. The difference between Pahadi and Madhesi was inserted into the political domain so that a polarised disposition of Pahadi vs Madhesi could be created, portraying Pahadis as synonymous to anti-Madhesi, laying solid ground for the violent atrocities against Pahadis in 2008. As Miklan (2008, p. 4) outlines, “MJF pamphlets demonize Pahadis from the Kathmandu valley, accusing Pahadis of operating a ‘colony of torture’ rooted in racial discrimination, with Madhesi ‘under the threat of extinction’ due to their domination and suppression by Pahadis ‘since the foundation of the state of Nepal...at all levels’ of society.”

203 Despite the violence affecting both communities, it became discernible due to its focus against the Pahade communities, where the mass atrocities, abductions, killings and rapes were employed as part of a systematic campaign of terrorisation and violence, seeking rationality through the tropes of historical oppression.

204 Source: Nepal Identifies 17 Crimes Committed on Its Border with India,” IBN News, August 31, 2013, Available online at : <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/nepal-identifies-17-crimes-committed-on-its-border-with-india/418551-2.html> (06/10/2020).

advancement towards the territory of a small state for the establishment of a new territorial identity, as outlined in Figure 4. Inheriting the British legacy, India ought to regard the ‘Junge pillars’,<sup>205</sup> as the official territorial demarcation with Nepal. However, India’s eagerness to disapprove the ‘Junge pillars’ and instead engage in the practice of territorial encroachment of Nepal has led to some pillars going missing and others shifting towards the Nepali side, expanding the Indian territory.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, out of the 8,553 pillars between India and Nepal, 1,325 border pillars have gone missing, and a few are yet to be constructed (Shrestha et al. 2020). Various reports suggest that out of the 26 districts of Nepal bordering India, 21 face the problem of border encroachment, which exceeds 60,000 ha. (in 71 areas of disputes) in 26 places, including Mechi, Tanakpur, Susta, Kalapani, Limpiyahura and Lipulekh, as shown by the deforestation and population growth on the Indian side, Susta and Kalapani being the most prominent example (Shrestha, 2013; Paudyal, 2013; Zehra, 2020).

However, on the contrary, India alleges Nepal has encroached on its territory. For instance, following the shifting course of the Gandak River towards Nepal, India has successively encroached on part of the Susta region Nepal (appx. area of 14,500 ha.) (For details, see Zehra, 2020). However, when Nepal subsequently raised the issue of territorial encroachment, the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Mr Pranav Mukherjee, during his speech in the Indian Parliament on 6 December 2007, remarked: “The shifting of course in Susta region of the Gandak River...the government is constantly monitoring the situation with a view to prevent encroachments by the Nepalese side” (Bhatara 2020b). This is redolent of India’s tendency of forming pre-emptive justifications for its encroachment practices.

More importantly, the Kalapani issue has recently gained global currency. Geographically, Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura (collectively referred to as the Kalapani region; area: appx. 400 sq. kms) hold strategic significance, as the Lipulekh Pass is considered the shortest distance of land route from India to China (Peri, 2020). The Kalapani region (including the Lipulekh Pass) has been claimed by Nepal based on the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli (Annex 6.1.) it entered into with the British colonial rulers to define its western border with India, the Naya Muluk Treaty (1860), the supplementary Treaty of 1875 and various other

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205 Since the British period in India, Junge pillars’ have had been the main boundary pillars between Nepal and India (Zehra, 2020).

historical documents.<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, a letter from the Acting Chief Secretary of the Government of India dated March 1817, to the Commissioner of Kumaon, ruled that the six villages (Budhi, Garbyang, Gunji, Nabi, Rokuti [Nihal] and Kuti) to the east of the Kali River categorically belonged to Nepal.

While both states agree on (Maha) Kali River as the western boundary, the Kalapni issue has led to the proposal of two separate theories on the origins of the Kali River (which was not the case till the end of 1950s): Kathmandu claims the river originates in Limpiyadhura as the western border, but New Delhi asserts that the river emerges from Lipulekh. As mentioned earlier, though Indian stationing in the Kalapani region could have occurred long before the 1960s, it gained national attention in Nepal only since 1992 when the United Marxist Leninist (UML) party raised the issue in a parliament meeting. The issue became further complicated by the Treaty of Mahakali in 1996 (detail in Chapter 5) regarding the origin of Kali River. In recent years, India has seemed eager to systematically materialise its claim over the Kalapani region, as evident in its unilateral publication of a new political map in November 2019 that included the Kalapani region (For details see Peri, 2020; Bagchi, 2021). Here it is relevant to cite Ashcroft et al. (2007, p. 29), who contends that, both literally and metaphorically, maps and mapping are the dominant practices of colonial and post-colonial cultures that inscribe the (colonial) ideology by serving as “(allegorical) tools of exploitation”.

Worsening the matter, India inaugurated a new 75-km link road from Dharchula (via Lipulekh) to Kailash-Mansarovar, situated in the Tibetan plateau, on 8 May 2020. As a reaction, Nepal not only protested the Indian act diplomatically, but also unveiled its new political map that included the Kalapani region as a part of its territory, followed by the ratification of an amendment bill (by the parliament) to change the country's external boundary on its national emblem on 13 June 2020 (Sharma, 2020)<sup>207</sup>. India perceived this as a threat to its border-hegemony, as reflected during the visit of then-Nepal Foreign Minister Mr Pradip Gyawali's to India in January 2021, when India used it as a bargaining point for the boundary negotiation.

India's unilateral moves regarding the Kalapani issue infer an attempt towards formal legitimacy and authorship that textualise the spatial reality of the 'others' land within the

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206 Source: (Myrepublica, 2020) India's official documents show that Limpiyadhura is the real source of the Kali river, Online available at: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/even-india-s-official-documents-show-that-limpiyadhura-is-the-real-source-of-the-kali-river/> (05/06/2020). See Annex 6.1, 6.2.

<sup>207</sup> See Annex 6.3.

symbolic and literary act of mastery and control, whereby it can project itself. In addition, India's recent actions may convey various meanings: 1) assessment of Nepal's reaction; 2) paving the way to formally include those areas within its territory; 3) making a political gain through the internal outrage in Nepal created due to the border dispute; and/or 4) a presupposition that China could stand with India (as in a series of India-China trade agreements). This last point could ease the way for India to alienate Nepal from the Chinese sphere of influence, based—of course—on the presupposed *de facto* status that if Nepal is not with India, it will be with China, always one or the other, a reflection of the hegemonic attitude.

Equally, the Indian border-hegemony is evident in the form of knowledge construction. As mentioned earlier, when Nepal attempts to resist its hegemonic practices, India uses the trope of the 'China card' or denies that any such issues exist, using the anomalous construction or illustration of the Chinese border encroachment in Nepal to neutralise or decelerate, deflect or subvert the voices of Nepal. For instance, in the case of the Kalapani dispute, India alleged that Nepal's resistance was 'Nepal being politically motivated' (see Nayak, 2020b), 'territorial nationalism' or 'ultra-nationalism'; or labelled the parties of Nepal, such as the Nepal Communist Party as 'anti-Indian' or 'pro-Chinese' and the Nepali Congress Party as 'Pro-Indian' (see Mehta, 2020); or stated Nepal was acting 'on behest of someone else', as Indian army chief M.M. Naravane did (see Philip, 2020).

Furthermore, in a write-up in the *Indian Defense Review*, published on 9 Aug 2017, Lt Gen, (Dr) J.S. Bajwa of the Indian Army, says: "It [China] is also instigating Nepal to raise a dispute with regard to the Western Tri-junction of Nepal-Tibet-India in the Kalapani-Lipulekh Pass area where, in fact, none exists" (TOI, 2020; TET, 2020). In line with this, in an article on the *South Asia Monitor*, Lt. Gen. of Indian Army Chief, Katoch (2020) speculated Nepal's objection to Indian border encroachment occurs with the (aggressive) support of China, asserting that the Lipulekh Pass lies within the line of actual control (LAC) between India and China. Nonetheless, *First Post* (2020), immediately after Indo-Nepal border dispute, published an article on 24 June 2020 titled, "After snubbing India on border clash, Nepal faces reality-check as Beijing encroaches its territory to construct roads in Tibet".

