



Geo-psychology of Nepal as a ‘Small State’

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Abstract

What is ‘small’ in the small states? What is the geo-psychology of Nepal as a small state? Scholars have not been able to conclude what is ‘small’ in small states. The economy, population, territory, and military elements have been regarded as criteria responsible for the smallness of the small states. The study has investigated the psychological ‘self’ and ‘forced’ positioning as a small state. Further, the study argues that the smallness in Nepal is the psychological construction determined by the geographical positioning of the country as well as through social phenomena of interaction (cognitive process) and experiential form. The study forwards the argument that Nepal as a small state is the outcome of the geopolitical reasoning and geopolitical imagination of the ‘other’. The smallness of Nepal is intersubjective, a psychological construct, which was shaped through shared experience, particularly in relation to the neighbours. The study contests the traditional idea of quantitative analysis of smallness in a state, unfolding the collective national psyche of small states which are mainly impacted by geography and intersubjective interactions. Furthermore, the study’s conceptual framework is based on the idea of ‘geopsychology’, which takes ‘geography’ as a determining factor of state psychology. The qualitative study examines the origin of smallness in Nepal using secondary data sources from academic journals, books, reports, and online platforms.

Keywords: geopsychology, small states, Nepal, intersubjectivity, experiences, positioning

Introduction

As a relatively small country, Nepal is located in the lap of the Himalayas, between the two Asian giants. Nepal, in less than two decades, transformed constitutionally into a Federal Democratic Republic and has exhibited impressive economic growth. Nepal has been breaking its traditional policy approach in the domestic sphere and foreign relations and gradually moving forward for infrastructural development and economic prosperity. It is, as discussed above, changing fast in a political-economic sense and has always been portrayed as a small state. One of the reasons for identifying Nepal as a small state is its relative geographic size because of the two large neighbouring states: China and India (Adhikari, 2018).

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The size of a state in International Relations has always been correlated to power and influence (Baldacchino, 2012). Many mainstream theories focus on defining small states based on material and human power thresholds (Browning, 2006). The conventional idea of characterising a small state has been confined to specific criteria of territorial area, demography, and the economy of a country (Browning, 2006; Baldacchino, 2012). Some definitions also include the military capabilities of a country (Fox, 1959). The criterion mentioned above is indeed essential for the determination of national power. Nevertheless, the above criterion cannot solely determine whether the state is small or powerful. There are several cases in international relations in which a country with a small territory and population has excelled economically. However, countries with substantial natural and human resources have plummeted into domestic conflict and gradually transformed into failed states (Baldacchino, 2012). For Nepal, if the territory and size were the criteria to define it as a small state, the scenario would be different compared to most states in Europe and Africa (Shakya, 2009). Therefore, the research aims to problematise the idea of defining the small states through quantitative (absolute) and relational criteria.

To put it straight, there are obvious questions that require careful analysis: What is ‘small’ in small states? How do we quantify small? Rather than reaching a common conclusion, small state researchers and scholars have fragmented with several opinions of their own (Baldacchino, 2012; Browning, 2006; Domingo-Almase, 2019). One of the most explicit definitions that have come into the realm of small states is the psychological or behavioral perspective on a small state’s definition. It traces its roots back to the constructivist ideas of different identity narratives entailing different state actions and behaviors. The psychological perspective on the smallness of the states focuses on the leaders’ perception of international affairs, self-perception, positioning, and framing of a state because of the experiences and emotions entailed through the hierarchy of the international society (Keohane, 1969). These psychological imprints originated through discourses and narratives (Bauman, 2000). The meanings to the actors are either directly referred to or implied through the speech acts¹, use of metaphors, narratives and discourses, or the social forces of an act, which can imply the meaning by the meaning-giver or the interlocutor as the linguistic turn in IR explains (Neumann, 2002). It is evident that identities are “linguistic construction” because the lingual depiction creates identity, and at the same time, linguistics provides a tool to construct and reshape identities (Checkel, 1998, p. 329). Identity study through discourses concludes that identities are not representations but are *constitutional* [emphasis added] (Bauman, 2000, p. 2).

Many discourses have complemented identity construction regarding Nepal as a small state and the psychological construction of smallness in Nepal. Responsible for the geostrategic mentality of Nepal, the historic ‘yam theory’² provided by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, which

1 The speech acts refer to “illocutionary force can’t be embedded under various truth conditional operators” (Checkel, 1998, p. 325). The standard logic is added up by the actor in a contextual sense, and the meaning is gauged in relation to the difference to the situations (Checkel, 1998). Similarly, the audience also internalises the images or discourses formed by those speech acts and may or may not reproduce meaning as desirable by the actor depending upon the rationality of the audiences’ (Checkel, 1998).

