

The Sugauli Treaty and the Evolution of Nepal–India Boundary Politics

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ABSTRACT

The Treaty of Sugauli (1816) is the main legal document which had shaped the boundary between Nepal and India and has continued to shape the boundary issues of the present day and the political relations among the two countries and also the administration of the boundary. The article investigates the treaty not only as a historical treaty negotiated and signed following the Anglo-Nepalese War, but also as a living legal-political agreement whose meaning shifts with the evolution of the sovereignty systems, cartographic methods and geopolitical dynamics of the region. The study examines the primary provisions of the treaties, boundary notes from both the colonial and postcolonial periods, official maps, diplomatic communications and a sampling of secondary sources in a qualitative historical-legal fashion to explore the construction, contestation and reinterpretation of boundary politics between Nepal and India over time. The paper holds that the Sugauli Treaty adopted a 'boundary principle' which had 'territorially consequential' ramifications, but was 'interpretatively incomplete' in such a way that scope was left for future discussions on river courses, watersheds and the location of key frontier points like the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh area. It also demonstrates the shift from purely cartographic issues of boundaries to the issues of nationalism, state legitimacy, strategic geography and cross-border governance. The study underscores the significance of treaty interpretation in the current diplomatic claims and border disputes. The article locates the treaty in the broader context of the history of Nepal–India relations, and engages the broader scholarship on international boundary-making, postcolonial interpretation of treaties, and Himalayan geopolitics. The study postulates a process of durable resolution of Nepal–India boundary problems not only through historical clarification but also through the political will, institutional discussion and mutual recognition of legal evidence and geopolitical sensitivities.

Keywords: Sugauli Treaty, Boundary Politics, Nepal–India Relations, Border Dispute, Historical Interpretation

INTRODUCTION

For centuries in South Asia, borders have been drawn by war, treaty, Imperial rule and postcolonial statecraft, not on a map by an international body, but through a process of struggle and negotiation. The process of boundary making has become particularly problematic in the Himalayan region where rivers change their course, and mountain corridors gain strategic significance. The current literature reveals that border disputes between the South Asian states are more complex than just territorial issues, as they are

also influenced by nationalism, sovereignty, strategic geography, and the legacy of colonial rule (Sharma, 2024; Thapliyal, 2012). To grasp this broader picture is crucial to understanding the boundary politics between Nepal and India, one of the most historically complex boundary issues in the region.

The Treaty of Sugauli (1816), signed following the Anglo-Nepalese War, is the basic legal agreement for the boundary between Nepal and India.

The treaty brought an end to the war, and gave Nepal up its claims to the disputed Tarai and to lands west of the Kali River (Britannia, n.d.). Historical and legal studies also indicate that the treaty established a permanent boundary system, but there were important issues left unaddressed in the treaty regarding space, particularly in riverine and mountainous regions (Historical and legal analysis, 2020; The colonial legacy of India–Nepal borderland disputes, 2020). In this respect, the treaty was not a military treaty but the starting point of a long term (geopolitical and legal) order.

But the trouble is that the treaty's power hasn't been enough to clear up the ambiguity. In contrast, the Sugauli Treaty has received divergent interpretations due to its boundary terms which were read through colonial maps, documents, and postcolonial colonial history. Recent research on boundary dispute in Kalapani shows that boundary disputes are not merely technical cartographic issue but it is associated with the rise of nationalism and shifting geopolitics (Sharma, 2024). Likewise, research on the bilateral relationship between Nepal and India indicates that the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship established a special type of bilateral relationship but also raised debates on the issues of reciprocity, sovereignty and strategic autonomy over a longer term (Thapliyal, 2012). More recently, an article on regional mobilisations around the 1950 treaty also suggests that, beyond the immediate border area, such treaties remain today in the political discourse as well (1950 India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, and Regional Mobilisations in Eastern India, 2023).

This study maintains that the Sugauli Treaty has to be read as a "living" legal-historical framework, not as a "closed" colonial document. The primary argument is that Nepal–India boundary politics has changed from the nineteenth-century imperial settlement into the contemporary struggle over the interpretation and meaning of the treaties, the concept of national identity and geopolitical space. A gap in the literature is an integrated historical-legal approach that links the text of the treaty to the ongoing development of boundary politics in the colonial and postcolonial eras. Existing works speak about the treaty or the border dispute or the political tensions in the contemporary times; very few examine the continuum between the two historical settlement and contemporary-day boundary politics from a single

analytical vessel (Sharma, 2024; The colonial legacy of India–Nepal borderland disputes, 2020).

