

(De) Construction of State Identity through Postcolonial Examination of Geography: A Case Study of Nepal

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Abstract: Postcolonialism on geographical studies encompasses scholarships that draw on postcolonial perspectives to challenge forms of colonial and imperial domination of geographical narratives. The studies within and beyond geography have construed how colonial discourse and discrimination have distinctive spatial dimensions and special effects on the (de)construction of the identity of the states. Thus, applying postcolonial lenses and examining colonial and Eurocentric geographical narratives, the paper aims to deconstruct the state identity. First, the paper introduces postcolonial studies to geography by way of a review of the literature. Then, the paper reviews the Eurocentric geographical architecture to establish modern geography as a western or colonial creation. Additionally, the paper provides a colonial justification for those geographical constructs and paves the way for de-mapping the Eurocentric geographies. Notably, the paper takes a unique case study of Nepal and examines the colonial geographical frameworks the British East India Company constructed during colonisation in the Indian sub-continent. Likewise, the paper outlines the consequential colonial geographical narratives formed due to the colonial discourses and the postcolonial explanation of Nepal's identity. In the end, the paper presents Nepal's native geographical identity by comparing *Divya Upadesh* with that of the colonial narratives. In conclusion, the paper emphasises the Eurocentric and colonial geographical penetration into the knowledge system to construct a state identity and postcolonial approach as the method of deconstructing those identities of the state.

Keywords: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Geography, Identity, Nepal



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1. INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial studies are fundamentally geographical, and the intersections between postcolonialism and geography provide puzzling opportunities to discover the spatiality of colonial and neo-colonial discourse and the spatial politics of exemplification (Krishnan, 2017). Geography is one of the central discourses of colonialism that postcolonialism pursues to destabilise and problematise the conducts in which the world is identified, and to experiment with the undervalued and unexamined assumptions that may be intensely

insensitive to the values, meanings and practices of other cultures. Postcolonial approaches raise an explicit critique of the spatial metaphors and temporality repeatedly engaged in geography and essential to what in the West is stated as “progress” and “modernity” (Sidaway, 2000). Postcolonial theory discloses the location of knowledge, mainly the universalising knowledge created in imperial Europe, while simultaneously being accustomed to its places of formation.

Likewise, contemporary states have derived this colonial hegemonic knowledge and narrative to construct their own identity. The colonial

cartographies, border demarcation, mapping, and consequently formed colonially geographical epistemologies and ontologies have been the centre of constructing the states' identity (Mahmud, 2007). The Western rulers' colonial geographical knowledge has been critical in setting today's narrative for the states. Development projects, military strategies, trade routes, climate and natural explanation, and the divide of East-West or North-South have been affected by the colonial geography marked in a very Eurocentric nature as the guiding principle. Presently, the states, knowingly or unknowingly, have been driven by such colonial narratives.

This study takes the case of Nepal to examine the geographical narratives imposed to construct state identity. Nepal was depicted as a 'buffer' between China and India. The buffer identity was used for a long time to explain Nepal's geostrategic position and geopolitical vulnerability. The British East India Company created Nepal as a "buffer" state in response to the Qing Empire's aggressive advance into the South. With India's independence, Nepal was required to act as a buffer, and this was done through the "Himalayan Frontier Policy" (Adhikari et al., 2013). Focusing on Nepal's Cold War-era geopolitical vulnerability due to the rivalry between India and China helped the country adopt this identity (KC & Bhattarai, 2018).

Additionally, King Birendra also described Nepal as a "gateway" to South and Central Asia, while King Gyanendra later advocated Nepal as a "transit state" at the 2005 Afro-Asian Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia (Adhikari et al., 2013; Bhattarai, 2020). Scholars and officials have suggested that these identity discourses as "gateway" and "transit" may be realised through a variety of strategies, most notably through the BRI, which is led by China (Bhattarai, 2020). Later, academics from Nepal and China and political officials regarded Nepal as an economic "bridge" between India and China (Adhikari et al., 2013; KC & Bhattarai, 2018; Tao, 2017). This shift in the political language from "barrier" to "bridge" also reflects Nepal's psychological transition from a security-focused to an aspirational outlook on economic growth (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). Nonetheless, all the geographical identities used for depicting Nepal originate from the colonial construction of a 'buffer'. Nepal, amid colonial construction of identity, has overlooked the

indigenous identity of 'yam' between the two boulders as suggested by King Prithvi Narayan Shah.