However, contrary to these Indian reactions and statements, there have also been statements made by Indians diplomats and officials suggesting that the Kalapani region belongs to Nepal. For instance, during a Central University of Tamil Nadu speech in 2017, Indian diplomat Mr V.P. Haran clearly remarked that:

Kalapani as such is far more important to India than other disputed areas such as Susta. The security establishment has thus floated the idea of a land swap; India would not give up Kalapani but allocate the same area of land to Nepal in some other place (Bhattarai, 2020b).

It is important to underline that, to mutually set up the border disputes, including Susta and Kalapani, various committees have been formed since the 1990s<sup>208</sup> like the Joint Working Group on Border Management (JWG), Border District Coordination Committees (BDCCs) and Boundary Working Group (BWG) (2014) for dealing with the border issues and construction, repair and restoration of boundary pillars (MOFA, 2020) (see Annex 6.4). However, India's neglect of Nepal's concerns<sup>209</sup> manifests its border-hegemony to which Nepal is left to react.

#### **6.4.1. Nepal's reaction in the border dispute with India**

Retrospectively, in Nepal, realising the repercussive effects of the 1950 Treaty, including the open border provision, that confirmed the Indian service over Nepal's sovereign identity, King Mahendra attempted to make some internal adjustments. These included passing legislation that curtailed Indian rights and restrictions related to migration in Nepal. Equally, laws like the Industrial Enterprise Act, 1961, the New Mulki Ain of 1963, the Citizenship Act of 1964, the Land Reforms Act of 1964 and the Ukhanda Land Tenure Act 1964 were enacted, crippling Indians interests. However, scholars like Pattanaik (1998) have viewed this move as a violation of the 1950 Treaty giving an anti-India tone to the foreign policy of Nepal, which seems to serve the Indian hegemony rather than addressing the marginalised voices of Nepal.

Notably, Nepal attempted to accommodate the space for resistance. For instance, in 1983, the Population Commission was established by Nepal to address the negative consequences of the open-border system. Its report criticised the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950, stating that "the treatment which Indians are successfully getting in Nepal are far from being bilateral",<sup>210</sup> highlighting the unrestricted border movement as

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208 As the Nepal-India Joint Technical Level Boundary Committee has stated, "97% of the task of strip-mapping the border, according to 1874 Persian map adopted by the committee" has been completed and all disputes have been resolved except Susta and Kalapani (Zehra, 2020).

209 There were instances when India had ignored the evidence presented by Nepal, as in 2001 (Dhakal, 2020). Equally, in 2019, India even disregarded Nepal's proposal of sending a special envoy for boundary talks during the period when it was engaged in the border negotiation with China (Karki & K.C. 2020, p. 89).

210 The report had suggested the regulation of the open Indo-Nepal border in three stages: 1) Registering details at a specific border point; 2) A year after the first stage, the introduction of a multi-entry permit system for people residing within 10 km of the border (to be renewed each year); and 3) The introduction of a passport system at an appropriate time.

detrimental to Nepal in terms of human resources, job availability and changes in lowland demographic character (GON, 1984); the issue waned after 1990.

With the inception of democracy in 1990, the issues that voiced Nepal's experience began to get frayed within the intellectual and political domain. Moreover, there seemed to be a lack of coherency among Nepali intellectuals about open-border provision. For instance, Nepali scholars like Timalsina (2019), referring to international theorists, argue that blocking an open border is unnatural and inhuman; thus, closure of the border is not a sensible and feasible proposition but one that could be retrograde and adversely affect people. The prevalence of such discourses that serve the Indian interest and the sustained unstable internal political conditions of Nepal have directly affected the way Nepal resists the Indian hegemony, as will be discussed in the next section.

Thus, for India, the border issue, including the open border, has been leveraged to disprove Nepali political leaders, diluting the uproar in Nepal within the melting pot of this 'bilateral relationship'. Furthermore, it could signal a shift in the 'critical point' of the resistance towards 'territorial sovereignty' for better control of territorial affairs (as in Figure 4). Whereas, for Nepal, the resistance is functional at the local, regional and in various realms of social, cultural and political strands that are subject to various forms of visibility. Referring to Figure 4, the Susta case can be considered an issue located within the 'buffer zone' region, exposed to various levels of campaigns, public outrages and even bilateral meetings (see Zehra, 2020). This is because, despite the public resistance, the issue has not gained enough consolidation to take a shape that generates national resistance; or, in other words, it has not reached the tipping point. Whereas the Kalapani issue, due to the extent of the resistance, can be located within the 'region of reaction' that has already surpassed the 'buffer zone' at some point of time in history. Moreover, to gain a complex and detailed insight into the border issues of Nepal, it is necessary to move beyond this binarism, where Nepal, India and China's territorial interests meet.

### **6.5. Nepal-India-China tri-border identity and Nepal**

This section highlights the power asymmetry, representation and resistance, to exhibit how the postcolonial take can offer a comprehensive view of the border affairs of Nepal with India and China. India and China's territorial affairs and contestations become convoluted when their security imperatives intersect within the cartography of the territorial purview of neighbouring small states like Nepal. At the core of the practice lies the explicit and unabashed denial of the

agency of small states and the forefronting of their status as dependent to India and China. The great powers' animosity is transformed to amicability only under the conditions that ensure the manipulation of the small state's territory. Nepal's persisting border issues with India, including the open border, and the inadvertent engagement of China, conspicuously illustrate the simple metamorphosis of the bilateral border affairs into tri-lateral border issues.

Notably, China, apart from its adjoining border concern with Nepal, has equally remained sceptical towards anti-Chinese activities and protests and the presence of external powers like the USA and EU within the Indo-Nepal border region (Bhattarai, 2005; Aryal, 2019). Meanwhile, India has remained sceptical about the advancement of Chinese and other external threats through the use of open border provision of Nepal. China and India's varying economic and security concerns have been the driving forces for their (territorial) attitude towards Nepal (see White paper, 2010). In this context, the tri-lateral border identity, whereby the interests of three countries meet, carries a special significance when power becomes a determinant factor.

#### *Power asymmetry*

Due to its complex geopolitical configuration, tri-border identity has always remained ambiguous since the colonial times with the de-facto control determined through the actuation of power. As evident recently in the Doklam incident<sup>211</sup> in 2017, the tri-border issue held the potential to pose a consequential risk to a small state, Bhutan. This holds true in the case of Nepal, too, due to the lack of a formal tri-border agreement among Nepal, India and China (Shrestha, 2020). Here, it is important to underline that Nepal claims that two tri-border points need to be established at Nepal's North-Western and North-Western corners at Jhinsang Chuli (altitude 7,483 metres) and Limpiyadhura (altitude 5,532 metres), respectively (ibid.). The concern for Nepal has been the attitudes, languages and practices of its neighbours that contradict to this claim.

Since 1953, India and China have entered a series of bilateral agreements mentioning the Lipulekh Pass—that Nepal claims to be its territory—as the trade route between them, with the most recent being the trade pact of 2015<sup>212</sup> made during Indian PM Mr N. Modi's visit to

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211 The Doklam incident occurred within the tri-border region of Bhutan-India-China in 2017, where the military standoff between India and China regarding the territorial dispute placed Bhutan in a precarious position (see Nayak, 2015).

212 As the Sino-India agreement in 2015 stated, "...The two sides (India and China) agreed to hold negotiation on augmenting the list of traded commodities, and expand border trade at Nathu La, Qiangla/Lipu-Lekh Pass and Shipki La". (Source: India's ministry of external affairs. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral->



China. This is not only a violation of the Indo-Nepal agreement for resolving the border issue through negotiation but equally a violation of the Chinese formal commitment and agreement with Nepal.<sup>213</sup> In this context, the Kalapani dispute, with the involvement of China, has gained momentum as a tri-lateral issue that has established the Lipulekh Pass as the tri-junction between Nepal, India and China, steering the tri-border affairs to a different level by marginalising Nepal's voice.