The study has two aims. It first looks at the importance of the Sugauli Treaty in the demarcation of Nepal–India border. Second, it explores the impact of the treaty on the development of boundary politics since the colonial era. These objectives are achieved by a historical-legal examination of the text of the treaties, some of the boundary interpretations, and recent scholarly work.

This study is of academic and practical importance. In the academic field, it helps the study of borders, treaties, and geopolitics of the Himalayas by connecting colonial legal discourses and current territory politics. From a practical perspective, it offers a historical context to understand the continued relevance of boundary issues in Nepal-India relations and how it continues to impact the trust in the diplomatic relationship. History is always relevant to policy and diplomacy as recent research on Kalapani suggests that unresolved border issues are interlinked with nationalism and regional security issues (Sharma, 2024; A Case Study of the Kalapani Border Dispute Between India and Nepal, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is now a much larger body of literature on Nepal-India boundary politics, building on the narrow focus on treaty description to a wider discussion of territoriality, nationalism, border governance and the geopolitics of the Himalayas. The Nepal–India border is now a space that is no longer perceived as static, but as one that is full of the dynamics of politics, strategic interests, and movement. The transition can be discerned in reading Nepal–India relations through border studies, geopolitics, energy history and securitization, all of which continues to influence political debates since the Sugauli Treaty was signed (Sharma, 2024; Borderline politics, 2023; The colonial legacy of India–Nepal borderland disputes, 2020).

One of the principal lines of research highlights the colonial roots of the conflict. The colonial legacy framework suggests that we must reconstruct Britain's frontier-making practices, administration mapping and frontier river disputes to appreciate the nature of contemporary border tensions. The colonial history of India–Nepal borderland

disputes article (2020) frames Nepal's current demands in a historical context of imperial mapping, surveying and military rule over disputed areas. In the same way, *Unsettled South Asian Borders* (Ghimire, 2024) has pointed out that the colonial and non-colonial borders continue to play an important role in Nepal's foreign policy and national sovereignty. In combination, these studies make it clear that this conflict is not a new phenomenon, but a structural result of the border production in South Asia.

The second set of studies are concerned with the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura dispute as a tangible reminder of Sugauli. The conflict can be seen on two fronts, one the nationalism of India and Nepal, and the other a shifting geopolitics of the Himalayan border, as shown by Sharma (2024). This argument is buttressed by the argument in the book *Why Does a Border Dispute Exacerbate?* The escalation from securitization theory (2025), explaining why incidents get worse when they are securitized as a matter of national security. The 2023 study on Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura also points out that the historical facts were used selectively by both the states for the respective claims and the strategic interest of China in the issue further complicates the situation. As a whole, these works indicate that the border issue is not just legal or cartographic, but rather a part of regional power politics and nationalisms.

The other major theme is the importance of diplomacy and foreign policy in addressing and managing unresolved boundary issues. The *Foreign Policy Analysis study on Challenges to Diplomatic Efforts in Resolving Nepal-India Border Problems in the Himalayas 2021* reveals that Nepal's diplomatic initiative has been hampered by asymmetry, inadequate bargaining power, and India's slow pace. The study also highlights the importance of ongoing reference to historical treaties and documentation in the formal negotiation process. *Disputed Territories between Nepal and India* (2020), in another contribution, outlines the enduring nature of conflict in various areas, including the enduring nature of institutional records, the changing nature of borders in riverine regions and the weakness of border management mechanisms. These studies take the discussion beyond the abstract discussion of sovereignty into institutional and administrative settings that support boundary uncertainty.

In recent literature, the political significance of borders in everyday life and state practice is also analyzed. This book, *The Politics of Border and Nation in Nepal in the COVID 19 Era* (2020), examines how the frontier has become a place of exclusion, surveillance and symbolic nationalism in Nepal's COVID era, and how far politics of the frontier extends beyond treaty archives. Likewise, *Borderline politics: Reading Nepal-India relations as "energohistory"* (2023) looks at energy infrastructure as a part of border history, not an economic issue per se, and in particular at the hydropower and electrical transmission lines. This is important because it makes a connection between territoriality and development, meaning that infrastructure projects are not simply neutral technical arrangements, but part of a geopolitical arrangement. This type of study widens the perspective from border conflicts to political economy of border governance.