"How to deconstruct colonial geographic narratives?" has constantly challenged questions concerning the scope of the endeavour. Conducting a research to deconstruct or examine colonial geographic identity construction by the state is arduous. Steering this conversation in the right direction is not simple. It is perhaps helpful to identify the Eurocentric architecture of geography, and only then would it be easy to deconstruct those narratives through the postcolonial perspective. Hence, the study by taking the case of Nepal and engaging in an ontological inquiry of postcolonial construction of identity attempts to deconstruct the state identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

One critical literature that commenced the re-evaluation of colonialism and empires is Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Since then, the subaltern and postcolonial studies have been the critical lenses through which a researcher can interrogate and develop a critical framework to study the cultural, geographical, and ideological frames of reference created and sustained by colonialism. Human geographer Doreen Massey (2005) in *For space* quotes that "one of the effects of modernity was the establishment of a particular power/knowledge relation which was mirrored in a geography that was also a geography of power (the colonial powers/the colonised spaces), a power-geometry of intersecting trajectories" (Massey, 2005, p. 23). Given this reflection, it is possibly anticipated that the question of colonialism's geographies, both "imagined" and the "material", in Edward W. Said's terms, has long remained a central concern of postcolonial studies and colonial discourse analysis more broadly (Said, 1978). Said presented how the notion of the "Orient" was constructed in the Western imagination as the "other" of the West. Said's critical analysis of texts, mainly Western literature, uncovered how Western cultural forms often acknowledged and legitimated colonialism's structures. Said's work and the debates surrounding it across numerous disciplines have had a lasting effect on geography. Many geographers were predominantly taken with his concept of "imaginative geography" and with his explanation of how categories such as "the East" and "the West," evidently fixed blocks of geographical reality, are

constructed through language and cultural imagery and are formed by grids of power (Said, 1978).

Postcolonial insights into the relationship between forms of knowledge and colonial power operations have had a significant influence on work in the history of geography, and ongoing works depict how the discipline advanced in tandem with Western colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lewis & Wigen, 1997; McEwan, 2003; Mahmud, 2011). With its practices of exploration, cartography, resource inventory, and spatial languages of discovery and colonial conquest, geography was of significant imperial importance. Indeed, one historian of the subject has defined geography in the nineteenth century as the “discipline of imperialism par excellence” (Blunt & McEwan, 2002; McGee, 1997). Furthermore, studies have focused on how geographical institutions, ideas, and practices were bound up with nineteenth-century exploration and empire cultures. Others have projected how cartography practices contributed to the fashioning of imperial space.

Nevertheless, several studies have reflected how geography teaching in British institutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries endorsed imperial citizenship (Bhabha, 1990; Noyes, 2006; Sidaway, 2000; Soja, 2011). Likewise, Carl Schmitt’s postcolonial imagination makes modernity Eurocentric and colonial and presents the opposition between decolonisation and anti-colonialism. He explains that the latter is described as an absolute political negation of the former. His conclusion involves the political significance of the postcolonial as alternative spaces where more significant regions and geopolitical blocks might develop into becoming founding participants and equal members of universal global *nomos* (Kalyvas, 2017).

The varied work of Edward Said (1978, 1993), Gayatri Spivak (1987) and Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994), to take three renowned figures as examples, is, therefore, part of a broader development of a body of knowledge that takes as its object the practice and language of colonialism as well as the creation of colonial subjectivities. Here, through the literature, it is clear that the postcolonial geographical work deliberates the construction of “imaginative geographies” of empires through various cultural representations, from travel writing to photography. Furthermore, the literature review gives a pathway

for this study to examine the colonial geographical narratives and (de)construct the state identity. The review also points out that there have been no attempts to view the geographical identities of Nepal through postcolonial lenses.

3. EUROCENTRIC GEOGRAPHICAL ARCHITECTURE

The foundational ideas of the modern world geography for just in case of the geographical epistemologies and ontologies dates back to the fifth century BCE, rooted in the ancient Greek debates (Lewis & Wigen, 1997). Through critical geography lenses, it is apparent that the necessary information about the highest level of geographical taxonomy is the most problematic and very Eurocentric in nature. The classical division of geography into a handful of fundamental geographical units that Greeks invented, followed in the Roman, Medieval and Renaissance periods to the present, does most of the injustice and adds complexities to the world’s understanding. When used by those who exercise political power, its significances are catastrophic (Mahmud, 2007).

