

**EMERGING GEOPOLITICAL CRISIS IN HIMALAYAN
REGION AND ITS RESPONSES: A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF NEPAL & BHUTAN**

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GEOGRAPHY

By

PRIYA CHAUDHARY

Registration No.: 11813839

Supervised By

Dr. Anand Kumar (25230)

Department of Geography (Assistant Professor)

Lovely Professional University



LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY, PUNJAB

2025

DECLARATION

I, hereby declared that the presented work in the thesis entitled “**Emerging Geopolitical Crisis in Himalayan Region and Its Responses: A Comparative Analysis of Nepal & Bhutan**” in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.)** is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr Anand Kumar**, working as **Assistant Professor**, in the **Geography** of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

(Signature of Scholar)

Name of the scholar: Priya Chaudhary

Registration No.: 11813839

Department/school: Geography/ School of Liberal and Creative Arts (School of Social Sciences and Language)

Lovely Professional University,

Punjab, India

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled **“Emerging Geopolitical Crisis in Himalayan Region and Its Responses: A Comparative Analysis of Nepal & Bhutan”** submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** in the **Geography/ School of Social Sciences and Language**, is a research work carried out by **Priya Chaudhary, 11813839**, is bonafide record of his/her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Anand Kumar', with the date '25/02/2025' written below it.

(Signature of Supervisor)

Name of supervisor: Dr Anand Kumar

Designation: Assistant Professor

Department/school: Geography/ School of Liberal and Creative Arts (School of Social Sciences and Language)

University: Lovely Professional University

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Priya Chaudhary

ABSTRACT

This work aims to provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of the geopolitical responses of Nepal and Bhutan to the emerging challenges in the Himalayan region. This study delves into how Nepal and Bhutan navigate their foreign policies amid these pressures, balancing their historical ties, economic dependencies, and strategic interests. The study assesses the impact of these conflicts on regional stability and the broader geopolitical landscape.

The Himalayan region, characterized by its immense strategic, economic, and cultural significance, is witnessing an emerging geopolitical crisis driven by the complex interactions between major regional powers, India and China. The geopolitics of the Himalayan region is influenced not only by the geographical and historical context but also by the broader dynamics of international relations and global strategic interests. The ongoing boundary disputes and the strategic maneuvers by regional powers such as China and India have heightened the geopolitical stakes, underscoring the urgency of understanding the geopolitical environment.

Nepal and Bhutan, situated in the heart of the Himalayas, have unique geopolitical landscapes shaped by their histories, cultures, and geographical locations. Bhutan, with its strategic location between India and China, maintains a delicate balance in its foreign policy. This thesis examines the geopolitical features, geostrategic significance, and geo-economic aspects of these two nations, highlighting their critical role in the regional power dynamics.

While there is substantial literature on Sino-Indian rivalry and its impact on regional dynamics, there is a lack of comprehensive comparative analysis focusing on the geopolitical responses of smaller Himalayan states like Nepal and Bhutan. This study addresses this gap by exploring how Nepal and Bhutan navigate their foreign policies amid pressures from India and China, balancing their historical ties, economic dependencies, and strategic interests.

The study employs quantitative methods, including reliability analysis and factor analysis, to analyze the geopolitical strategies of Nepal and Bhutan. It examines the political, economic, socio-cultural, and defense relations of these countries with

both India and China. The analysis is based on historical contexts, strategic priorities, and geopolitical dynamics.

The distinct geopolitical strategies of Nepal and Bhutan are highlighted. Nepal leverages its strategic location to balance Indian and Chinese influences, whereas Bhutan adheres to a cautious approach, prioritizing its longstanding ties with India while cautiously engaging with China. This analysis underscores differing approaches in addressing economic dependencies, political alignments, and strategic collaborations.

The comparative analysis highlights the distinct yet interlinked geopolitical strategies of Nepal and Bhutan. While Nepal has increasingly leveraged its strategic location to balance Indian and Chinese influences, Bhutan has adhered to a cautious approach, prioritizing its longstanding ties with India while cautiously engaging with China. This analysis underscores the differing approaches in addressing economic dependencies, political alignments, and strategic collaborations, providing insights into the broader regional power dynamics.

Nepal's political relations with India and China are characterized by distinct historical contexts, strategic priorities, and geopolitical dynamics. India remains a crucial political ally with deep-rooted cultural and historical ties, extensive economic cooperation, and significant influence on Nepal's political landscape. In contrast, China's engagement with Nepal is marked by strategic economic investments and increasing political influence, driven by broader regional ambitions. Nepal's foreign policy strategy involves balancing its relations with both India and China, leveraging its unique geopolitical position to enhance national development while maintaining sovereignty and stability. Comparative response of Nepal's political, economic, socio-cultural, and defense relations with both India and China, highlighting the strategic maneuvers and policy shifts in response to the emerging geopolitical challenges.

Bhutan's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by a policy of neutrality and non-alignment, maintaining cordial relations with both India and China. The historical treaties with India have cemented a strong bilateral relationship, in contrast, Bhutan's engagement with China is marked by caution and strategic considerations, influenced by unresolved border disputes and geopolitical dynamics. A comparative

analysis of Bhutan's economic relations with India and China reveals distinct patterns and influences. While India remains a dominant and long-term economic partner, China's presence is gradually increasing. Bhutan's economic strategy will need to balance these relationships to maximize benefits and minimize risks.

Bhutan's socio-cultural relations with India and China reflect distinct patterns and historical contexts. India remains Bhutan's primary socio-cultural partner, with deep-rooted ties and extensive collaborations in culture, education, and people-to-people interactions. In contrast, Bhutan's socio-cultural engagement with China is emerging, marked by cautious but growing exchanges and collaborations. Bhutan's strategy involves maintaining and strengthening its traditional cultural ties with India while exploring new opportunities for cultural and educational exchange with China, ensuring a balanced approach to socio-cultural relations.

Bhutan's defense relations with India and China reflect distinct historical contexts, strategic priorities, and geopolitical considerations. India remains Bhutan's primary defense partner, with extensive military cooperation, strategic agreements, and mutual security interests. In contrast, Bhutan's defense relations with China are minimal and cautious, influenced by unresolved border disputes and strategic caution. Moving forward, Bhutan's defense strategy will likely focus on maintaining strong ties with India while cautiously exploring potential engagement with China, ensuring a balanced and pragmatic approach to its national security interests.

The emerging geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region presents complex challenges for Nepal and Bhutan. Their responses, shaped by historical ties, geographical constraints, and strategic interests, reflect broader regional dynamics. This thesis provides valuable insights into the strategic interactions between Nepal, Bhutan, India, and China. The findings underscore the need for nuanced, multi-faceted policy approaches to navigate the evolving geopolitical environment in the Himalayas.

The study highlights the significance of the Himalayan region in regional geopolitics, the geostrategic conditions of Nepal and Bhutan, and the impact of treaties and border relations on their foreign policies. Policymakers in Nepal and

Bhutan, as well as regional powers and global actors, can benefit from these insights to develop strategies that enhance regional stability and cooperation.

The emerging geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region presents complex challenges for Nepal and Bhutan. Their responses, shaped by historical ties, geographical constraints, and strategic interests, reflect broader regional dynamics. This thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical landscape of the Himalayan region, offering valuable insights into the strategic interactions between Nepal, Bhutan, India, and China. The findings underscore the need for nuanced, multi-faceted policy approaches to navigate the evolving geopolitical environment in the Himalayas.

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CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Geopolitics is the study of how geography affects a state's politics. The geopolitics of any place nowadays are not solely dictated by geography but also by the globalization of warfare, terrorism, environmental diversity around the world, satellite monitoring, and nuclear technology, which are all of enormous importance. China must take into account each of these geopolitical aspects when deciding how to interact with South Asia (CP. Chung, 2018).

The geopolitical situation in the Himalayan region is shifting of great significance, especially with regards to the shifting of Indo-Sino ties. Nepal and Bhutan, being neighbouring countries to India and China, respectively, have their own unique foreign policies that are influenced by their history, culture, Economy, politics and geography. The complex and evolving relationship between India and China, as well as the involvement of other major powers such as the US, have also impacted the geopolitical landscape of the region (Liu, F. 2020).

The Himalayan boundary conflicts between China and India, including the recent standoff in Ladakh, have highlighted the need for accurate analysis and assessment of the region (J Field & I Kelman, 2018). The geopolitical implications of these disputes are significant, and they have the potential to escalate into larger conflicts. Additionally, the US military's primary objective in the region is, as well as India's "Neighbourhood First" and "Act East" policies, suggest a larger power game in the region that involves not just India and China but other major powers as well (Alatas, 2018).

Himalayan range is one of the highest, youngest, and most folded mountains in the world. These are spread out over an area of around 2400 miles, from the Indus Valley in the west to the Brahmaputra Valley in the east. Their width ranges from roughly 200 km in Arunachal Pradesh to about 500 km in Jammu & Kashmir. The majority of the Himalayan Mountain ranges are located in India, Nepal, Bhutan, and along Tibet's southern border (Husain, M. 2014). The highest peak in the world,

Mount Everest, is situated at an altitude of 8848 metres above sea level. The Mount Everest's northern slope located in China while southern slope is facing Nepal.

The Himalayan range is important to the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent. The Himalayan region is rich in natural resources. Perennial rivers are significant suppliers of hydropower and other mineral resources. Himalaya serves as a natural barrier and line of defence against India's adversaries in geopolitical terms. There are numerous problems in the Himalayan region, such as border problems, hydropower problems, security problems, terrorism, etc. (Shukla, 2010). The territorial disputes over J&K between India, Pakistan, and China; Doklam issue between India and China; the Chumbi Valley issue between Bhutan and China, the Siligudi dispute between India and Nepal, etc. Countries use these issues as a cover for geopolitical games.

Important geopolitical challenges for India include China's desire to keep Nepal out of India's influence and newly rising Chinese threats from Nepal. India and Nepal have a 1,751 -km- long border, which goes across 20 districts in five Indian states. Nepal and India have an open border. Through its extensive plan, China has attempted to reduce Nepal's reliance on India. To counterbalance India, the Maoist forces in Nepal have used the China card (Nayak, 2008). Infrastructure built on roads and rails has made it possible for China to travel to the interior of India. Chinese economic and other initiatives are intended to undermine India's strategic success in Nepal. If Nepal's Chinese wave doesn't stop, India may soon face a number of security risks (Kumar, S. 2010).

Bhutan's unique geography, history, and political system have contributed significantly to its foreign policy decisions. Bhutan's small population, landlocked location, and lack of colonization have limited its options for foreign policy. Bhutan's constitutional monarchy, with a strong connection between society and religion, has also shaped its foreign policy decisions (Iyer, 2019).

Bhutan's extreme poverty and underdevelopment have also influenced its foreign policy. The country has had to rely on foreign aid and support for its economic development, which has made it vulnerable to external pressures. Bhutan's negligible military power has also limited its options for foreign policy. Given these

constraints, Bhutan has pursued a policy of neutrality and equidistance in its foreign policy. Bhutan has maintained friendly relations with its neighbours, India and China, and has sought to avoid being drawn into their geopolitical rivalry. Bhutan has similarly maintained a non-alignment strategy and has not allied with any one power force (Hey, 2003).

However, throughout time and for a number of historical reasons, Bhutan chose to work with India. The treaties of 1910, 1949, and 2007 formally established this partnership. Bhutan has no relationship with China because of its affiliation with India. However, due to China's manoeuvres in South Asia, particularly on either side of the Himalayas, and the shifting dynamics of world politics, Bhutanese policymakers are being confronted with the dilemma of "how to deal with China" more frequently (Kuensel, 2009).

Bhutan and China have historically interacted through Tibet. Bhutan shut its northern border in 1960 as a result of its fear over China's takeover of Tibet and the subsequent revolt in Tibet. Bhutan, however, revised its strategy in the 1970s and gradually improved ties with its neighbour. As a result of border talks that started in 1984, a deal was made in 1998 regarding the maintenance of calmness throughout border areas. Despite the fact that China and Bhutan do not have diplomatic ties or engage in any official trade, expanding Chinese ambitions in South Asia also includes Bhutan (Smith, 2014).

Bhutan must therefore balance the need to respond to Chinese outreach and find a peaceful, expedient key to the border conflicts with its obligation to protect the interests and feelings of its longtime ally India. The Indian element continues to be dominant in the Sino-Bhutanese relationship. Bhutan's policy toward China will be heavily influenced by the dynamics of the Sino-Indian relationship as well as by the operations and strategic interests of China and India in the Himalayas (Kumar, 2010).

Due to their geographic proximity to India and China and their location in the heart of the Himalayan range, Nepal and Bhutan are strategically connected to both countries (Chandra, 2020). Additionally, this area is strategically close to South Asia. With their similarities to India and China in terms of ethnoculture, religion, and tradition, these neighbours could seize the opportunity presented by the economic

collapse and intervene to expand their influence. In an effort to outsmart one another and expand their areas of influence in the Himalayan region, a number of indigenous and international forces have been active. All relevant powers have been focusing on the South Asian nations' strategic direction and fully utilising their individual political, provident, and military advantages to increase their influence and move Nepal and Bhutan in their undeniably own advantageous course (ibid.).

Some of the recent circumstances that have impacted Indo-Sino ties and the geopolitical situation in the Himalayan region. A major standoff between India and China over China's construction of a road in the Doklam plateau, which is disputed territory between China and Bhutan, lasted 73 days in 2017 and was known as the Doklam problem (Ahlawat, 2018).

The revoking of Composition 370 and 35A of the Constitution in Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, which led to the formation of two union territories, has also impacted the geopolitical situation in the region (Zia, 2020). This move by India was strongly opposed by China, which claimed that it violated China's territorial sovereignty. As of May 5th, border clashes between China and India have been ongoing in the Ladakh region around Pangong Lake, with incidents taking place at numerous locations along the Line of Actual Control (Westcott, 2021). The main reason for the tension between India and China is the demilitarization and development of infrastructure.

The Nathu La Pass in Sikkim has also been a site of recent border tensions between China and India. These circumstances have highlighted the need for accurate analysis and assessment of the geopolitical situation in the region and for effective political operations to ensure steadiness and safety in the region. The recent boundary dispute between Nepal and India over the Kalapani area is just one illustration of the enormous geopolitical significance of the Himalayan region. The relationship between Nepal and India is a longstanding and complex one, and it has indeed brought many benefits to both countries over the centuries (Buzan, 2011). The relationship also witnessed a remarkable display of unity among political parties.

In the repercussion of the Doklam incident, which saw a military standoff between India and China in 2017, both countries realized the need to engage in

dialogue and resolve their differences through non-violently act. This led to the arrangement of two rounds of talks between the leaders of both countries, in Wuhan, China, and Mamallapuram, India, which are often referred to as the "informal China-India summit."

It is clear that India plays a significant strategic role when it repeatedly emphasises its "Act East Policy," "Look West Policy," and most recently, "Look Far East Policy." India has a stronger preference for a "strategic rebalancing approach" (Kiglics, 2022).

China's geopolitical proposal, the "String of Pearls," and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have raised concerns in India, which has traditionally considered South Asia to be its sphere of influence (Brewster, 2017). The "String of Pearls" refers to Chinese ambitions to build a network of vital ports and other infrastructure along the Indian Ocean, notably in South Asia, to ease its trade and energy flows. This has led to concerns in India that China is seeking to encircle it with a "string" of military and economic assets, which might put India's security interests at risk (ibid.).

South Asia is being used by China as a launching pad for the Indian Ocean. The 1.6 billion requests that South Asia has, as well as the region's volition and relatively quick access to both Tibet and the Xingjian economy, are all of interest to China. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) spans across Eurasia and Central Asia, and the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC) and the "Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor" (BCIM EC) are of geostrategic interest to the US and other middle powers in the Indo-Pacific (Rosendal, T. 2022).

The CPEC is the leading project of the BRI, which involves the development of a network of roads, railways, and other infrastructure projects connecting China's western Xinjiang province with the Pakistani port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea. This has raised concerns in India and other countries in the region, as it is seen as a challenge to their own strategic interests and a potential threat to regional stability (ibid.).

Similarly, the BCIM EC is a proposed economic corridor that would connect Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar by mean of a network of trains, roadways, and other infrastructure initiatives. This project is also of interest to the US and other

middle powers in the Indo-Pacific, as it has the potential to transform the economic landscape of the region and create new opportunities for trade and investment (Muhamad Iksan & Jenn-Jaw Soong, 2023).

Regarding Nepal, it is true that it is located at the intersection of several of these BRI projects. The proposed Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor (THEC) is a project that would connect China's Tibet Autonomous Region with Nepal through a network of roads and railways, which could have significant economic and strategic implications for the region (Anwar, A. 2020).

1.2 Study Area

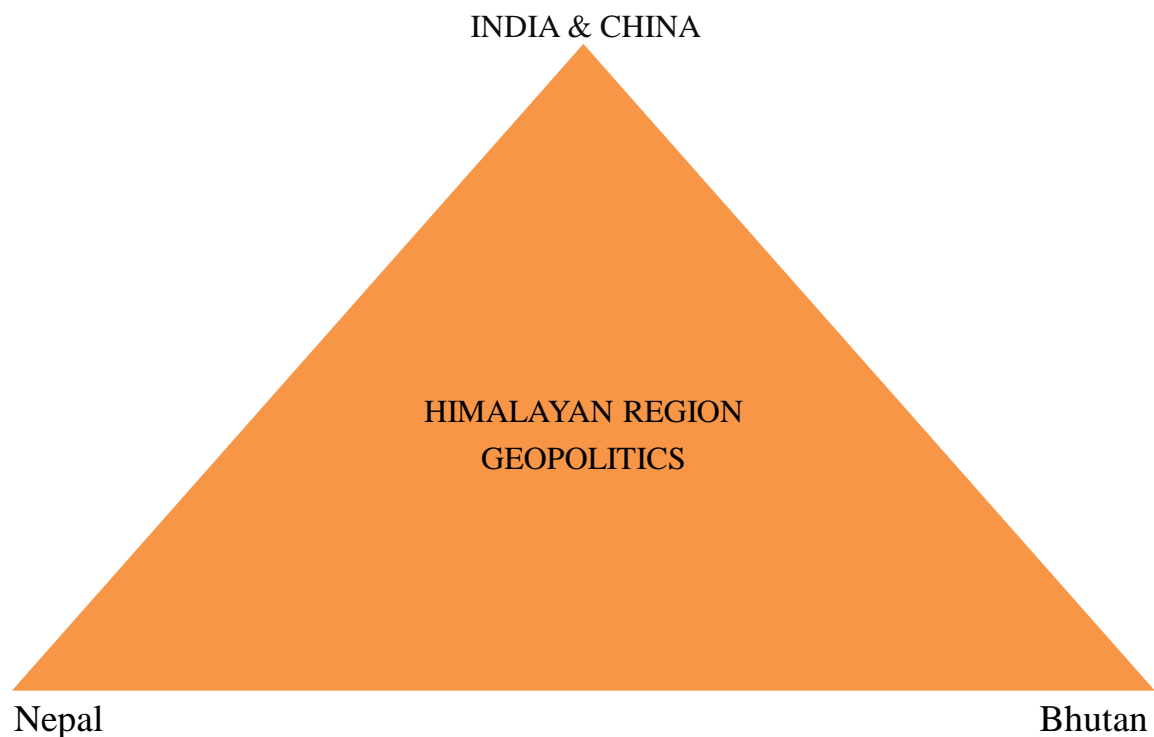
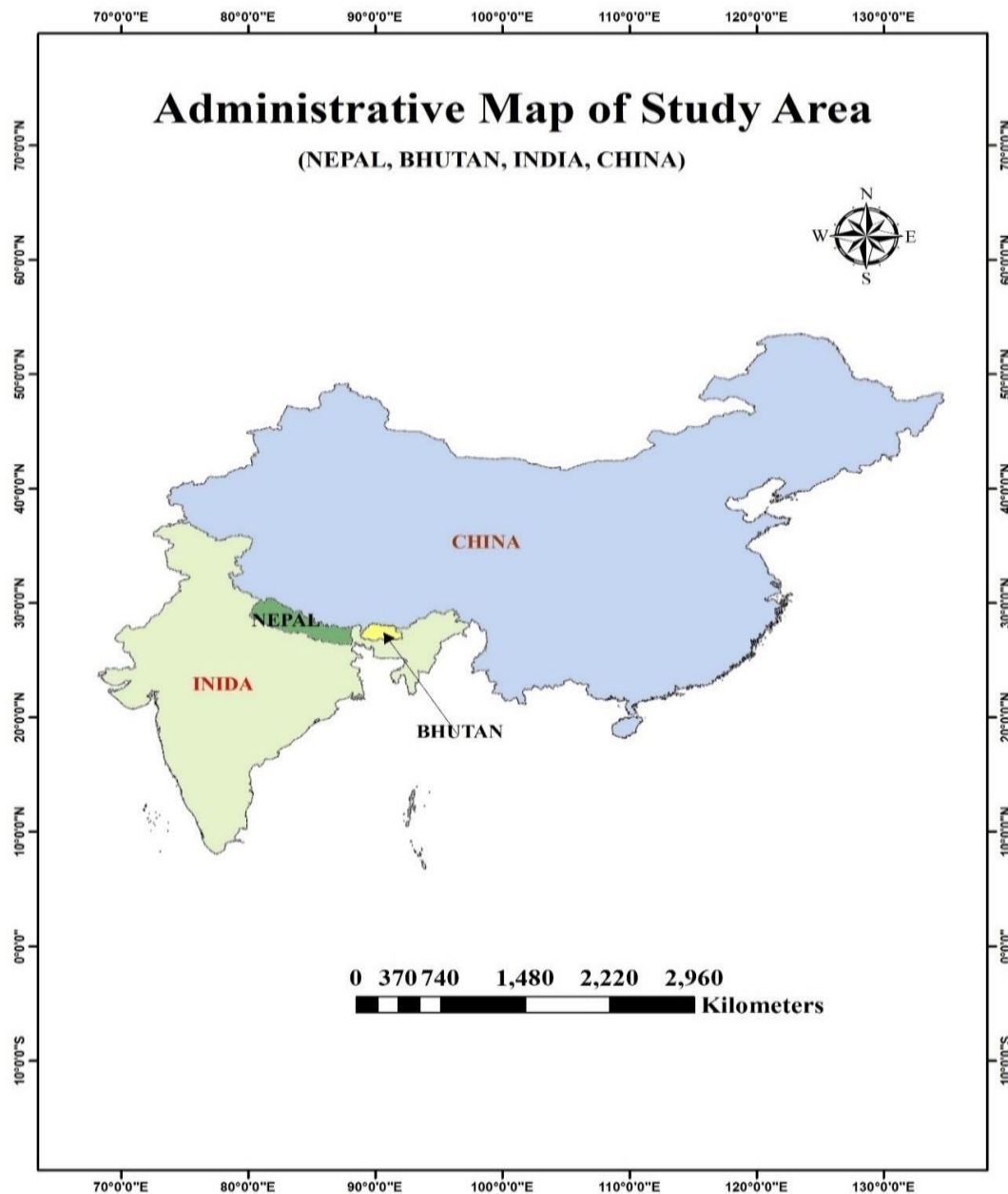


Figure 1: Administrative Map of Study Area



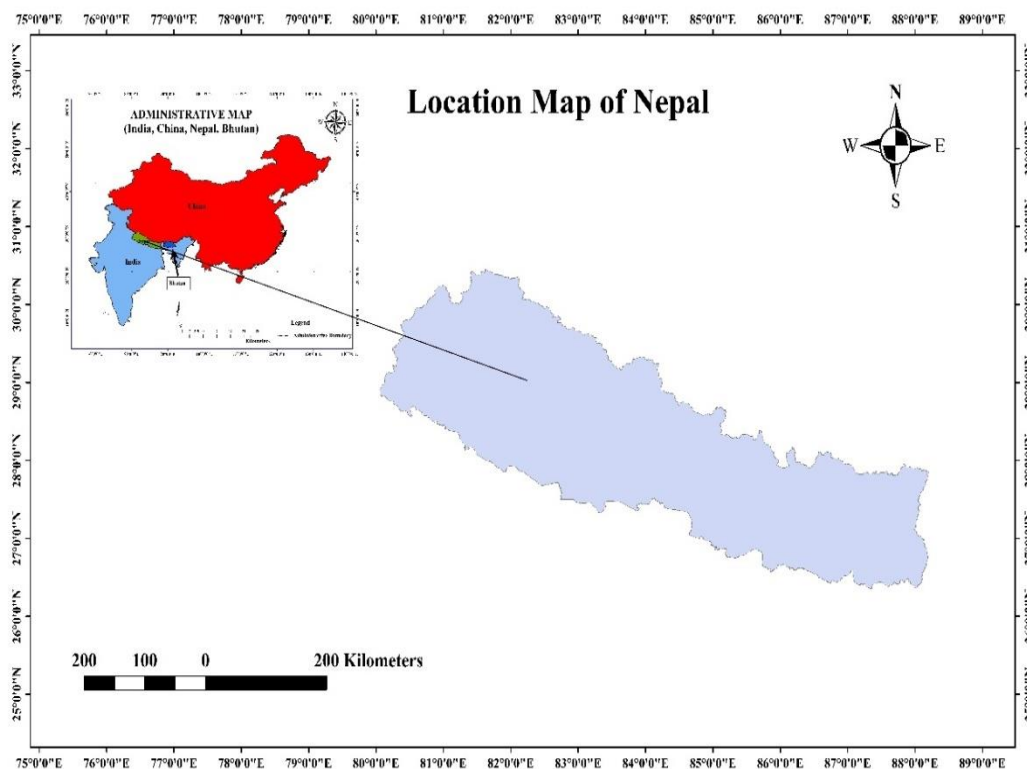
Source: India's shapefiles retrieved from Survey of India. Nepal, Bhutan and China's shapefile retrieved from DIVA-GIS, Digitizing with Georeferencing on World Map. Organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

1.2.1 Location of Nepal

Nepal is a buffer nation. It is situated between the two giant powers, China and India. The below figure no. 2 shows the "Location Map of Nepal" It covers the northern hemisphere from latitudes 26° 22" to 30° 27" N and the eastern hemisphere

from longitudes $80^{\circ} 04''$ to $88^{\circ} 12''$ E. According to the area, Nepal placed 93rd in the world ranking, with a total land area of 147,181 km². There are elevations between 70 and 8,848 metres. The highest peak, Mount Everest, is located in Nepal and is known there as Sagarmatha. Three geographical sub-regions make up Nepal: the Terai, a lush, lower waterlogged plain; the mountainous, northern border region; and the hilly, central region (Afroz, R. 2006).

Figure 2: Location Map of Nepal



Source: Country's shapefiles retrieved from DIVA-GIS, digitizing with Google Earth Pro. Organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

The Ganges and Brahmaputra River tributaries irrigate the Terai region. While the southern, eastern, and western borders of Nepal are connected to India and share a total of 1758 km of border with five Indian states- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and West Bengal the northern part of Nepal, which is primarily mountainous, is connected to China.

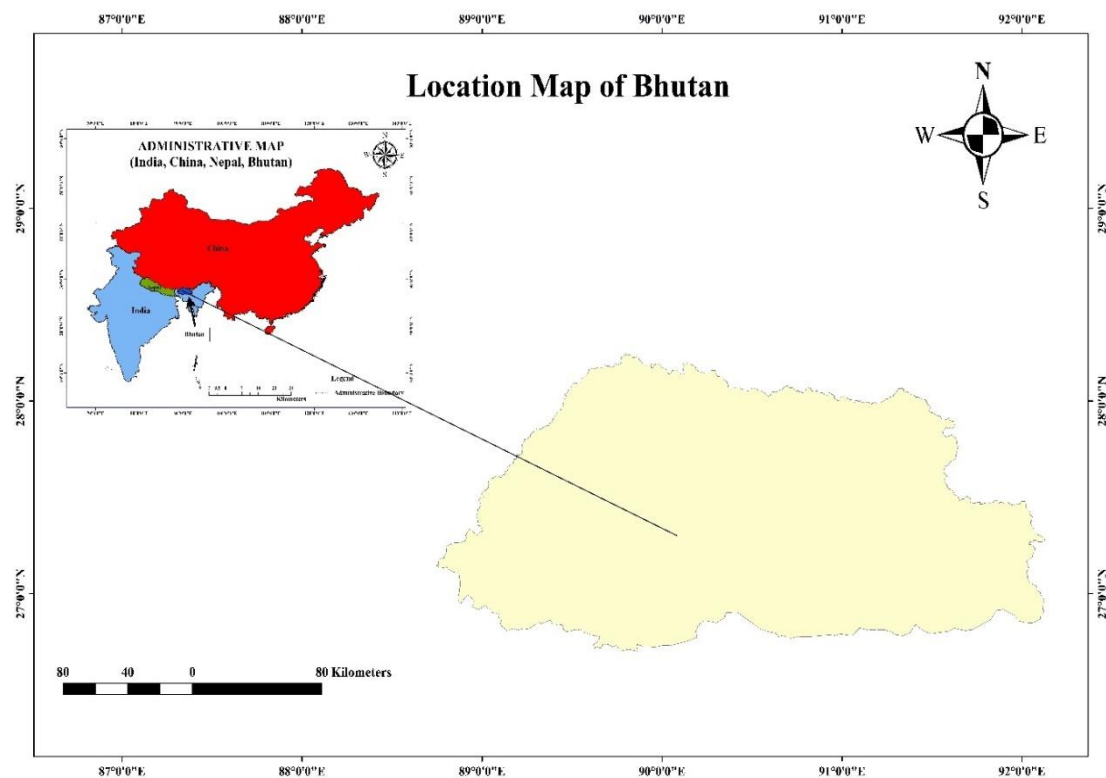
In terms of population, Nepal is the 48th-largest nation in the world, with an estimated population of 28,982,771 as of 2016. In Nepal, only 17% of people live in

cities. An estimated 81 percent of the population of Nepal is Hindu. The currency of Nepal is the Nepali Rupee, and Nepali is the official language of the nation. Kathmandu, Nepal's largest city, serves as the nation's capital. The SAARC nations' headquarters are in Kathmandu. The nation takes pride in the fact that it has never been colonised (Anil, 2018).

1.2.2 Location of Bhutan

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a buffer state located in the eastern Himalayas. Below the figure no. 3 shows the “location of Bhutan”. The nation shares borders with China (Tibetan region) to the north, the Indian states of Sikkim and the Chumbi Valley of Tibet to the west, Arunachal Pradesh to the east, and Assam and West Bengal to the south. Bhutan's coordinates are 26⁰N and 29⁰N latitudes and 88⁰E and 93⁰E longitudes. The nation occupies 133rd place in the world and covers a total area of 38,394 km². Thimphu is the largest city in Bhutan, and it serves as the nation's capital (Khamrang, 2020).

Figure 3: Location Map of Bhutan



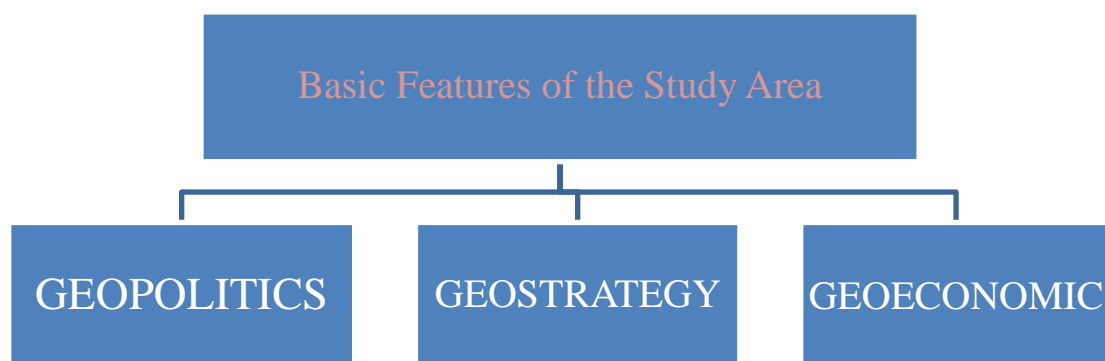
Source: Country's shapefiles retrieved from DIVA-GIS, digitizing with Google Earth Pro. Organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

Bhutan is South Asia's least populous nation, after only the Maldives. According to 2019, it has an estimated population of 7,41,700 and occupies 165th place on the globe.

On August 8, 1949, Bhutan signed a treaty of friendship with India. Bhutan achieved freedom without ever having been colonised. Prior to India's independence, British India considered Bhutan the main state while it was under their control. British India provided reparations to Bhutan (Penjore, 2004).

1.3 Basic Features of the Study Area

For a better understanding of the study, an overview of some of the basic features, like geopolitical features, geostrategic features, and geo-economic features of the study area, is considered helpful.



1.3.1 Geopolitical Features

The study of the connection between political processes and geographical contexts and perspectives is known as geo-politics. Geographical patterns, features, and the multiple regions they create make up the settings. Both domestic influences that affect international behaviour and forces that function on an international scale are part of the political process. Political and geographic environments both change throughout time, influencing and being influenced by one another (Cohen, 2003).

With the inclusion of domestic factors as having an impact on foreign politics, this definition often also incorporates the concept of critical geopolitics. It's crucial to understand that "geopolitics" is not seen as a single entity but rather

as a plurality of vital geopolitical factors (Bassin, 2003). This implies that there might be different geopolitical interpretations of a particular event or circumstance of significant global import.

Bhutan has always had a foreign policy similar to that of India. By examining the strategic triangle's relationship since 1950, one may determine the main reasons why the negotiations failed, the current state of the three countries' relations, as well as how Bhutan, India, and China interact and develop (Sharma, G., Sharma, AK. 2016).

1.3.2 Geostrategic Features

The geographic focus of a state's foreign policy is its geo-strategy. Geo-strategy, which more accurately describes how a state directs its diplomatic and military endeavours, describes where it focuses its efforts. The fundamental premise is that states don't have enough resources to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, even if they wanted to. Instead, they must concentrate their political and military efforts on particular global regions. Therefore, a state's geostrategy may not always be driven by geographic or geopolitical considerations. Because of ideologies, interest groups, or just the notion of its leader, a state may project power to a locality (Grygiel, 2006).

The country's geostrategic location, on the one hand, and ongoing political unrest there, on the other, always posed a threat to its survival. Two Asian countries are close by geographical location, and their security concerns have increased the threat to their independence. All of these factors have influenced how foreign policy decisions have been made (Baral, 2018).

Nepal's geographical location makes it strategically important in the South Asian region, given its position between two major powers, India and China. Both countries have their individual benefits in Nepal, and this has resulted in a certain degree of geopolitical competition. However, it is also true that triangular cooperation between India, Nepal, and China can be in the interest of the region. Nepal can serve as a bridge between the two countries, and all three countries can benefit from improved economic and trade ties, as well as increased regional connectivity (Sapkota, 2017).

For the sake of India's and China's security concerns, a stable and secure Nepal is crucial. Nepal's stability and security can also help in addressing issues such as terrorism, cross-border crime, and the flow of refugees. Maintaining a balanced relationship with both China and India is crucial for Nepal to avoid being drawn into their strategic competition. Nepal can play a constructive role in promoting regional peace and stability, and act as a mediator between India and China in times of tension (Kumar, 2017).

Bhutan's strategic location and natural resources make it an important player in the region. As mentioned above, Bhutan is situated between two major nations, India and China, and both countries have their own interests in the small kingdom. India has historically had a close relationship with Bhutan, and has provided significant economic and military assistance to the country. However, China's growing economic and military power in the region has led to concerns in India about its influence in Bhutan (Ganguly and Scobell, 2018).

China has indeed been increasing its presence in Bhutan in recent years and has been involved in several disputes with Bhutan over border issues. China's interference in Bhutan's development process is also a concern, as it could lead to reduced Indian influence and increased Chinese influence (Wagner, 2016).

Both India and China are competing for influence in Bhutan, and this competition can strain India-Bhutan relations. However, it is also true that Bhutan is trying to maintain its relations with both India and China and has tried to maintain a balanced approach to its foreign policy (Shivamurthy, 2022).

It is important for Bhutan to carefully navigate this complex geopolitical landscape and to work towards maintaining good relationships with both India and China for its own economic and security interests. At the same time, India and China should respect Bhutan's sovereignty and work towards resolving any disputes through peaceful means (Chandra, 2007).

1.3.3 Geo-economic Features

The convergence of commercial and physical elements affecting global trade. In 1981, the word "geoeconomics" was first used. Geo-economics study is about how

the economy operates in a global context. Essentially, it is an academic study of how labour, markets, and capital are moving around the world. Thus, the idea of geo-economics interacts with the physical and demographic characteristics of states and subsequently determines their own trade and economic policies. The states with the biggest economic strengths are listed in the geo-economics section, along with how that affects the power structure. The Himalayan region is a plentiful source of hydropower and natural resources. Source of scenic beauty is tourism.