Literature on open borders and cross border mobility provides one more layer. The research on the Nepal-India open border indicates that the treaty mechanism put in place in 1950 had a special form of exchange and movement of people, labour and social dependency. This openness, however, is also regarded as a weakness for smuggling and border control weakness, and complexity for border governance. The book *Nepal-India Open Borders: Problems and Prospects* (2015) describes this as a historic and a management challenge. Border regions, identity politics, and the power dynamics and unevenness of state power are also present in more recent scholarship on the 1950 treaty. This body of literature illustrates the need to view the Nepal-India boundary as not only a line of separation but also as a social and economic corridor that is lived.

The concept of territoriality and South Asian Border Theory is explored in a second body of work on the topic of boundary politics. The theoretical article *Boundaries and Territoriality in South Asia* (2008) continues to be influential, in arguing that colonial processes of statehood, sovereignty and breakage in demographic and cultural continuity have influenced the region's territorial disputes. The conceptual framework is quite old but still influences the more recent studies of Nepal-India relations, as it provides a reason for emotive and political salience of the border disputes well beyond their legal roots. Similarly, recent research on the border issues of the

Indian subcontinent as a whole reveal that the conflict over territory can trigger micro-conflicts, local nationalism, and cross-border insecurity. The literature is useful because it helps to frame the Nepal-India conflict within a broader regional context as opposed to viewing it as a bilateral issue.

Recent publications of books also extend the scope of the analysis. The book *Understanding the India-China Border* (2022) is not about Nepal per se, but it is relevant because of the example of how a border becomes militarized when it is geography and a strategic competition. This goes some way to explaining why the Nepal-India border regions are growing more sensorial to India-China competition over infrastructure and rivalry. In a similar vein, the Himalaya, as a strategic frontier zone, where state interests, mobility and security concerns overlap are given a historical-geopolitical perspective by *Himalayan Frontiers of India*. These pieces are helpful in understanding Nepal-India boundary politics in a broader security context of the Himalayas.

Legal and discursive aspects of border disputes have also been brought to the fore in recent scholarship. *Border Issues, Territorial Disputes and their Implications for Geography and Geography Education in the Pacific*, the Sharma 2024 Pacific Review article, is an entryway to nationalism and geopolitics, and *India-Nepal Relations: Contestation and Border Issues* from the NUS policy literature offers a brief overview of the politics of border management. Similarly, in a tumultuous regional landscape, *Shared Bonds, Strategic Interests 2025* discusses the Nepal-India relations in the era of water, hydropower, transit and strategic recalibration. From this context, it becomes clear that the issue of boundary politics has become an integral part of the larger issue of connectivity, energy and regional security cooperation.

The literature further suggests that the politics of the boundaries is conveyed via public narratives and policy responses. The cartographic aggression, the concept of national identity and the escalation of territory are a potent mix that makes border disputes potent, as evidenced in articles. The case of Kalapani is particularly notable as it has emerged as a point of reference in the discussion about historical justice, the legitimacy of the state and external pressure. In this way, the Sugauli Treaty is not only a legal document,

but also a sort of memory object, which continues to be invoked in the present-day discourse. The continuing conflict shows that the issue of treaty interpretation is far from settled, but continues to be a place where struggle exists alongside settlement.

The recent literature on Nepal-India boundary politics is therefore rich; but it is also sparse. Some studies concentrate on the colonial history of the border, some on the Kalapani controversy, and some on open borders, energy or diplomacy. What is missing is the historical-legal study of the Sugauli Treaty from its original 19th century context to its reinterpretations in post-colonial times and the current geopolitical context. There are few works more recent that combine the elements of treaty text, cartographic transformation, diplomacy, nationalism and infrastructure politics in a single framework. This gap is what spurred the current study that focuses on the Sugauli Treaty as the basis for the development of Nepal-India boundary politics and tries to tie historical interpretation of treaties to the current state of the border between Nepal and India.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the Treaty of Sugauli is analyzed through a qualitative historical-legal research design to understand the implications of the treaty and its impact on the development of Nepal-India boundary politics. The reason for a qualitative design is that the research problem involves treaty interpretation, continuity (historical), narrative elements of the diplomatic process, and competing boundaries claims which are not measurable. In recent studies of border disputes between Nepal and India, qualitative documentary analysis, primary and secondary sources, and geopolitical interpretation of historical documents and context is used (Sharma, 2024; Bhattarai, 2021).