The current world order is a Eurocentric construction of the images of the world – a world order established essentially on Eurocentric terms in which the remaining two-thirds of the world’s humanity are adhering to these terms or suffer the consequences. The Eurocentric profession of geography created a thought style based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the “Orient” and “Occident”, as Edward Said mentions in his book *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). Central to this process was a manipulation of geography, in which geographers shared the manipulation of time and space. Nevertheless, there was an assumption of power, superiority, and a right to exert intellectual power (hegemony) and draw boundaries. The terms used by Western geographers and cartographers are essentially Western and do not have equivalent words in non-western languages (Blunt & McEwan, 2002). Thus, the geographical space has created an identity and fundamentally distinguished non-Europeans, creating a distinctly non-European image and space.

To explain the start of identity creation, studying the period of geographical ‘discovery’ and exploitation is essential. However, this process accelerated in the nineteenth century with European political and territorial expansion into the world’s

non-European part. Geographers who called themselves explorers, and explorers who called themselves geographers, charted the empires' dimensions under the sponsorship of institutions such as the Royal Geographical Society (Krishnan, 2017). The second phase is when the Second World War geographers became more concerned with interpreting the non-Western "other" states for a Western audience (Blunt & McEwan, 2002). Western presses published the majority of geographic writing for a Western audience. Lastly, the other component of this phase of the geographical relationship was Western geography's implantation into other parts of the world (Sidaway, 2000). From the early twentieth century onwards, geography was founded upon a newly established network of colonial universities. These taught the "others" about the geography of the Western world constructed by Western geographers. This process of implantation is inclined to be very paternalistic. There was little that non-Europeans had to offer but nascent minds to be moulded in the Eurocentric image. In numerical relations, this embedding procedure has been quite efficacious.

This Western geographical knowledge positioned a metaphorical hall of mirrors, which have played a vital role in making the non-western construction of geographical knowledge invisible, writing over and blocking out knowledge systems. These European cartographies or cartographical narratives elucidate European desires, values and images. To explain the cartographic manipulation or invention to architect Western geography, Gerhardus Mercator, whose 1569 summary map, publicised by Richard Hakluyt in his *Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London: 1589), liberated cartography from dependence on Ptolemy (map formerly used before Mercator map), and included a projection that allowed navigators to understand the coasts of the New World (Sidaway, 2000). This map exaggerated the size of the Northern hemisphere and consequently inflated the European image in the world. Thus, generations of European and American were indoctrinated with the glories of nationalism and colonialism through this map. The modern modification of the Mercator projection is also Miller's cylindrical projection. This map also tends to project the Western domination of geography over the non-western world.

Until recently, the sixteenth century's Mercator map, so popular globally, projected a Eurocentric perspective on the world. It is a map that assured Europeans that they possessed a centrally located continent and were superior people who could rightfully dispose of the New World inhabitants. Through the rhetoric of the Mercator maps, Europeans imposed their imperialistic images onto the non-European landscape. Therefore, this Eurocentric architecture of geography dictates that all geographical distinctions are arbitrary. This architecture of geography has posed the rotating sphere into the distortional and directional indicators into distinct regions. These cartographic processes have divided the globe into several narratives but have also put forward European domination and non-European subjugation. These geographical narratives have been a clear foundation or bases for colonial endeavours in the past and colonial domination over those regions. These maps directed the mental maps and distinction of the humans and culture into a hierarchy.

4. COLONIAL JUSTIFICATION OF GEOGRAPHY: A POSTCOLONIAL "DE-MAPPING"

After the end of colonialism in the twentieth century, the colonial projects left behind imposed geography and many newly independent nations drawn upon colonialism's territorial lines. From its inception, modern geography formed part of the knowledge and practices attendant to colonialism to objectify and classify the colonised territories and bodies by deploying an impulse to chart, count, and map. Modern geography developed and was supported "largely, if not mainly, to serve the interests of imperialism in its various aspects, including territorial acquisition, economic exploitation, militarism, and the practice of class and race domination" (McEwan, 2003, p. 347).