This is reflective of India and China's tendency to establish the sacrality of security by utilising the notion of (post-colonial) securitisation to conform to the border-hegemony and investing in the idea of themselves being rising regional powers. For instance, it was India's securitisation strategy that led to the occupation of the Kalapani region that Nepal claims as its territory after the Sino-India War in 1962 (Peri, 2020). As such, it is relevant to highlight what Buzan et al. (1998 in Zeitoun & Warner, 2006) affirm: that a state can take exceptional measures over an issue by propelling it into the realm of securitisation. It is through such calls for securitisation that India and China have adopted different approaches to their border with Nepal.

The aspect of hybridisation of the adjoining border culture is another significant aspect of the border issue that Nepal shares with India and China. As the open Indo-Nepal border shares much more cultural, economic and social affinity compared to the close border with China as maintained in 1955 (Jha, 2012), India intends to sustain its border-hegemony through the mass influx of its citizens into Nepal by using the 'politics of amalgamation'. China, on the other hand, seems to be interested in alienating the Tibetan threat via Nepal through the 'politics of alienation'. However, for Nepal, both of these policies are counterproductive in terms of the way the territory is weaponised to sustain the(ir) border-hegemony.

It is important to note that India (and China's) recent and contrasting moves regarding the Kalapani region have compounded the (tri) border issue, adding cultural significance (as a viable route to Kailash-Mansarovar) to the (earlier) economic and geopolitical imperatives. Here both India and China have their own set of interests. While India intends to take complete control over the region, China intends to leave the territorial issue (between India and Nepal)

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documents.htm?dtl/25240/Joint\_Statement\_between\_the\_India\_and\_China\_during\_Prime\_Ministers\_visit\_toChina).

213 During the Sino-Nepal border agreement in 1961, China accepted the Kalapani region as the territory of Nepal.

unresolved<sup>214</sup> so it can utilise the bilateral or even tri-lateral border issues as bargaining points against Tibetan activities in Nepal, reproducing colonial practices. Against the backdrop of the neighbour's reluctance to resolve the border issue through two-way interaction, the lack of a formal tri-border agreement and the amicable Sino-India trade relations amid their border disputes, Nepal has become angered that the trade interests of its two neighbouring powers could overshadow its territorial integrity.<sup>215</sup>

### *Representation*

Equally, India (mostly) and China's tendency of appropriating the trope of 'the card factor' (the 'China card' or 'India card') in their territorial affairs with Nepal has had a profound impact on Nepal. This can be related to these nations' attempts to strategise 'issue aggravation' or issue deflection<sup>216</sup> and thus is problematic for many reasons. Firstly, it presents a simplistic and reductionist view of the multifaceted border affair to politicise its gravity. Secondly, such conceptualisation envisions small states as irredeemable by restraining and exclusively bracketing them within the rubric of paternalism; within the frame of pro-Indian (or 'anti-Chinese') or pro-Chinese (or 'anti-Indian'). Thirdly, this way of conceptualising is the product of the politics of fear that considers their (India and China) positioning as immutable and that any deviation from the (border) hegemonic prescriptions is unnatural, threatening the regional geopolitical landscape. Finally, it reflects a temptation to weaponise the territorial issue that portrays Nepal as vulnerable, dependent and incapacitated while lacking (if any, as they believe) sufficient evidence to vindicate its claim; as such, it is a replication of the binaries of centre and periphery that resonate with the dependency theory.

Thus, such fervid representational practices, rather than being natural, real or material, create a systematic, material, symbolic and regressive account that tends to functionally reduce and degrade Nepal by constraining, thwarting or denying its positional space. In relation to Figure 4, this manifests the border hegemon's intention of naturalising the hegemonic moves to establish that the imaginary central axis has not been traversed, thus denying any surrounding border issues. In addition, it manifests their refusal to differentiate between the resistance and

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214 China intends to retain the territorial issues as unresolved to keep India calm regarding Tibet (Garver, 2012, p.102). According to Garver, this is enrooted in the different Indian and Chinese narratives about Tibet whereby Beijing fears that the 'reckless action' of India, in the case of territorial conflict, do not weigh heavily on India's calculations.

215 The Sino-India amicability and enmity have both been proved to be counterproductive to Nepal. For example, the Sino-India conflict (1962) compelled Nepal to experience the Indian occupation of Kalapani, whereas their amicable relations led to the trade agreement as of 2015, including the territory of Nepal.

216 For detail on the appropriation of the discourse of deflection to gain political neutrality, legitimacy, naturalisation of narrative and apolitical justification, see Crow-Miller (2015).

denunciation rather than giving a factual account towards the positive ideal. In this consideration, any form of resistance by Nepal, as will be discussed later, is conveniently neutralised or ignored by relegating it to complete passivity with the theology of exclusion and regional dominance. I refer to this as a ‘demonisation of resistance’ strategy those who resist so as to transform the representation of resistance to Indian (or Chinese) hegemony and domination to gain the particular territorial control are demonised.

In other words, the strategy of demonising the resistance can also be considered as extremisation (a colonial practice). This extremisation of the resistance of ‘other’, coupled with the normalisation of the border-hegemony of ‘self’, function as the twin drivers for the sustenance of the unchallenged form of border-hegemony. These all form a part of the securitisation strategy of India and China that tends to shift the territorial issue towards the territorial sovereignty of the small state (Figure 4). Thus, contrary to the Indian and Chinese allegations, Nepal’s resistive moves are attempts to safeguard its territorial integrity, embracing amities and forward-looking agendas of external balancing and diversification developed over many years. These factors have all assisted to form a ‘tipping point’ at which resistance occurs. Had Nepal been antagonistic, it would have asked for the retrieval of the territory lost in the Sugauli Treaty through the privilege of the (article 8) 1950 Treaty (see Annex II.).

### *Resistance*

In this context, Nepal has tended to accommodate space for resistance through the forms of nationalism and knowledge (re)construction. In response to India and China’s mutual agreement in May 2015, as mentioned earlier, the government diplomatically objected to these actions as against the international norms and values that side-lined the negotiation table (The economic times, 2015). Equally, Nepal requested Chinese affirmation in its agreement made with Nepal during the visit of the Chinese military delegation led by Maj. Gen. Ei Hujeng (Nayak, 2015). Nepal’s sustained form of resistance led China to clarify its position, stating:

Chinese side always holds the view that the problem of Kalapani between Nepal and India should be resolved through friendly bilateral consultation and the Chinese side fully understands the concerns of the Nepalese side and respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nepal (ibid.).

The Chinese concern was equally visible during the cartographic issue between India and Nepal in 2020 when the Chinese ambassador to Nepal said, “...the Chinese side has always respected [the] sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nepali side” (Bhattarai, 2020a).

Nepal's response to the Kalapani issue using diplomatic means can be ascribed to the collective product of various internal political conditions, including widespread public support, intellectual will and, more importantly, the political will buttressed by a sense of nationalism. Accordingly, Nepal not only protested the Indian moves, accusing India of changing the status quo without diplomatic consultations, but also summoned the Indian ambassador to Nepal and systematically deployed its security forces on the adjoining border region.

Against this backdrop, Newman and Paasi's (1998, p.187) assert the relevant view that, as boundaries are directly linked with the ideas of territory, territoriality and sovereignty, small states have lower threshold points regarding the resistance to any form of hegemony. As displayed in Figure 4, due to the lower threshold point, small states tend to eschew conflict, due to which, they react or resist only when the critical limit is traversed, which has been the case with the Kalapani region issue. In other words, apart from the visibility of a dominant power within this region, the resistive forms are equally visible, partly elucidating the two-way interaction (though of the contentious form).

The resistance of Nepal has been affected by a lack of internal consensus.<sup>217</sup> In this context, the recognition of the necessity to recover or develop a national narrative tarnished by the hegemonic border interacting structure cannot be achieved simply by reversing the category of centre and periphery without analysing the origin and structure of the dominant narrative. The disruptive and disorienting experience of dislocation becomes a primary influence on the regenerative energies of small states (Ashcroft et al. 2007, p. 65). Even after something is acknowledged as a myth, its deconstruction still matters as, "unlike crude propaganda, myth[s] often drive action through sincerely held views, and possess a tenacity borne of limiting the horizon of possibilities" (Gopal, 2019, p. 450).