The study is mainly descriptive studies that include historical analysis and documentary analysis. Historical analysis is employed to trace the origin of the boundary as per the Treaty of Sugauli and follow the reinterpretation of the boundary in subsequent political and administrative processes. The Treaty text, official maps, historical boundary records, diplomatic statements, scholarly articles and selected policy documents are analyzed using documentary analysis. The methodology is in accord with recent scholarship on the border disputes in the Himalayas that locate

attention on the importance of archival sources, treaties and map-based evidence in the understanding of contested borders (Sharma, 2024; Disputed territories between Nepal and India, 2020).

The research is based on primary and secondary sources. The Treaty of Sugauli and other bilateral agreements or treaties, official maps of boundaries or border, Government statements, and documents in Government archives and Government portals are primary sources. Secondary sources comprise of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy papers and academic reports analyzing Nepal–India relations, border governance, territorial dispute and Himalayan geopolitics. Multiple sources create a triangulation effect, which helps to minimize the risk of depending on a single source of information and/or interpretation. Recent research on the Kalapani issue and Nepal-India border politics (Aryal & Pulami, 2024; Vindegg, 2023) use similar triangulation methods by employing historical material with political analysis.

The analysis procedure consisted of three phases. The study first identified and classified the appropriate materials thematically - treaty history, interpretation of the boundaries, border disputes, diplomacy, and geopolitical change. Second, these materials were critically read for the discovery of legal clauses, historical claims, common arguments, and contradictions in interpretation. Third, the results were organized in chronological and thematic fashion to demonstrate how the Sugauli Treaty influenced subsequent boundary politics. The method allows for analyses of border studies, as boundary conflicts tend to be created by the interplay between law, history, geography, and political discourses, not exclusively by the legal text.

The analysis is guided by a critical interpretive framework. The study does not assume that the text itself explains itself, but rather focuses on the ways in which it has been read, enacted, and interpreted in the past by interested parties and through geopolitical contexts. This is significant because the Nepal–India border has been addressed in various ways – colonial cartography, post-colonial sovereignty, nationalism, politics of open border, and strategic security. The recent works of scholarship on border governance and territorial dispute are focused on how border disputes are socially and politically constructed therefore not

mere description but interpretive analysis is required to understand such a dispute (Pulami, 2023; Ghimire, 2024).

The study used four inclusion criteria for selection of sources. The source needed to be: (1) directly related to the boundary issue in Nepal-India, to the interpretation of treaties, or to geopolitics in the Himalayas; (2) published in a scholarly journal, academic book, policy paper or official document; (3) readily available in full text or in reliable abstract; (4) relevant to the historical period from 1816 to the present. Sources that detailed only general India–China geopolitics and were not about a different regional boundary dispute were not included unless they provided an illustrative comparison. This helped to focus the study to remain confined within the Sugauli legacy and its long lasting political impact.

Limitations of the study are the availability and access to historical records, particularly early colonial maps and diplomatic correspondence. There are some boundary materials spread into the archives, and some contemporary policy debates which are tainted by some nationalistic or diplomatic sensitivities. To compensate for this, the study uses sources that are traditionally considered academic or official and, when possible, verifies conflicting statements from more than one source. It also aligns with recent studies on the border that dispute areas tend to be enveloped in competing versions and inconsistencies in documentation (Bhattarai, 2021; Sharma, 2024).

In general, the methodology will yield a historically informed and analytically sound treatment of the impact of Treaty of Sugauli on the politics of the Nepal-India boundary. The study intends to use historical analysis, document reading, and critical interpretation to go beyond the summary of the treaty and attempt to explain how the settlement of the nineteenth century continues to influence the territorial dialogue of the twenty-first century.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research shows that the Treaty of Sugauli is the most important historical and legal basis for Nepal – India boundary politics, and that its practical implications have been constantly changed and reshaped by subsequent cartographic decisions,

administrative practices and strategic developments. Its essential thrust is that it did not definitively fix the frontier boundary, but rather adopted a boundary principle based on the course and source of the Kali River which was subject to future disputes. Such ambiguity has enabled both states to rely on different map series and traditions and claimed historical legitimacy. In other words, the treaty did not define the boundary in terms of a single and clear spatial reading of each segment, but rather in terms of the framework of the boundary.

Treaty text and boundary ambiguity

The most significant legal provision regarding the western border is Article Five of the Treaty of Sugauli, which reads, "Nepal hereby waives all claims to the 'countries lying to the west of the River Kali'. The treaty itself did not include a map or specify exactly where the river was going to start, and that was the crux of the dispute later. In reality the Treaty remains unaffected, its geographical scope is not. The issue is not just about the land, it is about which arm of the river is the Kali and hence, which is the treaty's border line, as recent analytical writings on Nepal-India border disputes have pointed out.