Postcolonial theories are "an attempt to transcend in rhetoric what has not been transcended in substance" (Noyes, 2006, p. 12). From a postcolonial perspective, "the history of geography reflects the evolution of empire. The very formation and institutionalisation of the discipline were intricately bound up with imperialism" (Raat, 2004, p. 297). It has been noted that "geographers have always been among the front ranks of explorers, surveyors, technologists, and ideologues of the

empire, and often “became the most vociferous imperialists” (Raaf, 2004, p. 297). Europe’s “planetary consciousness” would not have been possible without geographical knowledge development (Soja, 2011, p. 10). As a frontline colonial scholarship, geography played a founding role in the modern construction of race by facilitating suture bodies and consciousness with space, a construction indispensable to the formative stages of modern colonialism (McGee, 1997).

There is also a significant relationship between postcolonialism and cultural geography as well. States tend to construct their identity because of the geographical hegemony implanted in their indigenous cultures through which they have constructed a clear image of the colonial construct (Bhabha, 1990). Postcolonial de-mapping of the geographies will be alert to imperialism’s continued imperialism, and systematically irrepressible in disrupting and disturbing established frames, assumptions, and methods. Between the encouragement to rework, rethink and re-contextualise or deconstruct ‘our’ geographies and the acknowledgement of the impracticality of such revised geographies exclusively or entirely evading their ‘western’ genealogies and conveying us to the particular postcolonial promised land, are the spaces for forms and guidelines that will at the very least relocate or possibly, sometimes radically, dislocate familiar and frequently taken-for-granted geographical narratives (Krishnan, 2017).

Postcolonial critiques examine western geography as sovereign-universal-global truth, and it is vital to reaffirm here that postcolonial critiques do not bid a straightforward way out of compound theoretical and practical matters or questions. Instead, they open layers of questions about what reinforces and is taken for granted in western geographical narratives and how they have been inseparably entwined with the world they seek to examine and misguided for self-contained, universal and eternal truths (Blunt & McEwan, 2002).

5. COLONIAL GEOGRAPHICAL SCAFFOLDING IN CONSTRUCTION OF NEPAL’S IDENTITY

The Nepali nation was born against improbable odds. In the most challenging terrain imaginable, the Nepali people achieved unity and withstood the British threat to rule all of South Asia. Nepal’s

evolution as a state can be traced from 1744 to 1951 (Stiller, 1999, p. 1). At that time, there was a slow decay of the Mughal Empire, the Marathas from Pune had swept into India’s plains; from Afghanistan, Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah came down to Delhi; Mughal governors in Hyderabad, Bengal, and Avadh became autonomous. This was the chaos that Clive and the East India Company mastered to become rulers of India (Adhikari, 2018). Nepal and the British had their first contact not as friends but as enemies, and the armies of both states made their beginning at the battleground of Sindhuligadhi. Though the Gorkhali soldiers at Sindhuligadhi defeated the Company’s army, the British continued their attempts to know the secrets of the Himalayan kingdom through numerous missions in 1770, that of James Logan and in 1784 of Foxcroft. These missions could collect convincing data about Nepal, but they were inadequate to materialise the British interests in the Himalayan kingdom (Manandhar, 1991).

After the East India Company came to India, one of the primary aims was to establish a trade relationship with Tibet and China. This sole economic motive of the Company became the starting point of the geographical scaling of Nepal. Different studies and reports have been made about Nepal’s geography by the Company to find a passageway for a trade route with Tibet. This consequently led to the imposition of hegemonic geographical knowledge as scaffolding for the identity of Nepal. Colonel William J. Kirkpatrick’s mission to Nepal was undertaken in 1793. This visit came in the Nepal-Tibet war milieu in 1792, and Kirkpatrick’s visit was motivated by the desire to further trade with Tibet and Nepal. His account of Nepal is one of the most considered reports with insight into the British colonial knowledge imposition. The geography, mainly the trade routes and natural forts, explained in his report to the Governor, is essential to trace Nepal’s colonial construction back. This became important to further the Company’s interest in the land before a *terra incognita*. This report considered Nepal a better approach or access route to Tibet than Bhutan (Kirkpatrick, 1969). Kirkpatrick says, “(Nepal) [...] owing to its situation concerning Tibet appears highly interesting to us in a commercial view” (Kirkpatrick, 1969, p. 290). In the report, Kirkpatrick writes, “The company government would not have

felt easy about the Chinese overrunning Nepal and occupying it permanently” (Kirkpatrick, 1969, p. 303). His book gives a good account of Nepal’s geography focusing on trade and commerce and Nepal’s strategic geographical location between the company government and China.