It is necessary that Nepal disentangle and segregate the border issues with India and China and deconstruct the myth of undermining the 'self' and that the encroached territory can no longer be reclaimed and returned. One of the myths that have extensively penetrated Nepal's social and political discourses is that the Kalapani region cannot be retrieved as it was given (or sold) or ignored historically by political leaders, like King Mahendra. Specifically, scholars

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217 The direct relationship between the internal political condition and resistance can be observed in the two cases. During the period the resistance, the Oli government of Nepal was elected by almost two-thirds of the majority in the general election of 2017 (Nayak, 2015). Meanwhile, the successive Sher B. Deuba government, formed with a minor majority, despite public outrage, stayed silent over the issue when PM Modi stated that his government had "built the road up to Lipulekh and it is being expanded further" (see NLT, 2022; The Wire, 2022).

like Shrestha (2006) and Cowan (2015) have accused King Mahendra of inaction on the Kalapani issue due to his placing priority on power over the national interest. Furthermore, in a remark on the Indo-China trade agreement in 2015, then-Foreign Minister of Nepal, Mr M. B. Pandey, controversially stated that the Kalapani region was handed over to India by King Mahendra.<sup>218</sup>

Yet these claims or remarks are not only inconsistent per se, but more importantly, they also largely undermine the basic norm that a state's territory is not subject to any form of manipulation, bargaining or transaction according to a political authority's will or desire. In addition, these allegations selectively ignore Mahendra's contribution to upholding a nationalistic stance, including the evacuation of the Indian security posts from Nepal amid the Indian threat of border closure that had created a diplomatic rift between Nepal and China (as discussed in Chapter 4). Thus, such narratives, rather than feeding the national interest, instead risk creating internal dispute in Nepal by consolidating the Indian claim over these regions.

With the aftershocks of the Sino-India War (1962), the state actors of Nepal refrained from instantly resisting the Indian encroachment in the Kalapani area, as following Nepal's neutrality and the defeat of India in the war, this could risk Nepal being labelled as 'pro-Chinese'. However, it became an issue due to Nepal's state actors' prolonged silence offering India the opportunity to question Nepal's seriousness (Bhattarai, 2020b). Referring to Figure 4, Nepal then failed to acknowledge the sensitivity of the Kalapani issue, considering it within the 'buffer zone', when it had already progressed towards the 'region of reaction' and had the capacity to shape the tri-lateral issue, which re-emerged amid the Indian discontent regarding Nepal's overtures towards China since 2015.

As dependency is a significant driver of the hegemony, weaker states are inclined to reduce their reliance on the hegemonical regimes and attempt to set up alternative arrangements of their own (Collins, 2003 in Zeitoun & Warner, 2006). In a similar manner, following the economic blockade in 2015 and the border dispute with India in 2020, Nepal has (re)initiated its attempts to diversify its trade and maintain the border security. However, Nepal has yet to give serious attention to border region maintenance, including the adoption of new cartographic techniques<sup>219</sup> and document collection, securitisation and management (Bhandari, 2015).

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218 See Pradhan, P. R. (2020). The story behind Indian occupation in Kalapani, Online. Available at: <https://www.peoplesreview.com.np/2020/05/26/the-story-behind-indian-occupation-in-kalapani/>

219 For instance, Nepal's unwise decision to accept the Persian map as the basis for demarcation caused Nepal to lose 1,630 ha of its land to India (Zehra, 2020).

Thus, in summary, the border issues (like Kalapani) are the combined result of India and China's hegemonic performances and Nepal's weak diplomacy and lack of coherent knowledge (construction) in line with its territorial sovereignty (Figure 4), further exacerbated by its lack of soft-power and diplomacy. In this respect, it is vital that India, China and Nepal properly understand the geopolitical sensitivity of the territory. Here, the 'threshold line' is crucial, because below this line, the internal power (of the small state) rather than transforming towards the resistance begins to swerve towards internalising the hegemonic interest.

Therefore, Nepal needs to actively pursue a policy of strategic diversification that prioritises its non-aligned policy, economic delivery and connectivity without antagonising its neighbours. The mere realisation of a legitimate 'international space' is the 'strategy' that a small state needs to adopt to shield itself from the hegemonic exercise of the bigger states, rather than depending on the 'co-incidence'. Thus, to evade the presumption of synonymous explanation of anti-India (or anti-China) sentiment with nationalism, Nepal needs to continuously pursue diplomatic and negotiation efforts with greater strategic maturity. In the face of disdainful interaction and active silencing from the various quarters of the hegemonic establishments, it is these lines of resistance and resilience that matter most for the prospect of a (fully) decolonised border-interaction.

Thus, the application of the postcolonial lens to the border affairs of Nepal has been insightful for several reasons. Primarily, it is useful to explain how Nepal's border relations with India and China have relevance beyond the norms of strategy and their regional contention. Partly, this reflects how their mutual territorial rivalry is often transformed into their amicability by resorting to the colonial practice of domination and control, when the territory of a neighbouring small state comes into question. Secondly, it is important to reveal how China and India have employed representational practices as a geopolitical tool to neutralise or deflect their border issues with small states in a way that has provided leverage to them to portray their positive image while demonising the agency of Nepal. Thirdly, it has been useful to trace the contour of how Nepal has resisted, as considered within the framework of border-hegemony. Nepal's present territorial identity cannot be taken for granted, for the role of the resistance bolstered by nationalism is something that has persistently challenged the border-hegemony of India and China to explain the border relationship in a way that counters the power asymmetry.

## 6.6. Conclusion

The power asymmetry has been the determinant factor in the border affairs of Nepal with India and China. The border affairs carry a salient position within the relational dynamics of Nepal and its powerful neighbours, as both those states are concerned about their spill-over effect on the border region of Nepal (Fravel, 2005). Nepal's border issues with India and China are subject to different levels of priority—for India or China, it is the matter of feeding their 'strategic thirst', but for Nepal, it is about maintaining its territorial and sovereign integrity. Thus, to address the underlying issues as presented by the power asymmetry and to provide a better insight into the norms of resistance, a framework of border-hegemony has been proposed. The framework, as a postcolonial take, intends to provide an analytical paradigm of the overall border interaction that acknowledges the agency of the smalls state, including the challenge to the hegemony to make a shift towards cooperation.

Notably, both the Sino-Nepal and Indo-Nepal border face the issue of proper demarcation, which has been further exacerbated by the lack of a Nepal-India-China tri-border agreement (Forester, 2014, p. 35). With border-hegemony being prevalent within the bilateral border interaction, the lack of such an agreement highlights the precarity of the situation, whereby the bilateral border issue could easily transfer abruptly into a tri-lateral issue. Against such a backdrop, the forms of resistance Nepal is practising are attempts to liberate Nepalese territory from the neo-colonial form of Indian and Chinese encroachment to protect its territorial sovereignty. As border issues can easily take the form of a political agenda, Nepal needs to tread cautiously without alienating either of its neighbours—segregating the nationalistic sentiment from the anti-India/China sentiment—and take a firm stance based on knowledge construction within its nationalistic agenda to ensure adequate space for resistance.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

The discernible shift in the global geopolitical dynamics, marked by the de-provincialisation of Eurocentric endeavours towards the Global South has meant that scholarship has increasingly tended to challenge the hegemony of mainstream Western IR theory. However, this does not ignore, reject or denigrate IR entirely, for any such endeavour risks undermining the contributory subscription of a discipline on the ways the local, regional and global politics are imagined, designed and understood. Instead, this eschewal for me has entailed disentangling the dominant modes of understanding world politics and duly acknowledging the existence of the alternative mode(s) of thinking. This is the case because, under the premise of any form of ‘exclusionary’ approach, we risk following the colonial ideologies, norms, beliefs and practices against which we have catalogued the history of sufferings and sacrifices.

IR as a discipline cannot function and exist in a vacuum, for its actuation is activated only when a certain cause exists. In dominant modes of IR, this may refer to something of ‘interest’, whether that be of social, cultural, economic and/or political aspects. Contemporarily, it is evident that the political assertions are carefully camouflaged with the other (former) factors. This may include cultural forms, such as representation, territorial forms and the resources, such as water, through which the power is machinated. Notably, all of those factors can induce the functionality of power, whereby the difference lies only in the extent to which the power is put in motion and is experienced, thus problematising the inter-state relationships.