1.4 Scope and Significance of the Study

The nature of this research has been descriptive and analytical. Along with geopolitics, geostrategic and geoeconomic factors have been considered in this study. The proposed research will also cover a theoretical understanding of emerging geopolitical issues in the Indian subcontinent, their importance to India and China, and their impact on Nepal and Bhutan. In the present situation, all the factors, apart from geography, that affect geopolitics are discussed; political relations, economic relations, socio-cultural relations, defence etc.

The main emphasis of the study has been the security threat from China, which emerges in the Indian subcontinent as well as in Asia in economic and security terms through land and sea routes. The period of the present study starts from the independence of India from British rule in 1947 to the current geopolitical scenario. However, the historical linkage between Nepal, Bhutan, India, and China has been discussed.

Economically, Nepal and Bhutan are both mostly dependent on their neighbouring countries, India and China and play a vital role in India and China's geopolitics. China wants a strong influence on neighbouring countries of India because India is the only country, which is the hurdle on the way China becomes the superpower of Asia-Pacific (Malik, 1995). The purpose of the study is to show that both Himalayan countries are old allies with India, but somewhere Nepal and Bhutan are both attracted to China. And India is concerned with that. How is the effect of South Asia's geopolitical situation on India and China's bilateral issues?

Nepal and Bhutan, both countries, have been ruled by a monarchy system until recently, while China is a communist government and India was ruled over by the British till 1947, and now it has a government that is run by democracy (Kathiwada, 2007). Although the study areas differ from each other, this is one of the first attempts at research to compare bilateral relations and changing geopolitical situations in Asia.

Due to the presence of vast hydropower and natural resources and by becoming a breeding ground for transportation connectivity, the Himalayan region has become a hot centre of geopolitics. This region is becoming the ground of rivalry between two significant regional powers in Asia: India and China. So, it is essential to identify measures that can promote peace and stability between India and China in the region. One important step is to resolve any outstanding border disputes through peaceful means, such as negotiation and dialogue. Both India and China have a responsibility to ensure that any disagreements are resolved in a peaceful and diplomatic manner (Malik, 2001).

Another important measure is to promote commercial ties between the two nations. Greater economic cooperation can help reduce tensions and promote stability while also benefiting the economies of both India and China. At the same time, it is important for both India and China to respect each other's strategic interests in the region. This means avoiding actions that could be seen as provocative or aggressive and working to build trust and confidence between the two countries.

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1.5 Review of Literature

Providing a theoretical framework is crucial for any research endeavour. The evolving geopolitical crises in the Indian subcontinent have been analyzed by numerous social thinkers and writers from various perspectives over time. A comprehensive review of literature is a vital part of the research process, as it lays the

foundation for a focused and coherent study, ensuring that the research does not become directionless.

To gather relevant information for this study, extensive efforts were made to collect and review the available literature. This included frequent visits to libraries and consultations with books, M.Sc. dissertations, Ph.D. theses, and research journals. Additionally, various government publications, newspapers, magazines, and personal collections were referenced. The collected literature was organized and reviewed under four main themes:

1. Geopolitical Concepts and Significance of Himalayan Region
2. Nepal and Bhutan's Responses to the Himalayan Geopolitical Crisis
3. Emerging Indo-Sino Geopolitical Crisis.
4. India's Responses to the Current Emerging Geopolitical Crisis in the Indian Subcontinent.

1. Geopolitical Concepts and Significance of Himalayan Region

Sreeradha Datta (2000) "Security of India's northeast: External linkages" this paper aims to examine the external factors influencing conflicts in the northeast region. Despite various political configurations, the northeastern states of the Indian federation have struggled to address the demands of different ethnic groups seeking recognition of their unique identities.

Colin Gray (2004) "In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On" stated in his article Sir Halford J. Mackinder, the British geographer, may not have originated geopolitics, but he undoubtedly emerged as its most significant and influential thinker. Despite the varying contexts of his three major geopolitical analyses in 1904, 1919, and 1943, Mackinder's theories resonated deeply due to their strategic, political, and technological relevance at the time. Remarkably, history has validated the core assumptions and overall framework of Mackinder's geopolitical doctrine. His Pivot-Heartland thesis, which acknowledges the significance of both land and maritime power, remains pertinent in the modern era, akin to its relevance in the past century. Mackinder's ideas have endured for over

a century, withstanding criticism and evolving to accommodate changing global dynamics. Even in the face of contemporary scepticism fuelled by globalization, Mackinder's insights continue to hold relevance, suggesting that current critics are unlikely to undermine his enduring legacy.

Ambrish Dhaka (2004) "Afghanistan 'Goeconomic Watershed' of South and Central Asia." Under current geopolitical circumstances, there's a resurgence of interest in reviving a previously halted endeavour: the establishment of a trans-Afghan pipeline to export oil and natural gas from central Asia to south Asia. Additionally, efforts are underway to develop sustainable transit routes for landlocked central Asian republics to reach the Indian Ocean. India's strategic significance is evident in both initiatives, yet progress might be hindered by the stability of Afghanistan and Indo-Pak relations, serving as potential obstacles.

Thierry Mathou (2005) "Tibet and Its Neighbours: Moving toward a New Chinese Strategy in the Himalayan Region" this article examines the political and diplomatic objectives of Chinese authorities in the Himalayan region, emphasizing their aim to achieve development within a peaceful environment. It also explores the potential for this policy to foster connections between the Tibetan Autonomous Region and other states and regions in the Himalayas. The analysis delves into the strategic significance of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and considers the potential impacts on Tibet, the Tibetan people, and neighbouring Himalayan regions.

Sudeepta Adhikari, Akhouri Radha Krishna Sinha, and Mukul Kamle (2008) "India's Changing Geopolitical Code: An Attempt at Analysis" the study sought to investigate the factors behind India's transition from a nonaligned stance to a more assertive and dominant geopolitical position, both regionally and globally. As the world moves towards multipolarity, the traditional nonaligned approach inherited from Nehru has become obsolete. India has now established itself as one of the major poles in global politics. Continuous threats and pressures from neighbouring countries, both smaller and larger, have forced India to redefine its geopolitical strategy towards one of cautious assertiveness, aimed at managing hostilities effectively.

Dawa Norbu (2008) "Chinese Strategic Thinking on Tibet and the Himalayan Region" throughout history, Tibet has held significant importance for the dominant powers of South and East Asia, both in the past and in contemporary times. Control over the region, whether exercised directly or indirectly, has often served as a barometer of one power's superiority over others. At the turn of the century, Tibet was a focal point in the 'Great Game' involving Great Britain, Tsarist Russia, and China. By 1950, with the emergence of nationalist regimes in China and India, Tibet once again became a contentious issue between the two nations. The central question revolved around which country should occupy this strategically vital frontier region between the two giants. Nehru acquiesced to Chinese demands by 1954, hoping to establish the Himalayas as a mutual boundary for political influence and defense perimeters. Since then, significant developments have unfolded in Sino-Indian relations.

Shiping Tang (2009) "The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis" the article proposed a refined definition of the security dilemma, offering a more thorough understanding of its implications. It scrutinized various extensions and interpretations of the original concept, revealing many to be flawed and deceptive, and suggested corrective measures. Additionally, it pinpointed several areas for future research that could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the security dilemma.

Hasan Yaser Malik (2015) "Siliguri: A Geopolitical Manoeuvre Corridor in the Eastern Himalayan Region for China and India", the Siliguri Corridor serves as a strategic junction nestled amidst Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India's Seven Sister States, and the Chumbi Hills in the Eastern Himalayan Region. Given its pivotal location at the nexus of these neighbouring countries, the landlocked Siliguri holds significant economic and political importance for the entire region. Its proximity to China and India's Seven Sister States further amplifies its diplomatic significance within the Eastern Himalayan Region. In 2002, discussions among Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh explored the possibility of establishing a free trade corridor to facilitate smoother goods transportation through the Siliguri Corridor. However, no such agreement materialized, leaving unresolved issues such as smuggling and terrorism that persistently challenge economic and diplomatic efforts in the area.

Colin S. Gray (2015) “Nicholas John Spykman, the Balance of Power, and International Order” Nicholas John Spykman, arguably the most eminent American geopolitical theorist of the twentieth century, contributed significantly to the field despite his relatively brief involvement from 1938 to 1943. Regarded as a fitting intellectual heir to Sir Halford Mackinder in Britain, Spykman introduced the concept of the Eurasian Rimland, which remains politically and strategically relevant today. Known for his outspoken and controversial nature, his writings reveal a nuanced balance between the pursuit of power and genuine considerations for global stability and order.

Anne-Marie Schleich (2020) “Geopolitics in the Himalayas: A Kingdom sandwiched between China and India” India is also apprehensive about China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) within its South Asian vicinity. It views this initiative as jeopardizing its longstanding influence in South Asia and has consequently bolstered its ties with South Asian neighbours through initiatives such as its Neighbourhood First and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policies. Additionally, due to the escalating geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China, India is also striving for increased geopolitical manoeuvrability.

Alexander E. Davis, Ruth Gamble, Gerald Roche & Lauren Gawne (2020) “International relations and the Himalaya: connecting ecologies, cultures and geopolitics” this article scrutinized the international relations (IR) perspective on the Himalayas. The authors contended that while the potential for armed conflict over disputed international borders exists, it is not the foremost international challenge facing the region. They advocated for an expanded analysis of the region within IR that transcends a narrow focus on states and security concerns, centred around Delhi, Beijing, and Islamabad. Instead, they proposed examining the intricate interplay between geopolitics, cultures, and ecologies in the region. The authors suggested achieving this by integrating more interdisciplinary approaches and by emphasizing the interaction between the organization of political power and the environment in the region.

Fidel Rahmati (2020) “Himalayas and its Strategic Challenges to India” the paper underscored the imperative of addressing the strategic hurdles currently

confronting India. Predominantly geopolitical in nature, these challenges encompass border disputes with China, Pakistan, and Nepal.

Susan Walcott studied in his paper “Challenges and Prospects, Bordering the Eastern Himalaya: Boundaries, Passes, Power Contestations”, the eastern Himalayan region's national borders show the strains of modernising transition between two strong rising nation-states. The author focused on the conditions in which borders are upheld. Physical characteristics such as geography, borders, and passes have played significant roles in shaping the cultural identity, population movements, and political dynamics of various regions throughout history. Power dynamics bound the space, making its delimitation worthwhile for cultural preservation.

2. Nepal and Bhutan’s Responses to the Himalayan Geopolitical Crisis

Padmaja Murthy (1999) "Indo-Bhutan relations: Serving mutual interests" the author has examined several factors influencing the ongoing relationship between India and Bhutan, characterized by occasional tensions. While the "perpetual peace and friendship" term in the 1949 treaty portrays an enduring bond between the two nations, questions arise regarding its applicability in perpetuity. The relationship between India and Bhutan serves the interests of both countries, but the extent of mutual benefit remains a subject of discussion. The author delves into the challenges that this relationship may encounter in the future, considering evolving domestic, regional, and international dynamics. The aim is to define the distinctive nature of the relationship shared by the two nations.

Rajesh Kharat (2004) "Bhutan’s security scenario" this paper examined the challenges and opportunities in ensuring the security of Bhutan, a small, landlocked nation situated between India and China, with limited economic development. Typically, a nation seeks various avenues to ensure its security, including diplomacy to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, Bhutan faces significant constraints: it is largely isolated from the international community, struggles with inadequate internal infrastructure, and maintains a monarchy system that restricts its ability to shape its own security and foreign policies. Despite its weak military, primarily due to financial constraints, Bhutan has leveraged diplomacy, economic development, and cultural diplomacy effectively. Despite its limitations,

Bhutan has successfully maintained its sovereignty and a degree of autonomy in its actions.

Gyan P. Nyaupane, Dallen J. Timothy (2010) "Power, Regionalism and Tourism Policy in Bhutan", this study utilized frameworks on power relationships and concepts of regionalism to analyze two political dimensions of Bhutan's approach to tourism, characterized by low volume but high yield. Rather than employing an annual visa quota, Bhutan regulates tourist numbers through a daily minimum tariff, mandatory guided tours, specific spatial restrictions, and perceived inconvenience associated with the visa process. However, this controlled tourism policy applies primarily to Western visitors, constituting only a quarter of arrivals. While Bhutan has effectively mitigated environmental and cultural impacts from Western tourists through its low-volume, high-yield tourism policy, the motivation behind this approach is more closely tied to power dynamics and regional politics than solely a pursuit of sustainable tourism.

Pranav Kumar (2010) "Sino-Bhutanese Relations: Under the Shadow of India–Bhutan Friendship" throughout history, Bhutan's connection with China was primarily mediated through Tibet. The annexation of Tibet by China, followed by subsequent unrest, instilled fear in Bhutan, leading to the closure of its northern border in 1960. However, Bhutan gradually adopted a more open approach in the 1970s, fostering increased interaction with its northern neighbour. Border negotiations commenced in 1984 and culminated in a peace agreement in 1998, aimed at maintaining tranquillity along the border regions. Despite the absence of diplomatic ties or formal trade relations between China and Bhutan, China's expanding interests in South Asia inevitably involve Bhutan. Consequently, Bhutan faces the challenge of balancing its historical allegiance to India while navigating Chinese overtures and resolving border disputes peacefully and expeditiously. In the Sino-Bhutanese relationship, India remains a pivotal factor. The evolving dynamics between India and China, as well as their strategic activities in the Himalayan region, will significantly influence Bhutan's policies towards China.

Indra Nath Mukherji (2010) "Revision of India-Nepal Treaty of Trade and Its Implications for Strengthening Bilateral Trade and Investment Linkages" and focused

to analyse the trend in the two countries' bilateral commerce is highlighted in the article. It states that, despite difficulties in some years, bilateral trade between the two nations has been rapidly expanding. Concerns concerning Nepal's labour laws and the absence of arbitration panels in the event of a disagreement are expressed in the article. Numerous Indian industries have already closed, and those that are in the works could also suffer.

Kumar S. (2011) "China's Expanding Footprint in Nepal: Threats to India" this paper presents a detailed examination of the motivations driving Chinese economic expansion overseas. It suggests that China's increasing geo-economic influence is intricately tied to broader shifts in global capitalism, particularly the weakening confidence in the US dollar by the US government. The study critically analyzed two recent developments: the involvement of the China Investment Corporation and state-owned enterprises in accessing international markets, and efforts to extend the global reach of the Chinese yuan. The author contends that these trends are part of China's broader strategy to ensure domestic economic security, given its significant holdings of dollar reserves and the constraints of its fixed foreign exchange regime.

Medha Bisht (2012) "Bhutan-India Power Cooperation: Benefits Beyond Bilateralism" this study explored the transition of India and Bhutan into a new phase of power cooperation, underscoring the necessity for both nations to reassess their policies and adopt sustainable approaches for the future. The article suggests that establishing a sub-regional energy grid involving Bhutan, India, and Bangladesh could serve as a valuable platform for enhancing sub-regional diplomacy. Such an initiative could also address the latent concerns within Bhutan, which may have long-term implications for bilateral relations between India and Bhutan.

Nirdesh Silwa (2012) "Geopolitics of the Great Powers on the Weak State Nepal, An Offensive Neo-Realism Perspective", has examined the great powers compete in Nepal's geopolitics for their hegemonic position inside the system, or at the very least at the regional level. This study highlights the difficulties faced by weak states encircled by strong actors as well as the potentially hostile behaviour of hegemonic actors in the global system. Through an offensive neorealism lens, this

study seeks to assess the roles, motives, and effects of major powers on Nepal's sovereignty.

Patel, Dharmesh (2013) “The entangled triangle of Nepal, India and China”, Nepal stands out among nations with its distinct and robust sovereignty, yet it grapples with maintaining a delicate equilibrium between its two powerful neighbours, India and China. Geographically constrained, Nepal faces limitations in its foreign policy pursuits and choices, as well as in its overall survival strategy. Surrounded by India to the south, east, and west, Nepal encounters vast frontiers. Meanwhile, to the north, the formidable Himalayas present a formidable barrier, defining the boundary with China.

Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt (2014) “The Great Himalayan Game: India and China Rivalry in Nepal”, the objective of this paper is to examine the competition between India and China and its implications for Nepal in terms of geo-strategy and geopolitics, using theoretical, conceptual, and empirical approaches. The rivalry in foreign policy between India and China not only affects investment and trade choices but also permeates issues concerning stability, governance, and political structures.

Neetu Choudhary and Abhijit Ghosh (2014) “Indo-Nepal Economic Cooperation: A Sub-regional Perspective” explored the low levels of commerce within the South Asian sub-region and how sub-regional interaction with surrounding regions can encourage economic cooperation among nations. The study developed a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat framework with particular reference to shared historical legacies and culture-driven formal and informal interaction between Nepal and the Indian state of Bihar to rationalise and reflect on the need for a sub-regional perspective towards the promotion of regional cooperation. He also discussed the imperatives for policy development related to the operationalization of the new perspective, as well as formal and informal difficulties.

Rajeev Kumar (2016) “India-Nepal Open Border: Springboard for Opportunities” this article explored the shared necessities of individuals residing along the open border, which serves as a crucial lifeline for inhabitants of border regions. It examines the measures implemented at both grassroots and governmental

levels to ensure the sustained mutual benefits enjoyed by communities during periods of prosperity as well as adversity.

Geetanjali Sharma and Ajay K Sharma (2016) “Geopolitics of Bhutan and its Relevance in the Security of India” the author clarified that Bhutan has consistently aligned its foreign policy with India's. This paper investigated the underlying reasons for the breakdown of negotiations and the current status of the triangular relationship, while also examining the dynamics of interaction and growth among Bhutan, India, and China. This analysis is conducted by exploring the evolution of the strategic triangle relationship since 1950.

Bawa Singh (2016) “India's Neighbourhood Policy: Geopolitical Fault Line of Its Nepal in the post-2015 constitution”, examined the shortcomings of India's Neighbourhood policy, particularly concerning its response to Nepal's Constitutional Crisis Post-2015. Quoting Prime Minister Vajpayee's assertion that "friends can change but not neighbours who have to live together," it's evident that the neighbourhood policy holds a crucial position in Indian foreign affairs. Since independence, India has pursued a neighbourhood policy. The current government has also introduced the 'Neighbourhood first' policy under the visionary leadership of PM Modi. However, despite such initiatives, India has recently seen a decline in its geopolitical influence in Nepal, while China has expanded its presence in the country.

Umesh K. Bhattarai (2016) “Geopolitical Dimension of Nepal and its Impact on South Asia” the geopolitical environment of a nation has a significant impact on both international security and its importance to a country's stability. Geopolitics study about the interaction between politics, geography, demography, and economy, particularly with regard to the foreign policy that a country within the region chooses to pursue. The overarching governmental policies are determined by it. In other words, the country's geographic position determines the power structure. We must comprehend the geographical context of the Indian subcontinent as a whole in order to comprehend the significance of Nepal's geo-strategy.

Ram Prasad Aryal (2016) “Democratization and Development in Nepal” studied in his research on impacts of democratization on development activities are not instantaneous, and challenges still exist. However, the progress made in Nepal's

democratic journey has laid a foundation for more comprehensive and sustainable development in the country. the process of democratization in Nepal has brought about significant changes in various sectors, including health, education, and transportation. It has also encouraged migration and increased remittance inflows into the nation. This report was anticipated to have significant policy ramifications from all angles.

Malik AH and Sheikh NA (2016) “Changing Dynamics of Indo-Bhutan Relations: Implications for India”, attempted to systematically analyzed the relationship between two neighbouring countries and to illuminate the complexities and shifts in their relationship since 1949, as well as its potential prospects for the future.

Subash Rai, Aaron T. Wolf & Nayan Sharma (2017) “Hydro politics and hydro political dynamics between India and Nepal: An event-based study” discussed the India and Nepal have engaged in hydro-diplomacy for more than a century, navigating turbulent political situations to learn how water relations have changed over time. TFDD, researchers and analysts can access data on specific cases and use the provided definitions of conflict and collaboration to assess the intensity and nature of these occurrences. The study found many instances of cooperation; but, when the findings were seen through the lens of conflict cooperation levels, they showed only somewhat favourable cooperation without a lot of tangible results.

According to Rohit Kumar (2017) in his work “Geo-strategic status of Nepal between India and China: A Security perspective” studied about Nepal's location in the South Asian region has grown as strategic importance, particularly in the context of the competition and geopolitical dynamics between India and China. Nepal may turn into the epicentre of geopolitical conflict between a growing China and a defending India. Collaboration between these three nations (China, Nepal, and India) may be advantageous for the region.

R. Padma (2017) “Indo-Bhutanese Relations: From ‘Special Relationship’ to ‘Strategic Partnership’” paper explored the developmental ties between the two nations, delineating them into three distinct phases. The initial phase, spanning the 1960s to the 1970s, prioritized the establishment of social and physical infrastructure.

The second phase, from the 1980s to the 1990s, saw significant strides in democratization and decentralization efforts. The third phase, post-1990s, centered on the development of hydropower projects, which subsequently broadened to encompass other areas of collaboration including information technology, disaster risk management, education, and research.

Damber Kharka (2018) “Dependence of Bhutanese Economy on India: Empirical Analysis of Inflation Dependency”, this research investigated the economic ties between Bhutan and India, focusing on the extent of Bhutan's reliance on India. Historical records indicate that Bhutan has relied significantly on India for the majority of its development endeavours and investment initiatives. The study reveals that trade is highly concentrated with India, accounting for approximately 85% of total trade. Furthermore, it is noted that Bhutan's domestic inflation is largely influenced by Indian inflation, with approximately 66% of Bhutan's inflation explained by Indian economic trends.

Monja Sauvagerd (2018) “India’s Strategies on its Periphery: A Case Study in the India-Bhutan Relationship” this paper examined India's foreign policy approach concerning its neighbour Bhutan, concentrating on two specific areas: Bhutan's diplomatic endeavours, particularly its initiatives to cultivate ties with China, India's regional competitor; and the development collaboration between India and Bhutan, specifically in the domain of hydropower projects.

Amit Ranjan (2018) “India-Bhutan Hydropower Projects: Cooperation and Concerns” paper scrutinized the bilateral interactions between India and Bhutan within the hydropower sector, emphasizing the necessity for both parties to tackle the issues stemming from India's engagement in this field.

Deepjyoti Chand (2018) “Trade Embargo as a Geopolitical Tool: A Case of Nepal-India Trade Relations” this paper studied about Trade between Nepal and India is growing, especially as a result of Nepal's dependence on India as a transit country and its consequences. Additionally, it provides a general description of the two nations' trade relations while concentrating on India's trade restrictions. Embargoes or trade disruptions between India and Nepal have indeed had both political and economic repercussions.

Girdhari Dahal (2018) “Foreign Relation of Nepal with China and India”, this paper explored the foreign relation of Nepal with, China and India have indeed been characterized by a mix of friendly and sometimes challenging dynamics. Nepal maintains a policy of adhering to the "One China Policy," it regards Tibet as an essential component of China and recognises the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate government in the country.

Lubina Sarwar and Arif Hussain Malik (2018) “Nepal's Transition from Monarchy to Democracy: An Analytical Perspective of Post-2008 Indo-Nepal Relations”, this paper analysed the narratives to showcase the effects of the changing relations of India and Nepal. The authors have also spread information on India's contribution to Nepal's transformation from a monarchy to a democracy. The numerous strategies that the Indian government should employ when dealing with the recently democratic nation were also supported.

Anil Sigdel (2018) “China's Growing Footprint in Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities for India”, Nepal, India's neighbour in the Himalayas, is being approached by China, who understandably wants to take advantage of the potential on its northern border. He analyzed that how India is affecting by the growing footprints of China in Nepal. This article analyzed the likelihood that India will succeed in competing with China in Nepal and puts out two key considerations: New Delhi's general ability to confront Beijing and its political commitment to changing its contentious policy toward Nepal. It makes the case that a fully autonomous Nepal with the ability to pursue an independent foreign policy is advantageous and not harmful to India given the shifting geopolitical landscape.

Le Thi Hang Nga; Tran Xuan Hiep; Dang Thu Thuy; Ha Le Huyen (2019) India-Bhutan Treaties of 1949 and 2007: A Retrospect This article seeks to reassess the treaties signed between India and Bhutan in 1949 and 2007, contending that the latter treaty signifies Bhutan's evolution and maturation as an independent and sovereign nation. It emphasizes the need for India to continually adapt its foreign policy towards Bhutan to safeguard its influence in this significant yet diminutive nation and uphold the robustness of bilateral relations between India and Bhutan.

Satish Chandra Pant (2019) “Opportunities & Challenges to India- Bhutan Bilateral Trade in Present Scenario”, the research paper examined the trade connections between India and Bhutan. Bhutan acted as a mediator between India and Tibet. The author explored how the India-Bhutan Treaty of 1949 developed and enhanced the enduring ties of friendship and trade relations between the two nations.

Subhash Chandra (2020) “India-Bhutan Relations: Geo-Strategic Dimensions” the author examined Bhutan's geopolitical significance and its natural resources. Positioned as a buffer state between two significant Asian powers, India and China, Bhutan garners attention from both nations seeking to cultivate positive relations with it. This paper endeavours to analyzed the geopolitical aspects of Indo-Bhutan relations.

Amrita Chatterjee, Dipayan Dey “Water Woes in South East Asia: Geo-Ecology of Trans-Border River System and Dams Between India and Nepal”, The floodplains of Bihar are now more susceptible to disastrous floods due to Himalayan rivers pouring over the Indo-Nepal boundaries of the Ganga Basin, leaving thousands of hectares of land as flooded fallows. The majority of the tributaries are under the control of irrigation barrages, which also significantly affect aquatic biodiversity by altering the flow of the major rivers. The goal of their research has to evaluated the issue from a conservationist perspective and offer alternative methods and regulations that will preserve the ecosystem of these wetlands.

3. Emerging Indo-Sino Geopolitical Crisis

Dawa Norbu (1997) "Tibet in Sino-Indian Relations the Centrality of Marginality" has stated that post-colonial era has seen a complex and dynamic relationship between India and China, marked by periods of cooperation as well as conflict. The politics of Sino-Indian relations are closely intertwined with the history of Indo-Tibetan interactions. Tibet, a region that has historically been culturally and politically linked to both India and China, has been a key point of contention between the two countries. This implies that international relations are much more complicated than a simple bilateral relationship between A and B; there are a number of intervening elements that alter or restructure policy goals, which are then mediated by domestic politics and transnational political structures.

Christopher J. Rusko and Karthika Sasikumar (2007) jointly work in the article “India and China: from Trade to Peace?” explored potential economic reasons for this reconciliation. Describe three potential avenues via which commercial interdependence might bring about peace between nations, and then look at how they might work in the example of India and China. He concluded that both countries' concerted efforts to be recognised as responsible contributors to the global economy are the most likely cause of the relationship shift. Therefore, the India-China relationship may benefit from broad economic insight rather than a specific bilateral component.

David Scott (2008) “The Great Power ‘Great Game’ between India and China: ‘The Logic of Geography’”, understanding the dynamics of the twenty-first century requires grappling with the simultaneous ascent of China and India, which is a pivotal aspect. Emerging as Great Powers a relative designation, they find themselves in a positional clash across Asia and its surrounding maritime regions. Traditional geopolitical theories espoused by figures like Mackinder, Spykman, and Mahan shed light on their spatial strategies concerning Central Asia, South Asia, Pacific Asia, and the Indian Ocean. These tangible spatial realities intersect with perceived geopolitical outlooks. These neighbouring powerhouses aim to sustain their rise while strategically constraining each other through tactics such as mutual encirclement and alliances with proxies. This dynamic mirrors a modern rendition of the historical 'Great Game,' evident across military-security, diplomatic, and economic domains.

Jonathan Holslag (2009) "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India" this study assessed whether the enhancement of Sino-Indian relations correlates with a reduction in military threat perceptions. An analysis of the demilitarization of the border, military strategies in the Indian Ocean, and nuclear arms programs indicates that both nations remain embroiled in a military security dilemma. Mutual distrust continues to drive military buildup efforts.

Iskander Rehman (2009) "Keeping the Dragon at Bay: India's Counter-Containment of China in Asia" this article provided an analysis of the Sino-Indian relationship in the last decade from a realist viewpoint, highlighting that despite apparent progress, mutual distrust continues to taint bilateral relations. It suggests that

China has pursued a strategy aimed at containing India, challenging its dominance in South Asia and hindering its aspirations for global influence. A closer examination of India's increasingly assertive foreign policy, both regionally and internationally, indicates that New Delhi has opted to respond to Beijing's containment efforts with its own form of counter-containment.

Kean Fan Lim (2010) “On China’s growing geo-economic influence and the evolution of variegated capitalism”, This article presents a nuanced examination of the motivations behind China's economic expansions abroad. The author posits that China's growing geo-economic influence is a result of interconnected factors within the broader context of global capitalism, particularly the erosion of confidence in the US dollar by the US government. The paper critically assesses two recent developments: firstly, the involvement of the China Investment Corporation (a newly established sovereign wealth fund) and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in accessing global markets, and secondly, the initiatives to expand the international presence of the Chinese yuan. The author argues that these phenomena are closely linked to China's overarching goal of safeguarding its domestic economic security, given its substantial holdings of dollar reserves and the constraints imposed by its fixed foreign exchange regime.

Raman Puri and Arun Sahgal (2011) “The South China Sea Dispute: Implications for India” in this article, the author examines how the end of the Cold War created a strategic void in the South China Sea. The collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in its departure from Cam Ranh Bay, alongside the closure of United States' naval bases in the Philippines, and Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia, significantly reduced superpower influence in the region. These developments prompted various East Asian littoral governments to reassess the strategic and national security implications of their sovereignty claims over islands in the South China Sea. Additionally, the financial crisis that affected national economies across East Asia in 1998 further heightened tensions over conflicting maritime claims in the area.

Stephen Robert Nagy (2013) “Territorial Disputes, Trade and Diplomacy”, study investigated the impact of the territorial dispute between China and Japan on

their bilateral trade. It contends that the traditional principle of *seikei bunri* (separation of politics and economics) that characterized the post-World War II relationship between the two countries has evolved into a more confrontational dynamic. In this new context, economic pressure has been utilized as a tool to exert leverage on Japan regarding bilateral issues. The study suggests that examining how tensions stemming from territorial disputes have influenced the trading relationship between China and Japan could offer insights into managing similar disputes in other regions of North and Southeast Asia.

Bashir Ahmad Dar (2014) “Major Bilateral Issues between China and India” the paper focused on the bilateral issues that impede communication between the two countries and seeks to find common ground on crucial subjects for the orderly emergence of the two Asian superpowers. For instance, there are conflicts between the two about their respective interests, such as boundary disputes, water issues, etc. Here, an effort has been made to shed light on whether China and India would engage as partners or adversaries as a result of their respective courses.

Katherine Richards (2015) “China-India: An Analysis of the Himalayan territorial dispute” this paper evaluated the border issue in the Himalayas between India and China. Despite the constant threat of small skirmishes and territorial incursions, it determines that the likelihood of a large Sino-Indian border confrontation is remote. It contends that there are important limitations that will prevent military assertiveness and the consequences of either side's miscalculation for the foreseeable future. He concluded that the existing strategic impasse along the "roof of the world" will continue to produce a security status quo that is largely stable but stressful.

Waheeda Rana (2015) “Regional Competitors towards a Cooperative Relationship” tried to analyze in her study, after decades of unpleasant relations, now, instead of seeing each other as a threat, China and India regard each other as an opportunity. Mutual distrust has been noted to exist on a number of geostrategic and security problems, making both parties suspicious of one another's economic and military development. It is determined that the two nations are certain to avoid direct and open conflict because of their shared interests in a number of important areas. As

a result, the groundwork for the reconciliation process is established, and their conflicts would be outweighed by their shared interests.

Obja Hazarika (2016) “Soft Power Contestation between India and China in South Asia” this paper investigates the dynamics of soft power competition between China and India in the South Asian region. It aims to delve into China's efforts to exert soft power influence in South Asia, and India's reactions to these endeavours. Specifically, it examines how India views China's expanding influence in its neighbouring region and whether India holds a strategic advantage in countering China's soft power initiatives in South Asia in the long run.

Abhijit Singh (2019) “Sino-Indian Dynamics in Littoral Asia-The View from New Delhi”. The paper examined the increasing involvement of China in the Indian Ocean, specifically focusing on the expansion of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in South Asia. This development has raised significant concerns in India, where many perceive Chinese naval activities as encroaching upon New Delhi's traditional sphere of influence. China's growing presence in strategic areas of interest to India, particularly its expanding submarine operations, is viewed with suspicion in New Delhi, prompting calls for a strategy to counter China's influence. As China continues to expand its Belt and Road initiatives in the Indian Ocean, strengthening its hold over strategically important islands and coastal states, New Delhi is faced with a dilemma in its own neighbourhood.

Chao Xie (2019) “How Status-seeking States Can Cooperate: Explaining India–China Rapprochement After the Doklam Standoff”. This article endeavours to propose that the pursuit of status does not inevitably lead to zero-sum outcomes. It aims to outline conditions under which status-seekers can effectively mitigate conflicts and foster cooperation through innovative utilization of social mobility and creativity strategies. Using the evolving relationship between India and China since 2013 as a case study, this article illustrates how interactions between these two states driven by status-seeking aspirations can sometimes escalate into confrontation due to conflicting status-seeking motivations.

Nalin Surie (2019) “China’s India Policy: The Importance of Bilateralism an Appraisal”. China's negotiations over the border and economic ties with India have

traditionally been characterized by a bilateral approach. Historically, this bilateralism has enabled China to strengthen its control over Tibet and pursue a mercantilist economic strategy in relation to India. However, the shifting geopolitical landscape of both nations suggests that bilateral relations, particularly following the Wuhan summit, have been recalibrated to reflect those between two major powers with broader regional and global interests. While bilateralism will continue to shape their cooperation on matters such as common development, regional progress, and the establishment of a community with a shared future for humanity, China must reconsider its approach to bilateralism by expanding and deepening it to foster a genuinely reciprocal relationship.

4. India's Responses to the Current Emerging Geopolitical Crisis in the Indian Subcontinent

Anindya Jyoti Majumdar (2014) "Making Sense of India-Bangladesh Relations", India and Bangladesh share intertwined geopolitical relations, yet their fundamental objectives differ. While geopolitical factors introduce ongoing challenges due to their proximity, encompassing critical issues such as security, migration, and resource distribution, Bangladesh is still in the process of defining its identity, with India's perceived image playing a significant role. The attitudes and expectations developed by both countries towards each other shape the nature of their bilateral interactions. This research examines India-Bangladesh relations across three dimensions: geopolitics, attitudinal effects, and functional exchanges. It portrays these relations as typical of power dynamics between a larger and smaller country, where policies are primarily guided by the principle of self-interest, but are also influenced by Bangladesh's aspiration to establish itself as a nation-state.

Rahul Sen, Mukul G Asher, Ramkishan S Rajan (2014) "ASEAN-India Economic Relations Current Status and Future Prospects" paper analyzed although there has been an increase in the volume of political and economic connections between ASEAN and India, there hasn't been much movement in the evolution of elite ASEAN attitudes in some nations toward deeper engagement with India. Additionally, ASEAN institutions, think tanks, and the media seem to lack knowledge of or interest in India. As a result, even if the de facto ASEAN plus the economic

relationship between ASEAN and India has been growing steadily in recent years, but there are still some challenges that need to be addressed before the relationship can be fully optimized. While there is a natural grouping between ASEAN and India that could lead to an expansion of the existing ASEAN Plus Three framework to ASEAN Plus Four, various biases and concerns are impeding progress in this regard.

Priya Chacko (2015) “The New Geo-Economics of a “Rising” India: State Transformation and the Recasting of Foreign Policy”. This article explored how both ideological and practical factors of state evolution have influenced India's global involvement across various eras. To illustrate, it delved into a specific case study on energy policy.

Umbreen Javaid and Rameesha Javaid (2016) “Strengthening Geo-strategic bond of Pakistan and China through Geo-economic Configuration” this study aids in examining the incorporation of the geo-economic dimension into the geo-strategic relationship between China and Pakistan, particularly with regard to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, within the evolving geopolitical landscape.

Suparna Roy (2016) “Review of Trade Relations between India and other SAARC Nation and its Challenges” study examined the historical context of trade relations between India and other SAARC nations. Additionally, it aims to shed light on the current status, trade balance, and interdependence between India and other SAARC countries.

Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Colin Flint (2017) “The Geopolitics of China’s Maritime Silk Road Initiative”, in this article, the author examined China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative, which comprises two distinct components: the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). These components were announced separately in 2013. The MSRI represents a geopolitical endeavour involving various stakeholders, including governments, private companies, and Chinese state-owned enterprises, operating across different geographic scales. Arrighi's conceptual framework, incorporating both territorial and economic power dynamics, is utilized to contextualize and link the articles in the special section, offering insights into the multifaceted geopolitics of the MSRI and illustrating its complexity and dynamism as a large connectivity project.

Parvaiz Ahmad Thoker and Bawa Singh (2017) “The Emerging China, Pakistan, and Russia Strategic Triangle: India’s New Gordian Knot”. The emergence of a triple alliance comprising China, Russia, and Pakistan in South Asia stems from the desire to counterbalance the growing political, economic, and military ties between India and the United States. Following the Cold War, India leaned significantly towards the West, a shift that drew disapproval from this alliance. Consequently, Russia's recent warming of relations with China and Pakistan has strengthened the strategic bond between China and Pakistan. India's extensive collaboration with the US, especially after the civil nuclear deal, has facilitated the convergence of these three nuclear powers. As a result, South Asia has become an arena of interest for major global powers, with increasing involvement from various extra-regional players. This study primarily focuses on the rise of the South Asian Triple Axis and its potential implications for the growing strategic influence of India and the US.

Parvaiz Ahmad and Bawa Singh (2017) “Sino-Pakistan Friendship, Changing South Asian Geopolitics and India’s Post-Obama Option”, the alliance between China and Pakistan has consistently regarded India as a shared adversary, particularly as China acts counter to India's interests, especially given the increasing strategic cooperation between India and the US. Amidst this intricate scenario, which also involves implications for Central Asia, this article aims to identify India's geostrategic interests and potential future outcomes within the context of the robust friendship between China and Pakistan. Our primary findings indicate that in this evolving geopolitical landscape, Indo-US relations are set to become increasingly vital. However, India should not rely solely on US decisions and should proactively pursue its own strategic initiatives.

Bhim Nath Baral (2018) “Changing Dynamics of Nepalese Foreign Policy: Patterns and Trends” Making foreign policy has become challenging due to the tendency of governments and leaders to shift their foreign policy stances frequently. The nation was constantly in danger of dying out due to its geostrategic location on the one hand, and its ongoing political unrest on the other. Two Asian countries that are close by and their security concerns have increased the threat to our independence.

The determination of foreign policy decisions has been influenced by all of these factors.

Smruti S. Pattanaik (2019) “India’s Policy Response to China’s Investment and Aid to Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives: Challenges and Prospects”, the strategic landscape in South Asia has undergone significant changes following the introduction of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While China highlights the economic benefits of investing in infrastructure and energy projects, the strategic implications are also evident. China's extensive lending has resulted in indebtedness among recipient countries, enabling Beijing to establish a strategic foothold in the region, which India perceives as crucial to its security interests. Despite India's aid efforts focusing on its neighbouring countries, its assistance remains relatively modest compared to China's, and is hindered by delivery challenges. This article investigates India's policy reaction to China's increasing presence in the region.

Rakesh Kumar (2019) “India & South Asia: Geopolitics, regional trade and economic growth spillovers”. The paper underscored the significant impact of India's economic growth and regional trade on the economic growth of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan, both in the short and long term. The author's analysis offers valuable insights for policy implications, emphasizing the importance of greater trade openness for achieving balanced economic development in the region. India has the potential to serve as an engine of growth and therefore needs to take a leading role in advancing the objectives of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) through political and diplomatic initiatives.

Pramod Kumar (2019) “India's Geostrategic Aspects and Security Scenario”. Geography has exerted a profound influence on India's historical trajectory, shaping its insular perspective and strategic mindset. India's strategic positioning, vast size, and dense population have all played a role in its significance, particularly in the Indian Ocean region and on the global stage. Ranked as the 13th most globalized nation, India's future trajectory is intricately linked to global developments. The diverse geographical landscape across different regions of India has contributed to varied progress, providing insight into its past development and potential future directions.

Angana Das 'India's Neighbourhood Policy' paper discussed India's recent efforts to promote peace in South Asia are examined, along with the country's policies towards its immediate neighbourhood. The SAARC member states are considered to be India's near neighbours and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'neighbourhood first' foreign policy strongly emphasises the need of improving ties between India and its neighbours. The report makes a number of recommendations for continued engagement between India and its neighbours as well as for possibility for newer integration in order to advance peace in the region.

1.6 Research Gap

Traditionally, India has maintained hegemony over the Indian sub-continent or South Asia due to its large geographical size and economy. However, over time, the rise of China has led to a decline in India's hegemony in the region.

This has been creating and change in India sub-continental geopolitical change. Countries like Nepal, whose relationship with India was historically close, are now showing signs of shifting towards China. This shift can be attributed to Nepal's political alignment with China and its growing economic ties with the country. Similarly, Bhutan, a country that has long been aligned with India, is also beginning to show signs of shifting towards other major powers such as China. Against this backdrop of changing geopolitical dynamics, the Himalayan region has emerged as a key area of research, particularly focusing on how these smaller states navigate the influence of major powers like India and China in the South Asian geographic realm.

1.7 Hypothesis

- 1 The rise of China in the South Asian region has resulted in a geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region.
- 2 Among Bhutan and Nepal, the latter is capable of playing a balancing role in the Himalayan geopolitical crisis.

1.8 Objectives

1. To understand the nature and importance of Himalayan region in the geopolitics of Indian subcontinent.
2. To examine the geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China.
3. To analyse the treaties and agreement and border relations of concerned countries with India.
4. To evaluate the current scenario of Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China.

1.9 Research Methodology

The present research work collected primarily from secondary sources and also from primary sources. Sample size for Primary data collection was done by 50 various experts and academicians, like professors, research fellows, and military officers who were posted at border areas through telephonic communication and questionnaires. Data collected at the time of COVID-19; at that time, it was impossible to cover a large sample size. On the basis of data collection, analysis was done using a 5-point Likert scale.

The majority of good quality PhD work typically draws more heavily on primary sources. However, this study relies more heavily on secondary sources, such as books, journals, articles, and papers presented in publications and lectures. Data, declarations, speeches, and official publications have all been taken into account when using primary sources to assess a problem. Additionally, information for articles, documents, and data is gathered from online sources.

Proposed research will be based on historical, analytical, qualitative and quantitative methods. According to research study there are two variables; Dependent and Independent. Geopolitics crisis of Himalayan region is an independent variable and emerging responses from Nepal, Bhutan, India and China is dependent variable.

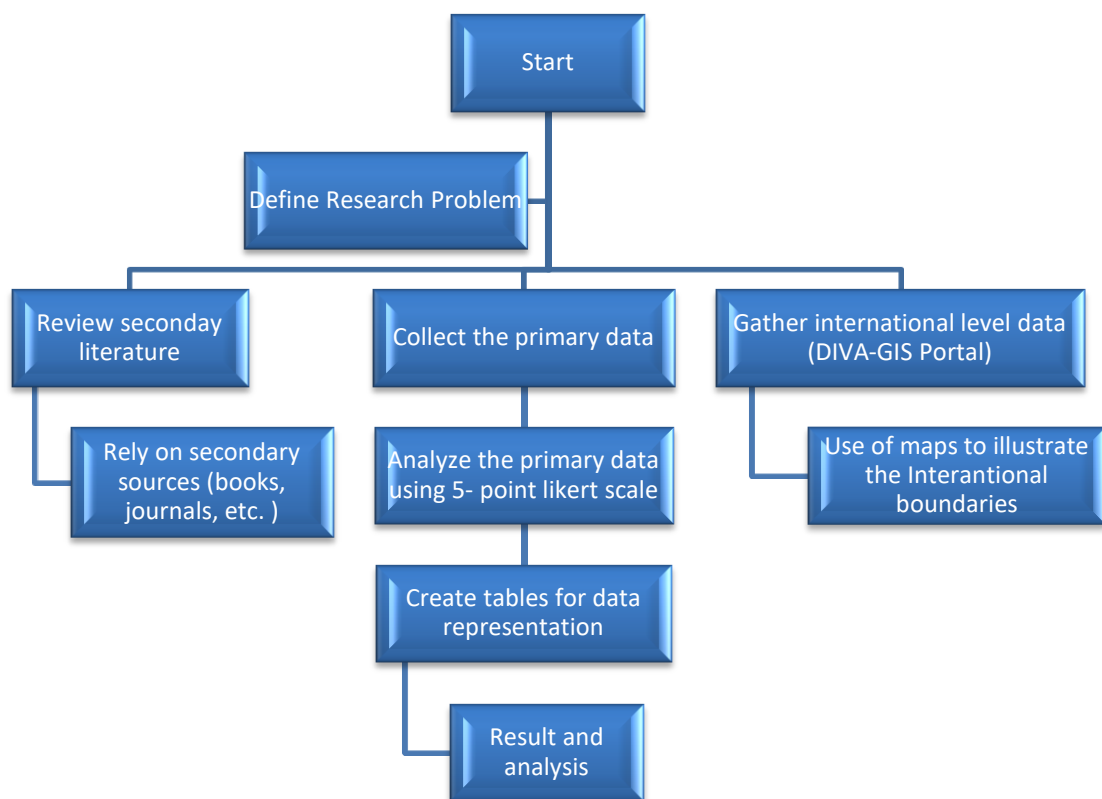
International level data such as administrative boundaries, water, roads are retrieved from DIVA-GIS portal:

<https://www.diva-gis.org/gdata>

Tables: Tables are representing data set in simple and organized way.

Maps: Maps are used for show the international level data such as countries' administrative boundaries, water, road and disputed territories.

Flow Chart of Methodology



CHAPTER II

EMERGING GEOPOLITICAL CRISIS IN HIMALAYAN REGION

2.1 Geopolitics: At Glance

Geographical location is a fundamental aspect of international relations. It can have a significant impact on a state's economic, political and military power, as well as its relationships with other states. For example, a state with a large coastline and a strategic location can have an advantage in terms of trade and access to resources, while a state located in a landlocked region may face greater challenges in terms of trade and transportation (Faye, ML. et al., 2004). Similarly, a state that shares a border with a powerful neighbour may be more vulnerable to security threats, while a state that is isolated from potential aggressors may be more secure. Overall, geography plays a crucial role in shaping international relations (Ashworth, 2013).

The term "geopolitics" is a combination of the words "geo" and "politics." Geographical variables, such as location, temperature, natural resources, physical topography, and demographic traits, are referred to as "geo" (Nordhaus, 2006). However, "politics" was a struggle to advance one's interests. The study of how geography affects state behaviour is known as geopolitics. Studies have looked at how factors including geography, climate, natural resources, topography, and demographics affect a state's choice of foreign policy and where it falls in the state hierarchy (Spykman, 1938). The connection between political processes and geographical locations and views is what is meant by the term "geopolitics" in its literal sense.

It is essential to say a few words about geography when discussing geopolitics. Geography is a social science that deals with the study of the physical features of the earth, its atmosphere, and its human and natural environments. The study of landforms, climate, vegetation, water bodies, natural resources, and the geographic spread of human activities and cultures are only a few of the many themes it covers. Geography helps us understand the relationships between people, places, and the environment, and how they influence each other. Therefore, Geography is concerned with the study of the Earth's physical and human systems and how they interact with

each other. Physical geography deals with the study of natural features of the Earth such as mountains, rivers, oceans, and climate, while human geography examines the economic, socio-cultural, and political aspects of human activities on the Earth's surface. The two major systems that geography focuses on are the natural environment and human societies, and how they interact with each other.

According to Robert Strausz-Hupe, geography is concerned with how things actually are, rather than how one could wish they were. According to Nicholas Spykman, geography is just what it is; it does not debate.

2.1.1 Geography and Politics

Geography examines how humans and the environment interact. Man, and the environment interact in two ways: first, the environment influences him, and second, he influences the environment. Additionally, it examines how people engage with one another through economic, social, and political activities as well as how individuals interact with space, locations, and one another. Politics is therefore the distribution of authority, resources, and public goods among the inhabitants of a certain geographically defined area.

Politics and geography interact and have an impact on one another. Climate is an environmental component that directly affects individuals, and it has been proposed that it is the primary cause of the racial differences in man's skin colour, size, and shape. Geographical proximity can be friendly or antagonistic in the relationship between States. A thorough understanding of geography provides the immediate environment for battle and influences how war will turn out. The adage "The best-informed wins the final battle" by Haushofer is pertinent here (Cahnman, 1943). This shows that geography has a big impact.

Since ancient times, the state has understood the value of its geographic location. Aristotle noted that Athens had hills for protection and a harbour for the growth of marine trade, which contributed to its ascent to power as a State. Aristotle notes that huge nations grow on the vast expanses of level and flat terrain, but regions of variable topography emerge in a number of political states (Norris, 1980). The vast countries in the flat sections of South America and the small nations in the mountainous regions are both excellent examples of this concept.

In the sixteenth century, work by Jean Bodin revealed the connection between geography and politics once more. According to Bodin's "Six Livres de la Republica," changes in geography and climate have an impact on national traits. Because national character varies depending on the environment, so too do state political systems. Bodin used the strong, disciplined, and brave characteristics of people who live in cold climates and mountains to demonstrate his claim about how they sustain political independence. Contrarily, plain regions are vulnerable to invasion due to both their difficulty in defence and the nature of the people that inhabit them. (Norris, 1980).

Jean Bodin was a French philosopher and political theorist of the 16th century who contributed to the development of modern political theory. Bodin is best known for his work "Six Books of the Commonwealth," in which he argued that the state was the supreme political authority and that the monarch had absolute power.

Bodin believed that the environment played an important role in shaping political systems, but he also believed that human reason could overcome such variables. He argued that a society's political institutions, laws, and customs were shaped by the physical and environmental conditions of the region in which they lived. However, he also believed that humans had the ability to use their reason to create new institutions and laws that were not necessarily determined by the environment.

Overall, Bodin believed that the relationship between environment and politics was complex, and that while the environment could influence political outcomes, human reason and agency also played an important role in shaping political systems.

Montesquieu used global geography in global politics in the seventeenth century. He was particularly interested in how people, their laws, and their political systems were affected by climate and topography. He also discussed the impact of geographic features like continents and islands on political independence. By asserting that cold temperatures are linked to political freedom whereas warm climates result in despotism and slavery, Montesquieu reiterated some earlier beliefs (Norris, 1980).

Like Aristotle, Montesquieu believed in the theory of environmental determinism, which states that a society's physical environment shapes its social and

cultural characteristics. He argued that different environments produced different types of people and institutions. However, he also believed that humans have the ability to overcome environmental constraints through their own efforts and adapt to changing circumstances. He believed that social and political progress could be achieved through human rationality and ingenuity, and that people could use their intelligence to overcome the constraints of their physical environment. In this way, he recognized both the influence of the environment on politics and the potential for human agency to shape the course of history (ibid.).

Politics has an impact on a region's boundaries as well. The geographical location of any state also affects its foreign policy. One example is the Maldives. Its main foreign policy objective is to increase public awareness of the threats that climate change poses to the Maldives. If these impacts are left uncontrolled, the Maldives and other low-lying island countries and coastal areas could be in danger of flooding or perhaps total submersion, which would result in the eviction of millions of people and the destruction of entire nations. This is why there is a growing urgency among nations to take action to address climate change and mitigate its effects. This imperils the State's ability to maintain its borders. The Maldives prioritises global warming protection over all other nations since it is the most important foreign policy principle.

The realist international relations thinker Morgenthau also acknowledges the significance of geography in international relations. When describing the components of national power, (Morgenthau, 2001) regarded "Geography" as one of the key determinants of national power. He addresses two categories of factors, the first of which is relatively stable, and the second of which is subject to constant change. He claimed that the most reliable component on which a nation's power depends is its "geography."

He cites the example of how the US's continental region is separated from other continents by oceans. The US's place in the world is permanently influenced by its size, which is more than 6000 miles broad to the west and 300 miles wide to the east (Morgenthau 2001). Even though transportation and military technologies have advanced, every country must consider this reality while determining its policy.

Morgenthau viewed international politics as a struggle for power and saw power as a key element for the survival of a state. The ability of a state to obtain and control these resources might have a substantial impact on its foreign policy and international position, in his opinion, as they were essential elements of power and national existence. Morgenthau argued that a state's foreign policy should be driven by its national interests, which were shaped by a combination of factors, including its geography, demography, economic resources, and military capabilities.

In the above discussion, it was discovered that politics and geography are intertwined, with politics also having an impact on the geographic limits of States. National power is also affected by geography.

2.1.2 Definitions

Kjellen was the one who initially introduced the term "geopolitics" in 1899 (Cohen, 2003), explained: "The theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space".

Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) was a German army officer, geopolitician, and professor of geography but he is known for his influential works on geopolitics, which sought to examine the relationship between geography, politics, and international power dynamics. Haushofer was a prominent member of the German military and advised Adolf Hitler on foreign policy matters, whose ideas were inspired with Nazism and also called the father of German Geopolitik. Haushofer developed the geopolitics with the help of various sources like Alexander Humboldt, Karl Ritter, Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen and Halford John Mackinder. He defined the geopolitics (Cohen, 2009).

"Geopolitics is the new national science of the state, ... a doctrine on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography."

According to Patrick Sullivan (1986) "geopolitics is the study of geography of relations between powers, be they rulers of nations or transnational bodies"

Geoffrey Parker, a British historian stated about geopolitics (Cohen, 2009).

“Geopolitics is the study of international relations from a spatial or geographical perspective.”

Saul Bernard Cohen is an American human geographer who describes geopolitics in his own words in his book ‘Geopolitics the Geography of International Relations, (Cohen, 2009).

“Geo-politics is the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other, political processes. The settings are composed of geographical features and patterns and the multilayered regions that they form. The political processes include forces that operate at the international level and those on the domestic scene that influence international behaviour. Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, each influence and are influenced by the other.”

2.1.3 Domestic and International Politics

Domestic politics refers to politics in interactions between citizens of a state. Domestic politics are based on national legislation, which also serves as the framework for government. Domestic politics include even laypeople and is characterised by peaceful legislation, administration, and persuasion. Individuals are subject to the state's coercive authority in domestic politics.

International politics is the study of interactions between countries, and the common individual has no interest in it. Groups of countries' needs, desires, and disputes are referred to as interests and conflicts, respectively, in international politics. Conflict and the threat of war are key concepts in understanding international politics. The foundation of international politics is international law. The presence of groups that engage in international politics is its primary goal, and the existence of a sovereign state is its ultimate goal because it is constantly in danger from other states. These independent states are ruled by lax laws.

2.2 Evolution of Political Geography and its Application in Present World

The development of geopolitics can be broken down into several schools of thought and phrases that are related to one another as a subject of perceptive investigation and as a tool for understanding the foreign policy behaviour of nation-

states. For instance, the German School of Thought corresponds with the first phase of the evolution of the concept of geopolitics, whereas the English School of Thought corresponds with the second.

2.2.1 German School of Thought

The German school of thinking, which was strongly linked to the German soil, culture, dialect, and identity, was responsible for the theory and practice of geopolitics. Since it was transmitted by and associated with Germans, it can therefore be categorically considered a German science. Geopolitics, according to Wickham Steed and George Kiss, is the result of consistently German goals and ideology. The notable scholars who contributed to the German School of thought were Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen, and Karl Haushofer.

In the past, political geography and "anthropogeography" were the roots of geopolitics. It combines political geography with human geography. The study of the interaction between a state and its territory is known as political geography. The term "anthropogeography," which means "human geography," was also employed by the Ratzel in his studies (Barua, M. 2018). The most significant entity here is the *Anthropos* or man. Nobody discusses the individual or the human in international relations; only the state is mentioned. This is not the case in geopolitics. More layers of analysis are attempted in geopolitics than in international relations. This is why there have been issues with this field of study since some academics believe it is not a precise science because it is too wide and involves too many levels in a single notion (Dugin, 2019).

Numerous causes contributed to the development and widespread use of geopolitics as a framework for foreign policy in Germany. In 1871, the German people achieved political union, and the German Empire rose to prominence as a major force in Europe. Few thinkers have made the case that Germany actually started the First World War in an effort to extend its political dominance. Germany's loss of a substantial chunk of her territory to allied forces in World War I and the terms of the "Treaty of Versailles" both served as shocks to its sense of national pride (Neiberg, 2017).

The German academics' replication of pre-war objectives as post-war rights did not occur in a vacuum. German post-war goals were greatly influenced by the Treaty of Versailles, which put an end to World War I and severely restricted Germany. The treaty was widely viewed in Germany as a national humiliation and led to a sense of resentment and desire for revenge. Many Germans believed that the treaty was unjust and sought to overturn its provisions, including territorial losses and war reparations (Laffan, 2020).

This sense of grievance and desire for a "proper place" in the world was exploited by German academics, politicians, and military leaders in the interwar period, who sought to reestablish Germany's dominance in Europe and expand its territorial and economic power. In the end, this triggered the start of World War II and the destruction that followed.

Hitler employed aggressive geopolitical measures throughout the interwar period to advance the objectives of the German people, which were based on Bismarck's dictum that Germany deserved its place in the sun. As a result, Germany attacked Poland in 1939, starting a new World War. Thus, three interests; wanting to reclaim lost territory, reclaim its glory, and seize enough lebensraum (living space) to support its population dominated German policies during the interwar period.

Primarily, German anthropologist and geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) is credited with developing the concept of geopolitik. Ratzel is credited with founding political geography and is frequently referred to as the father of contemporary political geography. He wrote a piece titled "Organic State Theory" in 1897 that discussed how the state is similar to an organism. He talked about how states are like some primitive organisms in that they can never stop growing or dying. A state's decision to enlarge its border at the expense of another state is a sign of its internal strength. To survive, the powerful state needs room to expand. Each state represents a section of the world and a piece of humanity (Taylor, 2017).

He coined the phrase "Lebensraum" for the first time (living space). He argued that superior people should have the freedom to outpace their less-privileged neighbours in terms of living space. He made it clear that a state, like a simple creature, must either grow or perish and can never remain stationary. This lebensraum

theory, which holds that superior peoples (nations) have the right to extend their territories at the expense of inferior neighbours, is what gave rise to the debate between superior and inferior races. When a state expands its borders at the expense of a weak state, he explained, this is a reflection of its internal strength. Thus, the superior nations' rule over the weaker peoples satisfies an intrinsic need. Ratzel's theory served as the foundation for German policy (Adhikari, 2015).

He shaped Germany's geographical structure and built the country's real geopolitical order. His most famous works were the 1897 book "Politische Geographie," which compared the "state" to an organism, and the 1896 article "Laws on the Spatial Growth of States." Ratzel believed that borders were defined as dynamic lines that only indicated a certain condition in a spatial context between two states, and he described the state in his observations as an organism fixed in the soil (Sharghi, 2021). Stronger states are absorbed along the process, and eventually, only a few complex states are left to compete for dominance. Boundaries expand and show the aggressive state's extensive jurisdiction.

Darwin's Theory of Species Evolution impacted Ratzel. He used Darwin's theory to analyse human societies. This comparison implied that a group of people would have to work just as hard to survive in a given environment as would plants and other living things. Social Darwinism is the name for this. Ratzel believed in the principle of the fittest surviving in a given environment, so to speak. He waged a vigorous campaign in the 1890s to urge Germany to acquire foreign colonies and strengthen its naval fleet in order to confront Britain. His way of thinking reflected how the Darwinist battle for existence had geographical ramifications. States must develop in order to prosper, and higher types of civilisations must flourish at the expense of lower ones, according to the rules of territorial growth. Ratzel's opinions complemented Germany's territorial ambitions. Anglo-American geographers disapproved of Ratzel's writings because, after his passing and the First World War, German geopoliticians revived his theories to serve their own goals (Adhikari, 2015).

Rudolf Kjellen (1864-1922) was a Swedish political scientist and professor of political geography at the University of Uppsala. He is best known for coining the term "geopolitics" in his 1899 book "Staten som livsform" "(The State as a Living

Organism)”, where he explored the relationship between geography and politics (Parker, 1985).

Kjellen believed that the state was a living organism that needed living space to survive and grow, and that the state's power and influence were largely determined by its geographical location and resources. He argued that the study of geography was essential to understanding the state's strategic and political interests, and that the state needed to have control over its geographical environment in order to ensure its security and prosperity (ibid.).

Kjellen's concept of geopolitics influenced many scholars and policymakers in the early 20th century, particularly in Germany, where it became closely associated with the rise of Nazi ideology and territorial expansionism. However, Kjellen himself was not a supporter of imperialism or militarism, and his work focused primarily on the academic study of political geography (ibid.).

Ratzell's theory of states and conception of living things were enhanced by Kjellen. He adopted the growth laws and declared that important governments had to enlarge their territory through invasion, merger, or colonisation. According to Kjellen, a nation must meet three criteria in order to be a global power (Noriss, 1980). The first need is that states be "spacious," or situated within a sizable infectious area. Second, for a state to be powerful, there must be internal coherence. Third, Kjellen argued that great states require a degree of mobility. Kjellen supported the Scandinavian block to counter this threat because despite being aware of the threat that Russia's expansionist tendencies posed to his own country, Sweden, he thought that it wasn't enough to act something.

Kjellen's main focus was on the relationship between geography and politics, and he believed that a state's power was influenced by its geographical location and its ability to expand its territory. The final objective of a state was seen as the achievement of natural frontiers externally and a harmonious unity internally. According to Kjellen, geopolitics means the natural environment of the state. In his analysis of the state, he made certain distinctions- “geopolitics was concerned with the relationship of geography and state; “demopolitik” with population and state;

“econopolitik” with economic resources and state; “sociopolitik” with society and state.

Kjellen developed his views during a time of uncertainty in Europe, which was marked by the emergence of new nation-states and the decline of empires. The political map of Europe was being redrawn, and Kjellen sought to provide a theoretical framework for understanding these changes (Newman, 1998). His ideas about the importance of geography and the nation-state influenced many political leaders and policymakers in the early 20th century. However, some of his ideas were also controversial and contributed to the rise of aggressive nationalism and territorial expansionism in Europe.

Thus, he advocated for a strong state and considered Germany as an idealized model of such a state. Kjellen believed that control of land and resources would be more important than control of the seas in the future, and that Germany, with its central location and ample resources, would become a dominant world power. He believed that Germany would be able to expand its influence through a combination of military might, economic power, and cultural influence, and that it would be able to establish a new order in Europe and beyond. His ideas were influential in shaping the geopolitical thinking of German leaders in the years leading up to World War I (Scholvin, 2016).

Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) was a German army officer, geographer, and geopolitician who developed a theory of Geopolitik that aimed to explain the strategic interests and territorial ambitions of nations. The works of previous geopolitical thinkers like Halford Mackinder, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Friedrich Ratzel, and Rudolf Kjellen had a significant impact on Haushofer.

Mackinder's theory of the Heartland and the World Island, which posited that control of the Eurasian landmass was the key to global domination, was particularly influential for Haushofer. Haushofer adapted Mackinder's ideas to his own theory of Lebensraum, which argued that Germany needed to expand eastward into the Soviet Union in order to gain access to the resources and territory it needed to become a world power.

Haushofer also drew on Mahan's theories of sea power, which emphasized the importance of naval dominance in global affairs, and Ratzel's concept of the organic state, which viewed nations as living organisms that needed to expand in order to survive. Kjellen's theories of the state as a biological organism and the importance of geopolitical factors in shaping foreign policy also influenced Haushofer's thinking.

Overall, Haushofer's theory of Geopolitik drew on a wide range of intellectual influences, including earlier geopolitical theorists as well as his own experiences traveling and studying in Asia. He founded the journal together with other prominent German geographers, including his former student Hans Grimm and the geographer and writer Karl Allmenroder. The journal aimed to promote the study of Geopolitik and to provide a platform for discussion and debate among scholars and practitioners interested in the strategic and territorial aspects of international relations (Vihma, 2018).

Under Haushofer's leadership, the journal became associated with nationalist and expansionist views, advocating for German territorial expansion and the creation of a pan-European federation under German leadership. The journal was also notable for its anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic views, reflecting Haushofer's belief in the importance of a German-dominated Lebensraum in Eastern Europe.

Karl Haushofer borrowed the term "geopolitics" from the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen and developed his own distinctive understanding of the term. Haushofer distinguished geopolitics from traditional political geography, which he saw as overly descriptive and lacking in strategic insight. For Haushofer, geopolitics was a more dynamic and strategic approach to understanding the relationship between geography, power, and international relations. Geopolitics, in his view, involved analyzing the spatial aspects of political power and exploring the strategic implications of geographical features such as natural resources, climate, and topography.

Haushofer saw geopolitics as an interdisciplinary field that drew on geography, history, economics, and military strategy. He believed that any state trying to effectively advance its national interests in a complex and competitive international system needed to have a firm grasp of geopolitics (Jacobson, 1968).

Overall, Haushofer's understanding of geopolitics was rooted in a belief that geography was not merely a neutral backdrop to political and military action, but rather a crucial factor that shaped the possibilities and constraints of statecraft. His vision of geopolitics as a strategic and interdisciplinary approach to international relations helped to establish the field as a distinct and influential intellectual tradition.

"Political Geography views the state from the standpoint of space; geopolitics views space from the standpoint of the state". Further, Haushofer borrowed the term "Autarky" from Rudolf Kjellen, and he believed that economic self-sufficiency was an essential component of his vision for German Geopolitik (Bassin, 2021).

Haushofer saw Autarky as a means of achieving national economic independence and reducing Germany's vulnerability to external economic pressures. He believed that a great power like Germany should strive to produce everything that it needed domestically, so that it could be self-sufficient and free from dependence on other states.

According to Haushofer, Autarky would help to create a strong and stable economic foundation for Germany, allowing it to pursue its geopolitical goals without being constrained by external economic factors. He saw Autarky as a way of ensuring that Germany had the resources and economic strength to compete with other great powers on the global stage.

Haushofer's emphasis on Autarky was in part a response to Germany's experience during World War I, when the country had faced severe shortages and economic difficulties due to its reliance on imports. He believed that Autarky was a way of ensuring that Germany would not be vulnerable to such pressures in the future and could maintain its position as a great power. (Noriss, 1980).

Karl Haushofer borrowed the term "Lebensraum" from Friedrich Ratzel and developed his own understanding of the concept as a core component of his vision for German Geopolitik (Jacobson, 1968). The concept of "Lebensraum," a country has both the right and the obligation to increase its territorial authority in order to provide enough room and resources for its citizens. He believed that the natural growth of population within a nation would inevitably create competition for resources and space, leading to friction and conflict within the international system (Hirst, 2014).

Therefore, he argued, it was the responsibility of stronger nations to increase at the outlay of weaker ones in order to ensure their own survival and success.

Haushofer saw the acquisition of Lebensraum as a fundamental component of great power politics, and he believed that the successful expansion of a state would lead to the formation of larger, more powerful states with greater geopolitical influence. He argued that the acquisition of Lebensraum was not only a matter of territorial control, but also involved the acquisition of resources and strategic positions that would allow a state to project its power and influence beyond its borders (Child, 1979).

Haushofer's views on Lebensraum were controversial and contributed to the development of Nazi expansionist policies during World War II. However, it is important to note that Haushofer's concept of Lebensraum was not inherently tied to Nazi ideology, and other geopolitical theorists, such as Ratzel and Mackinder, had also developed similar ideas about the importance of territorial expansion for great powers (Herwig, 1999).

Karl Haushofer developed the concept of "Pan-regions" as a way of organizing the world into larger geopolitical entities. He argued that no nation could exist in isolation and that the future of international relations would be shaped by the competition between these larger regions.

According to Haushofer, there are three major Pan-regions that are arranged along a north-south axis. These were Pan-America, which was led by the United States, Pan-Asia, which included Japan as a frontier country, and Euro-Africa, which was governed by Germany. He also suggested the possibility of a fourth Pan-region consisting of Russia and India. In Haushofer's opinion, these Pan-regions, required to be both geographically sizable and economically self-sufficient. He saw the formation of Pan-regions as a way of achieving greater stability in international relations and reducing the risk of conflict between individual states (Cohen, 1991).

Haushofer also developed the concept of "dynamic frontiers", which rejected the idea of fixed borders as permanent barriers between nations (Kakel, 2011). Instead, he argued that borders were temporary halts on a nation's march toward achieving greater economic self-sufficiency and territorial expansion. He believed that

the creation of Pan-regions would help to overcome the limitations of fixed borders and enable nations to expand and compete more effectively on the world level.

It is important to note that Haushofer's views on Pan-regions and dynamic frontiers were controversial and influenced by his belief in the importance of territorial expansion for great powers. However, his ideas also reflected a broader trend in geopolitical thought during the interwar period, which emphasized the importance of larger geopolitical entities and the need for greater economic self-sufficiency.

However, it is important to note that Haushofer's ideas were controversial and have been criticized for their emphasis on territorial expansion and the creation of large geopolitical entities (Murphy, 2014). Some have argued that these ideas contributed to the rise of Nazi Germany and the pursuit of aggressive territorial expansion during World War II. Nonetheless, his ideas on geopolitics and the importance of geography continue to be studied and debated today.

Additionally, he contended that the dominance of major international powers in certain regions led to the division of the world into a number of pan-regions. Examples of these territories include the British Empire and the US's sphere of influence as a result of the Monroe Doctrine. Germany, in his view, held some overseas territories, and it was logical for Germany to assume more control over these regions as a great power seeking to expand its sphere of influence. It is worth noting that Haushofer's views on territorial expansion and the importance of controlling strategic areas were controversial and have been criticized for their potential contribution to aggressive territorial expansionism and the rise of Nazi Germany (ibid.).

Haushofer did make an analysis of warfare thought and believed that war had four phases and three dimensions. His analysis of the four phases of war included psychological warfare, ideological warfare, economic warfare, and military warfare. In the first phase, psychological warfare, a state aims to sway the rest of the world through its propaganda campaign. In the second phase, ideological warfare, a state prepares its citizens to think in terms of expansion and the need for space. In the third phase, economic warfare, the state prepares for war through the development of

munitions, equipment, and armies. Finally, in the fourth phase, military warfare, the actual battle takes place (Diner, 1999).

Haushofer also identified three dimensions of warfare, including land power, sea power, and air power. He argued that these dimensions should be developed equally in order to create a well-rounded military force. His ideas on the importance of psychological warfare and the development of a strong military force have been studied and debated by military strategists and geopolitical theorists (Jacobson, 1968).

Haushofer believed that the control of key geographic areas, such as trade routes, was essential for a country to become a successful world power. He considered the Suez and Panama Canals to be excellent examples of strategic locations that could be used to achieve a nation's goals. He emphasized that it was not enough to impose economic and ideological influence on other nations, but also necessary to have control over important geographic locations to ensure dominance in various regions of the world.

Haushofer was heavily influenced by Mackinder's concept of the Heartland, which referred to the vast central landmass of Eurasia that Mackinder believed was the key to world domination. Haushofer saw Germany as the natural power to control this region, which would provide the country with the resources and strategic depth it needed to achieve its geopolitical goals.

It is true that Haushofer was a member of the Nazi party and taught at a military academy during the Third Reich, there is no conclusive evidence that he was involved in the planning or execution of Nazi war crimes or atrocities. However, some historians believe that his ideas about geopolitics and the need for German expansion may have indirectly contributed to the aggressive policies of the Nazi regime. It is also worth noting that Haushofer's ideas were not unique to him and were part of a larger intellectual tradition that included other thinkers from various countries.

Indeed, the association of geopolitics with Nazi Germany and its aggressive territorial expansion during World War II tainted the field for many years. The term "geopolitics" became associated with imperialistic and expansionist policies and was viewed with suspicion and disdain in many parts of the world, especially in the West.

The perception of geopolitics as a tool for justifying aggression and domination lingered for several decades after the war. However, there has been a resurgence in interest in geopolitics as a topic recently, and academics have worked to disassociate the subject from its unfavourable connections with Nazism and imperialism.

Today, geopolitics is seen as a legitimate field of study that can provide insights into the complex relationships between geography, power, and politics in the modern world.

2.2.2 British School of Thought

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, Britain paid very little attention to geography, one of the oldest topics of human curiosity. Darwin's "Origin of Species" was published in 1859 and became popular among sociologists, geologists, and biologists (Caton, 2007). Following the adoption of this evolutionary theory, British academics began to consider the earth to be man's ancestral home. The end of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of geography as a discipline at British universities.

Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947) is known as the founder of the British School of Geography. Halford Mackinder's work brought the geopolitics of the globe into the realm of geography by attempting to explain the spatial relationship between the major world regions in terms of strategic positioning and spatial organisation.