Likewise, Francis Hamilton, a surgeon-naturalist with the British East India Company, observed in 1801 what was far more detailed than Kirkpatrick’s and far more valuable from a military point of view. In his report, he detailed the strong foothold or military forts in Nepal’s hills, but most importantly, he focuses on the fluid nature of the boundary below the hills in the south. This was explained by the close analysis of the then Nepali ruler’s perception of boundaries and the land disputes that Nepal and the company government had (Hamilton, 1819). Thus, his narrative or analysis of Nepal’s geopolitical circumstances is the landmark narrative the British colonial rulers used in the Anglo-Nepal war and the future. Furthermore, many British officers in several instances like William Moorcroft (1811), Major Paris Bradshaw (1812), and Dr Rutherford (1814), visited Nepal, where their reports and analysis mainly accounted for Nepal’s importance for commercial activities with Tibet and East India Company, focusing on the internal and external geopolitical narratives around Nepal and the Company, and the military explanation for the geographical conquest (Ludwig F. Stiller, 2017).

Importantly, Nepal’s colonial geographical identity construction was cemented at Sugauli in November 1815 when British and Nepali commissioners sat down to negotiate the end of the Anglo-Nepal war. In the process, they produced the Treaty of Sugauli, which put an end to Nepali expansion and, with significant adjustments, drew the boundaries of today’s Nepal. Before this Treaty, one of the strong colonial geographical narratives or colonial methodologies to delimit Nepal and Nepal’s colonial geographical identity construction was through the *Principle of Limitation* (Stiller, 1999, p. 50). It characterised an arbitrary line the Governor-General had drawn to demarcate Nepal’s possessions. According to this principle, the Hills belonged to Nepal and the plains to the British. Such a line of demarcation had no foundation. To extend the principle to the whole sweep of the Himalayan plains was vintage British imperialism.

However, in British political thought, a boundary was a static notion, well-defined by border pillars, surveys, and other appurtenances that continue into the modern era. In an interchange of official letters in July 1816 amongst the Governor-General in Calcutta, the Resident in Kathmandu Edward Gardner, and the Nepali courtier after the Sugauli Treaty, when discussions about returning a part of the Nepali Tarai instigated, the British persistence on the clear demarcation of the border is evident. The British emphasised the fixity of a political boundary because they went to war with Nepal in 1814. This was as alien to the Nepali political tradition as other princely states of the subcontinent, where “boundaries” were fluid constructs well-defined by physical and geographical structures. “Boundary lines were unfamiliar to [Bhimsen Thapa’s] thinking.” (Stiller, 1976, p. 123).

Another significant scaffolding of the colonial narrative to the geography of Nepal dates back to Sir Alfred Lyall. Lyall imagined and described a system of peripheral defence. This system had become second nature with India’s rulers. The British repeatedly adopted the policy of interposing a border of the protected state between the actual possessions they administered and the possessions of formidable neighbours they desired to keep at arm’s length (Buffer states, 1965). Thus, Nepal was also considered a *buffer state* to keep the Chinese aggression at a formidable distance in the northern part. Consequently, the presence of more assertive China and the imperialist USSR in the north directed British India to contemplate Nepal as a *buffer state* and assimilate Nepal into its security considerations (Adhikari et al., 2013).

Therefore, several British colonial officers created a narrative to explain Nepal geographically and, consequently, an identity that the existing knowledge system still holds to date through their Nepal visits.

6. RESULTANT COLONIAL GEOGRAPHICAL IDENTITY OF NEPAL

All the colonial geographical scaffoldings created in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, which had a considerable role in creating Nepal’s colonial identity, were related to commercial activities and strategic geography. Most of the early surveys by the British officers who wished to

increase the trade activities between Tibet and East India Company have noted Nepal as a better *access trade route* to Tibet commercially and politically than other Himalayan states. The reports and the conclusions by the colonial officers on Nepal were to employ Nepal as a pathway to Tibet for trade and commerce. Thus, through colonial lenses, Nepal's geography was explained as a trade route or *bridge* between the Company and Tibet, especially western Tibet.

Moreover, Nepal had an expansionist policy, and one of the Company's ambitions was to limit Nepal's expansionist endeavours, at a greater level, to colonise the whole sub-continent. However, as time continued after they entered the sub-continent, aggressive China became a concern for the British. The British did not want to engage with the Chinese in a more significant conflict. So, the construction of a buffer was necessary around British India. As developed by the British around India, the buffer system depends on its practical validity and effect on retaining and respecting complete internal freedom within the buffer area. Therefore, Nepal's construction of identity as a *buffer state* results from the colonial narratives created by the colonial rulers in the Indian subcontinent.