In this context, mainstream or conventional IR theory, as the name suggests, demonstrates inadequacies in dealing with the multidimensionality of how international politics are constituted, especially from the perspective of small states. This shortcoming is due to mainstream IR’s overwhelming, if not exclusive, concentration on power as ‘exercise’. For instance, realism draws from political geographical and geopolitical understandings, and they highlight the spatial dimension of state power, and focus on the influence and control of critical geopolitical and geographical space. Security and survival lies at the normative core of realism, which is characterised by the assumptions regarding the pursuance of unilateral interest that reify the norms of mistrust and conflict whereby small states are positioned as victims of external pressures and tactics.

However, such a construction of small states lacking any forms of agency is not an unbiased form of knowledge production but is rather a function of the existing power



asymmetry that reproduces the colonial vocabulary that has largely shaped the contemporary politics. Moreover, it implicates the ways conscious attempts are made to create a hierarchical system that ridicules, devalues, subdues, intimidates and silences or debilitates critiques, posing hierarchisation as normal and standard. This is typically true in the case of small states, whereby in the process of centralising the greater power, the smaller states are concomitantly marginalised.

Drawing on perspectives and considerations such as non-Western IR, resources (here water), borders, geopolitical dimensions, and the Himalayan region, I provided a characterisation of the region's geopolitical essence through the viewpoint of a small state, Nepal. I demonstrate how Nepal's relations with India and China show that Nepal's geopolitics is shaped through power asymmetries that resonate with neo-colonial formations and representations, and which offer limited space for accommodation and resistance. Nepal has managed its position within the proximity of these two hegemonic neighbours by seeking to play them off against each other, as it has been accused of doing by India.

It is important to note that the post-colonial states have employed the colonial cultural discourses for describing the changing nature of their own societies (Ashcroft et al. 2007, p. 33). Thus, while discussing the (re)theorisation of contemporary world politics, it is equally important to consider the colonial legacy and the existing form of neo-colonial relationship. In this context, the way postcolonialism's significant insight into the global political picture is to be applauded. Chowdhry and Nair argue that a critical international relations perspective on postcoloniality is necessary to investigate a variety of "colonizing practices that structure power relations globally, and resistance to these practices" (Chowdhry and Nair, 2002, p. 12). Specifically, this is relevant in the case of Nepal, which, though it remained independent even during the colonial period, bears a significant geopolitical position within both India's and China's neo-colonial attitudes and practices. Embarking on a journey of decentring, provincialising and deconstructing equally means offering something that could help 'repositioning'. This is what this thesis intends to perform. Accordingly, I contend that the underscored issues can be better addressed through the lens of postcolonialism.

After providing a short overview of Nepal's state building process in Chapter 1, I provided a general review of the literature on small states to demonstrate the senses in which Nepal is a small state. Here, I argue that due to the existing power disparity of Nepal vis-à-vis its neighbours, India and China, Nepal can be considered a small state, and that this has been a defining factor in its relationship with these neighbours. However, despite this, Nepal has

adopted a foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment, situating nationalism at its core to counter the hegemony of its neighbours.

Notably, India uses a hard-power (or assertive or overt) strategy to indicate its presence in Nepal and to seek to make the nation comply with its Indian terms and conditions. On the other hand, China uses a less confrontational, sophisticated, constructive, soft-power strategy of economic linkages and development to ensure that Nepal remains within its 'sphere of influence' (see Dahal, 2011; Karki, 2013). However, their orientation towards strategies delimits Nepal's exercise of independence, for their power play is a common essence mutually shared by both India and China.

Against the backdrop of the shifting geopolitical dynamics attributed to the rising powers India and China, mainstream IR's concentration on power-play falls short in locating a space for small states such as Nepal. In such a context, addressing the issue of negation of historical narratives, postcolonialism tends to denaturalise and deconstruct the great power narratives, revealing how they are problematic for small states. Postcolonialism draws attention to IR theory's neglect of the intersection of empire in the working of global power that reproduces a hierarchical IR centred around the concentration of power, and the way this obscures the possibility of a more equal distribution of power (Nair, 2017, p. 69). Chowdhry and Nair argue that a critical international relations' perspective on postcoloniality is necessary to investigate a variety of "colonizing practices that structure power relations globally, and resistance to these practices" (2002, p. 12).

The postcolonial approach collates vast historical knowledge and theoretical acumen in a politically engaged endeavour of deconstruction of theory and praxis of the dominant geopolitical settings, and a positive (and possible) alternative reconstruction in remaking the contemporary relationship. This challenges the simplistic figure of great power agency and interest, and provides novel insights into the ways small states can function outside the dimension of 'victim' or 'buffer' by usurping the voice of the other through which authority or authenticity is established. As such, Chapter 2 sets out the relevance of postcolonialism for my thesis and, based on Nepal's foreign policy founded on neutrality and non-alignment, underscores that small states do have agency, and the issue is only about an acknowledgement.

The remaining chapters employ the postcolonial critical attitude to highlight the norms of the existing power asymmetry between Nepal and India and China, and its resistance to these.<sup>220</sup>

Chapter 3 seeks to reveal how issues related to representation are key to understanding the relationship. Here, focusing on the representational practices employed by India and China, I provide insight into the crucial role Indian and Chinese representations play in regional dynamics as facilitated by power. The relevance of this consideration to the broader focus is established by the fact that India and China have been using representation as a tool to exert their hegemony. While acknowledging that representation does not reflect the real geopolitical scenario ‘on the ground’, it nevertheless has a productive impact on Nepal that serves the interests of India and China.

For a meaningful inquiry into the geographical setting, it is essential to delineate the historical contours that conform to these settings that draw the significance of geopolitics, which is the product of the geographical settings and historical processes in question. It is important to note that the domain of knowledge related to the state as a political-territorial entity is securely shelved within the universe of geopolitics (Soderstrom, 2010). Nevertheless, within the changing geopolitical dynamics, the conventional means of geopolitical framing that prioritise larger powers become parochial in their ability to defining the diverse nature of geopolitical functioning. Thus, tracing the changing historical trend and postcolonising geopolitics, Chapter 4 seeks to provide a general geopolitical overview of Nepal’s relationship with India and China and how Nepal has maintained equidistance with both neighbours.

Chapter 5 and 6 focus on water resources and borders, respectively, underlining the norms of power asymmetry and resistance. The two chapters share a common theme insofar as both hydro-politics and borders have been defined in a teleological context undermining the various factors—which are the specificities of a particular state—responsible for the formation of such (hydropolitical or territorial) interactions. Accordingly, in Chapter 5, I suggest that the water resource projects of Nepal with India and China need to be viewed through the significance of a small state and (the often negated) norms of resistance. Notably, had the power factor been side-lined, several water resource projects could have been designed by

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220 Here, resistance can be considered as a struggle for empowerment rather than the struggle for hegemonic status. This is not about assigning blame, but about recognising the present of alternative social and political structures.

transforming the fluvial power into national assets (such as irrigation, hydroelectricity) to meet the interest of Nepal, India and China.

With respect to geography, the norms of the zone of exposure or zone of protection are enacted through the process of bordering that actively separates the insider (self) from the outsider (others). While it is often taken for granted that a state is a fixed territorial entity, its territory is subject to change, with the weaker state often having such change forced on it by a stronger neighbour (as is mostly the case in the third world societies). Thus, it is necessary to situate the zone of resistance to counter any form of influence. Accordingly, in Chapter 6, influenced through the postcolonial approach, I offer the framework of border-hegemony combining the concepts of power, hegemony and resistance to facilitate the analysis through the viewpoint of a small state such as Nepal in terms of its resistance.

It is important to note that framing the ways India and China have exercised hegemony over Nepal does not mean these states perform in a similar way and to a similar extent. Nepal's geographical setting has inherently aligned it with its southern neighbour, leading Nepal to be considered within the Indian sphere of influence. This has been expressed in several Indian attitudes and practices, as in the case of the economic blockade over Nepal in 2015. Against this backdrop, Nepal has taken initiatives to make overtures to China, considering China's visible presence as a tool to minimise its vulnerability (Dahal, 2011, p. 40). But as a small state, this may become counterproductive for Nepal, as both India and China represent what Anand (2012) refers to as 'informal postcolonial empires'. In such a context, Nepal's existential certainty and progress rest on its ability to prioritise its sovereignty and maintain the norms of neutrality, non-alignment and equidistance with its neighbours.