"Britain and the British Seas," written by Mackinder, was released in 1902. This book, which displays a more developed and sensible approach to a regional interpretation of Britain and her oceans, is regarded as a classic in contemporary British literature. Before the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, Mackinder delivered the authoritative essay "Geographical centre of History." He developed the notion of the geographic pivot, commonly referred to as the Heartland. The heartland idea was put forth to explain land power, sea power, and how geography benefits the nation greatly. He put up a novel theory for the explanation of history using the unifying power of geography. He thought that there was the competition between land and marine powers. According to this theory, the continents of Eurasia and Africa make up a "World Island." He referred to the Heartland as the most inhospitable

region on the globe. Low population density and restricted access characterise this region. He encapsulated his ideas on global strategy in the well-known phrases:

“Who rules the East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules Heartland commands the World Island; who Rules the World Island commands the World”.

In accordance with Mackinder, the coastal regions have consistently been open to attack from the interior, while the interior has remained impervious to attack as long as sea power is prevented from reaching there. His principal objective was to develop a theory explaining how Britain's imperial authority might endure in the face of potential threats from Germany and Russia, the two major powers of the time. Thus, Mackinder, who was primarily concerned with the big picture in 1943, foresaw the threat of the entire heartland coming under Soviet rule and noted that Russia would then be able to invade the periphery of the "World Island" in the east, south, and west. According to Mackinder, Germany's partnership with Russia or Japan's influence over China should cause Great Britain and other Western European nations to exercise caution. These opinions show strong opposition from large powers to the idea of a dominant East.

Additionally, Mackinder suggested that the world had gone through three distinct geopolitical eras. The geographic pivot or key site for achieving worldwide dominance was in the closed heartland of Eurasia. Based on the idea that as the nineteenth century came to a finish, the age of maritime discovery, which started with Columbus was coming to an end. The following era of geopolitical influence would be built on advances in land transportation, which would reassert the importance of land-based power over sea power for political supremacy.

Since it was close to the borders of so many major countries, was inaccessible to naval force, and was strategically supported by an inner and outer crescent of land masses, this would result in a resurgence of Eurasia. Land transportation was the main mode of transportation during the third or early phase of geopolitical interaction. Thus, regardless of whether the mode of transportation predominated, Mackinder maintained that the eras of land, sea, and land transit once again shaped geopolitical ties, with the heartland remaining the crucial location on the global battleground.

Though to a lesser extent, the theories of Mackinder have had an impact on a number of theorists, notably Americans George Kennan and Nicholas Spykman. Mackinder also had an impact on Admiral Alfred Mahan's convictions that control of the sea lanes could prevent any Eurasian alliance from establishing world dominance. The book received greater notice in the US than it did in Britain. Karl Haushofer relied on his idea of the heartland to bolster his ambitious plan to rule the World Island. Mackinder published his prophetic notion of the Atlantic community that became reality after World War II and took on military form in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1924, cognizant of the lessons learned from World War I. (NATO). This school of thinking expanded the study of geopolitics by adding additional dimensions to the concept.

2.2.3 American School of Thought

Different scholars make up the American School of thought. The esteemed professors of this institution are Nicholas Spykman, Isaiah Bowman, and Alfred Thayer Mahan. By putting up their viewpoints, these academics contributed to the advancement of geopolitics. Although they have never used the phrase, the way they conducted their foreign policy clearly demonstrates the use of geopolitics.

The Monroe Doctrine, which was articulated in 1823, U.S. President James Monroe announced that the US would not accept any attempts by Europeans to colonise or meddle in the internal affairs of the newly established nations of Latin America. The doctrine became a cornerstone of American foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere and was seen as a way to protect U.S. interests in the region. Until and unless they attempted to encroach on the Western Hemisphere, European nations would be treated neutrally by the United States, according to the concept developed by previous American President James Monroe. Any attempt by a European state to rule this area would be seen as a possible challenge to American sovereignty. The Spanish-American War of 1898, however, might be viewed as a departure from this rule.

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), a renowned geopolitical expert in US history, made great efforts to inform the American people and their leaders of the value of geography and history in the study and practice of international affairs. The

“Influence of Sea Power upon the History: 1660-1783” was written in 1890 by Alfred Thayer Mahan, the director of the United States maritime War College and a lecturer on maritime history. It was a ground-breaking analysis of the role that naval might played inside the British Empire. Mahan emphasised the importance of maritime power over land power in this work and made the case that maritime preponderance is the fundamental tenet of foreign policy.

In his influential book "The Influence of Sea Power upon History," which was first published in 1890, Mahan argued that a nation's naval power was crucial to its ability to project military, political, and economic influence around the world. Mahan believed that the key to Britain's rise to global dominance was its powerful navy, which allowed it to control key sea lanes and project its power across the globe. He argued that other European powers, including France and Spain, had failed to maintain their naval strength and had consequently been surpassed by Britain.

Mahan's ideas had a significant impact on American foreign policy, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. American leaders recognized the importance of naval power and sought to build a strong navy that could help the United States become a major world power. Mahan's ideas also influenced the strategic thinking of other nations, including Germany and Japan, which sought to challenge British naval dominance and establish themselves as global powers. Overall, Mahan's ideas about the importance of naval power had a profound impact on the course of world history, shaping the strategies of major powers and influencing the outcome of numerous conflicts.

A. T. Mahan affected the thinking of many countries by arguing that the nations that gained and maintained control of the sea were those that dominated the world. The Sea served as a major thoroughfare for Mahan, or it may have served as a large public area where people could move in any direction but where some well-travelled routes indicate that people chose particular routes over others due to guiding factors. All states engage in trade, and seaborne trade is more prevalent in states that border the sea. (Adhikari, 1997).

He was a well-known advocate for "vigorous foreign policy." The US government's ability to guarantee access to upcoming international markets was

Mahan's main concern. Securing such access requires a merchant navy that can move American goods across the "great highways" of the high seas, a system of naval facilities that can supply the enlarged navy with fuel and supplies and the upkeep of open channels of communication between the US and its new markets.

He realised that maintaining the geopolitical plurality of Eurasia required the predominance of Anglo-American maritime power in the broadest sense. In light of that, he asked US policymakers to understand how the balance of power in Europe and Asia affects US security and interests. Mahan also predicted the Second World War's underlying geopolitical factors as well as the First World War's impending outbreak. He saw that Great Britain and eventually the US would face danger in the near future due to Germany's strategic location in Europe, unparalleled industrial and military prowess, and pursuit of sea dominance. The danger points for both European and global affairs is the competition between Germany and Great Britain.

Mahan also saw the basic geopolitical truths of the Cold War, which emerged from the ashes of the first two world wars, as early as 1901. He predicted that an alliance between the US, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Japan would be required to control an expansionist Russia, which was exactly what occurred between 1945 and 1991. But Mahan's foresight didn't stop there. He also envisioned a day when the US would need to be concerned about China's ascent and acknowledge the power potential of China.

Mahan's theories found favour with influential politicians in the 1890s, such as Theodore Roosevelt and Herbert Tracy. The US gained control of islands like Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines that could serve as naval bases and coaling stations when the Spanish American War was successfully ended in 1898. Mahan's works also influenced strategists in other countries, inspiring naval growth, especially in Japan, Germany, and England. In the years before World War I, Mahan had a tremendous impact on marine development, particularly in Germany. Mahan viewed military power as a way to prevent war, yet his views very obviously sparked the worldwide expansion that led to World War I. China in the twenty-first century has embraced Mahan, just like Germany did before World War One.

After World War I, the Monroe Doctrine was no longer a viable option for US foreign policy because it marked the beginning of the idealism movement in world politics. During the interwar years, idealism and liberalism were the cornerstones of US policy because President Woodrow Wilson was a strong advocate for liberal and moral values in international affairs. Due to its moral justification for entering the First World War, the US became a significant role in international politics.

Isaiah Bowman pushed for the US government's foreign policy professionals to become more geographically aware. He believed that having a solid grasp of political geography may give foreign policy professionals a valuable global perspective. For Bowman, the geography involved viewing the entire planet as a single space. He has generally demonstrated the importance of the connection between geographers and political power. His work, "New World: Problems in Political Geography," which highlighted the complicated effects of the 1919 peace accord, was released in 1922.

He also predicted that the US would play a bigger and bigger role in world politics. He rejected isolationists and believed that the US could be a key player in the expansion and advancement of the global economy. He contends that the authority to rule the territories should only be vehemently employed to ensure that free trade is widely disseminated through international agencies.

Nicholas Spykman was a prominent geopolitical scholar and strategist who had a significant influence on American foreign policy during the mid-twentieth century. His work emphasized the importance of geography in international relations and argued that the control of strategic land and sea routes was critical to maintaining power. Spykman believed that foreign politics was ultimately about power, and that states would always compete for influence and resources in order to secure their own interests. In his view, ideas and ideology were secondary concerns, and the struggle for power was the primary driver of international relations.

One of Spykman's key contributions to American geopolitical thinking was his concept of the "Rimland," which referred to the geographic region stretching from Western Europe to East Asia, including the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This area, according to Spykman, was strategically significant because it was home to

many of the most populous and resource-rich countries in the world, as well as vital sea and land routes that connected them. He believed that the United States needed to adopt a strategy of "containment" to prevent the expansion of Soviet influence in the Rimland during the Cold War. This strategy involved forming alliances with friendly nations in the region and maintaining a strong military presence to deter potential adversaries.

Spykman's approach to geopolitics emphasized the importance of geography and power in international relations, and his ideas continue to influence American foreign policy to this day. He rejected some aspects of Halford Mackinder's famous "heartland" thesis, but he did draw on Mackinder's ideas to develop his own theory of geopolitics. Mackinder's heartland theory argued that the control of the vast Eurasian landmass (the "heartland") would give a nation or alliance of nations the power to dominate the world. Mackinder believed that the heartland was accessible primarily by land transportation systems, which made it vulnerable to invasion and conquest.

Spykman maintained that the control of the Rimland Sea was more important than Mackinder's assertion that the heartland could be united through land transportation infrastructure (the outer fringe of Eurasia, including Western Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia) was more important in the post-World War II era. Spykman believed that the Rimland was strategically important because it contained many of the world's most populated and resource-rich nations, as well as critical sea and land routes connecting them.

However, Spykman did draw on Mackinder's thesis to advance the idea that a heartland existed and could be defined. Spykman argued that the heartland (which he called the "pivot area") was the geographic region of Eurasia that lay between the Rimland and the vast expanses of Siberia. He believed that the control of the pivot area was important because it provided a buffer zone between the Rimland and the potentially hostile powers of the interior.

Spykman claimed that the occupant of the heartland had a distinctive and significant defensive position, but he failed to acknowledge the extremely significant benefits Mackinder gave to the heartland. Spykman said that attaining global influence is more crucial for Eurasia's periphery than its core. He referred to this

region's margin as a rimland. He anticipated that rimland nations like Japan would probably grow into superpowers in the future. He believed that the Rimland was strategically important, he did not specifically argue that Rimland states received more innovation than heartland countries. However, Spykman did emphasize the importance of the Rimland's ability to leverage its resources and advantages in order to maintain power and influence in international relations.

The 'offshore' continents of Australia and Africa, according to Spykman, would have a significantly greater impact on determining geopolitics. Spykman asserts that Australia and Africa were the two regions with vast natural resource richness that were mostly overlooked in terms of their potential to become anything like superpowers. He discussed offshore continents with the US, Great Britain, and Japan before turning to the USSR. Spykman did not believe that all three organizations would become world powers. However, he did view Great Britain as a significant imperialist world power in his time.

Spymann's geopolitical approach focused primarily on the Eurasian continent and the surrounding Rimland, and he thought that the security and stability of the world depended greatly on the balance of power in this area. While he did not specifically address the potential rise of specific organizations, he analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of different regions and nations in terms of their geopolitical advantages and disadvantages.

According to Spykman, particularly the Soviet Union and the United States dominated the post-World War II era., with the United States occupying a position of strength in the Rimland and the Soviet Union controlling much of the heartland. He believed that the competition between these two superpowers was the central driving force in global politics during his time. While Spykman did not specifically address the potential rise of other organizations or nations as world powers, He did stress the significance of preserving a balance of power in the Eurasian region to prevent the emergence of prospective foes and to uphold international peace and stability.

American citizens were forewarned by Spykman that the First World War had not put an end to power politics and that the country had moved past the stage of isolation and inactivity in its foreign policy. He believed that the United States could

no longer maintain to remain isolated and passive in international affairs, given the changing geopolitical landscape and the increasing competition between global powers. In order to safeguard its own interests and preserve international stability, he contended that the United States needed to actively participate in determining the balance of power in the Eurasian region.

In particular, Spykman believed that the United States needed to maintain a strong existence in the Rimland in order to prevent the rise of potential adversaries and to maintain its position as a global superpower. He also believed that the United States needed to be proactive in promoting democracy and free markets around the world in order to counter the spread of communism and other authoritarian ideologies.

Additionally, before World War II concluded, Spykman prophesied that China would rise to prominence in Asia, Japan and Germany would lose the conflict, and that the US and the Soviet Union would continue to engage in hostilities. Spykman also envisioned a significant role for the US in the future. He believed that since both nations had ambitious geopolitical goals, war between the US and the Soviet Union was inevitable. In order to counteract the Soviet Union's potential aggression and defend Japan from China, Spykman thought it was crucial for the US to maintain its strength and resolve.

Spykman brought the word "geopolitics" from European politics to American politics. Some issues in US foreign policy have a geopolitical bent, despite the fact that the phrase was never used in that period between the end of World War II and the detente. Like Germany and the UK, the US adopted a geopolitical vision and changed its direction after the Cold War. According to the inclination of their foreign policy decisions, big nations have also used geopolitics during the Cold War and in the years after it.

Saul. B. Cohen divides the globe into two regions; geopolitical and strategic for the sake of geopolitical analysis. He analyses the world in terms of geographical patterns. According to Cohen, geostrategic zones are regions that are globally encompassing and have specific functions and qualities that have an impact on the entire world, including movement, trade orientation, and cultural or ideological ties.

He believed that these zones could be identified by their continuity of place, uniform geographical features, and complementarities of resources.

Cohen argued that geostrategic zones were important because they had a significant impact on the behaviour of states and the course of international politics. He believed that states would seek to control and dominate these zones in order to gain strategic advantages and advance their national interests. However, Cohen also emphasized that geostrategic zones were not uniform in their political or economic activity. Instead, they were often divided into smaller geopolitical regions, each with its own unique patterns of political and economic activity. These geopolitical regions were defined by the complementarities of resources and the patterns of trade and movement that characterized the larger geostrategic zone (Cohen, 1964).

Trade-Dependent Maritime World and Eurasian Continental World are these two geostrategic zones. The geographic division plan is based on location and movement. The place contains the locations of economic centres, major barrier zones, and regional populations; movements include trade orientation and ties between ideologies and cultures (Cohen 1964). The minor geopolitical regions that make up these geostrategic regions are further broken down. The maritime regions that depend on trade is made up of Anglo-America and the Caribbean, Maritime Europe and the Maghreb, South America, Off-Shore Asia, and Oceania. East Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Eurasian Heartland make up the Eurasian Continental World. The US is the dominant country in the maritime globe, which depends on trade, while Russia is the dominant country in the Eurasian continental region. In their respective geostrategic zones, Mainland China and Maritime Europe have risen to become the second power centres.

There is a Shatter belt spanning the Middle East and South East Asia between these two geostrategic areas. Bernard Cohen did indeed discuss the concept of "Shatter belts" in his work. According to Cohen, Shatter belts are regions that are strategically important and characterized by intense competition between rival states that are often caught between the competing interests of nearby great powers. These regions are often marked by political instability, conflict, and fragmentation, and are

shaped by complex patterns of cultural, economic, and political interaction (Cohen, 1964).

Regarding South Asia, Cohen did anticipate that it would become a distinct geopolitical entity due to its unique cultural and political characteristics. He thought that South Asia was becoming a major hub of power and influence in the world order and that its strategic significance would only increase in the coming years.

Regarding Africa south of the Sahara, Cohen did not argue that it was not a significant geopolitical region. Instead, he believed that the region was shaped by its relationships with the wider maritime world. Cohen argued that the trade-dependent nature of African economies, coupled with the historical legacies of colonialism and slavery, had created a complex set of relationships between African states and the wider world. These relationships had important geopolitical implications, as they shaped patterns of trade, migration, and political interaction that were critical to understanding the region's position in the international system.

2.2.4 Chinese School of Thought

Chinese geopolitical thinkers have played a significant role in shaping China's foreign policy and strategic outlook over the years. Here are some key Chinese geopolitical thinkers and their ideas:

Sun Tzu (c. 544-496 BC): Sun Tzu is one of the most famous Chinese military strategists and the author of "The Art of War." His work focuses on the principles of warfare, strategy, and tactics. Sun Tzu emphasized the importance of understanding the enemy, deception, and the use of intelligence in warfare.

Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997): Deng Xiaoping is known for his economic reforms, but he also had a significant impact on China's geopolitical thinking. He advocated for a policy of "hide your strength, bide your time" (taoguang yanghui), which meant that China should avoid provoking conflicts and focus on domestic development until it became more powerful.

Xi Jinping (born 1953): Xi Jinping, the current General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and President of China, has articulated the concept of the

"Chinese Dream." He has adopted a more assertive and nationalistic foreign policy approach, seeking to assert China's influence on the global stage.

2.2.5 Indian School of Thought

Chanakya (c. 350-283 BC): Chanakya, also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta, was an ancient Indian philosopher, economist, and strategist. He is best known for his treatise, the "Arthashastra," which covers various aspects of statecraft, including diplomacy, military strategy, and economics. Chanakya's ideas on realpolitik, espionage, and the balance of power continue to influence Indian strategic thinking.

K. Subrahmanyam (1929-2011): K. Subrahmanyam was a prominent Indian strategic thinker and policy analyst. He contributed to the development of India's nuclear doctrine and advocated for a robust national security strategy. He emphasized the importance of nuclear deterrence and modernizing India's armed forces.

C. Raja Mohan (born 1956): C. Raja Mohan is a contemporary Indian strategic thinker and a leading expert on India's foreign policy. His work focuses on India's relations with major powers, including the United States, China, and Russia. He has written extensively on India's role in shaping the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region.

Brahma Chellaney (born 1948): Brahma Chellaney is an Indian author and strategic thinker known for his writings on water security, geopolitics, and India's foreign policy. He has been a vocal advocate for a more assertive Indian stance on territorial and strategic issues.

2.3 Geopolitical Perspectives

A number of global conceptions of the interplay between geography and the relationships of world powers have been presented by geopolitical theorists (Child 1985: 24). The maritime, the continental, the aerospace and the resource perspective are the four basic geopolitical perspectives.

Geopolitics on Continental perspective: This perspective views armies and land control as crucial strategic elements in establishing global dominance. The

ultimate tool for projecting power and a nation's will, the navy and air force serve primarily to carry and support the army in battle.

Geopolitics on Maritime perspective: According to the geopolitical viewpoint, dominating the oceans is the best means to convey power and is essential to being a global superpower. Controlling maritime passages and bases on significant and vital Islands is necessary for a state to establish itself as a sea power. The State can then regulate the movement, trading, and transportation of military equipment.

Geopolitics on Airspace perspective: The development of technology in the sphere of combat led to the development of the aeronautical perspective. The use of fighter planes during World War I marked the beginning of aerial warfare, which would become increasingly important in subsequent conflicts. The development of strategic bombers and ICBMs during the Cold War further emphasized the importance of air power in global affairs. Alexander de Seversky is the main supporter of it.

Geopolitics on Resource perspective: The resource perspective is concerned with the impact of natural resources such as oil, minerals, and water on geopolitical relationships and power dynamics.

2.4 Geopolitical Realms

Geopolitical realms refer to broad geographical areas that share common geopolitical features and characteristics, such as physical geography, economic and political systems, cultural and ideological ties, and patterns of trade and migration. Geopolitical realms are often used as a way of grouping countries and regions into larger categories for the purpose of geopolitical analysis and understanding.

For example, some common geopolitical realms include:

2.4.1 The Western Realm

The Western geopolitical realm, also known as the Western world or the Western hemisphere, typically refers to the region encompassing Europe, North America, and Oceania. It is one of the most economically developed and politically

influential regions on the planet. Here are some key aspects of the Western geopolitical realm:

Europe: Europe is a major component of the Western geopolitical realm. It includes countries from Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. The European Union (EU) plays a central role in the political and economic integration of many European nations. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is a key security alliance that includes several European nations and the United States.

North America: North America comprises the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The United States, in particular, is a global superpower with significant economic, military, and political influence. The region has a shared history, with the United States and Canada having a long history of cooperation and Mexico being an important neighbor.

Oceania: Oceania includes Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Island nations. Australia and New Zealand are advanced economies and have strong political ties with Western nations, including the United States and the United Kingdom. The Pacific Island nations are diverse and have varying degrees of political and economic development.

Political Alliances: The Western geopolitical realm is characterized by a network of political alliances, such as NATO and ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty), which serve as security and defense partnerships.

Economic Power: The Western world is home to some of the world's largest economies, including the United States, the European Union, and Japan. It is a hub for global finance, trade, and technological innovation.

Western countries actively participate in and often lead various multilateral organizations and institutions, including the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The Western geopolitical realm plays a significant role in shaping global affairs, including international diplomacy, climate change negotiations, and efforts to combat global challenges such as terrorism and pandemics. The Western geopolitical realm faces various challenges, including political polarization, economic inequality,

immigration issues, and concerns about the impact of globalization on domestic industries.

2.4.2 The European Realm

The term "European geopolitical realm" refers to the region of Europe and the various geopolitical dynamics, relationships, and factors that influence the politics, security, and foreign policy of European countries. Europe is a continent with a rich history of power struggles, alliances, conflicts, and cooperation, and its geopolitical realm encompasses a wide range of issues and actors. Here are some key aspects of the European geopolitical realm:

Geographical Diversity: Europe is a continent characterized by diverse geographical features, including mountains, plains, rivers, and coastlines. These geographical factors can influence the strategic interests of countries and their interactions with one another.

European Union (EU): The European Union is a major geopolitical player in Europe. It is a political and economic union of 27 European countries that cooperate closely on issues such as trade, security, and governance. The EU has its own foreign policy, common currency (Euro), and institutions, making it a significant force in the region.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization): NATO is a military alliance of European and North American countries formed to ensure collective defense against common security threats. It plays a crucial role in the security dynamics of the European geopolitical realm, especially in countering potential threats from Russia.

Russia is a major player in European geopolitics due to its vast territory that spans Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. Its actions and policies, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, have a significant impact on the region's stability and security.

Countries in Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic States, have been a focal point of geopolitical competition between Russia and the West. Issues such as NATO enlargement, energy security, and historical tensions are prominent in this region.

The Balkans have been historically characterized by ethnic and political tensions. Conflicts in the 1990s, such as the Yugoslav Wars, had a significant impact on European geopolitics. The EU and NATO have played roles in stabilizing the region. The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (Brexit) has had profound geopolitical implications, affecting the UK's relationship with the EU and the dynamics within the EU itself.

Europe is heavily dependent on energy imports, particularly natural gas. Geopolitical considerations related to energy supply and infrastructure have an impact on European politics and foreign policy. European countries often form alliances and partnerships with other countries and regions, including the United States, China, and the Middle East. These alliances can shape Europe's geopolitical posture and influence its foreign policy decisions.

2.4.3 Eurasian Realm

The Eurasian geopolitical realm refers to the vast region that encompasses Europe and Asia, spanning from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. This region is of immense geopolitical importance due to its size, population, and strategic location. It includes a diverse array of countries with varying political systems, economic strengths, and cultural backgrounds.

Several major powers, including Russia, China, and the European Union (EU), have significant stakes in Eurasia. Russia's historical influence extends across much of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, while China's Belt and Road Initiative seeks to establish infrastructure and economic ties across the continent. The EU plays a key role in shaping the political and economic landscape of Western Europe.

Eurasia is rich in energy resources, including oil and natural gas. Countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan are major energy exporters, and the region's energy reserves have a substantial impact on global energy markets and geopolitics. The Eurasian landmass hosts several critical transportation corridors, including the Trans-Siberian Railway, the Silk Road, and various pipeline networks. These infrastructure projects are crucial for trade and connectivity between Europe and Asia.

The Eurasian realm has witnessed numerous geopolitical conflicts and disputes over the years, including the conflict in Ukraine, tensions in the South Caucasus, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and others. These conflicts often have global implications and are closely monitored by international actors. Various international organizations and initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), play roles in shaping regional cooperation and competition.

The geopolitical landscape in Eurasia is influenced by the interests and strategies of external powers, including the United States, which has sought to maintain a presence in the region to ensure stability and protect its own interests.

2.4.4 South Asian Realm

The South Asian geopolitical realm refers to the region in South Asia that encompasses several countries with shared geographical, historical, cultural, and economic ties. South Asia is known for its diversity, complexity, and significance in global geopolitics. The key countries in this region include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives. Here are some key aspects of the South Asian geopolitical realm:

India-Pakistan Rivalry: The long-standing rivalry between India and Pakistan has been a dominant factor in South Asian geopolitics since the two countries gained independence from British rule in 1947. The Kashmir conflict, nuclear proliferation concerns, and periodic border skirmishes have contributed to regional instability.

India's Dominance: India is the largest and most influential country in South Asia. It boasts the region's largest economy, military, and population. Its foreign policy decisions and actions significantly impact the entire South Asian region.

China's Influence: China has been increasing its influence in South Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which involves infrastructure projects in countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh. This has led to concerns about China's expanding presence in the region and its impact on regional dynamics.

Economic Dynamics: South Asia is home to a significant portion of the world's population and presents both opportunities and challenges for economic development. Countries like India and Bangladesh have experienced notable economic growth, while others still face developmental challenges.

Terrorism and Security: South Asia has been a hotspot for terrorism, with groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and the Taliban operating in the region. The global war on terror has had a substantial impact on South Asian geopolitics.

Regional Organizations: The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established to promote regional cooperation, but it has faced challenges due to political tensions, especially between India and Pakistan. Other subregional groupings like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) also play a role in regional cooperation.

Ethnic and Religious Diversity: South Asia is incredibly diverse in terms of ethnicity, languages, religions, and cultures. These diversities have led to complex internal dynamics and, at times, conflicts.

Water Disputes: Several major rivers, such as the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra, flow through South Asia, and water disputes are a common source of tension between countries in the region.

Humanitarian and Environmental Challenges: South Asia faces significant challenges related to poverty, healthcare, education, and environmental issues, including air pollution, water scarcity, and climate change impacts.

Overall, the South Asian geopolitical realm is marked by a delicate balance of cooperation and competition among its countries, as well as the influence of major external powers like the United States, China, and Russia. Geopolitical stability and economic development in South Asia have implications not only for the region but also for global security and trade.

2.5 China's Geopolitics in Indian Subcontinent

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a significant part of its strategy to expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. The BRI includes the construction of infrastructure projects such as ports, highways, railways, and pipelines across Asia, Africa, and Europe, with the aim of enhancing China's connectivity and economic ties with other countries.

China has been building artificial islands and military installations in the South China Sea, which has raised concerns among other countries in the region, including the United States. China has also been increasing its naval capabilities, including the development of aircraft carriers and advanced submarines, and expanding its maritime trade routes.

China's policy in the Indo-Pacific has both continental and maritime components as mentioned. The continental component involves the BRI and China's efforts to expand its economic influence in the region, while the maritime component involves China's naval expansion and its territorial claims in the South China Sea. These two components are connected, as China's naval presence in the region is intended to protect its economic interests and strategic investments, such as the ports and infrastructure built under the BRI.

Bangladesh plays a crucial role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which intends to build a huge network of infrastructure and trade linkages connecting China to markets and resources throughout the world. China has invested heavily in Bangladesh, particularly in the energy and transportation sectors, and has provided loans and financing for a number of major infrastructure projects, including the construction of power plants, seaports, and railways.

India has been making investments in Bangladesh's infrastructure, particularly in the fields of transport, electricity, and telecommunications, as well as seeing Bangladesh as a significant partner and participant in the region. Through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which includes Bangladesh and many other regional nations, India has also been seeking to strengthen its position in the region.

As a result, Bangladesh finds itself caught between the competing interests of China and India, both of whom are seeking to expand their influence in the country and the region. While Bangladesh has welcomed Chinese investment and financing, it has also been careful not to alienate India, which remains an important ally and trading partner.

China has also developed a novel strategy for containing India. The massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping, is a financial tactic that enables China to seize land in nations bordering India. This is known as the "debt trap" by analysts. According to a report by the think tank center for Global Development, based on a pipeline of project lending connected to BRI, eight countries, including the Maldives, which are in India's neighbourhood, and Djibouti, which is home to the only Chinese military base outside of China, are particularly at risk of debt distress.

China's approach is straightforward, it provides high-interest loans to smaller, less developed nations for infrastructure projects, buys stock in projects, and when the recipient nation is unable to pay back the loan, China takes control of the project and the land. It may exploit this land strategically to deter India.

China and Sri Lanka agreed to a \$1.1 billion lease for the 99-year use of the Hambantota port in 2017. This was a component of China's strategic aim to strengthen its influence in the Indian Ocean region as well as its Belt and Road Initiative. However, the move has been criticized by some analysts as it is feared that China could use the port for military purposes and it could increase Sri Lanka's dependency on China. China has recently provided Sri Lanka with sizable loans for infrastructural development. Sri Lanka is currently unable to pay back the loans.

In order to pay back its loans, it is leasing land to China. It will use a portion of the cash it receives from leasing the Hambantota port to pay off Chinese loans. This is how China infiltrates a nation through expensive loans. In the Maldives, a similar tale is also being told. Pakistan and Nepal are also at risk of getting caught in the Chinese debt cycle.

2.6 India's Geopolitics in Asia

India's geopolitics in Asia is also a complex and evolving topic, influenced by various factors such as geography, history, culture, and politics. The Himalayan region is of great importance to India's geopolitics due to its strategic location and its proximity to India's borders with China and Pakistan. Here are some key aspects of India's geopolitical strategy in the region:

Strategic partnerships: To offset China's dominance in the region, India has formed strategic alliances with nations like Japan, Australia, and the US. These alliances have also been made with the intention of strengthening Indian military and economic influence in the area.

Regional integration: India has taken a leading role in regional integration initiatives like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). These initiatives aim to increase economic cooperation and regional stability.

Territorial disputes: India has ongoing territorial disputes with China and Pakistan, which have been a source of tension and conflict. India's approach to resolving these disputes has been to maintain a strong military presence in the disputed areas while also pursuing diplomatic efforts.

Economic diplomacy: India has been pursuing economic diplomacy in Asia, with the goal of increasing its trade and investment ties in the region. This has included initiatives such as the "Act East" policy, which seeks to increase economic engagement with Southeast Asia.

Cultural influence: India has been promoting its cultural exports such as movies, music, and yoga to increase its soft power in the region. India has also been active in promoting its values of democracy and human rights in international forums.

Overall, India's geopolitical strategy in Asia is shaped by its desire to increase its influence in the region and counterbalance China's rising power. India's approach to achieving these goals has been a mix of strategic partnerships, regional integration, economic diplomacy, and military strength.

2.7 Himalayan Region: An Overview

The range spans over 2,400 kilometers and has an average elevation of around 6,000 meters, making it a significant physical feature with a significant impact on the geopolitics of the region. The greatest mountain chain in Asia and one of the newest mountain ranges in the globe spans the nations of Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. The Sanskrit terms "Hima," which means "snow," and "Alaya," which means "Abode," were combined to form the English phrase "Himalaya," which literally translates as the "Abode of Snow." The Himalayas are home to some of the tallest mountains in the world, such as Mount Everest, Kangchenjunga, Lhotse, Makalu, Cho Oyu, etc. act as a natural barrier between the Tibetan Plateau in the north and the Indian subcontinent in the south. The Himalayas not only impact the region's climate and weather patterns but also influence the movement of people, goods, and military forces, making it a crucial factor in the geopolitical changes of the region.

The Hindukush, Karakoram, Pamirs, Hengduan Mountains, and portions of the Tibetan Plateau are all included in the Himalayas. It's had significant geopolitical importance as a natural barrier for South Asia. The Himalayan range serves as a shield against external threats and has a significant impact on the region's climate and terrain, influencing the monsoon and river systems that support agriculture and economies across the region. Additionally, the Himalayas also have cultural and religious significance for many communities in the region, further increasing their strategic importance. According to geology, the Himalayas were created when the Indo-Australian tectonic plates collided. The area provides the Indian Subcontinent with a strategic benefit because it, together with the Indian Ocean, has long been considered to be India's geopolitical pivot. (Rahmati. F. 2020).

On the basis of their geology, geography, drainage systems, and climate, separate regions are identified within each of these mountain ranges (Davis. Et al. 2020).

2.7.1 Location

The Himalayas form a natural barrier between the Indian subcontinent and the Tibetan Plateau, serving as a formidable physical boundary that separates South Asia

from the rest of Asia. A number of significant rivers, like the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra, which are vital to the economies and way of life of the neighbouring countries, originate in the highlands.

More than 100 summits in the Himalayas are higher than 7,200 metres (23,600 ft) above sea level. The mountain range has some of the world's tallest peaks, including Mount Everest, which rises to a height of 29,032 feet (8,849 metres) in the highest point, recognised by a variety of names, including Chomolungma in Tibetan, Qomolangma Feng in Chinese, and Sagarmatha in Nepali.

The mountain ranges are a part of a vast mountain belt that wraps halfway around the world, from North Africa to Southeast Asia's Pacific coast. They act as the northern boundary of the Indian subcontinent and a nearly impenetrable wall dividing it from the lands to the north. Between Namjagbarwa (Namcha Barwa) Peak (25,445 feet; 7,756 metres) in China's Tibet Autonomous Region and Nanga Parbat (26,660 feet; 8,126 metres) in the Kashmir region administered by Pakistan, the Himalayas themselves extend uninterruptedly for about 1,550 miles (2,500 km) from west to east. The Himalayan nations of Nepal and Bhutan are located at its western and eastern ends, respectively (Davis et al., 2020).

The Himalayas to the northwest and Tibet's high and broad Plateau to the north are both bordered by the Hindu Kush and Karakoram Mountain ranges. The Himalayas are between 125 and 250 km (200 and 400 miles) wide from south to north. They encircle a total area of 230,000 square miles (595,000 square kilometres).

India, Nepal, and Bhutan are in charge of the majority of the Himalayas, but Pakistan and China also have territory there. In the disputed Kashmir region, which is located to the north and west of the "line of control" that was established between India and Pakistan in 1972, Pakistan has administrative control over an area of around 32,400 square miles (83,900 square kilometres). China has asserted claims to land in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which is located at the eastern terminal of the Himalayas, and controls around 14,000 square miles (36,000 square km) of the Ladakh region. These confrontations bring to light the boundary disputes that exist between India and its Himalayan neighbours.

2.7.2 Physical Terrain

The Himalayas are a geological marvel and a natural wonder, known for their towering heights, steep sides, and complex geologic structures. The range is still rising, and the process of creating mountains continues. As the bedrock is lifted, landslides and significant stream erosion occur, shaping the topography of the region. The Himalayas are also known for their diverse ecological associations, with various elevation belts or zones, each exhibiting unique flora, fauna, and climate. The high-altitude areas of the Himalayas are home to a wide range of wildlife, including snow leopards, Himalayan bears, and musk deer.

The four parallel mountain belts of varying widths that make up the Himalayan Mountain ranges can be roughly separated into four distinct geologic and physiographic regions. They are referred to as the Tethys, or Tibetan, Himalayas, the Great Himalaya Range, the Lesser or Lower Himalayas, and the Outer, or Sub-, Himalayas (also known as the Siwalik Range), in that order. Additionally, further north in Tibet proper, the Trans-Himalayas can be found. The three mountainous zones of the Himalayas, spanning from west to east, are the western, central, and eastern.

The Outer Himalayas, which include the Siwalik Range, are situated south of the main Himalayan Mountain range. It is characterized by structural valleys with flat floors and has a maximum breadth of 100 km. Its southern boundary is defined by the 275-metre elevation contour line, while it rises to another 760 metres to the north. The mountain gradually declines to flat-floored basins known as duns in the north, the most well-known of which being Dehra Dun in the state of Uttarakhand (Davis. Et al. 2020).

The Vale of Kashmir is a stunning area that can be found in Jammu and Kashmir, a union territory that is a part of the region of Kashmir that is managed by India. It is a structural basin that makes up a sizeable chunk of the Lesser Himalayas. The valley is roughly 50 miles (80 km) wide and 100 miles (160 km) long from the southeast to the northwest. The average elevation of the valley is around 5,100 feet (1,550 meters) above sea level. The Jhelum River, which originates from a spring in Verinag, flows through the valley and drains into the Wular Lake, the largest

freshwater lake in India. The valley is known for its scenic beauty, serene lakes, lush green forests, and snow-capped mountains.