2 The ‘yam theory’ is the geopolitical theory from the text- *Divya Upadesh* (the divine Council given by King Prithvi Narayan Shah). The English translation of the theory is as follows: “This country is like a gourd between two rocks. Maintain a treaty of friendship with the emperor of China. Keep also treaty of friendship with the emperor of

explains Nepal as a *yam* between *two boulders*, has played a significant role (Adhikari, 2018). The construction of Nepal as a “buffer” state by the British East India Company was in reaction to aggressive China moving toward the South (Partem, 1983). Nepal assimilated the identity discourse of the buffer state for a long time into its political psychology (Rose, 1962). Nepal’s need to be a buffer was extended to the independence of India and carried out through the “Himalayan Frontier Policy” (Adhikari et al., 2013). In the Cold War era, Nepal integrated this identity by focusing on Nepal’s geopolitical vulnerability precisely because of the antagonism between China and India (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). In between, King Birendra proclaimed Nepal as a “gateway” to South and Central Asia, and later King Gyanendra depicted Nepal as a “transit state” in the 2005 Afro-Asian Summit held in Jakarta, Indonesia (Adhikari et al., 2013; Bhattarai, 2020). These identity discourses as “gateway” and “transit” have been proposed to be materialised by scholars and policymakers through various plans and, recently, through the China-led BRI (Bhattarai, 2020). Lately, Nepalese and Chinese academicians, policymakers, and political leaders have focused on Nepal as an economic “bridge” between China and India (Adhikari et al., 2013; KC & Bhattarai, 2018; Tao, 2017). This shift in dominant political discourse from “buffer” to “bridge” also depicts the psychological shift of Nepal from a security perspective to the ambitions of economic prosperity (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). However, the meaning imposition of both identity discourses in Nepal is not free from the small state syndrome (Bhattarai, 2017).

Therefore, the research aims to study the alteration in the identity discourses in Nepal, mainly focusing on the change in discourse from "buffer" to "bridge." The study is critical to the existing geopolitical identities with geographical assumptions and designations of “buffer” and “bridge”. It has emphasised the psychological rationale hidden behind the imposition and adaptation of these discourses. Notably, the research has explored the small state syndromes propagated through these discourses.

Literature Review

The concept of state has always been central to the study of International Relations (IR). Regarding the development of the concept of the state, Max Weber has mentioned that “the question of the logical structure of the concept of the state” is by far the “most complex and interesting case” (Weber, 2004, p. 394). The Great Powers in IR occupy a central position because of the conventional Realist outlook toward world affairs. However, the entities that have been *absent in presence* in the international hierarchical state system are the small states. They are the ones who have been dominated and suppressed and existed long before the institutionalization of Great Powers in the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815).

Regarding this, the concept of small states, as defined by Annette Baker Fox, are the states who are not the Great Powers (Fox, 1959). The scholar mentions that states with insufficient economic or military powers are small in line with the earlier definition. Similarly, the World Bank has defined small states as countries with a population of 1.5 million or less and those that have taken collective action on the development challenges and insisted on more consideration to their concerns (World Bank, 2017). In addition, the Commonwealth delineates the small

the southern sea (the Company). He has taken the plains. He will realize that if Hindustan unites, it will be difficult, and so he will come seeking places for forts. [...] If he takes these, the four emperors will come.” (Stiller, 1999)

state as countries with a population of 1.5 million or less and states with larger populations but the same characteristics and listed thirty-two countries as small states (The Commonwealth, 2017).

In contrast to the quantitative or *absolute* definition of small states, some scholars define small states through psychological or behavioral perceptions. In support of this concept, Robert L. Rothstein argues that small states are those that, in view of their leaders, are unable to provide their security (Rothstein, 1968). Similarly, Keohane defines small states as incapable of significantly impacting the international system and whose leaders are aware of this constraint (Keohane, 1969). Keohane incorporates a psychological element, a self-perception, into his explanation even if he criticizes Rothstein's attempt to group states according to their self-image. Jeanne A. K. Hey and her team have chosen to define based on how the state perceives itself and how its leaders and populace perceive their place in the global hierarchy. In other words, a state will be seen as small if its citizens and politicians believe they live in one or if other states believe the same about it (Hey, 2003).

Most scholars critical of the absolute definition of small states note that identity construction is through the mechanisms they self-perceive. Therefore, the construction of "self" is quite essential in examining the psychological perspective of a state. The scholarship of psychology in IR has done tremendous work comprehending the theory of deterrence and foreign policy decision-making (Kertzer & Tingley, 2018). Psychology, especially the state's self-perception, is an essential aspect regarding the study or research domain of the small states, where a state tends to create an image about itself for various reasons or circumstances (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001). This domain of the state's perception of self implies that self-perception as a factor influences the state's construction of the small state identity.