Moreover, though Nepal was not colonised, many of its structures, systems and, more importantly, the territorial identity are the direct product of colonialism. In light of such considerations, mainstream IR theories are unequipped to address the historical contour of Nepal's geopolitical setting and challenges, given their excessive focus on power concomitantly negating the colonial norms. The postcolonial analysis of Nepal's geopolitical relationship with India and China, focusing on representation, hydro-politics and borders, underlines the significance of critically analysing the Indian and Chinese hegemonic attitude and practices within a deparochialised IR, subsequently offering a space for Nepal. The aim here is to carry out a critical interrogation of the geographical parochialism of mainstream, including critical, IR studies.

I thus seek to mobilise postcoloniality (or the postcolonial approach) to offer an alternative mode of thinking, one that moves away from the norm of power as an exercise towards power as an experience, and thereby promoting a better conceptualisation of the two-way interaction between the interacting entities (states). Here I accept that my mode of analysis partly deploys mainstream IR, such as the realist strand. This is explained by the fact that the way India and China view Nepal resonates with the way the colonial power(s) used to view them. Furthermore, queries may be raised by my adoption of postcolonial thinking, which embraces Western language and scripting, in the context of Nepal, embroiled with many colonial forms of state setting, structure and functioning. I duly acknowledge these constraints or challenges and, as a social science scholar, I believe that compared to pure science, a space always needs to be allocated for the norms of ‘relativity’.

I do not contend that the postcolonial mode of thinking is an end in itself; rather, it needs to be considered as a process to an end for the egalitarian society that we aspire to. This is a process of recuperating alternative modes of thinking, such as postcolonial, that I attempt to employ to obtain unexplored insights into Nepal’s experience of its relationship with India and China. Here, my caution has been to interrogate the dominant modes of analysis and thinking characterised by universalisation. Therefore, realisation about ethnocentrism assists to attain a higher degree of conscious difference between the self and others without politicisation, leading to a platform of the two-way form of interaction that eschews unilateralism.

Accordingly, my intention is not to denigrate or demonise India and China, nor to portray Nepal as a victim, but rather to highlight Nepal’s position for a two-way form of interaction. The thesis offers the postcolonial IR approach that challenges colonial history and the political problems within the neo-colonial context. Highlighting the geopolitical centrality of India and China within the contexts of norms of representation, hydro-politics and borders, it clarifies the real impact of the power-driven attitude and practices. It accepts the challenge of exploring asymmetrical power relations, the role of representation and the underlying resistance within the discursive production of Nepal as a site of Sino-Indian power-play.

With the downfall of the monarchy in Nepal in 2006, Nepal’s unstable internal political condition has affected every aspect of its state affairs. This has created a multiple shift in the geopolitical dynamics that characterise not only the Sino-Indian rivalry, but also the great power rivalries in general. The Indo-Pacific Strategy (as mentioned in Chapter 4) is a significant marker of this. The thesis intends to perform a deconstructive analysis of the Indian

and Chinese hegemonic attitudes and practices observed with respect to the water resources and the border affairs of Nepal. This is ensued by the reconstructive recognition underlining the notion of agency with the acknowledgement of the power-knowledge nexus.

In this study, I have used postcolonial approach as an alternative to the hitherto predominant realist/neo-realist approaches to IR studies. The latter would focus on and emphasise the unilateral exertion or exercise of hegemony on the part of India and China in their interaction with Nepal, and this has indeed been the exclusive focus of conventional approaches. I have found, in contrast, that the resistance posed by Nepal is of equal significance to illustrate not only the nuanced and in-depth analysis of how such interactions take place, but also to highlight the active role played by Nepal in determining the overall outcome.

As outlined in the preface, I have focussed on three research questions: 1) Does the study of the relationship between a small state and neighbouring rising powers require a postcolonial approach to IR? Taking the case of Nepal, this study suggests that the answer is in the affirmative. Conventional understandings of IR such as (neo)realism focus overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, on the greater power and their interests. Due to its inclusive nature of incorporating the voice of small states, the postcolonial approach can better address the surrounding issues of Nepal vis-à-vis India and China, including geopolitics, hydro-politics and border-politics of Nepal.

2) How does the asymmetry of power between a small state and its neighbouring rising powers shape geopolitics, hydro-politics and territorial identity? To answer this question, the study addressed the hitherto overlooked dimensions of power asymmetry with respect to the neo-colonial attitude and practices of India and China that I suggest share the attribute of the 'Imperial encounter' (Doty, 1996). Thus, the nature of interactions is not only problematic in terms of the way they are unequal regarding the exertion of unilateral interests, but also in terms of the way such power asymmetry has been responsible for leading to Nepal being considered a passive player, including in geopolitics, hydro-politics and border-politics. This has largely been sustained by the construction of the knowledge produced by those great powers about Nepal, which is then universalised or naturalised, for which I have taken a critical stance to such knowledge and power nexus.

3) How does a small state respond to the asymmetry of power vis-à-vis its neighbouring countries' rising power? To answer this question, I have highlighted that it is not only the

unilateral exercise of power that is apparent in the asymmetrical encounter, but also the resistance of the small state. Taking historical accounts of the way Nepal has negotiated in terms of the 'Imperial encounter', I have shown that, as a small state, Nepal has been able to resist and offer its own voice, and to demonstrate that it is not a passive player in the international system.

This research makes three main contributions: theoretically, methodologically, and empirically. Theoretically, I have shown how the postcolonial approach can be applied to the case of Nepal, a domain usually dominated by mainstream IR realist/neo-realist approaches. The adoption of a postcolonial approach is significant given the way India and China represent themselves as powerful and developed, while considering Nepal to occupy a relatively weak, victim status. Such a stance has a productive impact on the way they perform their relationship with Nepal, as is evident in areas including hydro-politics and border affairs. Moreover, the adoption of a postcolonial approach is intended to ensure an affordable space for Nepal to contribute towards deparochialising IR.

Notably, it does not imply the suitability of this approach for all small states, but to those states that are in close proximity to bigger ones, with the focus on the dimension of representation. Methodologically, I have highlighted how matters such as representation, geopolitics, hydro-politics, and border-politics can be studied in a way that has been either ignored or undervalued from the conventional IR perspectives.

Adopting the postcolonial approach, this study provides a comprehensive account of the Indian and Chinese hegemonic practices in Nepal upheld by the knowledge produced by the former two about the latter. The contours of Nepal's international relationships with India and China are significant to define Nepal beyond these frames of its neighbours, thus unearthing the agency of the small states. Here, it is important to highlight that it is not only the unilateral assertion of power but also the way the weaker or non-hegemonic entity is able to effectively resist or negotiate that determines the overall outcome of an interaction. Such ability to negotiate or resist is dependent on factors such as the internalisation of external knowledge and the internal consensus of the weaker states.

Here, I have attempted to highlight how resistance can be defined in terms of a small state, specifically regarding India and China being hydro-hegemons and border hegemonies. Influenced through the postcolonial approach, this is an attempt to locate the space for small

states, which has often been ignored within the conventional IR disciplines. This is also to denote that colonialism is not a story of the past, but it has been experienced in a new form of neo-colonialism, and thus the domination or hegemony has not remained as the privilege of the West. Failure to fully appreciate this may undermine the possibility of a comprehensive, just, and inclusive analysis of the constituents and nature of the international relationship.

In this respect, amid the increasing geopolitical gravity of the Himalayan region characterised by the dominance of the Indian and Chinese presence, including in the formation of knowledge production, this study has attempted to critically interrogate such simplistic and exhaustive tropes, offering a nuanced analysis about the position of small states such as Nepal. Moreover, such a study will be of significance to other small states that find themselves located between great powers in South Asia and beyond.