The Great Himalaya Range, which rises into the region of never-ending snow, serves as the spine of the entire mountain system. The range's highest point is in Nepal, where 10 of the world's top 13 mountains are located. These summits all rise beyond 26,250 feet (8,000 metres). The 10 tallest peaks in the Himalayas are Nanga Parbat, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna, Manaslu, Xixabangma (Gosainthan), Cho Oyu, Mount Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, and Kanchenjunga, ordered from west to east. Nanga Parbat is located in the western Himalayas in Pakistan, while the rest of the peaks are located in Nepal or on the Nepal-China border.

The Tethys Himalayas or Tibetan Himalayas and the Trans-Himalayas are part of the larger Himalayan Mountain system and do not have a well-defined border with the Great Himalayas to the south. These Himalayans extend from Jammu and Kashmir to the east through Bhutan and the eastern region of Arunachal Pradesh to Namcha Barwa. The Trans-Himalayas are located further north in Tibet and are characterized by a high plateau region with arid landscapes, deep gorges, and snow-capped peaks.

2.7.3 Drainage System

In the Indian Himalayas, the monsoon and glacier melting and snowmelt are the two main factors affecting the drainage system.

As a result, there is significant summer monsoonal precipitation, notably in the east and centre, and extensive winter snowfall at higher elevations. The mountain chain serves as an efficient barrier to both the winter westerly disturbances and the summer monsoon. This enormous system of high mountains, intermontane valleys, and plateaus generates one of the greatest renewable freshwater supplies in the entire globe. The Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze are some of the larger rivers.

Regarding water resources, the area can be separated into five sectors: (1) the river basins of the Hengduan Mountains; (2) the YarlungtsangpoBrahmaputra; (3) the

Ganges; (4) the Indus; and (5) the region of fragmented lakes north of the Himalayan crest line (Bandyopadhyaya; Gyawali, 1994).

19 major rivers drain the Himalayas; the Indus and the Brahmaputra have the greatest catchment areas, each covering over 100,000 square miles (260,000 square kilometres). Five of the 19 rivers that make up the Indus system, the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej make up the huge distance that divides Punjab state in India from Punjab province in Pakistan, with a combined catchment area of more than 51,000 square miles (132,000 square kilometres).

The Ganges, Yamuna, Ramganga, Kali (Kali Gandak), Karnali, Rapti, Gandak, Bagmati, and Kosi are the other nine remaining rivers. The Tista, Raidak, and Manas are three of the remaining rivers that make up the Brahmaputra system. Together, these three rivers drain an additional 71,000 square miles (184,000 square kilometres) of Himalayan region.

2.7.3.1 Nepal's Drainage System in Himalaya

Nepal, a country located in the central Himalayas, has several major river systems that originate from the mountains. These rivers are important for the country's economy, culture, and natural resources. Some of the major rivers in Nepal that originate from the Himalayas are:

Koshi River: Known as the "Sorrow of Bihar" in India, the Koshi River originates from the glaciers of Tibet and flows through Nepal and India. It is one of the largest tributaries of the Ganges River.

Karnali River: The Karnali River, also known as the Ghaghara River in India, is the longest river in Nepal. It originates from the Tibetan Plateau and flows through Nepal and India before joining the Ganges River in India.

Gandaki River: The Gandaki River, also known as the Narayani River in India, is one of the major rivers in Nepal. It originates from the Himalayas and flows through central Nepal before joining the Ganges River in India.

Bagmati River: The Kathmandu Valley is traversed by the Bagmati River, one of Nepal's main rivers. It originates from the Shivapuri Hills and flows through Kathmandu before joining the Koshi River.

Seti River: The Seti River is a major river in western Nepal. It originates from the Annapurna Mountain range and flows through the Pokhara Valley before joining the Karnali River.

These rivers provide water for irrigation, hydropower generation, and other economic activities in Nepal. They also have cultural and religious significance, as many Hindu and Buddhist temples are located along their banks.

2.7.3.2 Bhutan's Drainage System in Himalaya

Bhutan's river system is an important part of the Himalayan River system. The country's network of rivers originates from the eastern Himalayas and flows through the country's deep valleys and gorges, providing water for agriculture, hydroelectric power generation, and other uses.

The Amo Chu, Drangme Chhu, Puna Tsang Chhu, Sankosh, and Wang Chhu are some of Bhutan's principal rivers. These rivers flow from north to south and eventually join the Brahmaputra and Ganges rivers, which drain into the Bay of Bengal. The Amo Chu and Wang Chhu are the major tributaries of the Brahmaputra River, while the Drangme Chhu and Puna Tsang Chhu are tributaries of the Manas River, which flows through Bhutan and Assam, India.

The rivers of Bhutan not only support agriculture and hydropower, but also have cultural and religious significance for the Bhutanese people. Many of the country's important Buddhist monasteries and temples are located along river valleys, and rivers are often considered sacred in Bhutanese culture.

2.7.4 Climate

The most important elements influencing the climatic characteristics across significant areas in the mountains are latitude, height, and continentality. Local topographical factors alter the regional determinants' effectiveness in a moderating

manner (Barry, 1992). The Himalayan Mountain System follows a north-west to south-east route rather than an east-west orientation.

The entire Indian subcontinent's climate is heavily influenced by the Himalayan Mountains. The Indian subcontinent's plains are shielded from the cold, dry winds of the northern areas by the Himalayan range, which serves as a significant climate barrier. The southwest monsoons are also blocked by the Himalayas from reaching the northern side, resulting in excessive precipitation on the Indian side of the mountain range. The Indian Himalayas experience annual precipitation ranging from 1,500mm to more than 4,800mm with typical temperatures between -30°C and 25°C.

The Himalayan climate is highly influenced by the Indian monsoon, which brings heavy rainfall during the summer months from June to September, especially to the southern slopes of the range. This rainfall is crucial for agriculture and supports a wide range of flora and fauna. In contrast, the northern slopes of the range experience dry, arctic-like conditions with very little rainfall, and high-altitude deserts are found in these areas. The weather patterns of the middle latitudes also influence the Himalayan climate, with cold westerly winds bringing snow and low temperatures during the winter months. The variation in climate across the Himalayas has contributed to the region's unique ecological diversity and has also presented challenges for human habitation and development (Pant et al., 2018)

The Himalayas serves as a massive mountain barrier between the climates of south and central Asia. The vast Himalayan peaks act as excellent barriers in winter against the bitterly cold continental air that blows toward the Indian subcontinent from the south. The Himalayas prevents these winds, which take the shape of the north-east monsoon, from moving directly south; instead, they are deflected further east, where they bring some rain to India's east coast during the winter.

The Himalayas play a crucial role in shaping the climate of the Indian subcontinent by blocking the cold, dry winds from Central Asia during winter and channeling the moisture-laden monsoon winds from the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea during summer. As you mentioned, the Tibetan plateau also plays a vital role in creating the monsoon by heating up and forming a low-pressure area that

draws in the moist air from the oceans. This, in turn, creates a massive atmospheric circulation system that affects the weather patterns over a vast area of the continent.

The Tibetan plateau's high elevation and large flat area provide a significant heat source for the atmosphere, especially during late spring and early summer. This, in turn, influences the strength and interannual variability of the South Asian summer monsoon. The Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau act as a barrier to the moisture-laden winds that blow from the Indian Ocean, forcing them to rise and cool, leading to the formation of clouds and precipitation. Without this topographic barrier, the monsoon circulation would weaken, and South Asia would experience much less rainfall. Numerical simulation models have also shown the importance of the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau in the formation and maintenance of the South Asian summer monsoon, and their removal from the model leads to a significant decrease in monsoon circulation (Pant et al., 2018).

2.8 Himalayas and Indian Subcontinent Geopolitical Linkage

Two of the world's oldest civilizations that are currently aspirants to become Great Powers, India and China, are found in the Himalayas, the youngest mountain range on the planet. With nearly one-third of the world's population and the two largest economies in the world, these two Asian superpowers have the weight to have an impact on world affairs. These two developing powers, as well as a number of extra-regional forces, have been fighting for position in the last several years in the Himalayan Region, which influences and controls a significant portion of the Eurasian landmass. As the foundation of India's national consciousness, the Himalayas represent that country's physical prowess, spiritual elevation, cultural richness, and strategic benefit.

They serve as a geographical barrier between China and Central Asia from the Indian subcontinent. In reality, the Himalayas serve as the dividing line between South and Central Asia, giving the region a special geopolitical and geostrategic significance despite its diversity in identities, ecosystem, and civilizational and cultural traditions. It is a groundbreaking endeavour to analyse the region outside of the narrow lens of bilateral relations since it considers three crucial elements that have an impact on the region: cultural, political, and strategic.

Understanding the enormous opportunities that the region offers from being the hotbed of intense competition to an example of political and economic cooperation, supported by a complex web of religious-cultural and civilisational linkages requires elucidating contributions on a variety of critical issues from practitioners and experts par excellence (Bansal and Ketkar, 2019).

For tens of thousands of years, the Himalayas have served as a natural impediment to human mobility due to their magnitude and width. This has specifically avoided the mixing of populations from China and Mongolia with those from the Indian subcontinent, which would have resulted in markedly differing languages and traditions across these countries. Additionally, the Himalayas have obstructed commerce routes and military excursions across their vastness. For instance, Genghis Khan was unable to extend his dominion into the subcontinent south of the Himalayas.

2.9 Geostrategic Importance of Himalayan Borderlands

The Himalayan borderlands have significant geostrategic importance due to their location, natural resources, and strategic significance. The region is home to numerous disputed borders and territories, including the India-China border, the India-Pakistan border, and the disputed territory of Kashmir. The Himalayas also have vast natural resources, including forests, minerals, water, and hydroelectric power potential, which makes the region an attractive target for resource extraction and exploitation. The Himalayan glaciers, which are a vital source of freshwater for the entire region, are also under threat due to climate change, making their conservation and management crucial.

In addition, the Himalayas have strategic significance due to their proximity to major global powers, including China, India, Russia, and the United States. The region's strategic location has made it a site of great power rivalry, as these powers seek to gain influence and establish military and economic partnerships with countries in the region. The Himalayan borderlands also have cultural and historical significance, as they are home to numerous ethnic groups and religious traditions. This diversity makes the region a site of important cultural exchange and interaction, as well as a site of tension and conflict over identity and autonomy.

2.9.1 Strategic Importance of Himalayan Mountain Passes in Road Building

The Himalayan Mountain passes have always played a crucial role in the strategic importance of the region, especially in road building. Due to the rugged terrain of the Himalayas, building roads through the mountain passes has been a difficult task. However, these passes have strategic value as they provide access to remote regions and neighbouring countries. Historically, many of these passes have been used for trade and commerce, military movements, and cultural exchanges. The strategic importance of these passes increased during the colonial era when the British Empire was expanding its influence in South Asia. The British built several roads and railways through the Himalayan passes to connect the Indian subcontinent with their territories in Central Asia and China.

In modern times, the construction of roads through the Himalayan passes has continued to play a vital role in the region's development and security. The mountain passes have provided access to remote regions, which were earlier inaccessible, leading to the opening up of trade and commerce opportunities. The border areas between India and its neighbouring countries have also become more accessible, leading to increased security concerns. For instance, the strategic importance of the Nathu La Pass, located on the India-China border, has increased in recent times. It is a vital trade route between the two countries, with a significant amount of trade passing through the pass. The strategic importance of the Lipulekh Pass, located on the India-Nepal border, has also increased as it provides access to the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage site in Tibet. A mountain pass is a passable passageway through or over a mountain range. Throughout history, passes have been essential to trade, migration of both people and animals, and conflicts (Bhaumik, 2017).

A number of international border disputes in the middle of the 20th century barred the Himalayan routes that had been used for millennia by traders, pilgrims, and nomads. Over these various barriers, some trade and interchange have resumed, but the states concerned have worked tenfold harder to bolster control within their borders. They have sent troops to defend or advance their claims, and they have expanded the reach of large-scale transportation, resource extraction, and tourism into this culturally complex and ecologically vulnerable region (Davis, et al. 2021).

2.9.2 Ancient Route

Ancient travellers had access to the several passes that cut across the northern mountains. Through these passages, goods such as spices, muslin, and other items were transported from India to many nations. Since ancient times, mountain passes have helped with the exchange of goods and ideas. India is strategically positioned in the middle of the pathways that connect the nations of Europe in the West and the nations of East Asia across the Indian Ocean. India benefits from having close ties to Southeast and East Asia on its eastern coast and West Asia, Africa, and Europe on its western coast thanks to the Deccan Peninsula. No other country has as long of a coastline on the Indian Ocean as India does, hence the ocean to the south of India is called the Indian Ocean.

India's land routes are far older than its marine routes. The ancient travellers had access to many northern mountains passes since ocean interaction was previously restricted. Since ancient times, land roads have aided India in the flow of goods and ideas. The Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Panchtantra, the Indian numbers, and the decimal system were all spread by India, along with spices, muslin, and other goods that were donated to other nations. Various regions of India can also be recognised to have been influenced by Greek sculpture and West Asian dome and minaret architectural forms.

2.9.3 Economically Importance

The Himalayan region's exceptional biodiversity and the breathtaking natural beauty of the Himalayan Mountains draw visitors from all over the world, supporting the local tourism sector and the economy of the area. In addition, many followers of many religions, including Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism, see the Himalayan Mountain Range as a sacred location. This region has gained popularity as a trekking and mountaineering destination because of its distinctive natural features, which include the highest mountains in the world (Nyaupane and Chhetri, 2009).

The Himalayan region has significant mineral resources, including metallic and non-metallic minerals. Some of the minerals found in the Himalayas include copper, lead, zinc, tin, tungsten, mica, coal, limestone, and graphite. The region is also known for its significant reserves of precious and semi-precious stones such as

diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, topaz, and tourmaline. Additionally, the Himalayan region has a considerable oil and natural gas potential, especially in the Tertiary rocks. These resources have the potential to make a substantial contribution to the region's and its neighbouring nations' economic growth.

2.9.4 Political Importance

Due to its advantageous location and wealth of natural resources, the Himalayan region has significant political significance. It is a crucial geopolitical location since it serves as a natural boundary between many nations and regions. Conflicts and tensions have resulted from several nations in the region, including India, China, Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan, having conflicting territorial claims and ongoing border disputes.

In addition, the region's natural resources, including water, timber, and minerals, have become sources of contention among countries. The Himalayas are also a significant source of freshwater for the countries in the region, with several major rivers originating from the mountains. Furthermore, the Himalayan region has significant cultural and religious importance, with several sacred sites for Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions located in the area. This has led to the region's spiritual and cultural influence extending beyond its physical boundaries. Overall, the Himalayan region's geopolitical, natural, and cultural significance has made it a politically important area, with ongoing disputes and tensions among countries in the region.

2.9.5 Socio-cultural Importance

There are several cultural and legendary references to the Himalayas. On Mount Ashtapad in the Himalayan Mountain range, which is revered in the Jain religion, Rishabh deva, the first Jain Tirthankara, attained moksha. According to legend, once Rishabhdeva attained nirvana, his son, Emperor Bharata Chakravartin, erected three stupas and twenty-four shrines honouring the 24 Tirthankaras, each of which had a figure of a different saint set with precious stones. *Sinhnishdha* is the name given to this region. The Himalayas are known to Hindus as *Himavat*, the mountain ruler and father of the goddess Parvati. Furthermore, it is believed that the Ganga originated in the Himalayas.

The Himalayas are also very important to Buddhists. Bhutan's birthplace of Buddhism is known as Paro Taktsang. The Tibetan Buddhists also visit the Muktinath as a holy site. They contend that the poplar forest was planted with the walking sticks of 84 Mahasiddhas, or ancient Indian Buddhist magicians. They view the saligrams as being incarnations of the Gawo Jagpa, a serpent god revered in Tibet. The diversity of the Himalayan people is shown in a variety of ways. It is seen in their attire, architecture, languages, dialects, customs, and religious beliefs. People's homes reflect their beliefs and practical demands in terms of their shapes and construction materials.

Handwoven textiles from many ethnic groups in the Himalayas are another illustration of the diversity of the region's inhabitants. Finally, jewellery is something that certain individuals value highly. The Rai and Limbu ladies display their affluence through their jewellery by donning large gold nose rings and earrings. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism all hold special religious significance for a number of locations in the Himalayas. Paro Taktsang, the place where Padmasambhava is credited with establishing Buddhism in Bhutan, is a noteworthy example of a holy site.

Numerous Vajrayana Buddhist sites can be found in the Himalayas, Tibet, Bhutan, and the Indian states of Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Spiti, and Darjeeling. In Tibet, there were more than 6,000 monasteries, including the Dalai Lama's home. Ladakh, Sikkim, and Bhutan are also covered in a large number of monasteries.

2.10 Significance of Himalaya with Respect to Regional Geopolitical Powers

The Himalayan range is important to the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent. In addition to being the two regional giants in the South Asian region, China and India each have significant global influence. The smaller Himalayan republics of Nepal and Bhutan are affected by their regional and transregional conduct (Husain, 2014).

The Himalayan region is rich in resources. Hydropower comes from enduring rivers. Himalaya serves as a natural barrier and line of defence against India's adversaries in geopolitical terms. The Himalayan region is experiencing a variety of problems, such as border problems, hydro challenges, security issues, etc. A significant supplier of electricity and other natural resources is the Himalayas. Countries play geopolitics using these concerns as cover, such as the J&K territorial dispute between India, Pakistan, and China, the Doklam dispute between India and China, the Chumbi Valley dispute between Bhutan and China, the Siligudi dispute between India and Nepal, etc (Davis. Et al. 2020).

2.10.1 Significance of the Himalayan Region from the Indian Perspective

The Himalayas have played a significant role in Indian geopolitics. Significant obstacles exist in the Himalayan region that is extremely important and vital for India. Most of these issues, such as boundary disputes with China, Pakistan, and Nepal, are geopolitical in character.

The strategic rivalry between India and China is one of the issues that Indian officials constantly have in the back of their minds. India and China have fought for dominance in Asia for more than 60 years, not to mention on their 3,488-kilometer Himalayan border, which is also a point of contention. On the southeast side of Aksai Chin, a high plateau the size of Switzerland that China has held since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, Chinese and Indian troops were engaged in direct action in the Galwan Valley. An estimated 40 Chinese and 96 Indian soldiers were killed or wounded in the conflict. Given the current high levels of tension on its border with China, India may perceive a greater need to maintain positive relations with Russia should those tensions escalate into a full-fledged conflict. If that happened, India would require immediate access to Russian weapons (Chang, 2020).

The Russian government may also believe that it can be useful in such a confrontation, according to Indian leaders. Russia's connections to China may be able to control it or even negotiate a solution. In addition, Russia might put pressure on China by limiting its access to resources or even by deploying troops along its shared border with China to divert Chinese military force away from India. Even though all of it may sound like wishful thinking, Indian authorities may mention China's

newfound interest in de-escalation on their border after they leaned towards Russia (ibid).

2.10.1.1 Climatic Significance

The Indian subcontinent's climate, particularly in India, is significantly influenced by the Himalayas. As mentioned above the mountain range blocks the cold, dry winds from Central Asia, preventing them from entering India and keeping the region relatively warm. At the same time, the Himalayas act as a barrier to the southwest monsoon winds that bring the majority of the region's rainfall. Since these winds must ascend over the mountains, the leeward side of the range experiences a rain shadow and the windward side experiences heavy precipitation. The monsoon winds also bring moisture to the Himalayas themselves, contributing to the region's glaciers and rivers. The melting of these glaciers in the summer also contributes to the region's agriculture and hydropower generation.

2.10.1.2 Defence Significance

It serves as a barrier between India from nations in Central and East Asia. It also explains why the Indian subcontinent's weather and climate differ from those of the rest of Asia. Since ancient times, the Himalayas have served as a defensive barrier to keep foreign invaders out of India. The Himalayas have played a significant role in protecting India from invasions throughout history. The difficult terrain, high altitude, and extreme weather conditions of the Himalayan region make it an incredibly challenging region to navigate for any invading army. As a result, very few invaders have been able to successfully cross the Himalayas and launch an attack on India from the north. This has helped to shield India from potential threats and maintain its sovereignty. However, as per study result China's recent incursions in the Himalayan region have raised concerns about the security of the border and the Himalayas' continuing importance in protecting India's borders.

2.10.1.3 Economic Significance

The Himalayas have significant economic importance for India. Some of the key economic benefits that the region offers are:

Hydroelectric Power Generation: The Himalayas are home to numerous rivers that originate in the mountains and flow down to the plains. These rivers are a key source of hydroelectric power for the country. India has built several hydropower projects on these rivers, such as the Nathpa Jhakri Hydroelectric Power Station, Bhakra Dam, and Tehri Dam.

Agriculture: The Himalayan region is also significant for Indian agriculture. The rivers originating from the mountains provide irrigation water to the fertile plains, leading to high agricultural productivity in the region. The Himalayan region also has rich biodiversity, which makes it suitable for growing various crops, fruits, and vegetables.

Tourism: The Himalayas are a major tourist destination, attracting millions of tourists every year. The region offers various adventure sports, such as trekking, mountaineering, skiing, and river rafting. The region is also home to several religious sites, such as the Char Dham Yatra, Hemkund Sahib, and Amarnath Yatra, attracting a large number of pilgrims.

Forestry: The Himalayan region has significant forest cover, which is home to numerous rare and endangered species of flora and fauna. For many local populations who rely on the forests for fuelwood, timber, and non-timber forest products, the forest resources constitute a source of livelihood.

Minerals: The Himalayan region is also rich in minerals, including gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, and coal. The mining of these minerals provides employment opportunities and contributes to the country's economy.

Overall, the Himalayan region has immense economic significance for India, contributing significantly to the country's development and growth.

2.10.2 Significance of the Himalayan Region from the Chinese Perspective

Due to its high variety, China's Himalayan region was once a significant area for hunting and collecting medicinal herbs. Additionally, the region has traditionally been a crucial stop along the "silk route." A thousand years ago, China shipped items like silk, furs, and medicines to Pakistan, India, Italy, and other Mediterranean nations. (Ming; et. al. 2000)

The Himalayan region's strategic location is of immense importance to both China and India, as it not only serves as a natural barrier but also offers various economic and geopolitical benefits. In recent years, China's growing influence in the region has raised concerns in India, particularly in perspective of its territorial conflicts with China. Additionally, the region is important to China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aspires to link China with other regions through investments in infrastructure. The Himalayan region's vast water resources, including several major rivers, also make it a crucial source of water and hydroelectric power for both countries. The region's rich biodiversity and natural resources also offer opportunities for ecotourism and sustainable development.

It is certainly possible that a new era in regional diplomacy could begin as China focuses on economic development and stability in the Himalayan region. However, it is important to note that there are still many challenges and obstacles to overcome, including territorial disputes and political instability in some countries. The success of regional diplomacy will depend on the willingness of all parties to engage in constructive dialogue and work towards mutually beneficial solutions. It will also require a commitment to respecting international law and the sovereignty of all nations in the region. Only time will tell how successful these efforts will be.

China's policy in this region is focused on Tibet, which is located in the Himalayan foothills. Reassessing the impact of that strategy on China's perception of the Tibet issue is crucial in light of China's "Go West" policy and trade diplomacy towards South Asia. The Himalayan region serves as a good illustration of China's new border-area policy. In terms of geography and availability of natural resources, the Tibetan plateau is strategically located in central and south Asia. This area used to serve as a buffer zone between hostile neighbours for many years. A new era of detente between China and India has begun in part due to Beijing's emphasis on economic growth in a peaceful environment. In that case, Tibet might serve as a bridge between China and South Asia, albeit the geography and transportation system of the area will prevent this idea from materialising as a big economic reality (Mathou, 2005)

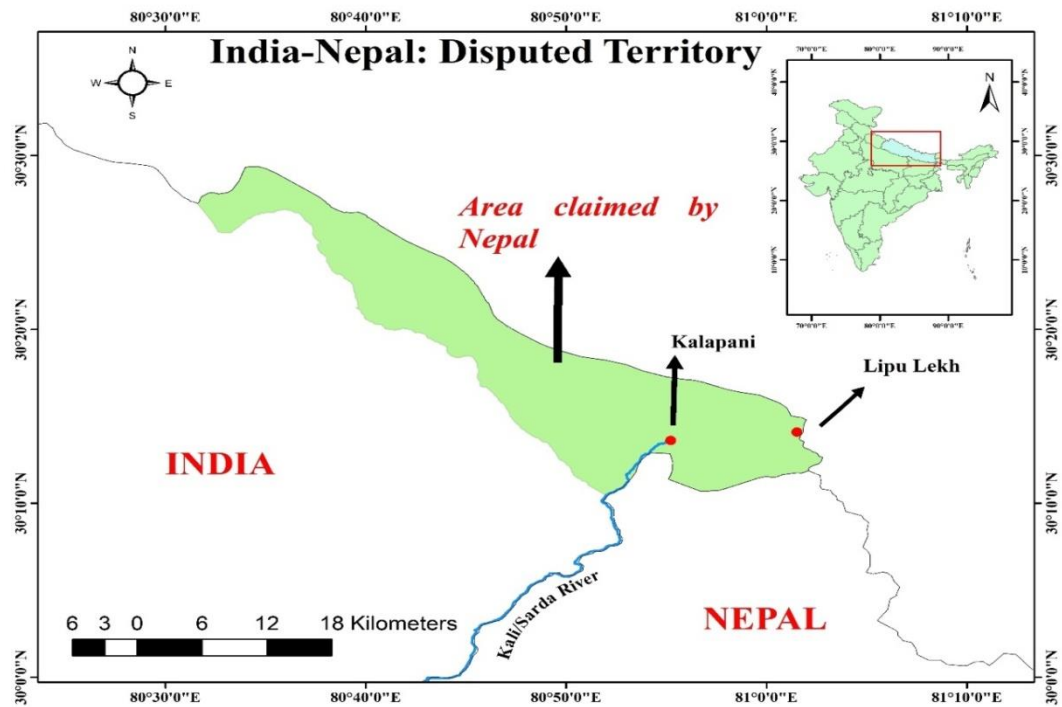
2.11 Disputed Territories in the Himalayan Region

2.11.1 India-Nepal Disputed Territories

The disputed territories of Lipulekh and Kalapani lie at the junction of India, Nepal, and China, nestled in the Himalayan region. Both countries claim sovereignty over these areas, which have historical, geographical, and strategic significance. The dispute stems from differing interpretations of historical treaties, cartographic discrepancies, and geopolitical considerations. Recent tensions have surfaced due to infrastructure development and border security measures by India, prompting Nepal to assert its claims more vigorously. International mediation efforts have been limited, leaving the resolution of the dispute uncertain. The situation underscores the complexities of border disputes in the region and highlights the need for dialogue and diplomacy to achieve a peaceful resolution.

Figure 4 Illustrates the "Map of India-Nepal Disputed Territory," with particular emphasis on the Lipulekh area, in addition to the Kalapani region, representing significant points of contention between the two nations. The disputed territory encompasses both Lipulekh and Kalapani, covering approximately 400 km², submerged beneath the course of the Kali River. Nepal asserts that the land to the west of Kalapani, including Lipulekh, primarily belongs to the Kali River basin, falling under its jurisdiction. Conversely, India maintains that the primary course of the Kali River runs to the east of Kalapani, encompassing Lipulekh. Since the 1962 India-China war, both Lipulekh and Kalapani have been patrolled by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police on the Indian side. The core disagreement revolves around determining the precise location of the India-Nepal border in this region, a longstanding issue yet to be resolved. India claims that the border follows the course of the Kalapani River, encompassing Lipulekh, while Nepal contends that it extends along the ridgeline to the west of the river, excluding Lipulekh. Tensions escalated significantly in 2019 when India released updated maps depicting both Lipulekh and the Kalapani region as part of its territory, prompting strong objections from Nepal. Despite ongoing discussions, a mutually agreeable resolution to the dispute remains elusive.

Figure 4: Map of India-Nepal Disputed Territory



Source: Country's shapefiles retrieved from DIVA-GIS, organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

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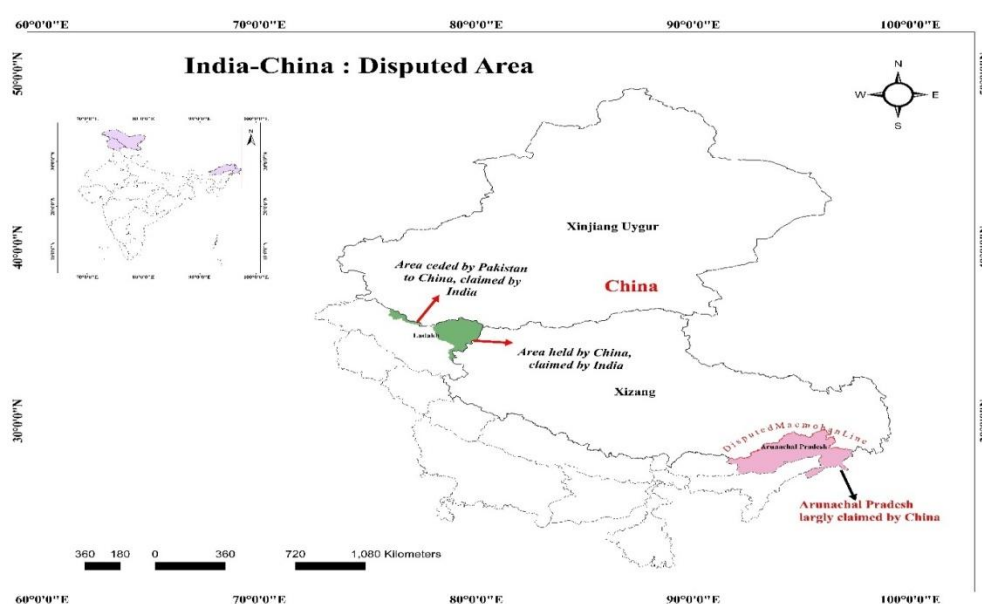
2.11.2 India-China Disputed areas

India and China have been engaged in a territorial dispute over 125,000 km², which includes three sectors, including the Western region, since 1947. The second sector is the eastern sector, which contains the 90,000 km² in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. This region was seized by China during the 1962 conflict, but after a unilateral ceasefire, China retreated from the McMahon Line, an international border. However, China currently asserts control over the whole Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Figure 5 “Map of India-China Disputed Areas” that effectively illustrates the disputed areas in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh, providing valuable context and information. India and China have been engaged in a territorial dispute over 125,000 km², which includes three sectors, including the Western region, since 1947. The second sector is the eastern sector, which contains the 90000 km² in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. This region was seized by China during the 1962 conflict, but after a unilateral ceasefire, China retreated from the McMahan Line, an international border. However, China currently asserts control over the whole Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Sikkim region, over which China is acknowledging Indian sovereignty, and other smaller pieces of land across the Line of Actual Control are included in the third sector, which is the central one (LAC).

The second-largest common border between India and China is the Aksai Chin region which covered 38,000 square kilometres. As it connects Tibet to the Chinese province of Xinjiang, this arid region at a high altitude of 5000 metres above sea level is nearly completely deserted playing a vital role in China's strategic point. In order to connect the provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet, the Republic of China constructed a 1200 km² roadway, of which 179 km² crossed across the Aksai Chin, which is currently claimed by India. Since the 1962 India-China War was sparked by this highway project, the region has been a source of conflict.

Figure 5: Map of India-China Disputed Areas



Source: Country's shapefiles retrived from DIVA-GIS, organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

Security concerns in the Xinjiang province, in addition to border disputes between the two nations, have increased China's anxiety. The initiative of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been implied to be in line with that. To safeguard the unrest-ridden Xinjiang province, the project ran in 2017 and went across Kashmir, which is governed by Pakistan. China has consistently complained about Pakistan's radical Islamist troops operating in the province of Xinjiang. Both China and Pakistan have a hostile relationship with India and share similar interests. One of the conflicts between the three nations is Kashmir, however, China consistently supports Pakistan for four reasons: The dispute has resulted in a few military conflicts between India and China, including the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

A large infrastructure undertaking, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) involves constructing roads, railroads, and energy pipelines to link China's Xinjiang area with Pakistan's Gwadar Port. India is worried about the project because it goes through the part of Kashmir that it claims as its own and that is controlled by Pakistan. India considers the initiative to be an invasion of its territorial integrity and sovereignty. In the India-China-Pakistan geopolitical triangle, China's backing for Pakistan against India, especially its use of its veto power in the UN Security Council, has long been a source of contention.

Nevertheless, it's important to note that China has made an effort to balance its relations with Pakistan and India given their strategic importance and potential for economic growth. A series of border disputes led to a full-fledged war between India and China in 1962. However, they were unable to address the problems with the Line of Actual Control, a border that is not clearly defined (LAC). The history of India-China ties has also been unreliable and lacking in "trust."

The most recent military assault on the Galwan Valley on June 15, 2020, which prompted unsuccessful trilateral and bilateral discussions, serves as evidence. China lacks the willpower to accept and share maps in order to establish the Line of Actual Control. Remember that geopolitical issues require far more time to resolve than diplomatic ones. India and China are now embroiled in a zero-sum game that cannot be won without significant changes to the regional status quo. Both nations

have used tactics to increase their share of regional influence as a sign of their discontent with the present quo.

2.11.3 China-Bhutan Disputed Areas

The territorial dispute between China and Bhutan over the Doklam region has been a source of tension in the region for several years. Located at the intersection of Bhutan, India, and China, Doklam holds strategic importance for all parties involved. This dispute, which dates back several decades, has recently escalated due to the construction of a road by China in the contested area.

The territorial dispute between China and Bhutan traces its roots back to historical agreements and conflicting claims over the ownership of Doklam. Both countries assert sovereignty over the region, citing historical precedents and geographic boundaries. Tensions flared in 2017 when China initiated construction activities in Doklam, prompting Bhutan to register a formal protest and seek international intervention.

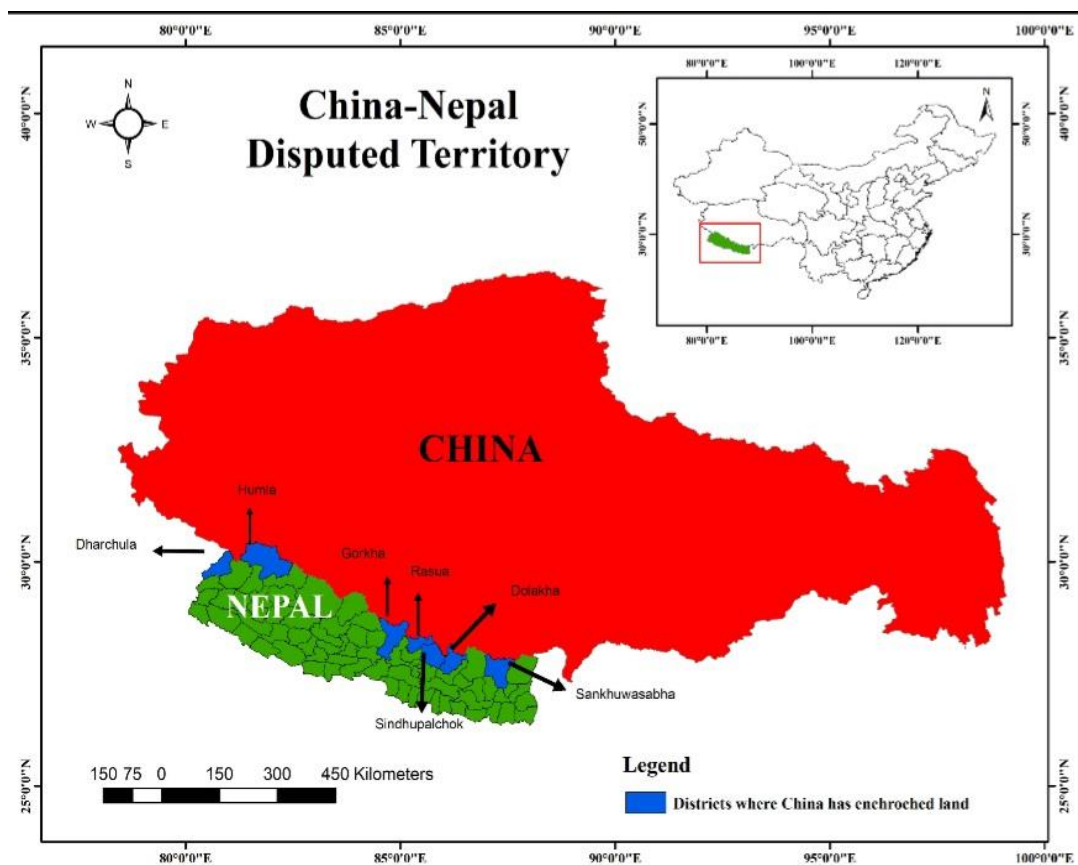
On June 29, 2017, in the vicinity of the junction of Bhutan, India, and China, Bhutan formally protested against China's construction of a road in the disputed Doklam region. This led to heightened tensions, prompting Bhutan to raise border security measures. Notably, there has been no indication from the Royal Government of Bhutan that it sought assistance from India. Subsequently, both China and India reached a deadlock at the tri-junction near the Indian state of Sikkim since mid-June 2017, when the Indian army intervened to prevent Chinese road construction in an area recognized by both Bhutan and India as Bhutanese territory.