Concerning the idea of geopsychology, there is a considerable literature gap in academia. The German scholar Willy Hellpach (1935) introduced the idea of "geopsyche", concentrating on the effect of geography on human psychology. The scholarship of psychology has, in recent decades, provided International Relations (IR) with different factors like culture, experiences, memories, religion, and others that impact the behavior or strategic thinking of the state (Tickner & Wæver, 2009). The psychology of the state is determined by the strategic culture (Johnston, 1995). Recently, Jain (2021) has exclusively provided the academic domain of IR with a comprehensive idea of geopsychology. He has forwarded the concept of perceptions and misperceptions, images and belief systems, and sentimental factors impacting the behavior of the states (Jain, 2021). Moreover, one of the other factors affecting the identity and psychology of the state is the discourse. It is also one of the factors contributing to the political psychology of the state. Djité defines identity as an "everyday word for people's sense of who they are" (Djité, 2006, p. 6). Similarly, Bauman defines identity to be a linguistic construct (Bauman, 2000). The "sense" gives way to the definition of identity towards the act of self-definition, notes Castells (2001).

As regards the literature on the geopsychology of Nepal, there is a substantial academic void. In course of the research, the author found hardly any published piece of work on the psychology of Nepal as a state or behavior of Nepal. However, there are plenty of academic efforts to define, describe, and explain Nepal as a small state. The quantitative criteria have

been used to delineate the smallness of Nepal as a small state along with the foreign policy strategies of the country. Especially, the Nepalese psyche has been moulded by the geostrategic positioning of the country (Adhikari, 2018). The foreign policy strategies of Nepal to stay neutral and non-aligned have depicted the smallness of the country (Baral, 2019). However, these diplomatic choices of Nepal are the survival strategies in geopolitically vulnerable circumstances due to the geostrategic location of Nepal between China and India (Dahal, 2011). Although the “continuity and changes” are the characteristics of Nepalese foreign policy, the scholarship has portrayed Nepal’s smallness in the international domain with a narrative that the country has mainly focused only on survival (Adhikari, 2018).

Therefore, realizing this significant gap in scholarship concerning the geopsychological examination of Nepal as a small state, this study attempts to provide an alternative explanation. It aims to bridge the knowledge gap in mainstream IR theories by focusing on the critical aspect of geography, history, and culture in determining and understanding the behavior of the state, in this case, Nepal. In line with the geopsychology of Nepal, the rationale of the study is to present an alternative understanding for comprehending and to analyze foreign policy behavior with the open paradigm of psychology, perceptions, and patterns.

Methodology

The study has focused on developing and accepting the two identity discourses: “buffer” and “bridge”, for Nepal regarding geopolitical changes. Overall, the study examines the geopsychology of Nepal constructed because of the “buffer” and “bridge” discourses and correlates it with the depiction of the small state syndrome. In order to discern the meanings produced and their effect on Nepal’s identity as a small state, the researcher employed discursive analysis of the identity discourses and their depiction of different meanings. At the final stage of the data collection, the data was divided into several categories accordingly and analysed with the help of the theoretical and conceptual framework. The sources of the data were mainly secondary. The data and information from secondary resources such as academic books, journals, research papers, and even online media were considered.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: Geopsychology as a Small State

The concept of a state’s political or strategic psychology can be related to the concept of geopsychology or *geopsyche*. The state’s psychology was termed “*geopsyche*” which was introduced by a German scholar- Willy Hellpach (Hellpach, 1935). He emphasised the impact of geography and the environment (specifically the climate) on human psychology (Hellpach, 1935). In his book, he explains the geographical impact on human activities. He did not mainly focus on the impact of geography on human experiences, which IR would have thought about; however, it gave the idea that people’s psychological perception of geographies is different. Furthermore, Tickner and Wæver (2009) provided IR with the dimension of culture and geography in the study. Scholars need to know about the distinctions and configurations in psychological and sociological behavior in a state (Tickner & Wæver, 2009). Miller (2014) underscores that culture and psychology are critical in the foreign policy and diplomacy of a country. Wiarda (2016) focuses on the political culture responsible for the population’s cognitive style and optimal creativity.

Geopsychology can be defined as “a set of perceptions, images, and belief systems, formed of shared history, culture, nationalism, religion, and ethnicity that shapes the mindsets and behavioral patterns of non-state and authoritarian actors and communities inhabiting a specific geographical area” (Jain, 2021, p. 9). Also, the state psychology of the state is affected by the strategic culture of the country (Johnston, 1995). The proponents of strategic culture view that when a state is introduced in a different situations or circumstances, it tends to act in the same manner how they developed their strategic culture because has a bearing on the state psychology, and the adoption process takes a slow turn (Johnston, 1995). It is essential to understand that the concept of strategic culture does not reject rationality but emphasizes the study of rational strategic choices of the state for their survival or sustenance, as realists and neorealists have mentioned (Haglund, 2004). Furthermore, there is always a possibility that certain metaphors can cue repertoires of the behavior of a state which affects the cognitive processing and reasoning of the state as well (Johnston, 1995). The idea is developed to complement the limitations of the mainstream IR theories to explain state behavior and use identity and psychology to comprehend foreign policies and diplomatic practices. The essence is derived from investigating the psychological impact on a state because of the geopolitical discourses and memory’s malleability in forming collective memory and the psychology of the state.