It is a classic case, from a boundary-politics perspective, of a treaty language that lasts long after it becomes legally valid and that creates conflict of interpretation. A river boundary is particularly susceptible as rivers can change and split into tributaries, and are sometimes depicted differently during different surveys. In the Nepal-India case, the Kali issue is further complicated as the reality is that the disputed area is not just a lowland border area, but a high Himalayan tri-junction with strategic importance for India, Nepal and China. So the treaty's ambiguity only gained political significance when the territory itself came to have significant security and geopolitical importance.

Historical maps and competing interpretations

One of the key lines of evidence in the literature is historical maps. The arguments for scholarship and studies on the border issue regarding the Kalidhara are centred on early British era documents and later revisions of the map, with the Nepali argument favouring the interpretation of the Kali from the Limpiyadhura, and the Indian (and quasi-official) on

the basis that it is closer to Lipulekh. This distinction is important because boundary arguments are not constructed in only in terms of the text of the treaty, but in terms of how the treaty was made effective after the treaty, in its visual and administrative aspects. Map evidence is thus a secondary legal language which can supplement or contradict the language of the treaty itself.

The important fact found is that later map series are more important than occasional early sketches. In which maps have been historically authoritative, from which maps were officially surveyed, and which were reproduced in government records have been the recurrent themes of the debate. Indian commentators have said that the later maps, such as those used in official boundary practice, follow the border of the Kali from near Lipulekh and Nepali scholars have quoted the older maps and hydrological interpretation to support the position of Limpiyadhura. The treaty has never been accompanied by an annexed map, thus both sides have been able to state that their favoured cartographic version is correct in accordance with the treaty. That's why the argument continues 200 years later: the border is a border as much as it is a line on the ground, and it's a dispute over the legitimacy of the archives.

Kalapani sector as a strategic frontier

It is also witnessed that the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura sector turned into a very sensitive area as it turned from being a remote borderland into a strategic frontier. In the wake of Sino-Indian war scenario and general security concerns for the Himalayan region, early in the post-1962 period, India's military presence in Kalapani became significant. From then on, the boundary issue had become much more than a historical matter, it had become associated with military logistics, access routes and strategic depth. What came out of that was a change in the way treaties were interpreted, toward security politics.

This strategic aspect is important because it is this disagreement that gained momentum in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Opening of roads, borders and pilgrim tracks added to the value of the Lipulekh area, and the changes in the national maps and even the claims to sovereignty made by Nepal made the issue more prominent as political issue.

There was a recent study that suggested that the "boundary problem" worsened because the symbolic assertion and the on-ground administration of the state started to become increasingly polarized. That is, the controversy became even more fervent not just because of the changing of evidence in history but because of the political usefulness of the territory.

Treaty legacy and postcolonial state practice

One significant outcome of this study is that it does not conclude with British rule, but continues in the postcolonial phase and is reimagined in the bilateral framework between India and Nepal. This is important because post-1947 India did not only get the border as it was defined but also all the diplomatic fall out. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 has established a special relationship, where there is a complete lack of borders, consultative mechanisms and good mobility rights. However, it has not solved the ambiguity of the Sugauli framework. Political intimacy and boundary fragility emerged in the postcolonial relationship as a consequence.

It seems that postcolonial treaties and agreements were better at negotiating mobility, trade, and diplomacy than at negotiating the ambiguity of the territory. River agreements, trade treaties, and transit deals increased the interdependency between the two countries, but also set new expectations for consultation and reciprocity between India and Nepal. Where conflicts arose, the two states were not faced with no treaty obligations whatsoever, they were faced with inherited treaty obligations and several further instruments. This multi-layered legal framework is key to the understanding of why boundary politics in the Nepal case is inextricably linked with broader bilateral relations.

Nationalism and boundary politics

The other key discovery is that boundary politics is now increasingly nationalistic. The Kalapani issue is an example of how the interpretation of the treaties can be used as a symbol of sovereignty, historical justice and state dignity. Recent studies have pointed out that the issue of boundaries between India and Nepal has been politically de-escalated with the growing nationalism on both sides. The nationalistic rhetoric over-simplifies the complex technical issue to reduce it to a moral equation of territory, identity and respect.

When it's presented that way, it becomes too politic to compromise, since any compromise can be seen as a betrayal.