On June 30, 2017, China and India each mobilized 3,000 soldiers. China released a map on the same day, asserting ownership of Doklam and claiming that the region south of Gipmochi belonged to China, supported by references to the Convention of Calcutta. On July 3, 2017, China informed India that Jawaharlal Nehru, a former Indian prime minister, had ratified the Convention of Calcutta. China further asserted on July 5, 2017, that there was a "fundamental consensus" with Bhutan and emphasized the absence of hostility between the two nations. However, on August 10, 2017, Bhutan unequivocally rejected Beijing's claim to Doklam.

2.11.4 China-Nepal Disputed Territory

China and Nepal share a long history of cultural and economic exchange, but territorial disputes have arisen over the years due to differing interpretations of historical agreements and border demarcations. These disputes have persisted despite diplomatic efforts to resolve them.

Figure 6: Map of China-Nepal Disputed Area



Source: Country's shapefiles retrived from DIVA-GIS, organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

The above figure no 6 “Map of China-Nepal Disputed Areas” illustrates all the disputed areas between China and Nepal, including Dharchula, Humla, Gorkha, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, and Sankhuwasabha:

Dharchula located in the western part of Nepal, Dharchula is a region where the border between China and Nepal is contested. Both countries claim sovereignty over this area, which is strategically important due to its proximity to the Indian border. Humla situated in the northwestern part of Nepal, Humla is another region

where the border between China and Nepal is disputed. This remote and mountainous area is of interest to both countries due to its natural resources and strategic location.

Gorkha, located in central Nepal, is a historically significant region and the ancestral home of the Shah dynasty, which ruled Nepal for centuries. The border between China and Nepal in this area is contested, with both countries claiming sovereignty over parts of the region. Rasuwa is a district in central Nepal, bordering China's Tibet Autonomous Region. The border between China and Nepal in Rasuwa is disputed, with both countries asserting ownership over certain areas.

Sindhupalchok is a district in central Nepal, situated near the border with China. The border in this area is contested, with disagreements over the exact demarcation between the two countries. Dolakha is a district in eastern Nepal, bordering China's Tibet Autonomous Region. Like other border regions, Dolakha is subject to territorial disputes between China and Nepal. Sankhuwasabha is a district in eastern Nepal, close to the border with China. The border in this area is disputed, with both countries laying claim to parts of the region.

Recent years have seen increased diplomatic engagement between China and Nepal to address these territorial disputes. However, resolution remains elusive, and tensions periodically flare up along the border. The territorial disputes between China and Nepal have implications for regional stability and security. They also impact bilateral relations between the two countries and have the potential to affect economic and diplomatic ties.

The territorial disputes between China and Nepal over regions such as Dharchula, Humla, Gorkha, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, and Sankhuwasabha are complex issues with historical roots and contemporary implications. Resolving these disputes will require sustained diplomatic efforts and mutual cooperation between the two countries.

CHAPTER-III

NEPAL'S RESPONSES TO THE EMERGING GEOPOLITICAL CRISES IN HIMALAYA REGION

3.1 Nepal's Historical Background

The Kiratis, believed to have migrated to Nepal from East Asia around the 7th or 8th century BC, are traditionally considered the pioneers of the country's recorded history. According to Nepali folklore, there are accounts of Buddha and his disciple Ananda visiting the Kathmandu Valley, particularly in Patan, known as Lalitpur at the time (Shrestha, 2003). However, due to the lack of concrete historical evidence, these claims remain unsubstantiated. It is widely believed that Buddhism was introduced to Nepal during the reign of Emperor Ashoka of India in the 3rd century BCE. By 200 AD, Hinduism had become the dominant religion, brought by the Licchavis who displaced the last Kirati ruler and migrated from Northern India. The establishment of the caste system and the emergence of the classical period in Nepalese art and architecture are attributed to Hindu influence (Levy, 1990).

By 879, the Thakuri dynasty had replaced the Licchavi era. Following this, Nepal experienced a period known as the "Dark Ages," characterized by instability and invasions. However, the strategic location of the Kathmandu Valley played a crucial role in the survival and expansion of the kingdom. Several centuries later, a revival of Nepali/Hindu culture began with the establishment of the Malla dynasty by Thakuri ruler Arideva (Slusser, 1982).

The etymology of the name Nepal remains uncertain, with various theories proposed. One theory suggests that "Nepal" originates from the Sanskrit word "Nepa," which refers to the Kathmandu Valley, the ancient capital of Nepal. Another theory posits that "Nepal" derives from the Newar term "Nepa," meaning "wool," reflecting the valley's historical significance in the wool trade. The term "Gorkhali" refers to the inhabitants of the Gorkha Kingdom, led by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18th century, who unified Nepal. While the Gorkha Kingdom played a crucial role in Nepal's unification, the term "Nepal" encompasses the entire nation, not just a specific region or kingdom (Asian Educational Services, 1996).

Gorkha village is revered as the ancestral home of the Shah dynasty, which ruled Nepal from the late 18th century until 2008. Its name is derived from the Hindu warrior-saint Guru Gorakhnath. Gorkha village is renowned for its temples dedicated to Guru Gorakhnath and his female counterpart, Gorakhkali.

It is noteworthy that the Shah dynasty, initiated by King Dhiraj Prithvi Narayan Shahdev, continued the territorial expansion of Nepal post-unification. They annexed several smaller kingdoms and principalities in the neighbouring regions, extending into parts of modern-day India, thus solidifying Nepal's influence in the area.

Moreover, the Nepalese invasion of Tibet in 1788-1791 was not an isolated incident but rather part of a longstanding history of border disputes and conflicts between the two nations. The situation was further complicated by the involvement of the Chinese emperor, who aimed to assert control over Tibet and intervene in the Nepal-Tibet conflict. The agreement forged between Nepal and China subsequent to the conflict, termed the "Kuti Treaty," marked the formal commencement of Nepal's diplomatic ties with China (Singh, 2016).

3.1.1 Nepal's Historical Relations with India

India and Nepal have strong bilateral relations. Strong and varied relationships exist between Nepal and India that are rooted in a common past, present, culture, and religion. They are close, thorough, and diverse relationships that are increasingly apparent in interactions between politics, social, cultural, religious, and economic systems. On June 17, 1947, the two countries established diplomatic ties to give their long-standing relationship a more official aspect. Peaceful cohabitation, sovereign equality, and respect for one another's interests and sensibilities are the foundations of the partnership, which have allowed it to develop and deepen through time (Adhikari, 2012).

The reign of King Tribhuvan (1951-1955) laid the foundation for later Nepalese unhappiness with India. The Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in 1950 and has since been a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship between India and Nepal. The treaty covers various aspects, including mutual recognition of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in internal affairs. It also

provides for the exchange of goods and services and allows Nepalese citizens to work and study in India without any restrictions. Additionally, the treaty created a unique relationship between the two countries, with Nepalese citizens having special privileges in India and vice versa (Thapliyal, 1998).

The open border between Nepal and India has allowed for the free movement of people, goods, and services between the two countries. The border is nearly 1,800 miles long, and Nepali and Indian citizens do not require visas to travel across it. This has greatly facilitated trade, tourism, and cultural exchange between the two nations.

3.1.2 Nepal's Historical Relations with China

Relations on the political, economic, religious, social, and cultural fronts between Nepal and China date back a long way. Although recorded history can only be traced back to the early fifth century AD, we can speculate that civilizational contacts between Nepal and China could have taken place as early as then based on the strong cultural affinities of both sides, whether Shakyamuni Buddha or Confucius (Ghosh, 2011). Manjushree, also known as Wen Shu Pu Sa in China, is described in Nepal as the creator of the Kathmandu Valley who carved out the gorge to drain the lake's water and make the valley liveable (Shakya, 2013).

Historical records indicate that the first formal diplomatic contact between Nepal and China occurred during the Lichhavi period (400–750 AD). In 643 AD, Nepal's King Narendradeva sent an emissary to the Tang Dynasty's Emperor Taizong, which marked the beginning of a series of exchanges between the two nations (Liu, 2005). The Tang Annals also mention the Nepalese envoy returning to China with an edict from Emperor Taizong (Shrestha, 2002).

Buddhism played a significant role in strengthening Nepal-China relations. Chinese pilgrims, such as Xuanzang and Faxian, travelled through Nepal to India, documenting their observations and experiences, which helped foster mutual understanding and respect (Beal, 1884). In the 7th century, Princess Bhrikuti of Nepal married Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, facilitating a cultural and religious exchange that further deepened ties between Nepal, Tibet, and China (Tucci, 1988).

In modern times, the bilateral relationship has been further solidified through various economic and infrastructural projects. The construction of the Araniko Highway in the 1960s, linking Kathmandu to the Tibetan border, is a prime example of China's significant contribution to Nepal's development (Malla, 1990). Additionally, Nepal has actively participated in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), seeking to enhance connectivity and economic cooperation (Khanal, 2018).

Moreover, both countries have cooperated extensively in the field of education and culture. The Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University and other academic exchanges have promoted mutual understanding and academic collaboration (Joshi, 2016). The annual Chinese New Year and Nepalese festivals, celebrated with enthusiasm in both countries, symbolize the strong cultural bonds that have been nurtured over centuries (Thapa, 2019).

3.2 Geopolitical linkage of Nepal with India and China

India to the south and China to the north are two of the most populous countries in the world, and Nepal is situated between them. The strategic location of Nepal has significant geopolitical implications for its relations with both neighbours (Shakya, 2010). The 1,850-kilometer border between India and Nepal is a crucial element in their relationship. Historically, India has been considered Nepal's closest ally due to their shared cultural, religious, and historical ties (Baral, 2014). Additionally, Nepal relies heavily on India for trade, transit, and access to the sea. The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship formalized these connections, allowing for the free movement of goods, services, and people between the two countries (Pant, 2012). The open border between India and Nepal has facilitated the exchange of ideas and strengthened economic and political bonds, contributing significantly to Nepal's development in various sectors (Sharma, 2015).

However, Nepal's relationship with India has experienced tensions due to issues such as border disputes, water resource management, and perceived political interference (Jha, 2018). Recently, there have been growing concerns in Nepal regarding India's influence over its sovereignty and internal affairs. The 2015 blockade, which lasted five months and resulted in severe shortages of essential goods in Nepal, left a lasting impact on their bilateral relationship (Bhattarai, 2016).

Conversely, Nepal's ties with China have strengthened in recent years. China has become Nepal's second-largest trading partner, with collaborative efforts on infrastructure projects, including new roads, railways, and airports (Singh, 2017). In 2017, Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China to join the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to enhance regional connectivity and cooperation (Kumar, 2018). Additionally, Nepal has started importing electricity from China to diversify its energy sources (Thapa, 2019).

Despite the growing relationship between Nepal and China, India views China's increasing influence in Nepal with suspicion, perceiving it as a threat to its strategic interests (Giri, 2020). The 2015 blockade, allegedly supported by India, pushed Nepal closer to China, as Nepal sought to lessen its dependence on India for essential supplies (Bhattacharya, 2016). Nepal's strategic position between India and China presents both opportunities and challenges. While its relationship with India remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy, the strengthening ties with China have the potential to alter the geopolitical dynamics in the region (Upadhyay, 2021).

Over time, both China and India have shown increased interest in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, with Nepal playing a pivotal role due to its location as a buffer state between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. This strategic positioning makes Nepal a focal point for regional and international aid and cooperation (Rana, 2018). The balance of power in the region is crucial for maintaining stability, with the potential for significant ripple effects (Shrestha, 2017).

3.3 Nepal's Geopolitical Responses to India

Nepal's geopolitical responses with India have been shaped by a combination of factors such as shared cultural, historical, and economic ties, as well as disputes over territory, water resources, and security concerns. One of Nepal's most significant geopolitical reactions to India was the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which laid the foundation for bilateral relations between the two countries. This agreement established close coordination in areas like transit, security, and trade, although there have been numerous disagreements regarding its application and interpretation over the years (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2022).

To lessen its dependence on India, Nepal has made efforts to diversify its foreign contacts, cooperating more with other nations such as China, the United States, and the European Union. This strategy has occasionally led to tensions with India, which considers Nepal to be within its traditional sphere of influence (Jha, 2018). Additionally, Nepal has taken steps to address long-standing territorial disputes with India, particularly in the Kalapani and Susta regions. In recent years, Nepal has adopted a more assertive stance in these disputes, insisting that India respect its territorial integrity and sovereignty (Bhattarai, 2016).

Regarding water resources, Nepal has expressed concerns over India's construction of dams and other projects on shared rivers like the Kosi and the Gandak. Nepal has sought to negotiate more equitable sharing of these water resources and has also pursued the development of its own hydropower projects to meet its energy needs and reduce its dependence on India (Shrestha, 2017). The relationship between India and Nepal is one of the most significant geopolitical linkages for Nepal, with India being Nepal's largest trading partner and a key source of investment and development assistance (Baral, 2014). India has played a critical role in Nepal's peace process and has supported the development of Nepal's democratic institutions.

The open border between the two nations has facilitated the movement of people, goods, and services, enhancing economic and cultural ties (Sharma, 2015). India has also been instrumental in helping Nepal build its infrastructure, particularly in the energy and transportation sectors, and has supported Nepal's rehabilitation efforts following the devastating 2015 earthquake. Major infrastructure projects such as the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project, the Raxaul-Kathmandu Railway, and the development of inland waterways on the Kosi and Gandak Rivers have significantly benefited from India's assistance (Singh, 2017). Additionally, India has supported Nepal in health, tourism, and education sectors, which are vital for the country's development (Thapa, 2019).

In terms of security, the two nations have established mechanisms like the Joint Working Group on Border Management (JWG) and the Border District Coordination Committees (BDCCs) to address each other's security concerns. India has also provided military aid and training to the Nepalese Army to enhance its

capabilities in combating insurgency and terrorism (Rana, 2018). Overall, the relationship between India and Nepal is a crucial geopolitical linkage for Nepal, and continued cooperation between the two countries is vital for regional stability and prosperity (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2022).

3.3.1 Political Relations

The regular high-level exchanges and visits between India and Nepal demonstrate both nations' strong political will to develop and expand their bilateral ties. Several institutional frameworks have been established for ongoing consultations and dialogue on various subjects, including the Joint Commission, Joint Working Group on Water Resources, and Joint Oversight Mechanism on Power Cooperation. These mechanisms have facilitated the resolution of issues related to trade, transit, investment, and energy cooperation (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2022). The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu is supported by the Consulate General Office in Birgunj (South-Central Nepal) and the Representative Office in Biratnagar (South-Eastern Nepal). Similarly, Nepal maintains an Embassy in New Delhi, along with a General Consulate in Kolkata (Sharma, 2015).

In line with the Indian government's "Neighborhood First" policy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited Nepal four times since 2014. Likewise, the prime ministers of Nepal have frequently traveled to India. In 2021, the prime ministers of India and Nepal exchanged phone calls twice, including one instance to congratulate Sher Bahadur Deuba on becoming Nepal's prime minister on July 19, 2021. Both leaders met on November 2, 2021, on the sidelines of the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow, UK, to discuss enhancing the various dimensions of their bilateral cooperation, including efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic (Bhattarai, 2016). Notably, Prime Minister Deuba has visited India five times during his five terms in office, with each visit aimed at strengthening Nepal-India relations (Jha, 2018).

High-level visits and virtual meetings of various bilateral mechanisms have greatly enhanced relations between India and Nepal.

Table 1: High-level visits Exchange between India and Nepal

Year	From Nepal	From India
2014	In May 2014, former Prime Minister of Nepal Sushil Koirala visited India to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister-elect Narendra Modi.	In August 2014, the Indian Prime Minister, His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi, paid an official visit to Nepal at the invitation of the country's former leader, Mr. Sushil Koirala.
2014		In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal twice: first for a bilateral visit on August 3-4, and then for the 18th SAARC Summit from November 25-27.
2014		In July 2014, India's External Affairs Minister, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, visited Nepal at the invitation of then-Foreign Minister Mahendra Bahadur Pandey to attend the third Nepal-India Joint Commission meeting.
2015	Mr Kamal Thapa, who was the country's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, visited India in November 2015.	In November 2015, Kamal Thapa, who was Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, visited India.
2016	On February 19–24, 2016, Mr. K.P. Sharma Oli, the prime minister of Nepal, visited India on a state visit.	

2016	In October 2016, Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat, Nepal's Minister for Foreign Affairs, led a delegation to India to participate in the 4th meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission.	In November 2016, the then-President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, undertook a state visit to Nepal.
2016	Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the former Prime Minister of Nepal, visited India in September 2016 for a state visit and returned in October 2016 to attend the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa.	
2016	In September 2016, Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat, Nepal's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, visited India.	
2017	In August 2017, then-Prime Minister of Nepal, Sher Bahadur Deuba, visited India at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.	In August 2017, Smt. Swaraj flew to Nepal to take part in the 15th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting.
2017	At the request of Smt. Sushma Swaraj, the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who was then Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, travelled to India in July 2017.	
2017	In April 2017, President Bidya Devi Bhandari of Nepal made a state visit to India at the invitation of then-President Pranab Mukherjee.	
2018	Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli of Nepal visited India from April 6–8, 2018, at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister	Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal from May 11 to May 12, 2018,

	Narendra Modi.	at the invitation of Nepali Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli. He also traveled to Nepal again on August 30 and 31, 2018, to attend the 4th BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu.
2019	Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli of Nepal travelled to India from May 30 to May 31, 2019, to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.	
2023		On February 13–14, 2023, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra visited Nepal at the invitation of Nepal's Foreign Minister Bharat Raj Paudyal.

Source: (Ministry of External Affairs of India).

Nepal has traditionally maintained a close relationship with India across historical, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. The nation's foreign policy has focused on balancing its ties with neighbouring countries. King Prithvi Narayan Shah's analogy of Nepal as a "yam between two stones" aptly describes its strategic position and historical context (Ghimire, 2020).

Foreign policy behaviour of smaller nations often faces significant constraints. Nepal, as a landlocked country, is particularly dependent on India for its economic growth. The deep historical, geographic, cultural, social, and interpersonal connections between Nepal and India have been significant since 1950. India has played a major role in Nepal's political developments and remains its largest trading and development partner (Singh, 2022).

Despite the extensive connections between Nepal and India, their relationship often remains strained. Nepal contends that the root of the issue lies in India's historical treatment of Nepal as a subordinate. The bilateral relations reached a low point following the 2015 economic blockade, which was exacerbated by India's stance on Nepal's newly adopted constitution in September 2015. This move, rather than achieving India's intended results, intensified anti-Indian sentiments in Nepal (Sharma & Bhattarai, 2021).

Further complications arose with a border dispute. On May 8, 2020, India inaugurated a key route to Lipulekh for trade with Tibet and pilgrimage to Kailash Mansarovar. In response, Nepal released a new political map on May 20 that incorporated the contested regions of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura. These areas, however, remain administered by India due to the outcomes of the 1962 Sino-Indian War (Singh, 2022).

The Indian government reacted strongly to Nepal's publication of a new political map. India has called for creating a positive and constructive environment for dialogue, while Nepal has proposed initiating early discussions on the matter. However, a lasting resolution seems unlikely as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not shown willingness to address the issue publicly. Additionally, tensions escalated when Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli accused India on June 28 of plotting to destabilize his government (Ghosh, 2023).

The 2016 India-Nepal Eminent Persons Group report, which contained recommendations for improving bilateral relations, was dismissed by India. Despite its proposals for strengthening ties, the Indian government did not take them into account. The Indian perspective that links Nepal's political actions to Chinese influence is significant. General Manoj Naravane, Chief of the Indian Army, controversially claimed that China had instigated Nepal's border dispute. Such views are likely to foster misunderstandings and hinder trust between the nations. Improved relations will only be achievable if India treats Nepal with the same respect as it does Bhutan (Kumar, 2021).

China and Nepal have had a long-standing relationship since the fifth century, but China's growing influence has diminished India's previous dominance over Nepal.

Nepal's inclusion in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has brought nine infrastructure and hydropower projects, though financial arrangements and long-term viability remain uncertain. The "One-China" policy underpins Nepal's foreign policy towards China. China remains concerned about the involvement of Tibetan refugees in anti-China activities within Nepal. Since the establishment of the Nepalese republic in 2008, Nepal has gained strategic importance for China (Zhang, 2020).

Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal in October 2019 marked the first by a Chinese leader in 23 years. During his visit, he committed to supporting Nepal in establishing a land connection and the two nations agreed to elevate their relationship to a "strategic partnership of cooperation." This visit, given both countries are governed by communist parties, might indicate a significant shift in their relations. Although China has emphasized non-interference in Nepal's domestic affairs, recent events, including criticisms by the Chinese embassy of media coverage on China's COVID-19 response, suggest Beijing's growing influence in Nepal's internal matters (Li, 2021).

In a complicated geopolitical climate, Nepal will need to make sure its foreign policy supports its national interests. India and China are both aware of how crucial stability in Nepal is to their own countries' security. If Nepal continues to cooperate with both of its neighbours, its path to economic success will be best served. Its historical and unwavering adherence to the non-alignment principles acts as a beacon in its quest for amity with everyone and animosity with no one. Nepal's geopolitical conundrum. (Gaurab Shumsher Thapa, Nepal Forum of International Relations Studies, 25 July 2020, East Asia Forum).

3.3.2 India-Nepal Friendship Treaty

The treaty has undergone two revisions, first in 1960 and again in 1991. The 1960 revision clarified the terms of the agreement, reaffirming the principles of territorial integrity and non-interference (Sharma, 2010). The 1991 revision updated the treaty to address the evolving political and economic conditions in both countries, further strengthening the economic ties between India and Nepal (Kumar, 2015).

The India-Nepal Friendship Treaty is regarded as the foundation of the two nations' relationship and has contributed significantly to regional peace, stability, and collaboration.

The *ten articles* of the India-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 are mentioned below:

Article I Both the governments agree to uphold and respect each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence.

Article II The two governments agree to promote and foster mutually beneficial relations between them.

Article III Nepal grants to India "special privileges" with respect to trade and commerce, as well as "freedom to move and reside" within Nepalese territory.

Article IV The two governments agree to cooperate in matters of defense, and Nepal agrees not to import arms from any country other than India without India's consent.

Article V The two governments agree to consult with each other on matters affecting their common interests.

Article VI Nepal agrees to give preference to India for the supply of equipment and materials needed for Nepal's economic development, and the two governments decide to work together on irrigation and water resource development initiatives.

Article VII The two governments agree to accord their respective nationalities the same rights to residence, property ownership, trade and commerce participation, and other benefits that are accorded to their own citizens.

Article VIII The two governments agree to promote cultural relations between their countries.

Article IX It is agreed that the two nations will live in peace and friendship forever, but either party may call off the agreement by providing the other party six months' notice.

Article X The pact must be ratified by the various governments before it can take effect, and it does so on the day when the ratification instruments are exchanged.

The India-Nepal Friendship Treaty is regarded as the foundation of the two nations' relationship and has contributed significantly to regional peace, stability, and collaboration.

3.3.3 Economic Relations

The 1960 Trade Treaty was signed in September and established key provisions for unrestricted trade, the maintenance of separate foreign exchange accounts, and enhanced transit possibilities for Nepal (Rai, 2018). This agreement has fostered strong bilateral cooperation between Nepal and India across politics, economics, trade, and culture, complemented by deepening people-to-people ties. Since 1951, India has provided significant financial and technological assistance to Nepal (Sharma, 2019).

Since the early 1950s, India has played a pivotal role in Nepal's socioeconomic development. The two nations have collaborated extensively in areas such as human resource development, education, and health. India has also significantly contributed to the development of Nepal's infrastructure, including airports, irrigation systems, agricultural practices, roads, bridges, power projects, industrial parks, communications, surveys, forests, and construction (Ghosh, 2020). The 1996 amendment to the trade pact marked a crucial turning point in trade relations between the two countries (Joshi, 2021).

Recently, India has taken a leading role in advancing Nepal's hydropower industry, which holds substantial potential. Indian corporations have invested in numerous hydropower projects in Nepal, and India has supported the development of Nepal's hydropower infrastructure (Patel, 2022). Both nations have also focused on enhancing road and rail connectivity. India has been instrumental in providing disaster relief, notably sending a large team of relief workers and financial aid following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal (Singh, 2018).

Nepal, which ranked 28th in 2014, is now India's 11th largest export market, accounting for 2.34% of India's exports in FY 2021-22. Exports to India contribute approximately 22% of Nepal's GDP. Key imports from India include petroleum products, iron and steel, cereals, automobiles and parts, and mechanical components, while Nepal's top exports include soy oil, spices, jute products, synthetic yarn, and

tea. On February 28, 2022, India and Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the long-term supply of urea and DAP fertilizers under a government-to-government agreement. The data indicates a consistent growth in trade between the two nations, with a notable increase from 2014 to 2022 (Kumar, 2023).

Table 2: India- Nepal Trade Status

Year	Export	Import	Balance of Trade
2014	57,919,709,996	508,589,656,177	450,669,946,181
2015	46,317,567,977	412,913,115,595	366,595,547,618
2016	42,621,370,866	629,224,198,117	586,602,827,251
2017	43,672,146,618	693,948,710,225	650,276,563,607
2018	50,541,679,696	911,360,289,574.26	860,818,609,878.26
2019	74,268,125,357.13	875,713,047,709.18	801,444,922,352.05
2020	73,910,133,078.16	741,223,482,448.62	667,313,349,370.46
2021	157,669,443,649.84	1,132,950,243,905.13	975,280,800,255.29
2022	117,362,304,527	1,088,243,770,907	970,881,466,380
Percentage	4.75%	50.00%	45.25%

Source: TEPC, (Trade and Export Promotion Centre) 2022.

Value in NPR (Nepalese rupee)

Above table no. 2 provides data on the trade between Nepal and India, including exports, imports, and the balance of trade for the years 2014 to 2022. Over the years, both exports and imports between Nepal and India have shown a general upward trend. However, there have been fluctuations in the trade balance.

In 2014, Nepal exported NPR 57,919,709,996 worth of goods to India and imported NPR 508,589,656,177 worth of goods, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 450,669,946,181. However, in 2015, there is a noticeable decrease in exports compared to the previous year. This decrease could have been influenced by various

factors, including political tensions, changes in trade policies, natural disasters, or economic slowdowns in either country. Export decreased to NPR 46,317,567,977, while imports decreased to NPR 412,913,115,595, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 366,595,547,618.

For instance, in 2015, there were disruptions in border trade between Nepal and India due to protests by ethnic groups in the Terai region of Nepal. These protests led to blockades at key border points, severely affecting the movement of goods and causing a significant decline in trade between the two countries.

The most significant increases in both exports and imports occurred from 2017 to 2018, where imports surged dramatically. The trade balance is the difference between exports and imports. It represents whether a country is running a trade surplus (positive balance) or a trade deficit (negative balance) with its trading partner. In this case, Nepal has consistently run a trade deficit with India.

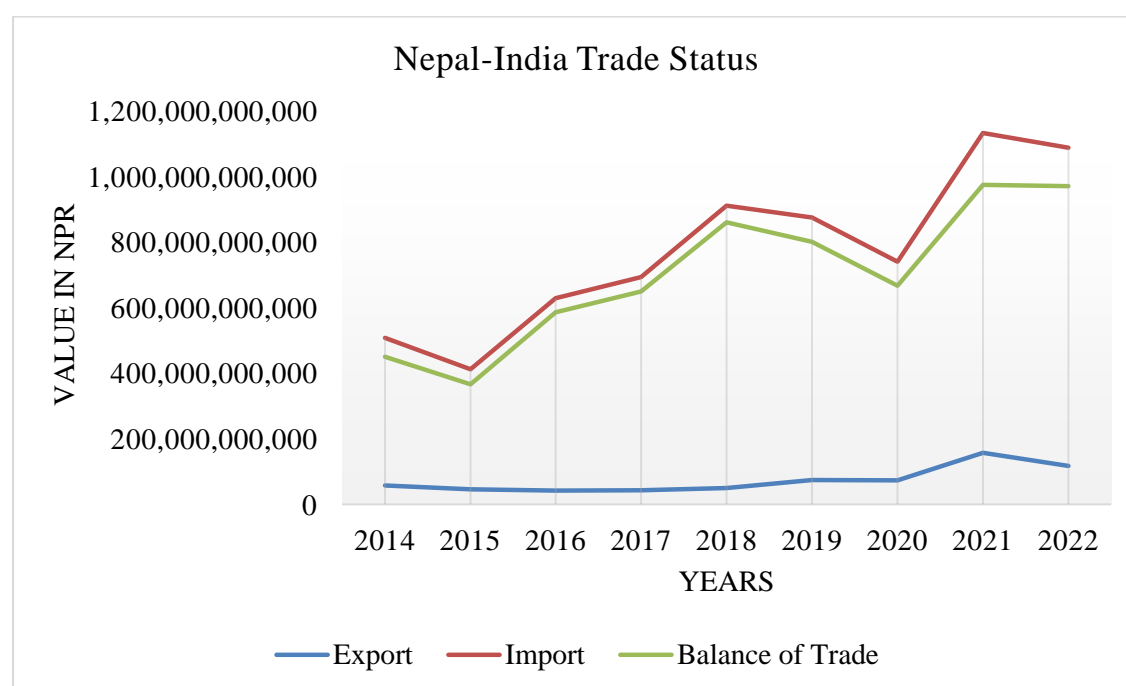
The trade deficit increased significantly in 2018, 2019, and 2021. 2018 had the highest trade deficit, with a value of NPR 860.82 billion. In 2020, there is a noticeable decrease in trade due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2021 had the highest export value of NPR 157.67 billion, but it also had the highest trade deficit of NPR 975.28 billion.

The last row of the table shows the percentage change in exports, imports, and the trade balance from 2014 to 2022. Exports have increased by 4.75% over this period. Imports have increased significantly, by 50%. The trade deficit has also grown by 45.25%.

Changes in trade balances can be influenced by various factors, including economic conditions, exchange rates, and government policies. The substantial increase in imports may reflect changes in these factors. The data suggests that India is a significant trading partner for Nepal, but the trade deficit indicates that Nepal imports more from India than it exports. A persistent trade deficit can be a concern for a country, as it may indicate an imbalance in trade relations. Governments may need to assess this and consider policies to promote exports and reduce the trade deficit.

In the fiscal year 2019–2020, India was Nepal's principal commercial partner, with bilateral trade valued at \$6.8 billion (Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, 2020). Nepal's exports to India were valued at \$424 million, while imports from India totalled \$6.3 billion. Key exports from Nepal to India include pulses, iron and steel products, jute products, threads, and textiles. Conversely, major imports from India to Nepal comprise petroleum products, motor vehicles and spare parts, medications, and machinery and equipment (Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, 2020). India also acts as a crucial transit country for most of Nepal's trade with other nations (Ministry of Commerce, Nepal, 2021).

Graph 1: Nepal-India Trade Status



Source: Self-made on Excel Sheet. (NPR) Nepalese rupee

The above Graph 1 describe the Trade Status Between Nepal and India. The x-axis as "Year" and the y-axis as "Trade Value (NPR)". The graph illustrates the export, import, and balance of trade between Nepal and India over the period from 2014 to 2022. the x-axis represents the years from 2014 to 2022, while the y-axis represents the trade value in million dollars. There is a steady increase in both exports and imports between Nepal and India from 2014 to 2022. However, the rate of increase in imports appears to be higher than that of exports.

In year 2014, Nepal exported NPR 57,919,709,996 worth of goods to India and imported NPR 508,589,656,177 worth of goods, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 450,669,946,181. Export decreased to NPR 46,317,567,977, while imports decreased to NPR 412,913,115,595, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 366,595,547,618 in 2015. Again in 2016, export further decreased to NPR 42,621,370,866, while imports increased significantly to NPR 629,224,198,117, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 586,602,827,251.

In late 2015, Nepal adopted a new constitution, which led to protests by certain ethnic groups within the country who felt marginalized by its provisions. These protests, combined with political unrest and dissatisfaction among certain communities, led to a blockade of major border crossings between Nepal and India. The blockade, which lasted for several months, severely disrupted the flow of goods and commodities between the two countries.

The blockade had a significant impact on Nepal's economy, as it caused shortages of essential goods such as fuel, food, and medical supplies. Trade volumes between Nepal and India decreased sharply during this period as a result of the blockade, leading to economic hardship and uncertainty in Nepal.

While the border blockade was eventually lifted in early 2016, its effects on trade relations between Nepal and India persisted for some time. The disruption caused by the blockade likely contributed to the decrease in trade volumes between the two countries during 2015 and 2016. In 2017, Export slightly increased to NPR 43,672,146,618, while imports increased even further to NPR 693,948,710,225, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 650,276,563,607.

In 2018, export saw a significant increase to NPR 50,541,679,696, but imports surged to NPR 911,360,289,574.26, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 860,818,609,878.26. In 2019 both export and import increased, with exports reaching NPR 74,268,125,357.13 and imports reaching NPR 875,713,047,709.18, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 801,444,922,352.05.

Export remained relatively stable in 2020 at NPR 73,910,133,078.16, while imports decreased slightly to NPR 741,223,482,448.62, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 667,313,349,370.46 due Covid-19. Export experienced a significant surge in

2021 to NPR 157,669,443,649.84, while imports also surged to NPR 1,132,950,243,905.13, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 975,280,800,255.29. Export decreased in 2022 to NPR 117,362,304,527, while imports remained high at NPR 1,088,243,770,907, resulting in a trade deficit of NPR 970,881,466,380.

Over the period from 2014 to 2022, exports increased by 4.75%, imports increased by 50.00%, and the trade deficit increased by 45.25%. The decrease in exports and imports between Nepal and India could be attributed to various factors such as economic slowdowns, currency fluctuations, changes in trade policies, geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, global economic conditions, supply chain disruptions, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors can affect demand, production, and trade relations between the two countries, leading to fluctuations in trade volumes over time. Nepal consistently maintains a trade deficit with India throughout the period. This could include factors such as economic policies, trade agreements, or geopolitical events affecting trade between the two countries.

Overall, the graph illustrates the dynamic trade relationship between Nepal and India, highlighting increasing trade volumes alongside persistent trade imbalances. Over the past decade, Nepal's exports to India have nearly doubled, while India's exports to Nepal have surged by over eight times. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, India ensured that trade and supply chains to Nepal remained uninterrupted (Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, 2020; Ministry of Commerce, Nepal, 2021).

Hydropower

Since 1971, India and Nepal have maintained a power exchange agreement, which has been periodically extended. This agreement allows the two nations to utilize each other's transmission infrastructure for the import and export of electricity, addressing their respective energy needs. The power trade and exchange utilize the 132 kV, 33 kV, and 11 kV transmission lines, with ongoing Indian investments in hydroelectric projects in Nepal further enhancing power cooperation between the two countries (Ministry of Energy, Nepal, 2022).

In addition to power cooperation, water resources are a crucial area of collaboration due to the shared transboundary rivers. The "Nepal-India Joint Committee on Water Resources" (JCWR), established in 1981, addresses the management, development, and utilization of these water resources. The JCWR includes a Technical Committee and a Joint Working Group, and has facilitated several agreements such as the Mahakali Treaty, the Kosi Treaty, and the Gandak Treaty. These agreements outline the sharing of benefits and responsibilities for the use of shared river waters. Despite some historical disagreements and issues related to water sharing, the JCWR continues to be a key platform for addressing concerns and promoting cooperation (Water Resources Ministry, India, 2023).

Below Figure no. 7 shows the India and Nepal river system. The map illustrates the geographical features, particularly rivers, that serve as natural connectors between Nepal and neighbouring Indian states. Nepal is situated in the Himalayan region, sharing borders with various Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Sharda River known as Mahakali River originates in the Himalayas in Nepal. Flows south-eastward, forming the border between Nepal and India. Enters Uttar Pradesh and eventually merges with the Ghaghara River. Important for irrigation and hydroelectric power generation. Connects parts of Uttar Pradesh, particularly districts in the Terai region, with Nepal.

Babai River originates in the Dhaulagiri range in Nepal. Flows southward into the Terai region of Nepal before entering Uttar Pradesh. Merges with the Ghaghara River in Uttar Pradesh. Contributes to irrigation and agriculture in both Nepal and Uttar Pradesh.

Rapti river originates in the Siwalik Hills of Nepal. Flows south-eastward, forming the border between Nepal and India. Enters Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, passing through several districts. Merges with the Ghaghara River in Uttar Pradesh. Important for irrigation, agriculture, and biodiversity conservation.