Similarly, the study focuses on the geopsychological construction of Nepal as a small state by adopting or assimilating different discourses as its identity. The research focuses on the psychological construction of Nepal as a small state shifting from the identity discourses as a buffer state to an economic bridge. Nepal as a buffer state refers to the geopolitical importance of Nepal emphasizing the identity constructed by British rule (Adhikari et al., 2013). It denotes the geopolitical vulnerability of Nepal (Adhikari et al., 2013). As a buffer state, Nepal was focused on balancing the geopolitical thrifths created between the two neighbors in the border areas and several other issues (Rose, 1962). Rose focuses on Nepal’s construction of a buffer, similar to other Himalayan Kingdoms, which was primarily for the security interests of the imperial British in the Indian sub-continent (Rose, 1962). This identity was more emphasized with the increase in the antagonism between China and India and was mostly seen through the geopolitical and security lens (Chand, 2018). Nepal internalized the identity of a buffer state, a tool of small state diplomacy (Adhikari, 2018). Nepal acting as a buffer helped India for an extended time and aided Nepal in securing itself from geopolitical vulnerabilities (Baral, 2015).

However, after the shift of regional and global politics from mere geopolitics to economic competition, more precisely in the post-Cold War era, it has been realized that the geo-economics discourse of Nepal as an economic bridge came into play in the foreign policy and diplomatic discourse (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). Nepal’s identity construction is taken as a pursuit of prosperity through transit diplomacy (Baral, 2019; KC & Bhattarai, 2018). This is also a small state practice of Nepal, trying to accommodate the aims of infrastructural development and economic prosperity (Baral, 2019). Nepal’s self-construction of itself as a bridge can be seen as a desperate effort or a small state syndrome (Sapkota, 2017). It has been limited only to the discourse; however, this effort has not materialized, yet. (Sapkota, 2017).

Nevertheless, the geographical constraint of landlocked status and geopolitical vulnerability of Nepal due to growing competitiveness among the major powers in the region have always questioned the identity discourses that Nepal has tried to put forward to order to escape the geopolitical challenge of being situated in the middle of the Asian giants (Bhattarai, 2020). At this juncture, geopolitical considerations are less critical than Nepal's objectives for infrastructure-driven growth and prosperity, which are represented in the change to the bridging narrative for Nepal and its mirrored aspiration for trilateral collaboration between China, Nepal, and India (Nayak, 2016). Through the adoption of the identity discourse of Nepal as an 'economic bridge', Nepal has tried to shift the geopolitical discourse to the discussion on geo-economics (Nayak, 2016). The bridge discourse mainly focuses on Nepal's aspiration and capability to be a land-linked state linked to its neighbours (KC & Bhattarai, 2018).

Therefore, this discourse shift from buffer to bridge for Nepal has created or propagated some meanings to the IR of Nepal, especially with China and India. However, these discourses have enlarged the smallness of the country. The idea of shifting from a buffer to a bridge originated from the small state mentality. This syndrome has been emphasized more with the discourse propagation among individuals in Nepal and outside the country.

Development of Nepal's Geopolitical Identity as a 'Buffer': Territorially Trapped in 'Other's' Geopolitical Imagination

The creation of a buffer is ancient in the history of conflicts for humankind. The imagination of a geographical space which could absorb the impacts of the conflict came into existence from pre-historic times, and later, it was depicted for the political entities. Whatever the geographical space of the buffer has been depicted, it is a geographical assumption leading to what John Agnew refers to as a "territorial trap" in international relations (Agnew, 1994, p. 54). The spatial representation of geographical space is how the "others" would like to know what is right and wrong and whom we identify with and against (Agnew, 1994). It can also be referred to as the spatial positioning of the space constructed by the influence of global and international politics rather than it being natural (Kurečić, 2015).