Later, due to the British's knowledge-power imposition, Nepal assimilated the *access route's* geographical identity and *buffer*, demarcated by the colonial narratives in contemporary times. Nepal's identity of *yam*, claimed by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, was then equated to the colonial idea of *buffer* and *access route*. Nepal declared many narratives to justify its geographical position, such as former King Gyanendra expressing Nepal's willingness to be a *transit state* and former prime minister Dr BaburamBhattarai in his opening speech at the second Convention of China and South Asia forum at Kathmandu projecting the notion of turning Nepal into a *vibrant bridge* (Adhikari et al., 2013). Nevertheless, all these geographical narratives derive their power from Nepal's colonial explanation. Though these colonial narratives are relevant in unravelling Nepal's geographical identity, they completely mislead Nepal's right geostrategic and geopolitical location.

7. POSTCOLONIAL EXAMINATION OF NEPAL'S IDENTITY

Nevertheless, this resultant colonial identity of Nepal as a buffer and trade route has described Prithvi Narayan Shah's *yam theory* in *Divya Upadesh*, where he places Nepal's geopolitical and geostrategic reality between the two bigger states. Though the narrative of *bridge* and *buffer* somewhat reflects Nepal's geographical identity, however, the constructs are colonial and imaginative, as Edward Said rightfully posits, they are imposed on Nepal's knowledge system to create an identity that the *Occident* wished for. The reflection of the Foucauldian notion of power by Edward Said, where he writes in his book that "Knowledge is not innocent; it is always operated by power" (Said, 1978, p. 69), can be construed in the identity formation of Nepal as this particular knowledge of geography by the colonial powers became an integral part of Nepal by the operation of power by British on Nepal. He depicts that the knowledge about the 'orient' created and disseminated in Europe was an ideological supplement to colonial power. He refers to political intellectuals, philologists, critics, statesmen, and academics who contributed to orientalism as an 'institution', a lens through which the 'orient' would be regarded and controlled (Said, 1978). Therefore, this construction of Nepal's geographical identity maintained and extended British hegemony over Nepali lands.

Similarly, Gayatri Spivak's concept of *worlding*, a process through which the local population was 'persuaded' to accept the European version of reality to understand their social world (Lochner, 2015), can be employed to understand the construction of Nepal's colonial identity. This geographical knowledge imposition by the British persuaded Nepal to follow and accept the British version of geographical reality to understand Nepal's geopolitical and geostrategic ideas. Knowledge, according to Spivak, is comparable to any other product exported from the West to the Third World. Academics from the West have long positioned themselves and their understanding of Eastern civilisations as objective. The third world's pieces of knowledge are frequently fabricated with the West's political and economic interests (Praveen, 2016). Spivak's postcolonial argument rightfully rejects the resultant geographical narratives formed under the scaffolding of previous colonial officers and reveals

the construction of Nepal's identity on the foundation of British political and economic interests.

Likewise, Nepal's construction and assimilation of the colonial geographical identity into its veins can be examined through the question that Homi K. Bhabha raises about the cultural identity and his argument on "mimicry" of the western ideas by the native thoughts (Bhabha, 1985). Over time, Nepal imitated colonial ideas and knowledge and construed its identity according to contemporary times. Similarly, Ashis Nandy mentions that the imposition of an overarching colonial system imposes specific ways of thinking about and observing the colonised society, resulting in new cultural, social, and political standards for the colonised, which are translated into new criteria of "being". These criteria result in a colonial consciousness bound to seep into colonial subjects' everyday meanings (Nandy, 1982). Similarly, Nepal has translated the new colonial geographical knowledge into the state consciousness, leading Nepal and the rulers to follow the criteria or structure the colonial rulers imposed.

8. PRITHVI NARAYAN SHAH'S *DIVYA UPADESH* AGAINST COLONIAL NARRATIVES

The construction of "legitimate" knowledge has been meticulously connected to the context, class affiliation, and producers' social identity. European colonisers have defined legitimate knowledge as Western knowledge, fundamentally European colonisers' ways of knowing, repeatedly taken as objective and universal knowledge. The delegitimisation of aboriginal knowledge by Western intellectuals, conferring to Karl Mannheim (1936), indicates that to comprehend a social phenomenon, such as knowledge, we must study the social circumstances within which the knowledge has been apprehended and born.