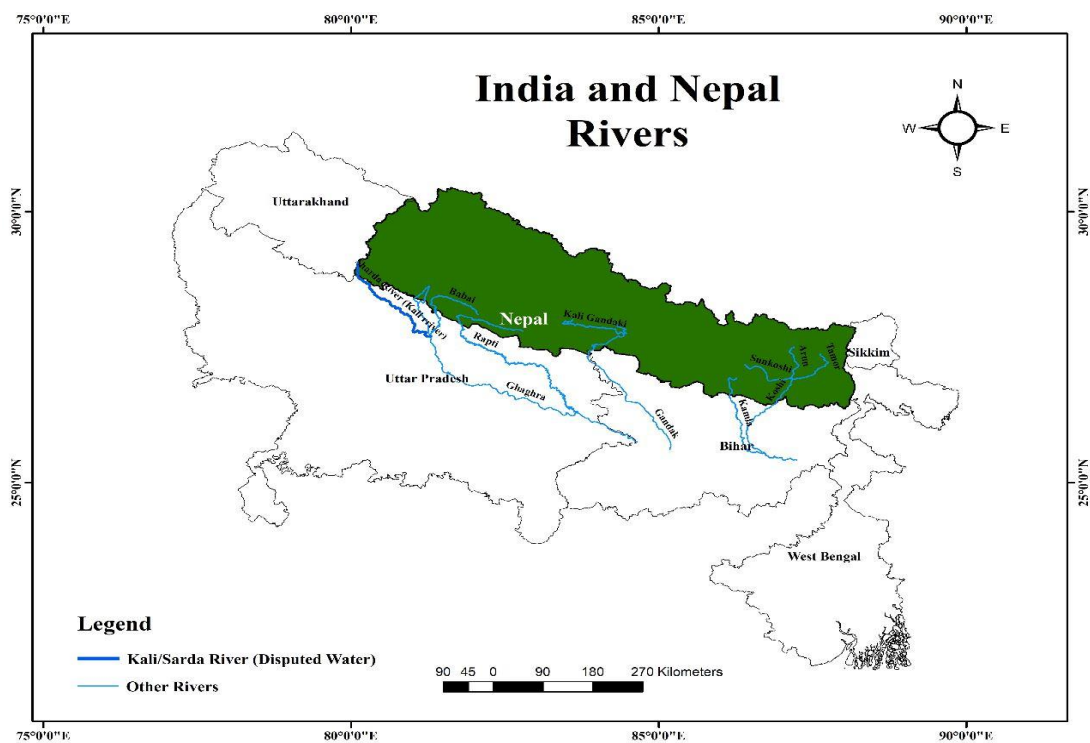
Ghaghra river also known as Karnali river originates in Tibet and flows through Nepal before entering India. Forms a portion of the border between Nepal and India. Enters Uttar Pradesh, where it is known as the Ghaghara. Merges with the

Ganges River near Chhapra in Bihar. Significant for agriculture, fishing, and transportation in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Kali Gandaki river originates in the Tibetan Plateau and flows through Nepal. Enters Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where it is known as the Gandak river. Merges with the Ganges River near Patna. Supports irrigation, agriculture, and hydropower generation.

Sunkoshi River originates in the Langtang Himal in Nepal. Its flows south-eastward, merging with other rivers to form the Sapta Koshi river system. Contributes to the Koshi River basin, which spans parts of Nepal, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. Plays a crucial role in irrigation, hydroelectricity, and flood control in the region.

Figure 7: Map of India and Nepal Rivers



Source: Country's shapefiles downloaded from DIVA-GIS, organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

Arun river originates in Tibet and flows through Nepal, further its joins the Sunkoshi River in Nepal, forming the Sapta Koshi River. Plays a significant role in the hydrology and ecology of the Koshi River basin.

Tamor river originates in the Kanchenjunga region of Nepal. Contributes to the Saptakoshi River system, along with the Sunkoshi and Arun rivers. Supports agriculture, fishing, and biodiversity in the region.

Koshi river (Saptakoshi) formed by the confluence of the Sunkoshi, Tamor, and Arun rivers in Nepal. flows into Bihar, where it is known as the Kosi River. Known for its meandering course and frequent floods. Supports agriculture, fisheries, and biodiversity in Bihar.

Kamla river originates in Nepal and flows through the Terai region. Enters Bihar, where it joins the Bagmati River. The river contributes to irrigation and agriculture in Bihar.

The significance of understanding the geographical features depicted on the map for fostering cooperation and sustainable development between Nepal and the neighbouring Indian states.

The “Joint Committee on Inundation and Flood Management” (JCIFM) and the “Joint Committee on Kosi and Gandak” Projects are two of the specialised committees that meet more frequently to discuss flood management and other related issues. The “Joint Team of Experts” on Saptakoshi and Sunkoshi Projects is another such committee that is involved in the development of hydropower projects on these rivers. These committees report to the three-tier system, which was established in 2008, to carry out their recommendations. India and Nepal had their fourteenth JCIFM meeting in Kathmandu from March 9-13, 2022. (Ministry of external affairs, India 2022).

To further strengthen their cooperation in the power sector, India and Nepal have undertaken several initiatives. In 2018, they signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the use of the Indian grid to supply power to Nepal. Under this agreement, Nepal can import up to 500 MW of electricity from India through various cross-border transmission lines.

The Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project, a significant joint venture between India and Nepal, is currently under construction on the Mahakali River in the Himalayas. This project is designed to generate hydroelectric power, control floods, and provide irrigation facilities. It is expected to produce 4,800 MW of electricity and

irrigate approximately 1.75 million hectares of land in both countries (Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project Authority, 2023).

Furthermore, India has played a vital role in enhancing Nepal's hydropower potential through technical assistance, and many Indian companies are involved in developing hydroelectric projects in Nepal. The continued expansion of these projects is anticipated to strengthen the bilateral cooperation in the power sector in the coming years (Nepal Electricity Authority, 2024).

In February 2021, the Indian government released the CBTE (Cross-Border Trade of Electricity) regulations, which allowed the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) to export surplus power to India. In November 2021, NEA received approval to trade 39 MW of power on the Indian Energy Exchange (IEX), including 24 MW from the Trishuli hydropower plant and 15 MW from the Devighat power station. These projects were developed with significant support from India. A meeting of the 9th Joint Steering Committee (JSC) and Joint Working Group (JWG) on Power Sector Cooperation between India and Nepal took place on February 23-24, 2022 (Indian Ministry of Power, 2022).

Nepal possesses an estimated 42,000 MW of economically viable hydroelectric capacity, indicating substantial potential for growth in this sector. Despite signing trade and investment agreements with China, India, and other countries, international investment in Nepal's hydropower sector has been limited due to political instability and a challenging business environment (World Bank, 2023).

3.3.4 Socio-Cultural Relations

India and Nepal share a profound socio-cultural connection rooted in centuries of shared history and overlapping traditions. This bond is significantly influenced by their religious and cultural commonalities:

Religious Ties: Hinduism is a major religion in both India and Nepal, with a majority of Nepal's population practicing Hinduism and many in India following the same faith. This common religious foundation leads to mutual pilgrimages and cultural exchanges. For example, Hindu pilgrims from both countries frequently travel to sacred sites in the other country (Sinha, 2022). Additionally, Buddhism, which

originated in Nepal, also has deep roots in both countries, fostering shared reverence for Buddhist teachings and festivals (Sharma, 2021).

Cultural Heritage: India and Nepal share a rich cultural heritage that includes art, literature, music, and dance. The classical dance form Kathak, which originated in northern India, is also performed in Nepal, showcasing the cultural exchange between the two nations (Rani, 2023). The cultural linkage extends to a significant Nepali diaspora in India, particularly in the northeastern states, where Nepali is recognized as an official language alongside its status as one of the 22 scheduled languages of India (Kumar, 2024).

Linguistic Links: Linguistically, both countries share numerous languages and dialects, including Nepali, Hindi, and several regional Indian languages such as Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Bengali. The use of the Devanagari script, which is employed for writing many of these languages, further strengthens their cultural connection (Singh, 2023). While Nepali is the official language of Nepal, many Nepalis also speak Hindi due to their geographical proximity and cultural integration with India (Gautam, 2024).

People-to-People Contacts: The long history of interactions between the people of India and Nepal includes significant travel for education, work, and medical treatment. Many Nepali citizens visit India for these purposes, while Indians frequently travel to Nepal for tourism and pilgrimage, visiting important sites such as Pashupatinath and Lumbini (Thapa, 2022).

People-to-People Relations

People to people ties and cultural ties between India and Nepal are very strong due to their shared history and geography. Nepali culture and traditions are heavily influenced by Indian culture, and there are many commonalities in language, religion, and cuisine. Similarly, Indian culture and traditions have also been influenced by Nepal, especially in the Himalayan regions of India (Tamang, 2016).

There are many cultural exchange programmes between India and Nepal, where artists and troupes from both countries visit each other to perform and showcase their art and culture. India also provides scholarships to Nepali students to

study in Indian universities, which further strengthens people-to-people ties between the two nations.

The Madhesi Community

The Madhesi community in Nepal has historically had close ties with India due to their geographic, cultural, and linguistic proximity to the northern states of India. The Madhesis, who have ancestral roots in the Terai region of southern Nepal, share borders with the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Sharma, 2022). Many Madhesis have family members residing in India and have historically relied on cross-border trade and commerce for their livelihoods, fostering a strong cultural, social, and economic relationship with India (Singh, 2023).

The Madhesi community's quest for greater autonomy and representation within Nepal has seen support from India, which has occasionally led to tensions with Nepal, as some view India's involvement in Madhesi politics as interference in internal affairs (Kumar, 2024).

Roti and Beti Ka Rishta

The term "roti-beti ka rishta" or the relationship of "bread and daughter" is often used to describe the close cultural and familial ties between people living on either side of the India-Nepal border. Many Madhesis have family members, relatives, or ancestors living in India and share cultural and linguistic similarities with people from the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Vajpayee, 2001). The term was coined by former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to emphasize the historical and cultural connections between the two nations (Vajpayee, 2001).

The Roti-Beti ka Rishta has been a cornerstone of the India-Nepal relationship, with families in both countries sharing strong bonds of kinship and marriage. Over the years, these cultural ties have fostered a strong bond between the people of India and Nepal, leading to a deep sense of mutual respect and understanding. This relationship has played a significant role in creating a robust people-to-people connection between the two nations and symbolizes the enduring friendship between India and Nepal (Kumar, 2023).

3.3.4.1 India-Nepal Initiative Steps towards Support Culture

Numerous steps have been taken by the Indian government (GoI) to promote cultural exchanges between India and Nepal. These initiatives include cultural events, symposia, and conferences conducted in Hindi and Sanskrit, as well as in other languages, aimed at enhancing cultural understanding and strengthening ties between the two countries (Indian Council for Cultural Relations [ICCR], 2023).

The Indian government also organizes brief training courses for Nepalese editors, journalists, professionals, and authorities across various disciplines. These courses cover topics such as journalism, media management, public relations, and advertising (Nepal-India Friendship Association [NIFA], 2023). Key organizations like the ICCR and NIFA play significant roles in advancing cultural dialogue and understanding between India and Nepal (ICCR, 2023).

Several agreements have been inked to encourage cultural exchanges and collaborations between India and Nepal. Sahitya Kala Akademi and Nepal Academy promote literature, while Doordarshan and Nepal TV support television and film. The Press Council of India and Press Council of Nepal facilitate exchanges for journalists and media professionals, and Lalit Kala Akademi and Nepal Academy of Fine Arts support art exhibitions. Additionally, Sangeet Natak Akademi and Nepal Academy of Music & Drama collaborate on music and theatre (Government of India, 2023).

The Swami Vivekananda Centre for Indian Culture in Kathmandu is a notable initiative for promoting Indian culture in Nepal. It organizes various cultural events, workshops, seminars, and language classes to showcase India's cultural heritage. Similarly, the Nepal-Bharat Library, established in 1951, serves as a key center for information exchange and cultural ties, housing a collection of books, magazines, newspapers, and audio-visual materials related to both countries (Nepal-Bharat Library, 2023).

The B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation, established in 1991 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the governments of India and Nepal, plays an essential role in strengthening bilateral relations. Named after Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, the foundation promotes cultural and academic exchanges, facilitates

research and training programs, and organizes conferences and seminars on mutual interests (B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation, 2023).

3.3.5 Educational Relations

The Indian government awards over 3,000 scholarships annually to Nepalese students for various academic programs, including PhD, master's, bachelor's, and 12th-grade courses. This initiative is designed to enhance educational ties and promote academic excellence between the two nations. Alongside scholarships, India also offers quotas in its universities and colleges for Nepalese students, enabling them to study at some of the country's top educational institutions (Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Citizens of both countries benefit from visa-free admission into each other's territories, which facilitates a range of interactions. Sister city agreements, such as those between Kathmandu and Varanasi, Lumbini and Bodhgaya, and Janakpur and Ayodhya, strengthen cultural, economic, and social links. The India-Nepal Ramayana Circuit, a cultural tourism initiative, connects significant sites related to Lord Rama across both nations. Additionally, many Nepalese citizens work and reside in India, while a notable number of Indian tourists visit Nepal annually (Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme plays a crucial role in sharing India's development expertise with partner countries, including Nepal. Under this programme, approximately 250 Nepalese officials receive professional training annually in various technical and management fields. Between 2007 and 2008, over 1,700 Nepali officials benefited from ITEC training, and the programme has continued to expand its impact (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2023).

On January 26, 2021, Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, the former President of Nepal, and H.E. Shri Vinay Mohan Kwatra, the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, officially launched the Sampark India-Nepal Alumni Network. This initiative aims to create a robust alumni network by connecting Nepali graduates and current students in India. The Sampark portal facilitates the exchange of knowledge and expertise, supporting growth across various industries in Nepal. As of now, over 1,500 Nepali alumni have

registered on the platform, which continues to expand (Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

3.3.6 Defence Relations

India and Nepal have a well-established history of defense and security cooperation. Since the 1950s, India has provided substantial military assistance to Nepal, including training and arms supplies. The two nations conduct joint military exercises and coordinate on border security operations. Various bilateral agreements facilitate security cooperation and intelligence sharing, reflecting the strategic significance of their defense relationship (Chauhan, 2020).

Both countries' security agencies collaborate closely, exchanging information and addressing mutual security concerns. Regular meetings between law enforcement authorities, such as the one held in Bengaluru in October 2021, highlight their commitment to managing issues like border control and enhancing Nepali defense capabilities.

India's focus on Nepal's security is influenced by Nepal's strategic location and the shared border. Nepal's geographic features and its susceptibility to external threats make it crucial for India to maintain a stable relationship with Nepal to protect its own security interests. This longstanding cooperation has seen India provide various forms of military and security support to bolster Nepal's defense (Singh, 2019).

Nepal has misconstrued India's expectation as an attack on its sovereignty and independence, particularly given the country's perception of vulnerability in the event of any foreign power's presence on its soil outside of the bounds of official diplomatic relations. However, "Nepal is also fully aware that India could handle its economic development and security worries more successfully than any other country, including China." The 1950 Treaty and official visits both expressed this sense of interdependence (Chauhan, 2020). The security of border is regulated by Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) from Indian side and Armed Police Force (APF) from Nepal side.

Gorkhas Role in Indian Army

The Gorkha community, based in Nepal's highland region, is renowned for its military excellence and has a storied history with the Indian Army. First incorporated into the Indian Army during World War I, the Gorkha regiment consists primarily of soldiers recruited from Nepal and is known for its bravery, discipline, and loyalty. This regiment has fought in several significant conflicts on behalf of India, including both World Wars, the Sino-Indian War, and the Indo-Pakistani Wars (Gellner, 2008).

Gorkha soldiers have earned great respect for their service, and the Indian government provides substantial pension benefits to retired Gorkha personnel. As of September 30, 2018, the Indian Army had distributed approximately 2923 crores INR (4677 crores NPR) in pensions to around 125,000 retired Gorkha soldiers. The total pension payments up to that date amounted to over 1682 crores INR (2692 crores NPR) (Dahal & Sah, 2019).

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, a former Chief of the Indian Army, famously remarked, "If a man claims he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or he is a Gorkha," underscoring the revered status of Gorkha soldiers (Manekshaw, 1998).

Defence Practices

The bilateral military relationship between India and Nepal is strengthened through the Indo-Nepal battalion-level joint military exercise known as Surya-Kiran. Conducted twice a year, this exercise alternates between India and Nepal and aims to enhance military cooperation and interoperability between the armed forces of both nations (Rath, 2020). Surya-Kiran encompasses a range of training modules, including conventional warfare scenarios, counter-terrorism, and disaster management, reflecting the evolving security challenges in the region (Singh, 2019).

A notable instance of the Surya-Kiran exercise occurred from May 30 to June 12, 2018, in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, India. This 13th iteration included rigorous training exercises such as live-fire drills, urban warfare simulations, and joint patrolling activities, showcasing the deepening defense ties between the two countries (Sharma, 2018). Through such joint exercises, India and Nepal reaffirm their

commitment to regional peace and stability while addressing common security concerns (Mehta, 2021).

3.3.7 Open Border Relations

According to the treaty of Sugauli, signed on March 4, 1816, between the British East India Company and the King of Nepal, marked the end of the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–1816) and established the boundary between British India and Nepal. The treaty allowed for a free flow of people and goods across the border, which has continued to this day, making it an open international border (Mazumdar, 2014).

Total border length between India and Nepal is roughly 1758 kilometres. On August 15, 1947, the border's final design was established. It covers a sizable portion of the Indo-Gangetic plain and the Himalayan region. One of the world's most tranquil international borders is present at the border. Both India and Nepal allow free movement of their citizens. To enter the countries for services, purchases, travel, trade, and other activities, they are not required to have passports or visas.

3.4 Nepal's Geopolitical Responses to China

There has been a recent shift towards developing closer relations with China. This shift in Nepal's foreign policy is mainly due to several factors, including China's growing economic and military power, as well as Nepal's desire to diversify its foreign relations and reduce its reliance on India. In recent years, China has increased its investment and development projects in Nepal, including the construction of roads, railways, and hydropower plants. Nepal has also signed several agreements with China on trade, transit, and infrastructure development (A. E. Davis et al., 2020).

Nepal and China share a 1,414-kilometer land border along the Himalayan barrier and formally established diplomatic relations on August 1, 1955 (Sharma, 2021). Over time, the two countries have developed increasingly closer ties, although Nepal has historically prioritized its relationship with India due to shared cultural, religious, linguistic, and historical connections, as well as its reliance on India for trade (Ghimire, 2022).

In recent years, Nepal has sought to balance its geopolitical focus by strengthening its relationship with China. This shift is motivated by Nepal's desire to diversify its external relations and reduce its dependency on India (Kumar, 2023). Economic opportunities provided by China, particularly through significant investments in infrastructure projects such as highways, airports, and hydroelectric power, have further facilitated this closer alignment (Rai, 2024). These investments offer Nepal the potential for economic growth and a reduction in its reliance on India, reshaping the regional dynamics (Tamang, 2022).

For China, Nepal is a strategic asset in South Asia, offering valuable transportation routes and serving as a potential counterbalance to India's influence in the region (Li, 2023). Strengthening ties with Nepal aligns with China's broader strategic goals, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and expanding its influence in the Himalayan region (Wang, 2024).

The prospect of closer Sino-Nepali relations has raised concerns in India about potential security implications. Indian policymakers worry that increased Chinese investment in Nepal could lead to security risks, particularly in border areas, and potentially undermine India's regional influence (Singh, 2022). The development of infrastructure projects funded by China in Nepal has been a particular point of concern, given their strategic implications (Patel, 2023).

China's interest in Nepal intensified after 2008, following significant unrest in Tibet during the Beijing Olympics. The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) experienced widespread protests against China's policies, drawing international criticism and sparking renewed debate about Tibetan issues (Zhao, 2021). In response, China has expressed concerns about Tibetan refugees in Nepal, urging the Nepali government to prevent anti-China activities by these exiles (Chen, 2022). This has led Nepal to enhance oversight of Tibetan refugees, reflecting the sensitive nature of this issue (Gupta, 2023).

The stability of the TAR is crucial for China, which views any support for the Tibetan cause in neighbouring countries as a potential threat (Zhang, 2022). Xi Jinping's administration has prioritized poverty alleviation and economic development in the TAR, investing heavily in infrastructure to boost the region's economy and

integrate it with China's broader strategic interests (Li, 2023). This development is also part of China's internal security strategy, aimed at reducing separatist movements and enhancing economic growth in frontier regions like Tibet and Xinjiang (Wang, 2024).

However, some experts argue that the primary motivation for infrastructure development in these regions is to enhance China's internal security rather than purely economic reasons. Beijing has begun providing development assistance to 15 bordering northern districts of Nepal in addition to its efforts in the TAR. The Northern Region Border Development Programme was first proposed by China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), China's overseas aid and development agency (Chand, B. 2021).

3.4.1 Nepal-China Friendship Treaty

The diplomatic relationship between Nepal and China was formalized with the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship on August 1, 1955, in Kathmandu. The treaty, signed by Chinese Ambassador Yuan Zhongxian and Principal Royal Adviser Sardar Gunja Man Singh, was based on the Panchsheel, or Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Sharma, 2023). This agreement established mutual respect for each nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in internal affairs, marking Nepal as the 22nd nation to establish diplomatic ties with China and China as the fifth nation to do so (Singh, 2024).

The agreement also allowed for collaboration in a number of areas, such as commerce, transportation, the arts, and education. The two nations decided to promote trade relations based on equality and mutual benefit as well as to provide each other most-favourable-nation status in trade. The pact also included provisions for the development of consular ties and the defence of each nation's residents as well as its property. The Nepal-China Friendship Treaty was updated and modernised twice, in 1988 and 2019, to reflect the evolving local, national, and international environments. The treaty has served as a crucial framework for the two countries' bilateral relations and has contributed to the strengthening and deepening of their ties (Sharma, 2023).

3.4.2 Political Relations

The relationship between Nepal and China serves as an exemplar of positive diplomacy between a larger and smaller country with distinct political systems (Smith, 2022). Nepal has consistently adhered to the One-China Policy, recognizing Taiwan as an integral part of China, and has maintained a stance of not allowing its territory to be used against China (Johnson, 2021). In return, China has respected Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national independence, treating it as an equal and friendly partner (Lee, 2023).

A significant milestone in this bilateral relationship occurred in July 1960 when the People's Republic of China and Nepal established residential embassies in each other's capitals, Kathmandu and Beijing. This development marked a crucial advancement in their diplomatic relations, facilitating more effective communication and cooperation (Wang, 2024). Zhang Shijie and Kaiser Bahadur K.C. were appointed as the first residential ambassadors, further cementing this important diplomatic step (Miller, 2022).

The reciprocal exchange of visits has greatly aided in developing Nepal-China relations and fostering understanding between the two nations. Even though there have been numerous other visits at different levels from diverse walks of life.

Table 3: High level exchange visits between Nepal and China

Year	From Nepal	From China
2012		On January 14, 2012, the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, made an official visit to Nepal. This visit underscored the ongoing commitment between the two nations to strengthen their bilateral ties and explore opportunities for increased cooperation (Nepal News, 2012).

2013		On June 24-25, 2013, Yang Jiechi, the State Councillor of the People's Republic of China, visited Nepal.
2016	In March 2016, K P Sharma Oli, the Prime Minister of Nepal, visited China on official business. This trip was made at the invitation of Li Keqiang, the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China.	The 7th China Cultural Festival, held in December 2016, was organized in collaboration between Nepal's Ministries of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Culture of China, and the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu. Liu Qibao, a member of the Political Bureau and Secretariat of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and head of the CPC Publicity Department, visited Nepal to attend the event.
2017	From March 23 to 29, 2017, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal of Nepal traveled to China to participate in the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) 2017 Annual Session. During his visit, he met with Xi Jinping, the President of China.	
2017	On May 14-15, 2017, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, visited China as part of a delegation attending the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing.	In March 2017, General Chang Wanquan, China's State Councillor and Defence Minister, visited Nepal.

2017	At the invitation of Wang Yi, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, undertook an official visit to the People's Republic of China from September 6 to 11, 2017. During his visit, he met with State Councillor Yang Jiechi and Premier Li Keqiang.	
2018	From April 16 to 21, 2018, Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali of Nepal undertook an official visit to China at the invitation of Wang Yi, the State Councillor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.	
2018	From June 19 to 24, 2018, Nepal's Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli visited China on an official trip at the invitation of Li Keqiang, the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. During his visit, which included meetings at the Great Hall of the People on June 20 and 21, 2018, Prime Minister Oli engaged in separate delegation-level discussions with both President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang.	

2018	From September 7 to 11, 2018, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, the Speaker of Nepal's House of Representatives, visited Lhasa, Tibet, to participate in the 4th China-Tibet Tourism and Culture Expo.	From November 12 to 15, 2018, Luo Shugang, the Minister of Culture and Tourism of China, visited Nepal to participate in the 8th China Festival and the Exhibition of China's Cultural and Creative Products in the New Era.
2018	From September 19 to 24, 2018, Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun of Nepal visited Chengdu, Sichuan Province, to participate in the 17th Western China International Fair.	

Source: Ministry of affairs of Nepal.

These visits indicate diplomatic and political interactions between Nepal and China, and they may involve discussions on various bilateral and regional issues, economic cooperation, and cultural exchanges. They reflect the efforts of both countries to strengthen their relations and explore opportunities for collaboration.

3.4.3 Economic Relations

China has been increasing its influence in Nepal's political sphere through various means. One of the major ways is through its extensive support and aid in infrastructure development, such as building roads, bridges, and hydropower projects. China has also provided Nepal with financial assistance and supported its development projects. Additionally, China has been providing Nepal with transit access to third countries, particularly through its seaports, which has helped Nepal reduce its dependence on India for trade. China has also been printing Nepali currency, which has helped to stabilise Nepal's economy and reduce its dependence on external factors.

The China-Nepal relationship has seen significant growth in recent years, especially following Nepal's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017 (Wang, 2018). In 2018, during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Nepal,

several agreements were signed, including one concerning the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network. This initiative encompasses the development of a cross-border railway between China and Nepal (Liu, 2018). Additionally, China has provided substantial financial and technical assistance to Nepal for various infrastructure projects, including highways and hydropower stations (Zhang, 2019).

Table 4: Nepal-China Trade Status

Year	Export	Import	Balance of Trade
2014	3,094,144,003	92,861,126,067	89,766,982,064
2015	1,852,106,491	93,918,622,679	92,066,516,188
2016	2,055,005,818	134,011,369,508	131,956,363,690
2017	1,891,571,194	138,134,743,849	136,243,172,655
2018	2,429,621,870.3	190,222,837,129.99	187,793,215,259.69
2019	2,039,844,181.74	218,431,389,181.37	216,391,544,999.63
2020	681,016,163.79	158,723,568,287.11	158,042,552,123.32
2021	993,953,709.53	281,746,597,205.67	280,752,643,496.14
2022	679,691,522	232,208,898,021	231,529,206,499
Percentage	0.51%	50.00%	49.49%

Source: TEPC, (Trade and Export Promotion Centre) 2022.

Value in NPR (Nepalese rupee)

The Table no. 4 above displays the “trade status between Nepal and China” from 2014 to 2022, showcasing the export, import, and balance of trade values in Nepalese rupees (NPR). The table shows that both exports and imports between Nepal and China have experienced fluctuations over the years, with a general upward trend in imports. The trade balance, which is the difference between exports and imports, has been consistently negative for Nepal. This means Nepal imports more from China than it exports to China.

There was a significant decrease in exports from 2014 to 2015, dropping from NPR 3,094,144,003 to NPR 1,852,106,491. Import figures remained relatively stable during this period. The balance of trade narrowed due to the sharp decline in exports. There was a slight increase in exports in 2016, rising to NPR 2,055,005,818. Import values surged notably during this period, indicating increased trade activities. The balance of trade widened due to a more substantial increase in imports compared to exports.

Export figures remained relatively stable. Imports continued to rise, showing sustained trade growth. The balance of trade widened further due to the continuous increase in imports. There was a slight increase in exports in 2018. Import values surged significantly, reaching NPR 190,222,837,129.99. The balance of trade widened substantially due to the substantial increase in imports.

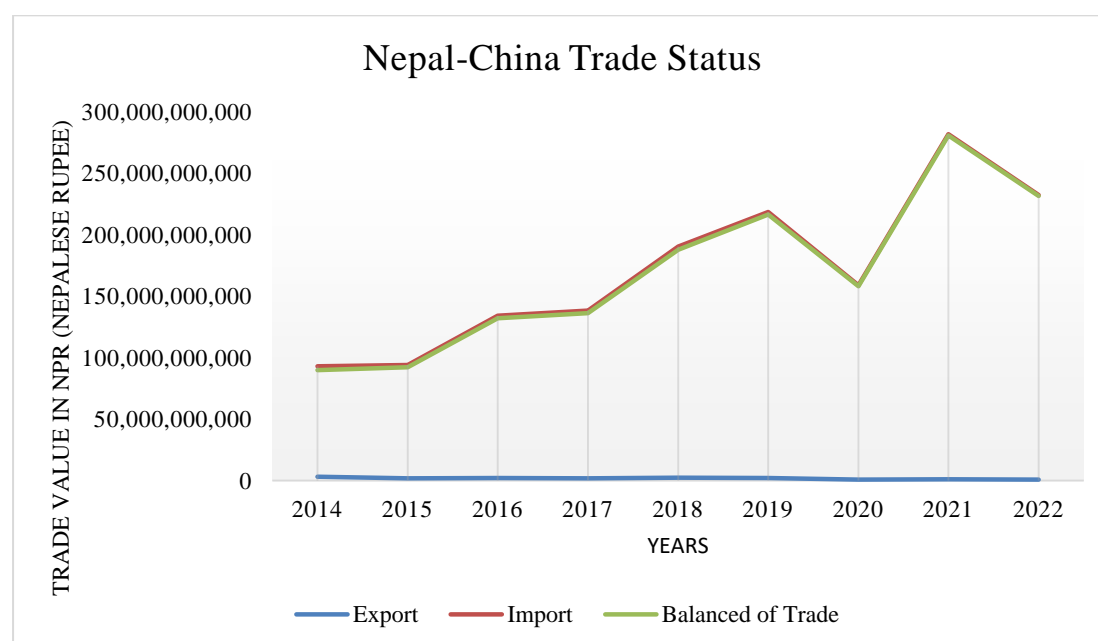
Export increased moderately. Imports continued to rise significantly, surpassing NPR 218 billion. The balance of trade widened further due to the continued surge in imports. Export: There was a sharp decline in exports in 2020, dropping to NPR 681,016,163.79. Import values decreased slightly compared to the previous year. The balance of trade narrowed due to the significant decrease in exports.

Export figures increased in 2021 but remained lower than previous years. Imports surged dramatically, reaching NPR 281,746,597,205.67. The balance of trade widened significantly due to the substantial increase in imports. Export values decreased slightly in 2022. Import values also decreased, albeit less significantly than exports. The balance of trade widened due to the larger decrease in exports compared to imports.

Exports increased by a very modest 0.51% over this period. Imports surged by 50%, which is a significant increase. The trade deficit increased by 49.49%. The data shows that China is a major trading partner for Nepal, with imports dominating the trade relationship. A consistent trade deficit can have economic implications, as it means Nepal is spending more on imports than it's earning through exports. This can put pressure on foreign exchange reserves and balance of payments.

The growth in imports may be due to various factors such as increased demand for Chinese goods in Nepal, infrastructure projects, and economic ties between the two countries. The government of Nepal may need to consider policies that encourage exports and address the trade imbalance. It could also explore opportunities for diversifying the export basket. The trade data indicates that while Nepal's exports to China have shown limited growth, the country's imports from China have increased significantly, resulting in a widening trade deficit. This trade deficit could have economic implications that need to be carefully managed by policymakers.

Graph 2: Nepal-China Trade Status



Source: Self-made on Excel Sheet.

The above Figure no. 2 illustrates the “Nepal-China Trade Status” from the year 2014-2022. The x-axis represents the years from 2014 to 2022, indicating the time span of the trade data. The y-axis represents the trade values in Nepalese Rupees (NPR). Three lines on the graph represent the export and import and balance of trade values over the years.

The export values show fluctuations throughout the years, with some notable peaks and troughs. There is a general increasing trend from 2014 to 2018, with the highest export value recorded in 2018 (NPR 2,429,621,870.3). However, from 2018 onwards, there is a noticeable decline in export values, reaching its lowest point in

2020 (NPR 681,016,163.79). The export values show a slight recovery in 2021 and 2022 but remain significantly lower compared to the peak in 2018. The import values show a consistent increasing trend over the years, with a few fluctuations. There is a sharp increase in imports from 2016 onwards, with the highest import value recorded in 2021 (NPR 281,746,597,205.67). The import values consistently outpace exports, leading to a widening trade deficit.

The balance of trade, calculated as the difference between exports and imports, shows a negative trend throughout the years. The trade deficit consistently increases, indicating that Nepal imports more from China than it exports to China. The widening trade deficit suggests a growing dependency on imports from China, which could have implications for Nepal's economy and trade policies. The fluctuations in export and import values could be attributed to various factors such as changes in demand, economic policies, exchange rates, and geopolitical dynamics. The increasing import trend could be due to Nepal's growing infrastructure development projects, industrial needs, and consumer demand for Chinese goods.

On the other hand, the fluctuating export trend might be influenced by changes in Nepal's production capacity, export-oriented industries, and market demand for Nepalese products in China. In summary, while Nepal's imports from China have been consistently increasing, its exports have shown fluctuations and a declining trend in recent years. This widening trade deficit could pose challenges for Nepal's economic sustainability and trade balance in the long run.

It is also impossible to deny that Nepal's expanding connections with China have an economic component. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Nepal provide much-needed infrastructure investment for the country. Nepal has struggled with developing its infrastructure due to its difficult geography and low GDP per capita income. In addition, the projects would improve connections between China and Nepal, maybe helping Nepal become less dependent on India.

China has been expanding its interactions with Nepal as part of its broader agenda in South Asia. In the past, India has viewed the area as a strategic hotspot where it is dominant. India faces security challenges as a result of China's expanding influence in Nepal, a nation with which it shares open borders. Beijing's goal to

challenge India's dominance in the area more and more is driven by the tense Sino-Indian relations.

3.4.5 Socio-Cultural Relations

Nepal and China have shared a long history of friendly socio-cultural and religious relations. Buddhism and Hinduism are the principal religions in Nepal, while China's religious landscape includes Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and Christianity (Singh, 2020). Buddhism, in particular, has served as a significant bridge between the two nations. Nepal, being the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, has long been a site of pilgrimage for Chinese Buddhist monks who visit Nepal to pay homage at prominent Buddhist sites such as Swayambhunath and Lumbini (Li, 2019).

Historically, socio-cultural exchanges have been facilitated through trade routes connecting Nepal and China. Nepali traders and artisans traveled to Tibet and various parts of China to sell their goods, while Chinese traders visited Nepal to purchase Nepali handicrafts and other products (Zhang, 2021).

In contemporary times, the collaboration between Nepal and China extends to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. For example, China has provided support for the reconstruction of Nepal's earthquake-damaged cultural sites, including the Dharahara Tower and the Rani Pokhari Pond (Chen, 2022). Additionally, Nepal participates in the Silk Road International Cultural Expo, which seeks to enhance cultural exchanges among countries along the ancient Silk Road (Wang, 2023).

3.4.6 Educational Relations

Nepal and China have a history of educational cooperation and exchange, which has strengthened in recent years (Gao, 2020). Many Nepalese students pursue higher education in China, and there are also Chinese students studying in Nepal (Chen, 2021). In 2019, the Chinese government announced its plan to provide 5,000 scholarships to Nepalese students over the next five years, aiming to bolster educational ties between the two nations (Li, 2019).

Additionally, there are numerous Chinese language schools and Confucius Institutes in Nepal, supported by the Chinese government, which offer courses in

Chinese language and culture and promote cultural exchange (Wang, 2022). Exchange programs for teachers and professors between Nepalese and Chinese universities further contribute to the growing educational relationship between the two countries (Zhang, 2023).

3.4.7 Defence Relations

In recent years, Nepal and China have significantly developed their defense ties. In 2017, Nepal's then-army chief, General Rajendra Chhetri, visited China and signed a military cooperation agreement with his Chinese counterpart. This agreement encompassed joint military exercises, military training, and equipment support (Sharma, 2018). Since then, the two nations have conducted several joint military exercises, including the Sagarmatha Friendship-2 military exercise held in September 2019. This exercise, which involved over 130 soldiers from each country, focused on counter-terrorism and disaster response (Singh, 2019).