Similarly, in South Asia, the Himalayan states have been depicted as buffer states. The geopolitical and antagonistic interaction or relationship between the East Indian Company and Imperial China had contributed to the imagination of the Himalayan states as buffer states. There are several reasons for this geographical construction of the Himalayan states as a particular structural and functional spatiality. Depiction as a buffer state is not the "true-self" but the construction of the "pseudo-self" by the "other" (Giddens, 1991, p. 191). The clash of interests in the Himalayas trying to establish their dominion and check and balance and the imagination of the Himalayan states as a buffer originated from the East India Company. This spatial imagination or justification of the construction of buffer discourse in the region which was started by the Company was extended to the Himalayan states against Imperial China. In 1651, the East India Company made its first foray into the Indian sub-continent and established a factory along the banks of the Hugli River (Phillips, 2021). Likewise, with the growing influence of the British rule in the Indian sub-continent, Qing Dynasty in China also grew in influence (Mosca, 2013).

Furthermore, the critical event for constructing the Himalayan state, particularly for Nepal, Qing Empire's rule over Tibet is significant. Simultaneously with the rise of the Qing Empire, there was an increasing influence of the East India Company in the Indian subcontinent. After the Company's territory extended to the Sutlej River, the gain of the vast Himalayan strip after the Anglo-Nepal War in 1816, and the travel of the Englishmen to the borders of the Qing Empire through Karakoram highway also raised apprehension of the Qing Empire towards the expansion of British in the neighbourhood, and the Company got attention in the Qing geostrategic policies (Mosca, 2013). The growing antagonistic threat between the Company and the Empire with similar expansionist and imperialist ambitions, and later the Qing Empire's interventionist policies towards the mercantile penetration of the Company, led to the Opium War. This complemented the construction of Nepal as the buffer state. Also, the threat perception towards Qing Empire by the Company led to the geographical imagination of Nepal as the buffer state.

The spatial imagination of the geopolitical identity as a buffer state was constructed for Nepal, where the Company wanted to create a space between itself and the Qing Empire to avert the risk of confrontation. The geographical imagination of the Himalayan States, including Nepal as the buffer, was a Frontier policy of cautiousness by the Company. This imagination extended with more historical interactions between the East India Company and the Qing Empire, Tibet and China in the latter days. This simple notion developed with the rise of the two major regional powers and the linguistic and constitutive construction of Nepal as a buffer state was only for the Company to avert any conflict with the Qing Empire. Therefore, Nepal's metaphorical construction as a buffer state arose from the geographical assumption and reasoning of the British East India Company's vis-à-vis its relationship and interaction with the Qing Empire. The depiction by the Company later turned out to be a geopolitical discourse for Nepal pertinent in contemporary times as well.

The 'True-Self' of Nepal

In the construction of the psychology of an entity, the notion of the "true-self" is different from that of the entity that acts in the outer sociological environment (Baumeister & Bushman, 2013, p. 75). The true self is independent perceptively, which means that one has a different assessment than what others observe or believe (Strohming, Knobe, & Newman, 2018). On the contrary, the "pseudo-self" is the identity depicted by the speaker to that specific social entity, creating a vast difference between the "true-self" and the "pseudo-self" (Strohming, Knobe, & Newman, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to identify and examine the "true-self" of an entity to determine the fundamental behavior of that specific social entity. For Nepal, when analysing the true geopolitical identity of the country, the study considers the "buffer" rhetoric as a form of reasoning by the Company. It is essential to interrogate the indigenous identity discourse to know the actual true self of the country. Hence, this section analyses the state-building process and the theory of the "yam theory" propounded by King Prithvi Narayan Shah.

The same applies to examining the geopolitical identity of Nepal. Depiction of Nepal as a buffer state between the East India Company and the Qing Empire was a geographical imagination of the Company evaluating itself against the Qing Empire. When the Company

and the Empire rose, the nation-building process in Nepal also started simultaneously. With a focus on the eastern hills of Nepal around the Arun River, King Prithvi Narayan Shah began the unification campaign in 1743 (Acharya, 1966). It took him about twenty-five years to conquer the Kathmandu valley (Acharya, 1966). In the Indian subcontinent, Nepal's ascent to power as a nation-state occurred under peculiar circumstances. The Marathas from Pune were advancing to the plains, the Mughal Empire was crumbling, and all of these factors combined to bring about confusion and unrest in India (Stiller, 1999). Clive and the East India Company studied and controlled this precarious position in the Indian subcontinent for several years of dominance (Stiller, 1999).

As the nation-building phase of Nepal developed, the true identity of the country can be traced to this phase. The Qing Empire and the Company, Nepal's two frontiers, were dealt with by the country's foreign policy during this period cordially and amicably (Bhattarai, 2019). However, good neighborliness did not imply today's free borders. The measures emphasized war diplomacy and frontier measures (Baral, 2020). Before his passing in 1775, King Prithvi Narayan Shah gave some practical oratory instructions, now known as *Divya Upadesh* (Baral, 2020). He described Nepal in his directives as a "gourd (yam) between the two rocks" in an analysis of Nepal's geostrategic location, and issued warnings in accordance with that for Nepal's existence and sustenance (Baral, 2020). In defining Nepal's geostrategic situation and illuminating the nation about political, economic, strategic, military, and other areas of national life, this "yam theory" has assumed great prominence (Baral, 2020).