In Nepal, border issues are frequently associated with a sense of territoriality and opposition to perceived asymmetry, suggesting this dynamic. However, in Indian discourse, the continuity of history, boundaries, and administrative jurisdiction are also cited in support of the current boundary. It results in mirror image nationalism, with both sides using the past in its own way. It does not mean that there is a lack of evidence, it means that there are competing regimes of evidence that are being brought to the fore for domestic legitimation.

Crucially, the study also reveals that the conflict has not been resolved because diplomatic activity has tended to deal with the symptoms rather than the real legal-historical crux of the boundary dispute. The issue has been raised in Nepal several times via diplomatic channels, but literature indicates that negotiations have led to only limited progress. Asymmetry is one of the reasons: India can view the boundary as a manageable problem, whereas for Nepal it can be considered as an existential problem. The other reason is the weakness of institutions, such as uneven border documentation, joint verification systems, and access to archives and their use, making the process of technical settlement difficult.

The evidence indicates that boundary diplomacy is best suited when there is an agreed-upon baseline of evidence, which has not happened here. Rather, every side emphasizes its own cartographic archives and historical take. Policy and academic research over the last several years consistently have found that border negotiations fail to progress when legal reasoning takes a back seat to political messaging. So the controversy continues, not out of ignorance of the treaty, but out of memory.

Broader geopolitical implications

Further, it has been discovered that the Nepal-India border issue goes beyond the bilateral issue. Kalapani-Lipulekh is linked to the issue of connectivity with the Himalayas, India-China strategic rivalry and political issues of access to the sacred and commercial routes. The historical literature on geopolitics of the Himalayas indicates that the border areas are becoming more contested when located at the

crossroads of regional powers and infrastructure networks. A treaty that was signed in 1816 now shapes the security planning of the twenty first century and trans-Himalayan access in this case. The historicity of that long arm is what makes the Sugauli Treaty so special.

This also implies that the Nepal–India border should be understood in a larger border-world where the local geography is entangled with the international strategy. Physically it is remote, in political terms central. These areas of the frontier can be over-determined, serving as not only sacred places and geographical edges, but also strategic pathways and historical evidence sites. Sugauli Treaty is at the heart of that overdetermination, since it provides both parties with a legal home base, albeit with different perspectives on it.

The overall picture of the findings lends credence to the main thesis that the Sugauli Treaty established a boundary order, which was durable but not final. It was in this article that the Kali River was accepted as the western frontier principle, but it did not include a clear cartographic annex and the identification of a river source was complicated, so there was room for disagreement later. It was then further complicated by the colonial changing of the survey and by postcolonial state practice, security issues, and nationalist politics. The Nepal–India boundary issue thus cannot be seen as a mere question of line, but is a multi-layered historical process, where treaty, map, state power and strategic geography have continuously interacted with each other.

The literature reviewed and the evidence in this study indicate that there is yet a comprehensive historical-legal analysis that links up the original boundary clause from the Sugauli Treaty with the complete history of the politics of the Nepal-India boundary from colonial to postcolonial, diplomatic and geopolitical period. Typical studies have tended to be on one of three fronts: treaty history, the Kalapani dispute, or contemporary diplomacy. The current 2016 territorial dispute is still very much shaped by an 1816 treaty, as few works have managed to combine these elements. As few works have managed to combine these elements, the current 2016 territorial dispute is still very much shaped by an 1816 treaty. The arguments of this gap warrant further research in a converging framework of treaty interpretation,

cartographic history, archival sources and geopolitical analysis.

CONCLUSION

The Treaty of Sugauli remains alive in the political relationship between Nepal and India, as it established the basic framework of the border under the law, but did not resolve the issues related to the geography. While the evidence used in this study confirms that the treaty remains at the heart of the issue, the lack of a precise map annexed to the treaty, and the hydrological circumstances of the Kali River meant that the river's source became a point of contention later on, particularly in the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh region. Nationalist politics, strategic security considerations and the contestation of historical evidence by both states is an integral part of the controversy as recent scholarship has shown.

Hence this study has concluded the Sugauli Treaty was not a settlement of history, but it took the form of a boundary arrangement that continues to this day. It was more than simply the line it tried to delineate in 1816—it was the long, complex string of diplomatic, cartographic, and geopolitical analyses that followed. This will not be achieved through rhetoric, but through continued bilateral discussion, the archival examination of history through an objective lens and the recognition of historical evidence and strategic sensitivities. Until this process is formalised the Sugauli Treaty will continue to be the birthplace of the border and its ongoing dispute.

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