Equally, this is about the interrogation of a norm that considers anything as real, standard or naturalised. Because such standardisation of the thinking or belief of 'self' alienates it from reality towards a hypothetical world that elevates the 'local' standard as universal and to attain it, the power is machinated. Thus, the view of the geopolitical relations of Nepal with India and China intends to open up an avenue for a new dimension of envisioning IR. I believe that this will contribute to shifting the postcolonial IR approach away from the conventional understandings. It is a progressive and sequential shift for a small state: from an initial stage of 'denial of agency' towards being 'agent of resistance', and further towards being an 'agent of change'.



## ANNEX

### Annex I. Map of Greater Nepal (green portion depicts the present territory of Nepal)



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/The-Great-Nepal-240599825985488/photos/240611042651033>). Figure not to scale.

### Annex II.

#### 1950- Nepal India Treaty of friendship and peace

The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed by the last Rana Prime Minister of Nepal, Mohan Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, and the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Chandreshwor Narayan Singh on 31 July 1950 and came into force the same day. It has ten articles. The treaty provides for everlasting peace and friendship between the two countries and the two governments agree mutually to acknowledge and respect the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other.

#### Text of the treaty

##### Article 1

There shall be everlasting peace and friendship between the Government of India and the

Government of Nepal. The two Governments agree mutually to acknowledge and respect the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other,

## **Article 2**

The two Governments hereby undertake to inform each other of any serious friction or misunderstanding with any neighboring State likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations subsisting between the two Governments.

## **Article 3**

In order to establish and maintain the relations referred to in Article 1 the two Governments agree to continue diplomatic relations with each other by means of representatives with such staff as is necessary for the due performance of their functions. The representatives and such of their staff as may be agreed upon shall enjoy such diplomatic privileges and immunities as are customarily granted by international law on a reciprocal basis : Provided that in no case shall these be less than those granted to persons of a similar status of any other State having diplomatic relations with either Government.

## **Article 4**

The two Governments agree to appoint Consuls-General, Consuls, Vice-Consuls and other consular agents, who shall reside in towns, ports and other places in each other's territory as may be agreed to. Consuls-General, Consuls, Vice-Consuls and consular agents shall be provided with exequaturs or other valid authorization of their appointment. Such exequatur or authorization is liable to be withdrawn by the country which issued it, if considered necessary. The reasons for the withdrawal shall be indicated wherever possible. The persons mentioned above shall enjoy on a reciprocal basis all the rights, privileges, exemptions and immunities that are accorded to persons of corresponding status of any other State.

## **Article 5**

The Government of Nepal shall be free to import, from or through the territory of India, arms, ammunition or warlike material and equipment necessary for the security of Nepal. The procedure for giving effect to this arrangement shall be worked out by the two Governments acting in consultation.

## **Article 6**

Each Government undertakes, in token of the neighborly friendship between India and Nepal, to give to the nationals of the other, in its territory, national treatment with regard to

participation in industrial and economic development of such territory and to the grant of concessions and contracts, relating to such development.

#### **Article 7**

The Governments of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.

#### **Article 8**

So far as matters dealt with herein are concerned, this Treaty cancels all previous Treaties, agreements, and engagements entered into on behalf of India between the British Government and the Government of Nepal.

#### **Article 9**

This Treaty shall come into force from the date of signature by both Governments.

#### **Article 10**

This Treaty shall remain in force until it is terminated by either party by giving one year's notice.

Done in duplicate at Kathmandu this 31st day of July 1950.



Prime Minister of Nepal, Mohan Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana and Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Chandeshwar Prasad Narayan Singh signing the treaty, 31 July 1950

(Source: <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6295/Treaty+of+Peace+and+Friendship>)

### **Annex. III.**

#### **Sino-Nepalese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Kathmandu, April, 28, 1960.**

The Chairman of the People's Republic of China and His Majesty the King of Nepal, desiring to maintain and further develop peace and friendship between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Nepal.

Convinced that the strengthening of good-neighborly relations and friendly co-operation between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Nepal is in accordance with the fundamental interests of the peoples of the two countries and conducive to the consolidation of peace in Asia and the world, HAVE decided for this purpose to conclude the present Treaty in accordance with the Five Principles of peaceful co-existence jointly affirmed by the two countries, and have appointed as their respective Plenipotentiaries: The Chairman of the People's Republic of China: Premier Chou En-lai of the State Council, His Majesty the King of Nepal: Prime Minister Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala. THE above-mentioned Plenipotentiaries, HAVING examined each other's credentials and found them in good and due form, HAVE agreed upon the following:

#### **Article I**

The Contracting Parties recognize and respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other.

#### **Article II**

The Contracting Parties will maintain and develop peaceful and friendly relations between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Nepal. They undertake to settle all disputes between them by mean of peaceful negotiation.

#### **Article III**

The Contracting Parties agree to develop and further strengthen the economic and cultural ties between the two countries in a spirit of friendship and co-operation, in accordance with the principles of equality and mutual benefit and of non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

#### **Article IV**

Any difference or dispute arising out of the interpretation or application of the present Treaty shall be settled by negotiation through normal diplomatic channel.

## Article V

This present Treaty is subject to ratification and the instruments of ratification will be exchanged in Peking as soon as possible. The present Treaty will come into force immediately on the exchange of the instruments of ratification<sup>1</sup> and will remain in force for a period of ten years. Unless either of the Contracting Parties gives to the other notice in writing to terminate the Treaty at least one year before the expiration of this period, it will remain in force without any specified time limit, subject to the right of either of the Contracting Parties to terminate it by giving to the other in writing a year's notice of its intention to do so. DONE in duplicate in Kathmandu on 28/04/1960.

Source:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20171123125935/http://www.nepaldemocracy.org/documents/treaties\\_agreements/sino-nepal\\_treaty1969.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20171123125935/http://www.nepaldemocracy.org/documents/treaties_agreements/sino-nepal_treaty1969.htm)

### **Annex-3. Indian strategy of infantilisation** (Source: ISRGKB)



### **Annex. 4.**

“Both Nepal and China have identified nine of the projects, that are-upgrading the Rasuwagadhi-Kathmandu road; Kimathanka-Hile road construction; road construction from Dipayal to the Chinese border; Tokha-Bidur road; Galchhi-Rasuwa Gadhi-Kerung 400kv transmission line; Kerung-Kathmandu rail; 762MW Tamor hydroelectricity project; 426MW

Phuket Karnali hydroelectric project; and Madan Bhandari Technical Institute” (see Shrestha, 2021).

### **Annex. 5.1. Resource Nationalism**

Focusing mainly on oil resources, Bremmer and Johnston (2009) categorised various modes of resource nationalism, which are of value in conceptualising the concept generally. They define the following forms. Revolutionary resource nationalism is less frequent, and is not directed only at natural resources, but linked to broader political and social instability and upheaval. Economic resource nationalism occurs in relatively stable political conditions, and does not consider the government (elected or unelected power elites) as a necessary precondition. It seeks to achieve rebalancing, with a focus on shifting a large share of commodity revenue to the domestic from international hands. Legacy resource nationalism involves the nationalisation of resources (such as oil in Kuwait (1960s) and Mexico (1930s) and assets that are central to national, political and cultural identity. It may be the most ingrained mode with durable impacts on the industry and (oil) prices. Resource nationalism is not exclusive to frontier and emerging market countries, as can be seen by the fact that it is rampant in OECD countries such as Canada and the UK, and emerging in the USA and Australia.

### **Annex. 5.2. Nepal’s water resource agreements with India and China:**

Koshi Agreement: The Koshi Agreement between Nepal and India was signed in 1954 (with some revisions formalized in 1966), to regulate river flows, power generation, irrigation and flood management, with India holding the responsibility for control (Shah, 2018).

Mahakali Treaty: The Mahakali Treaty between India and Nepal, signed in 1996, aimed at integrated development of water resources of the Mahakali River (Lama, 2019).

West-Seti: West Seti was previously given to SMEC, an Australian company (export to India basis), with this being revoked in 2003. In 2012, the Nepal Electricity Authority and China’s Three Gorges Corporation (CTGC) signed the agreement for construction of West Seti hydropower project (750 MW). Regarding the project, Nepal was compelled in numerous ways to agree the Chinese terms and conditions, including the change of the project structure that could meet the Chinese interest (Harris, 2017).