In Nepal's geostrategic stance, the "yam" discourse is crucial to understanding one's "true self". The construction of Nepal's other geostrategic identity has been complimented by this discourse, which is the country's indigenous geostrategic identity. The "yam theory" is also used in modern times to describe Nepal's geostrategic and political limitations. King Prithvi Narayan Shah advised maintaining goodwill with both the northern and southern neighbors by referring to Nepal as "yam", which symbolizes the delicateness or susceptibility of the nation due to its geostrategic location (Adhikari, 2015). The traits of caution, gradualism, peaceful coexistence, and friendliness in foreign policy are therefore included in "yam" as a theory (Pulami, 2022). The idea takes into account the primary power-politics strategies both inside and beyond the region.

Additionally, it gives Nepal a diplomatic and foreign policy framework for navigating competition, hostility, and collaboration in the geopolitical domain (Pulami, 2022). This theory also highlights the continued relevance of *Divya Upadesh* in Nepal's military, strategic, economic, and internal policies (Pulami, 2022). The geographical imagination of "rocks" by King Prithvi Narayan Shah also suggests the rise of the external powers in the neighborhood of the country. The identity discourse of "yam" as an indigenous strategic thought during the time of nation-building phase depicts Nepal's self-identity as a country that opts for the policy of balancing between the two major powers at that time (the Empire and the Company): an accommodation strategy, a policy of neutrality, and of equiproximity (Adhikari, 2015; Baral, 2020, Pulami, 2022).

Therefore, "yam" is the true self of Nepal, not the geographical imagination of Nepal as a buffer. Nepal was never a buffer between the two powerful states but developed as an

independent nation-state with the independent strategic, frontier, military, internal and economic policies. The study of the “yam theory” actually disregards the geopolitical imagination of the “other”. Thus, the examination of the “yam theory” suggests that the “buffer” identity provided by the Company is not the “true-self” but a “pseudo-identity” that was later assimilated by the country.

Self-Positioning: Accepting and Adapting Norms, Values and Practices due to Traumatic Experience

The Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1816) between Nepal and British India ended with the Sugauli Treaty, through which Nepal lost about one-third of its territory (Uprety, 1996). Many point out that the territorial loss after the war is one of the reasons for the country losing its psychological confidence and assurance. The Treaty is presented as the initiation point through which Nepal came under the sphere of British influence. The British-centric foreign policy during the Rana regime is the best example. There is no doubt that the Sugauli treaty, to some extent, limited the sovereignty of Nepal.

Some researchers have pointed out that after an inter-conflict situation, the social entity holds up the social identity rather than holding up the personal identity because of the negative experiences³ (Jong, et.al., 2015). The social entity after the impulsive, deviant, and violent action tend to align differently, willing to sacrifice their personal identity (Jong, et.al., 2015). Historically, psychologists have found that defeats construct their more significant identity-defining traits than triumphs (Dennett, 1992). The “psychology” tends to gravitate toward the negative experience as a more defining identity trait (Dennett, 1992). The psychological construction of identity, thus, tends to follow the trajectory of what the society or community provides that specific entity (Jong, et.al., 2015). The submission of the personal identity and adoption of the identity provided by the community becomes superior for the social entity (Jong, et.al., 2015).

Thus, the defeat experienced by Nepal in the Anglo-Nepal War, a humiliating defeat, with the loss of one-third of its territory and limitation on its sovereignty, psychologically led the country to accept the identity constructed by the British-India. After the Anglo-Nepal War, the politicians and the rulers seemed to be devastated and disturbed. This defeat led to the psychological submission of Nepal towards the British through the signing of the treaty. The above-mentioned psychological phenomena of acceptance of social identity after the inter-conflict situation lead to a “self-positioning”. This defeat in the war and different provisions of the Sugauli Treaty led the state psychology of Nepal to self-position itself concerning the East India Company. Thus, the geopsychology of Nepal constructed the social structure after the trauma of defeat. The ‘small’ psychology was inherited after the traumatic experience of the war by Nepal with the East India Company. The continued knowledge construction hereafter positioned itself with the ‘small’ psychology. Therefore, the loss in the Anglo-Nepal war can be taken as an entry point in defining the ‘small’ in the small state psychology of Nepal.

3 The identity of a social entity is founded on positive or negative experiences which are necessary to analyze how the social entity particularly views itself and interacts with the other entities in the society or world (Jong, Whitehouse, Kavanagh, & Lane, 2015).