This section presents Nepal's geographical notion by the founder of modern Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, through *Divya Upadesh*. Before his death in January 1775, he conveyed golden directives in the form of a text called *Divya Upadesh*. This was given from his deathbed to his inheritors and the people of Nepal to instruct the compatriots about his challenging expedition of unification. His 'Yam Theory' is still famous as the fundamental base of Nepali Foreign Policy and

diplomacy (Pulami, 2022). According to Prithvi Narayan Shah, "this country is like a yam in the middle of two rocks. Preserve a treaty of friendship with the emperor of China. Keep a treaty of friendship with the emperor of the southern sea" (Stiller, 1976, p. 332). Notably, the yam theory exposed Nepal's vulnerability and stressed more on defensive preparedness in the face of possible aggression from the south or north. *Divya Upadesh* is the foundation of Nepal's neutrality and non-aligned foreign policy (Pulami, 2022). Through this text, Shah's economic policies were cautious of foreign traders and focused on a self-reliant economy and an export-oriented state (Baral, 2020). Therefore, Prithvi Narayan Shah's idea of Nepal's identity relies on the state-centric notion, in which he describes the geopolitical scenario of the region and construes a defensive identity for Nepal. He explicitly mentions Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy based on balanced and equi-proximal relations with the neighbours. Though Nepal's economics does not align with globalisation's contemporary notion, he tried to form a self-reliant and export-oriented state identity (Stiller, 1968).

In contrast to this state identity constructed by *Divya Upadesh*, the colonial narratives are close to the geographical explanation but are different. Nepal's narrative as a buffer state explains Nepal's conversion of a geostrategic tool to prevent future confrontation with China, unlike explaining geostrategic and geopolitical location compared to the yam theory. The identity constructed as a buffer state is purely defensive but towards the British colonial rule in the Indian sub-continent, not for Nepal (Rose, 1962). Similarly, Nepal's idea as an access route to Tibet is converse to a self-reliant and export-oriented identity constructed by *Divya Upadesh* (Baral, 2020). In the contemporary context, being self-reliant and export-oriented for Nepal as a developing state is better than being a bridge between India and China.

However, Nepal or the rulers of Nepal translated the colonial knowledge system, forgot about Nepal's original state identity, and constructed a new state identity based on Nepal's colonial geographical explanation. The British knowledge structure delegitimised the indigenous knowledge of Nepal.

9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, modern geography's colonial construction has a significant role in constructing Western or Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies. These colonial narratives have successfully created a modern knowledge system with a colonial set of ideas and structures. The border demarcations, mappings, cartographic manipulations, and geographical naming constructed the states' identity. The colonial history left its colonial or imperialistic succession to the colonial-modern geography, which was constructed, and effective in persuading present minds and building state identity with colonial ontologies and epistemic roots. Based on the interest of the colonial powers, they carved into the maps the geographical borders, which are not merely the lines of demarcation but a whole set of knowledge systems imposed on the "other".

In response to this colonial legacy present in modern geography, postcolonialism critiques and seeks to subvert this colonial power and knowledge relationship. It suggests a unique tool for an acute and inquisitive undoing of our conventional geographical knowledge, predominantly to question power, inequalities, and privilege. This methodology requires critically studying both the colonial or imperial pieces of literature and the subaltern works of literature to destabilize the current relationship. Postcolonialism, especially the ideas of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha (explored in this article), helps to deconstruct the state's colonial identity through the colonial notion of geography.

Nepal is a particular case study connecting colonial narratives with the construction of state identity. Nepal never stayed under the colony of any world power, but it went through challenges throughout its initial days of nation-building. However, when the British East India Company entered the Indian sub-continent to colonise the whole region, it explained and analysed Nepal's geography following its economic, political, and security interests. Moreover, the colonial narratives the British geographers and officers created outlined an analysis and penetrated the native knowledge system, creating a colonial geographical identity within Nepal.

Thus, Nepal's colonial geographical narratives as an *access route* and *buffer state* penetrated and translated the existing native knowledge system, ignored the real state identity, and created the other narratives as a *transit state* or a *vibrant bridge* on the

foundation of colonial geography. So, the postcolonial narrative can be employed to deconstruct the colonial identity through geographical imposition on Nepal.

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