Arun-III Project (then estimated capacity of 844 MW; Mahat, 2014) met with much criticism focused around the issues of environment and conservation instigated by business (mainly thermal lobby) interests. Despite the significant investment of time and resources (eight years and US \$20 million cost on the feasibility study), on 18 October 1994, then secretary of the

Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist and Leninist), Mr M. K. Nepal, wrote a letter to the World Bank (the proposed investor) about reservations regarding the project. These focused on the project design, viability, domestic political instability and the possible environmental costs. Subsequently, on 3 August 1995, Nepal received a letter from the World Bank about the cancellation of the project (Mahat, 2014). Later the agreement was signed in November 2014 (on a build-own-operate and transfer (BOOT) basis) between Nepal and Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN) Arun 3 Power Development Company (SAPDC) (India) (The Kathmandu Post, 2019b).

Upper Karnali Hydropower Project: Often referred to as the ‘jewel’ in the crown, due to its cost and construction efficiency, the Upper Karnali Hydropower Project agreement was concluded by Nepal with the GMR (Grandhi Mallikarjuna Rao) Company of India in Sept. 2014 (during the visit of Indian prime minister, Modi) by decreasing its power production sharply from 4180 MW to 900 MW (Pun, 2014).

Saptakoshi High Dam Multipurpose Project (SHDMP): Saptakoshi is made up of the integration of seven tributaries: Tamor, Arun, Likhu, Indrawati, Sunkoshi, Tamakoshi and Dudhkoshi, and is the largest river of Nepal (Linkha, 2020). For the purpose of controlling floods in Bihar, India, in the 1950s India built an embankment on the Koshi River named Koshi Barrage under a bilateral agreement. In 2008, part of embankment collapsed, displacing millions of people in Nepal and India (Oza, 2014). Following this, as a new strategy for controlling floods on the Koshi River, the idea of building a multipurpose dam re-emerged (as initially conceptualised in 1946) (Oza, 2014). Subsequently India and Nepal reached an agreement for the construction of the dam in 1991, whereby the Saptakoshi Joint Commission Office was set up for the control of floods in South-east Nepal and Northern Bihar of India, with irrigation facility to dozens of districts of the Eastern and Central Tarai Region (Linkha, 2020, p. 168). The project later came to be considered an integral part of India’s river linking project and has been of significant concern for Nepal due to the following reasons: 1) On the northern, upstream side, the dam (height: 269m.; reservoir of 195 sq.km.) with proposed power of 3300 MW, is projected: The two channels of east and west would convey water to India, with the eastern channels proposed to supply water to Nepal (Shah et al., 2007). Efforts to restart the dam planning and construction began in 2008 with the initiation of India and

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221 Known as the ‘sorrow of Bihar’, Koshi River is famous for changing its route, and on the floodplain, India has already constructed the Koshi Barrage (Shah, 2018).

Saptakoshi Joint Commissions (Linkha, 2020). Though it is argued that the project would provide 3300 MW of electricity, Nepal would receive only 300 MW.

*Budhigandaki Hydropower Project*: Budhigandaki Hydropower Project (1200 MW) was signed between Nepal (Nepal Electricity Authority) and China (China Gezhouba Group Corp-CGGC) in May 2017. China has identified it as a component of China's Belt and Road initiative. See Harris (2017).

#### **Annex 6.1. Sugauli-Treaty (1816).**

As Article V of Sugauli treaty states: "The Rajah of Nepal renounces for himself, his heirs, and successors, all claim to or connexion with the countries lying to the west of the River (Maha) Kali and engages never to have any concern with those countries or the inhabitants there".

Source:

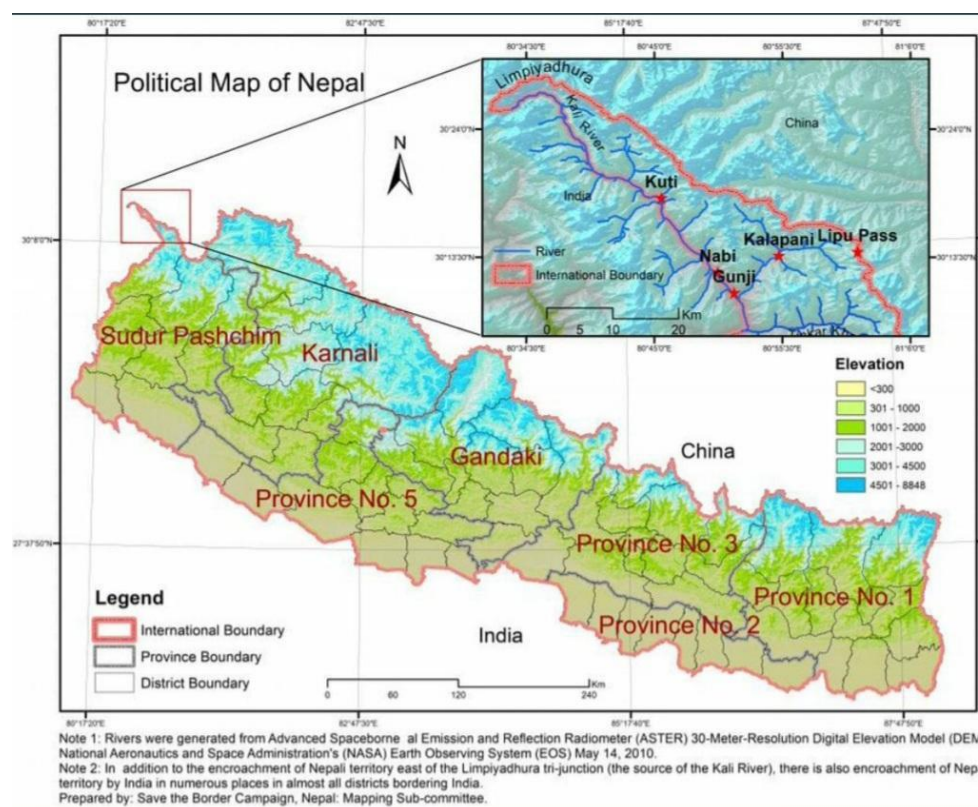
<http://nepaldevelopment.pbworks.com/w/page/34197552/Sugauli%20Treaty%20of%201815%3A%20Full%20Text>

#### **Annex. 6.2. Documents showing Limpiyadhura is in Nepal:**

A report submitted by then Chief district officer of Nepal, D.R. Joshi, mentions that India has encroached in the region since 1952. Former Army general of Nepal, Mr. G.S. Bohara claims the date to be 1959. In Nepal the Kalapani border issue has been publicly raised in the early 1970s by state minister for forest, Mr. B.S. Etwal from Darchula district. On 16 July 1973, Mr. N.P. Rijal, cabinet in Nepal formed a panel with representatives from Ministry of Home affairs and Foreign affairs, which clearly mentioned that India had created an artificial Kali river for the unilateral border demarcation. In the early 80s, then Chief district officer of Darchula, Mr. D.N. Dhungel had submitted a ground report on encroachment to the home ministry and suggested for the deployment of the security forces (Bhandari, 2015).



### Annex 6.3. A new map published by Nepal including Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipulekh in 2020.



Source: <https://www.southasiatime.com/2020/05/18/nepal-government-approves-to-publish-new-political-map-that-includes-kalapani-limpiyadhura-area/>

### Annex. 6.4.

There was an agreement for A four-tier mechanism (Timalsina, 2019): (i) “Both the countries i. e. Nepal and India formed a Border working Group (BWG) under the Surveyor Generals of the both countries to re-establish the remaining border pillars, reconstruct the missing pillars, repair and maintain existing pillars and clear the no man’s land; (ii) Under the Deputy Surveyor Generals from both sides the survey officials committee (SOC) was formed to fix the technical design, supervise and provide technical guidance to the field teams. (iii) Under the CDO of Nepal and District Magistrate (DM) of India Field Survey Teams (FST) were formed to conduct a joint field survey, repair and maintain the existing border pillars, relocate the missing pillars with GPS technology and prepare a strip-map. An Outstanding Border Issue Resolution

Mechanism (OBIRM) was formed at the foreign secretary level to suggest to the respective governments on the issues of Kalapani and Susta based on technical inputs from the BWG”.

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