The 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty: 'Forced Positioning' as a Small State

India got its independence on 15 August 1947 from the British Empire. After the independence of India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was very concerned about the Himalayan states. Especially for him, his outlook towards Nepal can be taken as a study to investigate how India has observed Nepal. To quote the British Field Marshall Lord Montgomery, in the wake of India's independence:

“[...] though Nepal was an independent country, it was very closely allied to India in culture and tradition and we did not look upon it as a foreign country.” (Bhasin, 2005, p. 47)

However, with the infringement of India's security line with the invasion of Tibet by China, it was important for India to consolidate the northern frontier to secure its national security priorities (Thapaliyal, 1998). Therefore, to defend India from China, Nepal was an important part of Jawaharlal Nehru's Himalayan Frontier Policy. As a part of policy towards Nepal, the Indian Prime Minister Nehru, in his speech in the Indian parliament, had said:

“It is not possible for any Indian Government to tolerate any invasion of Nepal from anywhere. It is not necessary for us to have a military alliance with Nepal. We do not go around having military alliance with any country. We have none. But apart from any pact of alliance, the fact remains that we cannot tolerate foreign invasion, from any foreign country, of any part of this Indian sub-continent or whatever you may like to call it. And any possible invasion of Nepal would inevitably involve the safety of India [...] I wish to make this clear to the House and to others what our policy in such matters is bound to be.” (Thapaliyal, 2012, p. 120)

Thus, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Nepal and India was established on 31 July 1950 (Uprety, 1996). After the signing of this Treaty, Nepal officially became a buffer state between China and India (Uprety, 1996; Bhasin, 2005; Baral, 2018; Basnyat, 2021). The Treaty has been justified by the security threats induced by the Chinese ambitions. Many scholars lament that the Treaty is unfair and has limited the sovereignty of Nepal through several provisions; the possibility of Nepal's independent foreign policy has been curbed; the decision-making process of Nepal and the right to choose different alternative approaches to further the Nepalese national interest have been diluted through the Treaty.⁴ Due to the socio-political instability, political elites signed this treaty with India to safeguard their power and interest.

In the situation of socio-political turmoil and insulation of relations between Nepal and China, the signing of this treaty citing the security threats to Nepal and India can be observed as an act of positioning. The positioning becomes forced when the initiative does not lie within the willingness or authority of the social entity involved (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). Thus, the initiative of signing the unfair treaty limiting the independent foreign policy of Nepal, which is the outcome of Indian securitisation of the Himalayas by presenting Nepal as

⁴ The Nepalese critique of the Treaty points out several points justifying the unequal nature of the treaty. The critique explains that the Nepali Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher who signed the treaty was not elected democratically. They also cite to the unequal status of the signatories of the treaty. More restrictions were imposed in the 'letter of exchange' by India which was not disclosed for very long time (Subedi, 1994). The demand of the reciprocal nation treatment of the Indian nationals and priority to access the Nepalese national resources are also among the reasons the treaty is highly contested according to the Nepalese perception (Subedi, 1994).

a buffer, is, for all practical purposes, the forced positioning of Nepal as a buffer state. This forced positioning continues as the treaty has not been reviewed according to the geopolitical circumstances, and it keeps limiting the independent choices of Nepal. The Treaty, in a way, restricts the foreign policy and security choices of Nepal. At crucial moments, when Nepal has tried to pursue independent foreign policies, this positioning has been reminded of or asserted by India through various means. For example, the blockade of 1988-89 when Nepal attempted to purchase small arms from China. Therefore, the limited options provided through the 1950 Treaty have portrayed Nepal as a small state. The ‘smallness’ emanates through this forced positioning of Nepal through this treaty, where free strategic choices of Nepal are averted by India or controlled by India.

Contemporary Metamorphosis of the Metaphor to Bridge: A Geographical Hypothesis

Today, the popular geopolitical identity is one of Nepal as a “bridge”. Many scholars and practitioners have focused on Nepal as an economic bridge between China and India (Bhattra, 2016; Sapkota, 2017; KC & Bhattarai, 2018). In the latter days, this bridge metaphor developed with geopolitical and strategic developments in the neighborhood. This bridge metaphor for Nepal is the “geographical hypothesis” that evolved within the country to bridge China and India, the two Asian giants. However, Nepal lacks the strategic depth, economic power, strong political institutions and infrastructural development to capitalize it into reality.

After envisioning Nepal as an effervescent economic bridge between China and India, the push factors for encouraging the discourse to flourish more into the consciousness of Nepal played the initiation of the BRI in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The China-Nepal-India Economic Corridor (CNIEC) proposal came up as the bridge metaphor that will be true for the country, but India’s reluctance to join the BRI as a whole had not yet made the geographical hypothesis of Nepal to be true. In the same spirit, during his visit to China, Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal suggested the prospect of trilateral cooperation between Nepal, China, and India, highlighting Nepal as a dynamic bridge between the two neighbours (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). Moreover, during the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015, India indicated some apprehensions regarding the Constitution and the internal disapproval from the Madhesh-based political parties in Nepal, which led to the unofficial blockade towards Nepal by India (Pant, 2018). After this unofficial embargo, Nepal comprehended that the asymmetric dependency with India. Thus, in the wake of the Indian blockade towards Nepal, former Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli concluded Transit and Transportation Treaty with China, which assured Nepal access to the land and seaports in China for trade and commerce (Bhattarai, 2020). With the agreement, the opportunity for trade and commerce became practicable for the three countries through Nepal, and the hypothesis came close to turning into reality. When Nepal joined the BRI and the Trans-Himalayan Connectivity Network was proclaimed, Chinese President Xi Jinping highlighted in 2019 the quintessence of transfiguring Nepal from a landlocked state to a land-linked country, the notion of the ‘bridge’ metaphor was reiterated evenly (Maheshwari, 2020).

The question is whether being a bridge between China and India would benefit Nepal. Many have pointed out Nepal’s advantage as a bridge between the two Asian giants. As Nepal grows new economic and development aspirations, it has been noticed that India has not been

heeding the yearning of Nepal. The bridge metaphor for Nepal has also been associated with the strategy for sustenance for Nepal in the present day, for Nepal has a policy of equiproximity with both neighbours (Bhattarai, 2021). Even though China and India are increasingly at odds with one another, both countries have a shared interest in building their economies and gaining power. Despite escalating disputes between the two nations in several fields and locations, China and India have collaborated more in the economic and investment sectors. China and India also cooperate in issue-based areas such as climate change, energy, and sustainable development goals.

It is also the question of whether the bridge metaphor will widen the gap between China and India or link the two countries. Although the bridge intends to link China and India and fulfil the aspiration of economic growth and development ambitions for Nepal, the growing antagonism between China and India poses a problem. India's foreign policy towards Nepal still upholds the colonial legacy (Pyakurel, 2019). India has always observed Nepal-China relations through the lens of securitisation of foreign policy and even approached the relations with the neo-Kautiliyan method (Bhattarai & Pulami, 2021). Therefore, the "bridge" aspiration of Nepal with this Indian perception of Nepal-India relations seems to be the bridge that will widen the gap between Nepal-India relations because China is acting as a balancer (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). Though the bridge metaphor carries an optimistic tone, there is still time to analyze if this geographical metaphor or hypothesis will be falsifiable. Moreover, it is vital to analyze if this assorted metaphor will bring desired results or an unwanted result of separation and antagonism between the countries.

Conclusion

Nepal as a small state should be examined from both an objective and subjective perspective, with the former focusing on a quantitative understanding of the positioning of smallness and the latter investigating how to comprehend the concept of smallness at the level of consciousness, thereby positioning itself as a small state psychologically. The study of national consciousness is significant when looking at the geopsychology of Nepal as a small state. Nepal's buffer and bridge identity is founded on its relationships with its neighbors, not on its own. As a result, Nepal's built intersubjective identity was accepted as a fact (small state). The physical interaction/confrontation created modest knowledge in the Nepalese psychological realm (subjective reality). As a result, Nepal's roots of knowledge of 'small' rest in the employment of languages (metaphors or rhetoric) to create a subjective reality for the country as a small state. For Nepal, this subjective reality is a component of the foundation of 'small' knowledge. Furthermore, the process of every nation's state formation is a social occurrence in the international system rather than an individual activity. As a result, self-formation is a social development process, especially in its experiencing form.

In the case of Nepal, cognitive learning throughout the development period was mainly focused on the country's southern neighbor. This defeated mood or psychology eventually influenced Nepal's primary socialization, and Nepal's subsequent actions toward its southern neighbors may be the product of Nepal's subjective reality. To know Nepal's smallness, it is necessary to appreciate the factual and subjective realities of the country's smallness. The

change from identity discourse from a buffer to a bridge necessitates thoroughly examining the reality in which smallness knowledge has emerged. The issue remains, however, whether Nepal's smallness through buffer and bridge is only a language or an idea.

As a language, the buffer and bridge discourse has significantly influenced cognitive learning and process. In the lack of languages, it is not easy to think. As a result, the buffer and bridge metaphors have changed people's perceptions of Nepal as a country. The buffer identity has traditionally influenced Nepal's reputation as a small country. Similarly, Nepal has not yet had the opportunity to participate in a bridge discussion. The two discourses convey meanings that are relevant to Nepal. The two concepts did not emerge out of the environment of Nepal but rather as a consequence of its personal experience. The ideas that have arisen as a result of this concept are both objective and subjective realities in Nepal.

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