In addition to these exercises, China has provided substantial military aid to Nepal. In 2018, China granted Nepal \$4.4 million for the acquisition of military equipment such as rifles, ammunition, and trucks (Wang, 2020). However, Nepal's growing defense cooperation with China has raised concerns in India, which traditionally has had close defense ties with Nepal and views the country as part of its sphere of influence (Kumar, 2021). India remains Nepal's largest supplier of military aid and equipment, and the increasing military collaboration between Nepal and China has introduced some friction in India-Nepal relations (Reddy, 2022).

3.4.8 China's Role in the Development of Nepal

The Upper Trishuli Hydropower Plant, with a capacity of 216 MW, is a significant project situated in the Trishuli River basin. This hydropower plant is expected to generate a substantial amount of electricity, reducing Nepal's dependence on imported energy. Additionally, it is anticipated to create job opportunities and stimulate regional economic development (Nepal Energy Department, 2021).

The Food/Material Assistance initiative in the northern 15 bordering districts aims to support communities in these regions, which are frequently affected by

extreme weather and natural disasters. This assistance includes providing food, shelter, and other essential supplies to those in need (Humanitarian Aid Nepal, 2022).

The Kathmandu Ring Road Improvement Project is a major infrastructure effort designed to enhance the road network around Kathmandu. This project involves widening and upgrading the existing ring road, constructing new roads, and building bridges to alleviate traffic congestion and improve city connectivity (Kathmandu Metropolitan Authority, 2023).

The Larcha (Tatopani) and Timure (Rasuwagadi) Frontier Inspection Station Project aims to construct border inspection stations at Larcha (Tatopani) and Timure (Rasuwagadi). This initiative is expected to enhance cross-border trade and commerce between Nepal and China by improving customs and immigration facilities and facilitating the movement of goods and people (Border Development Office, 2022).

The Pokhara International Regional Airport project is a significant infrastructure development aimed at enhancing air connectivity in Nepal. This project involves building a new international airport in Pokhara, which is projected to boost tourism and stimulate economic growth in the region (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, 2023).

The improvement of the Syaprubensi-Rasuwagadhi Road, the Kodari Highway, and the rehabilitation of the Kodari and Rasuwagadhi border bridges are critical for Nepal's development. The Syaprubensi-Rasuwagadhi Road is a vital transportation link to the Chinese border, requiring significant upgrades to handle increasing transportation demands and improve safety (Nepal Road Department, 2022). Similarly, the Kodari Highway and the border bridges, damaged during the 2015 earthquakes, are prioritized for restoration to facilitate trade and commerce with China (Earthquake Reconstruction Authority, 2023).

Additionally, upgrading the Civil Service Hospital is a priority for the Nepalese government. This hospital plays a crucial role in providing healthcare services to civil servants and their families, and its enhancement will improve the quality of medical care available in Nepal (Ministry of Health, 2023).

CHAPTER-IV

BHUTAN'S RESPONSES TO EMERGING GEOPOLITICAL CRISES IN HIMALAYAN REGION

4.1 Bhutan's Historical Background

The history of Bhutan dates back to the 8th century when Guru Padmasambhava, a revered Buddhist saint, introduced Buddhism to the region (Wangchuk, 2017). Over the following centuries, several Buddhist kingdoms emerged in Bhutan, with the Drukpa Kingdom being particularly notable in the 17th century. The term "Druk," meaning "thunder dragon," is why Bhutan is often called the "Land of the Thunder Dragon" (Rinzin, 2019).

By the 19th century, Bhutan evolved into a dual theocracy, with a Je Khenpo serving as the spiritual leader and a Druk Desi overseeing political and administrative matters (Dorji, 2020). In the early 20th century, Bhutan came under British influence, leading to the Treaty of Punakha in 1910. This treaty established British suzerainty over Bhutan while allowing the country to manage its internal affairs independently (Smith, 2021). In 1949, Bhutan signed a similar treaty with independent India, which replaced the earlier agreement with Britain (Thakur, 2022).

In 2008, Bhutan transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy with the adoption of a new constitution. This transition included Bhutan's first parliamentary elections, marking a significant move towards democracy (Jigme, 2023). Today, Bhutan is renowned for its unique Gross National Happiness philosophy, which focuses on sustainable development, cultural preservation, and the well-being of its citizens (Tshering, 2023).

4.1.1 Bhutan's Historical Relations with India

Bhutan's historical relations with India have been shaped by geographic proximity, cultural ties, and shared strategic interests (Sinha, 2012). These relations date back centuries but were formalized and strengthened during the 20th century, particularly following India's independence in 1947. The relationship has evolved

over time, with Bhutan transitioning from a dependency to a sovereign state that maintains a close and mutually beneficial partnership with India (Rai, 2015).

Pre-20th Century Interactions

Bhutan shares deep cultural and religious connections with India, especially with the Indian states of Sikkim, Assam, and West Bengal. The spread of Buddhism from India to Bhutan was a significant cultural linkage, with Bhutan's monastic traditions rooted in Indian Buddhist teachings. Historical trade routes linked Bhutan with the Indian subcontinent. Bhutanese traders engaged in the exchange of goods like wool, salt, and grains with their Indian counterparts (Penjor, 2004).

During British colonial rule in India, Bhutan's interactions with India were mediated through the British government. The Anglo-Bhutanese relationship was formalized in the 1865 Treaty of Sinchula, following the Duar Wars, in which Bhutan ceded parts of its southern territory to British India in exchange for an annual subsidy.

Post-Independence Era (1947-Present)

Bhutan and independent India formalized their relationship with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship in 1949. The treaty laid the groundwork for cooperation, with India agreeing to respect Bhutan's sovereignty and Bhutan committing to consult India on foreign and defense policy matters. India assumed the role of a developmental partner, providing economic aid and technical assistance to Bhutan. This included support for infrastructure, education, and healthcare projects (Planning Commission of India, 2007).

Hydropower has become a cornerstone of Bhutan-India relations. Bhutan exports electricity generated from its rivers to India, which serves as a major revenue source for Bhutan and helps India meet its energy needs. The trade agreements between Bhutan and India ensure duty-free access to each other's markets. India remains Bhutan's largest trading partner (Chaturvedi, 2015).

Bhutan's strategic location makes its security critical for India, particularly in the context of China's growing influence. India has provided military training and equipment to Bhutan and continues to support its defense infrastructure. The Doklam standoff highlighted the strategic importance of Bhutan to India (Bhatia, 2018). Indian

troops intervened to prevent Chinese road construction in the disputed Doklam region, underscoring India's commitment to Bhutan's territorial integrity.

In 2007, the 1949 Treaty of Friendship was revised to grant Bhutan greater autonomy in its foreign and defense policies. This reflected India's recognition of Bhutan's growing confidence and sovereignty while maintaining the core tenets of mutual respect and cooperation. India has consistently supported Bhutan's interests in global platforms, including its membership in the United Nations in 1971 and its participation in regional organizations like SAARC and BIMSTEC (SAARC Secretariat, 2016).

India has provided scholarships and training programs for Bhutanese students and professionals. Many Bhutanese leaders and officials have received their education in Indian institutions. India has financed major infrastructure projects in Bhutan, including roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals, under successive Five-Year Plans (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2020).

Tourism from India contributes significantly to Bhutan's economy. India remains a major source of tourists, especially after the liberalization of Bhutan's tourism policies. Bhutan's heavy reliance on India for trade and aid has raised concerns about economic sovereignty. Bhutan is seeking to diversify its economy and trade partners to reduce dependency.

Bhutan's cautious engagement with China, particularly regarding border disputes, occasionally creates diplomatic sensitivities with India. Hydropower projects, while economically beneficial, have raised environmental concerns in Bhutan, including deforestation and displacement of local communities (Mehta, 2019).

Bhutan and India continue to share a close and dynamic partnership. The relationship has adapted to changing geopolitical and domestic contexts, with both countries emphasizing mutual respect and shared growth. India remains a key ally for Bhutan, but Bhutan's growing assertiveness in foreign policy reflects its desire to maintain sovereignty while benefiting from its strategic partnership with India ((Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies, 2022).

Bhutan's historical relations with India are characterized by mutual trust, cultural ties, and strategic cooperation. While the relationship has its complexities, it remains one of the strongest bilateral partnerships in the region, driven by shared values and interests. As Bhutan continues to evolve, its ties with India are likely to remain a cornerstone of its foreign policy.

4.1.2 Bhutan's Historical Relations with China

There have been historical cultural, social, and religious ties between Bhutan and Tibet. Bhutan, located in the eastern Himalayas, has interacted extensively with its northern neighbour, Tibet. Tibetan culture and religion have had a significant influence on Bhutan's history and development (Smith, 2020).

Buddhism, the dominant religion in both Bhutan and Tibet, has profoundly shaped their societies and values. Tibetan Buddhist masters played a crucial role in the spread and development of Buddhism in Bhutan. The Tibetan language has been used in Bhutan for religious and cultural purposes, and Tibetan influence has been pivotal in shaping Bhutan's social and political structures (Tshering, 2021).

Despite these influences, Bhutan has remained an independent country and has never been under Tibetan rule. The relationship between Bhutan and Tibet has primarily been based on cultural and religious connections rather than political control (Dorji, 2022). Bhutan has consistently maintained a policy of neutrality in regional conflicts, including the border dispute between China and India over Bhutanese territory (Wangchuk, 2023).

In recent years, China's claims on Bhutanese territory have raised concerns about Bhutan's sovereignty. While Bhutan emphasizes a peaceful and friendly relationship with China, it underscores the importance of respecting its territorial integrity. To advance its economic and geopolitical interests, Bhutan has sought to strengthen ties with other nations, including India, Japan, and the United States (Sharma, 2023).

The arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in Bhutan in 1616 marked a significant turning point. At that time, Bhutan was divided into small fiefdoms, lacking centralized authority and facing frequent invasions by Tibetan armies and

other regional powers. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, a revered Tibetan lama and military leader, unified Bhutan under his rule and established a centralized government. His introduction of a unique governance system combining religious and secular authority laid the foundation for Bhutan's distinctive political system (Jigme, 2024).

One of Zhabdrung's notable achievements was the construction of dzongs, fortified monasteries serving both religious and administrative functions. These dzongs, strategically located in key valleys, became the headquarters of regional governors or dzongpons and were crucial in defending Bhutan against external threats. Zhabdrung's legacy, emphasizing Buddhist ethics, peaceful coexistence, and environmental conservation, continues to shape Bhutanese society and culture (Rinzin, 2023).

Even after the establishment of the Zhabdrung system, Bhutan and Tibet engaged in hostilities during the 17th and 18th centuries. The Drukpa political system in Bhutan aimed to resist Tibetan influence and maintain independence, while the Gelugpa-dominated Tibetan political system sought dominance over the Himalayan Buddhist world. The Tibetan emperor Polhane imposed his rule over the Southern Valleys in 1731 due to unrest in Bhutan. However, there is no evidence that Tibet fully imposed sovereignty over Bhutan. Despite periodic Tibetan assertions of influence, interactions between Bhutan and Tibet were characterized by mistrust and occasional hostility (Thakur, 2022).

Nevertheless, cultural and religious connections between Bhutan and Tibet remained strong. Bhutan continued to view Tibet as a spiritual and cultural center, with many Bhutanese monks traveling to Tibet for religious training and education. This complex and multifaceted relationship, marked by both cooperation and conflict, continues to evolve (Kumar, 2024).

The arrival of the British East India Company in Bhutan's southern frontiers in the mid-18th century dramatically altered the relationship between Bhutan, Tibet, and the British. Following the Anglo-Bhutan conflict over Kuch Bihar (1772–1773), Bhutan organized the first British mission into Tibet, led by Lt. George Bogle. The

Bhutanese authorities saw the British as a viable commercial and political conduit to Tibet and supported this expedition (Smith, 2020).

From the establishment of the monarchy in 1907 until India's independence in 1947, Bhutan's international relations were largely influenced by the British, following the Treaty of Punakha in 1910. The British played a key role in shaping Bhutan's relationship with Tibet during this period, with their influence extending to both Lhasa and Punakha. Despite this, Bhutan maintained strong cultural and religious ties with Tibet, although political dynamics were complicated by British imperialism and the region's shifting geopolitical landscape (Jigme, 2024).

Although Bhutan's traditional relationship with Tibet can be seen as independent in political terms, there were some indications of a tributary relationship, such as annual payments to Tibet and a Bhutanese representative in Lhasa. These practices were largely symbolic and did not necessarily signify political subordination or vassalage. The relationship between Bhutan and Tibet was complex, with cultural and religious ties playing a significant role alongside political dynamics (Tshering, 2021).

4.2 Bhutan's Geopolitical Responses to India

Bhutan and India share a close geopolitical relationship, with India being Bhutan's largest trading partner and providing substantial economic and military assistance. India's support has been crucial to Bhutan's development and security, and the two countries have strong cultural and historical ties (Rinzin, 2023). Bhutan has traditionally maintained a policy of close alignment with India in the geopolitical realm. The country has relied on India for its security requirements, and India has been a significant partner in Bhutan's development, offering aid in various sectors including infrastructure, education, and health (Dorji, 2022).

In recent years, Bhutan has also sought to engage with China in economic and diplomatic areas. However, Bhutan has carefully balanced its relations with China and India, making it clear that it does not want to jeopardize its security or sovereignty (Sharma, 2023). Bhutan emphasizes the importance of maintaining good relations with both India and China and strives to avoid becoming entangled in any geopolitical

disputes between the two powers (Kumar, 2024). Overall, Bhutan's geopolitical approach involves close alignment and cooperation with India, while also seeking to foster positive relations with other regional powers, such as China (Thakur, 2022).

4.2.1 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty 1949

After achieving independence, India and Bhutan formalized their relationship through a treaty signed on August 8, 1949, which established India's role in advising Bhutan on foreign affairs while ensuring non-interference in Bhutan's internal matters (Das, 1974). This treaty, often referred to as the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949, was designed to cement the peaceful and cooperative relationship between the two nations. Article I of the treaty declares, "There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the government of India and the government of Bhutan" (Nagender, 1988). Article II specifies that Bhutan must consult India on foreign policy issues. Despite its age, the treaty has sustained a cordial and stable relationship between the two countries.

The 1949 treaty preserved the non-interference clause from the 1910 Punakha Treaty but introduced new dimensions and contexts that strengthened bilateral relations. The treaty's Preamble highlighted the mutual intent to navigate the post-British era amicably and to advance friendly relations between India and Bhutan (Chhetri, 1995).

The treaty negotiations were represented by Bhutanese officials including Sonam Tobgye Dorji, Chho-Zim Thondup, Rin-Zim Tandim, and Ha Drang Jigmie Palden Dorji, while Harishwar Dayal represented India as the political officer for Sikkim (Dole, 2007). This treaty institutionalized and codified the relationship between India and the relatively smaller Bhutan, reinforcing their diplomatic and economic ties.

In 1946, Bhutan presented a document to the British Cabinet Mission emphasizing its special relationship with India and distinguishing itself from other princely states. This clarification was crucial as the British withdrawal left the status of Bhutan uncertain. Despite this, Bhutan remained an autonomous region, distinct from India (Chhetri, 1995). Historically, the British had provided Bhutan with an

annual subsidy of Rs. 50,000, increased to Rs. 1 lakh, and later raised to Rs. 5 lakhs annually under the 1949 treaty's Article III (Dole, 2007).

Article IV of the treaty stipulated that the annual subsidy would be paid on January 10 each year for the duration of the treaty. Additionally, the treaty included a provision for the return of 32 square miles of territory in Dewangiri, Assam, as a gesture of goodwill. This area, located in Kamrup district, served as an entry point to Bhutan, and its return was managed by the Government of India (Singh, 2003).

Article V ensures that trade and commerce between the two countries are free and unimpeded, providing facilities for the transport of goods by land, water, and air. Both countries agreed to facilitate the transport of each other's goods through their respective territories (Chhetri, 1995).

Article VI permits Bhutan to import necessary military and security materials from India, with the assurance that these imports would remain within Bhutan and not be exported elsewhere (Dole, 2007). Article VII guarantees equal justice and protection for citizens of each country residing in the other, affirming mutual respect and welfare for their people (Singh, 2003).

Article VIII deals with extradition, stating that individuals who commit crimes in one country and flee to the other will be delivered for justice. This article outlines the procedures and evidence required for extradition requests (Chhetri, 1995).

Article IX establishes a dispute resolution mechanism through negotiations or arbitration by a tribunal consisting of members nominated by each government and a chairman selected by Bhutan from the Indian judiciary. The tribunal's decisions are binding and must be promptly executed (Dole, 2007).

Article X asserts that the treaty will remain in force indefinitely unless altered or terminated by mutual consent (Singh, 2003). This provision underscores the enduring commitment of both India and Bhutan to support each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The treaty exemplifies the strong and enduring friendship between India and Bhutan, reflecting their shared history and commitment to mutual cooperation and development (Chhetri, 1995).

4.2.2 Political Relations

Bilateral relations between India and Bhutan are grounded in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1949. This treaty established a framework for cooperation and mutual support between the two nations. In response to evolving circumstances, the treaty was updated in February 2007 to reflect the dynamic nature of their relationship (Sharma, 2007).

Diplomatic relations were formally established when India opened a special office in Thimphu in 1968. Since then, India has been a major partner for Bhutan, being its largest trading partner, primary source of aid, and a key investor (Jha, 2012). This close relationship has been instrumental in Bhutan's economic and social development.

In the wake of India's acquisition of Sikkim in 1975, Bhutan experienced a period of unease regarding its political relations with India. Concerns about the stability of these relations led Bhutan to explore multilateralism and diversify its foreign policy strategies during the late 1970s and early 1980s. This shift was driven by a desire to safeguard Bhutan's national identity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity (Bhattacharya, 2011).

The Bhutanese elite's growing emphasis on preserving national identity resulted in increased focus on reducing economic dependence on Indian assistance. Despite the 1949 treaty, which gave India considerable influence over Bhutan's foreign policy, Bhutan began to seek a more independent stance. This shift included joining several international organizations such as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, and becoming more active in the Non-Aligned Movement (Singh, 1999).

In 1980, Bhutan took a significant step by allowing Bangladesh to open an embassy in Thimphu, thus establishing direct diplomatic relations. This marked a departure from Bhutan's earlier practice of maintaining close ties exclusively with India (Chopra, 2004). Bhutan also initiated direct talks with China to address border disputes, reflecting a more proactive and diversified foreign policy approach. During this period, Bhutan maintained closer relations with Nepal due to security concerns related to unrest in the southern regions (Jha, 2012).

As a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, Bhutan has been engaged in regional cooperation while maintaining a balanced approach to its international relations. Throughout the 1980s, Bhutan's foreign policy demonstrated sensitivity to India's security concerns, distinguishing it from other countries in the region that had contentious relations with India (Bhattacharya, 2011).

By the late 1990s, Bhutan's foreign policy saw significant changes under the leadership of the king, who sought to expand Bhutan's international engagement while maintaining controlled communication with the outside world (Sharma, 2007). This strategic approach has allowed Bhutan to balance its close ties with India while pursuing a broader international presence.

Table 5: India and Bhutan High level Visits Exchange

Year	From India	From Bhutan
2014	Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's State visit to Bhutan occurred from June 15-17, 2014.	His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Her Majesty Queen Jetsun Pema of Bhutan visited India from January 6-10, 2014.
2014	Visit of President Pranab Mukherjee to Bhutan	Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuck, Bhutan's Minister of Economic Affairs, visited India from January 16-17, 2014.
		Lyonpo Yeshey Dorji, Bhutan's Minister of Agriculture and Forests, visited again India from February 4-6, 2014.
		On February 18, 2014, Royal Grand Queen Mother Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck of Bhutan visited Kalimpong, India.

		Prime Minister Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay of Bhutan visited New Delhi, India, from May 25 to May 28, 2014.
2014	External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited Bhutan from September 18 to September 20, 2014.	Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuck, Bhutan's Minister of Economic Affairs, visited India from September 17 to September 20, 2014.
2015	Visit of Foreign Secretary Dr. S. Jaishankar to Bhutan.	Prime Minister Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay visited India from January 10 to January 18, 2015.
2015	Minister of Road Transport, Highways, and Shipping, Shri Nitin Gadkari, visited Bhutan from July 8 to July 13, 2015.	Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuk, the Minister of Economic Affairs of Bhutan, visited India from July 8 to July 13, 2015.
2015	Minister of State for Rural Development Shri Sudarshan Bhagat visited Bhutan from July 29 to July 30, 2015.	Foreign Secretary Dasho Tshering Dorji of Bhutan visited India from September 2 to September 3, 2015.
2015	West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited Bhutan from October 5 to October 9, 2015.	Bhutanese Foreign Minister Damcho Dorji visited India from October 22 to October 28, 2015.
2015	National Security Advisor Shri Ajit Doval visited Bhutan from November 26 to November 27, 2015.	Minister of Labour & Human Resources Lyonpo Ngeema Sangay Tashempo visited New Delhi from December 22 to December 25, 2015.
2016	Visit of MOS Home Affairs, Kiren Rijju to Bhutan 2-4 July, 2016	Visit of Prime Minister Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay to India 6-9 Jan 2016

2016	Visit of Minister of State (IC) for Commerce & Industry, Ms. Nirmala Sitaraman to Bhutan 11-13 November, 2016	Visit of PM Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay 26-27 May, 2016
2017	Visit of Minister of State of Health and Family Welfare, Shri Faggan Singh Kulaste 19-21 April, 2017	Visit of Prime Minister Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay to India 31 March 2017
2017	Visit of Dr. Sunial Baliram Gaikwad, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha to Bhutan 31 August-01 September, 2017	Visit of Finance Minister Lyonpo Namgay Dorji 3, April 2017
2017	Visit of Foreign Secretary Dr. S. Jaishankar 02 October-5 October, 2017	His Majesty the King of Bhutan alongwith Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan and HRH Gyalsey visited India 31 October-3 November 2017
2017	Minister of Power, Government of Assam, Shri Pallab Lochan Das visits Bhutan December 2017	
2018	Minister of Culture Affairs, Government of Assam Shri Naba Kumar Doley visited Bhutan 21-22 March, 2018	Foreign Minister Damcho Dorji visited India. 20-23 February, 2018
2018	Visit of Foreign Secretary Vijay K. Gokhale to Bhutan 1-2 April, 2018	Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay visited India. 5-7 July, 2018
2018	Visit of Foreign Secretary Vijay K. Gokhale to Bhutan 18-20 November, 2018	Prime Minister Lotay Tshering undertook his first official visit to India 27-29 December, 2018

2019	External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar 7-8 June, 2019	Prime Minister Lotay Tshering visited India to attend Swearing-in-Ceremony of PM Narendra Modi. 30 May-1 June, 2019
2019	Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi 17-18 August 2019	Visit of Foreign Minister Lyonpo (Dr.) Tandi Dorji to India 17-23 November, 2019
2020	Union Minister of Railways and of Commerce and Industry Shri Piyush Goyal 28-29 February 2020	
2022	Visit of EAM Dr. S Jaishankar to Bhutan 29-30 April, 2022	Visit of Lyonpo Loknath Sharma, Minister of Economic Affairs 6-14 January, 2022, revisited on 9-22 April 2022 and 18-21 July, 2022.
2022	Visit of Secretary (Power) Shri Alok Kumar to Bhutan 29-31 October, 2022	
		Visit of Finance Minister of Bhutan Lyonpo Namgay Tshering to participate in Asia Economic Dialogue 23-24 February 2023
		Visit of Foreign Minister Dr. Tandi Dorji to India for attending Raisina Dialogue 02-04 March 2023

Source: Embassy of India, Thimphu, Bhutan (2023).

These visits and exchanges demonstrate the strong diplomatic and friendly relations between India and Bhutan. They cover a wide range of sectors and highlight the importance of maintaining close ties between the two neighbouring countries.

High-level visits contribute to strengthening political, economic, and cultural relations between the nations.

It is worth noting that in addition to these high-level visits, there are also regular interactions and consultations between officials of both countries at various levels. This includes meetings between the Foreign Ministers, Joint Working Groups on various issues of bilateral cooperation, and interactions between officials from different ministries and agencies. These interactions serve to strengthen the existing ties and identify areas of mutual interest for further cooperation.

4.2.3 Economic Relations

The India-Bhutan Agreement on Trade, Commerce, and Transit, initially signed in 1972 and most recently amended for the fifth time in 2016, establishes a framework for free trade between the two nations (India-Bhutan Agreement on Trade, Commerce, and Transit, 2016). This agreement not only facilitates duty-free exports from Bhutan but also supports a significant portion of Bhutan's trade.

India has consistently been Bhutan's primary trading partner, serving both as a major import source and as a final market for Bhutanese exports. The trade volume between the two countries, which constitutes nearly 80% of Bhutan's total trade, increased dramatically from USD 484 million in 2014-15 to USD 1422 million in 2021-22 (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2022). The close trade relations are underpinned by the 2007 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty and the 2016 Trade, Commerce, and Transit Agreement, which together promote a free trade regime and ensure Bhutan's duty-free transit of goods to and from third countries (India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, 2007; India-Bhutan Agreement on Trade, Commerce, and Transit, 2016).

India's top exports to Bhutan include petroleum products such as petrol and diesel, automobiles, rice, wood charcoal, telephones, coke and semi-coke, excavators, and parts for electric generators and motors (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2022). Conversely, Bhutan's principal exports to India encompass electricity, ferrosilicon, ferrosilico-manganese, various types of cement, dolomite chips, silicon carbide, cardamom, betel nut, oranges, semi-finished iron or non-alloy steel products, boulders, and dolomite (Bhutan Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2022).

Table 6: Bhutan-India Trade Status

Value in NU (Bhutanese Ngultrum) in Million

Year	Export	Import	Balance of Trade
2014	21,167,809,187	47,528,600,424	26,36,07,91,237
2015	19,676,863,362	53,490,854,392	33,81,39,91,030
2016	19,020,366,716	55,111,782,444	36,09,14,15,728
2017	19,635,357,949	53,897,731,881	34,26,23,73,932
2018	21,591,811,700	59,811,692,437	38,21,98,80,737
2019	23,572,538,591	56,452,976,936	32,88,04,38,345
2020	15,989,551,354	51,197,864,999	35,20,83,13,645
2021	26,408,857,364	71,235,897,490	44,82,70,40,126
2022	26,698,526,989	85,093,224,356	58,39,46,97,367
0.00%	18.15%	50.00%	31.85%

Source: Royal Government of Bhutan, Department of Revenue and Customs, Thimphu, 2014-2022.

Above Table no. 6 provides data on “Bhutan-India Trade Status” the trade relationship including the values of exports, imports, and the trade balance (the difference between exports and imports) for the years 2014 to 2022, all measured in Nu (Bhutanese Ngultrum) (million). Both exports and imports between Bhutan and India have shown a general upward trend over the years.

The trade balance (the difference between exports and imports) has been consistently negative, indicating that Bhutan imports more from India than it exports to India. The trade balance has been in India's favour throughout the years, with Bhutan running a trade deficit. The deficit generally increased from 2014 to 2018 before stabilizing in 2019 and then significantly increasing again in 2020, 2021, and 2022. In 2015, Bhutan experienced the highest trade deficit with India, with a value of Nu 33.81 billion.

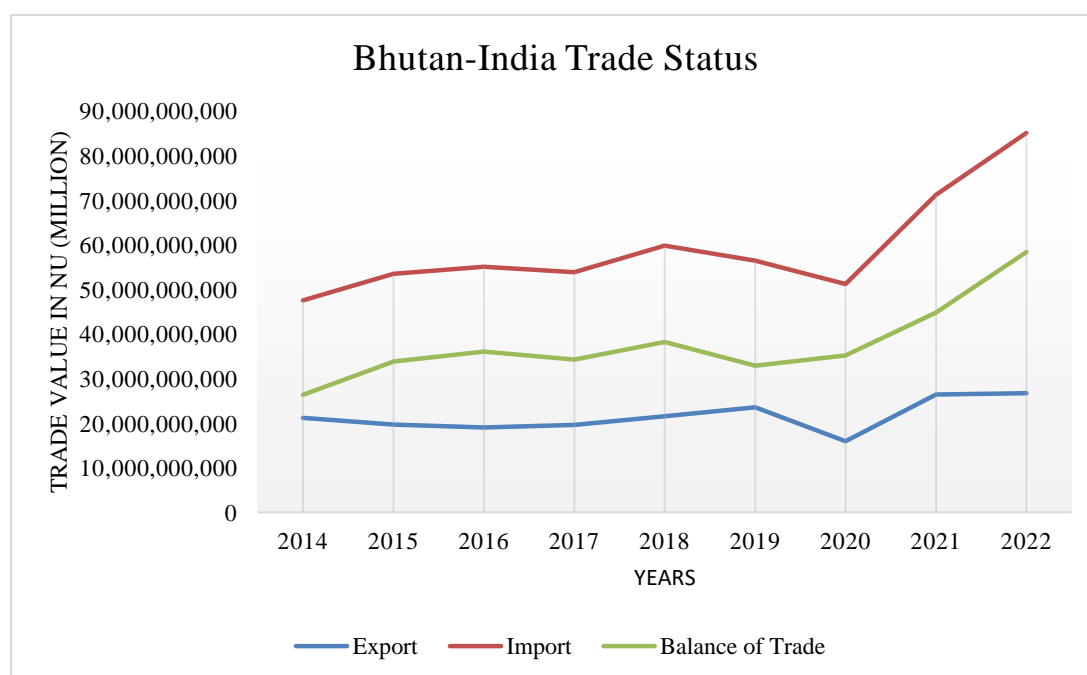
The highest trade deficit is observed in the year 2022 with Nu 58.40 billion with both export and import values reaching their peak levels. The table shows the percentage change in exports, imports, and the trade balance from 2014 to 2022.

Exports increased by 26.13% over this period. Imports increased by 79.88%, indicating a significant increase in Bhutan's imports from India. The trade deficit increased by 31.85%.

The data suggests that India is a significant trading partner for Bhutan, and the trade deficit highlights the economic relationship between the two countries. A persistent trade deficit can have economic implications for Bhutan. It means Bhutan is spending more on imports than it's earning through exports, which can impact its foreign exchange reserves and balance of payments.

The growth in imports may be due to various factors, including increased demand for Indian goods in Bhutan, infrastructure projects, and economic ties between the two countries. Bhutan may need to consider policies that encourage exports, diversify the export basket, and address the trade imbalance. Managing the trade deficit can be a significant policy challenge. The trade data reveals that while Bhutan's exports to India have increased, Bhutan's imports from India have risen even more, resulting in a widening trade deficit. Managing this trade imbalance and exploring ways to promote exports are essential considerations for Bhutan's economic policies.

Graph 3: Bhutan-India Trade Status



Source: Self-made on Excel Sheet.

Note: NU (Bhutanese Ngultrum).

The above Graph no. 3 provides information on “Bhutan-India Trade Status” Bhutan's export and import values to and from India for each year from 2014 to 2022, along with the corresponding balance of trade. The values are presented in Bhutanese Ngultrum (NU) and are in millions. "Export" refers to the value of goods and services exported from Bhutan to India in each year. "Import" indicates the value of goods and services imported into Bhutan from India in each year. "Balance of Trade" represents the difference between exports and imports, indicating whether Bhutan has a trade surplus (positive value) or trade deficit (negative value) with India.

The graph illustrates the increasing gap between export and import values, highlighting the growing trade deficit. Fluctuations in the lines may indicate variations in trade volumes or changes in economic conditions over the years. In 2014, the balance of trade is positive, so the trade is in surplus. In 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020, the balance of trade is negative, indicating a trade deficit. In 2021 and 2022, the balance of trade is positive again, indicating a surplus. Therefore, trade is negative (deficit) in the years 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020, and positive (surplus) in the years 2014, 2021, and 2022.

In the context of the Bhutan-India trade status data, a positive balance of trade (surplus) means Bhutan exports more goods and services to India than it imports from India. Conversely, a negative balance of trade (deficit) means Bhutan imports more from India than it exports to India. The reasons for these fluctuations could include changes in demand for specific products, variations in exchange rates, shifts in global economic conditions, and changes in trade policies.

India remains the leading investor in Bhutan, accounting for nearly 50% of all foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country. Currently, about 30 Indian companies are operational in Bhutan across various sectors, including banking, manufacturing, energy, agriculture/food processing, ITES, pharmaceuticals, hospitality, and education (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2023). Notable Indian businesses in Bhutan include Punjab National Bank, State Bank of India, Tata Power Company Ltd., General Insurance Corporation, Apollo Educational Infrastructure Services, Azista Industries, and Meghalaya Oxygen.

Trade between India and Bhutan is conducted using Indian Rupees, which are fully convertible into Bhutanese Ngultrum at par (Royal Monetary Authority of

Bhutan, 2023). In November 2022, the Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan (RMA) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) formalized an agreement to provide additional currency swap support of up to USD 200 million (approximately INR 1657 crore), supplementing the existing currency swap arrangement (RBI, 2022). This support aims to offer contingency credit for balance of payments and liquidity crises, facilitating further investment and trade between the two countries.

In 2022, Bhutan's Minister of Economic Affairs, Lyonpo Loknath Sharma, visited India three times to engage in discussions on strengthening bilateral trade and business ties and to explore opportunities for increased cooperation (Bhutan Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2023). The Government of India and Bhutan have also collaborated on various initiatives to bolster the startup ecosystem, such as the Bhutan-India Startup Summit in 2020 and ongoing virtual and on-site training programs for Bhutanese entrepreneurs (Startup Summit Report, 2020).

Despite diversification efforts, India remains Bhutan's primary market for both exports and imports. Historically, before the 1980s, Bhutan's international trade was minimal, and India has been pivotal in Bhutan's economic development and international aid. India funded Bhutan's first two five-year economic development plans and continues to play a significant role in Bhutan's economic landscape (Economic Development Plans, 2023).

Hydropower

Electricity, mineral products, chemical industry products, basic metals and products, timber and wood products, and electricity are Bhutan's principal exports to India. Hydropower generation is Bhutan's most significant comparative advantage. Many different products, including machinery, mechanical appliances, base metals, electronics, food, and other everyday commodities are imported from India.

The below Figure no. 8 “Map of India and Bhutan Rivers” illustrates the river systems that connect Bhutan with various Indian states. Here's a description of the rivers mentioned and their connections:

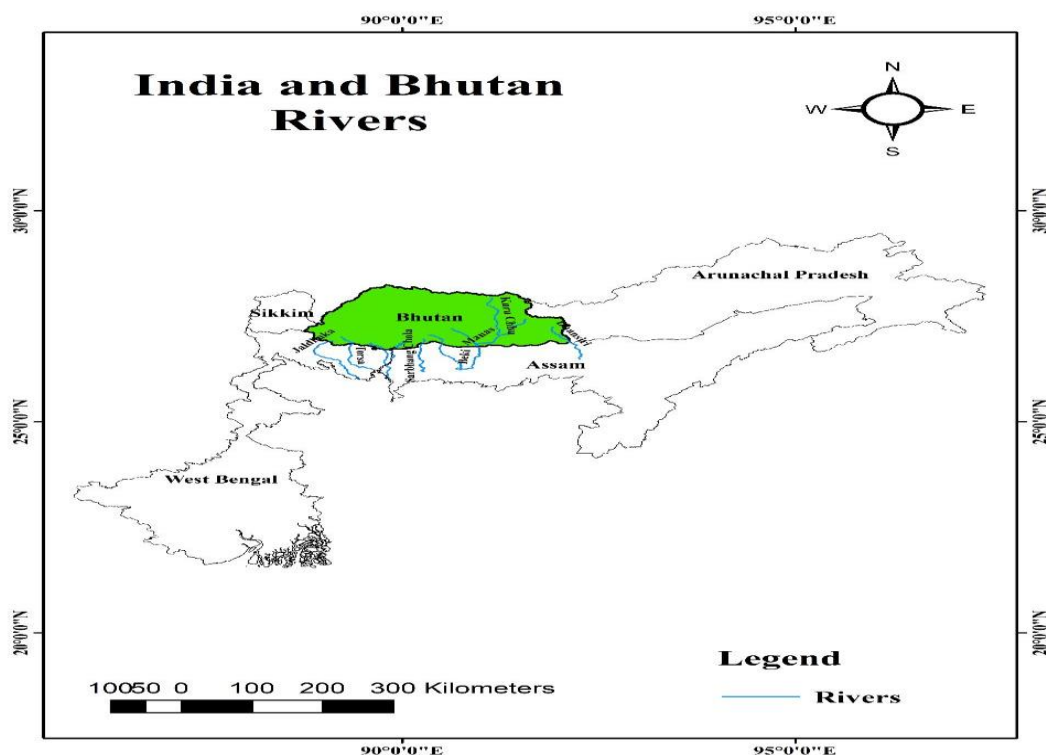
The Jaldhaka River originates from the Kupup or Bitang Lake in Sikkim, India. It flows through the Kalimpong district of West Bengal and forms a natural boundary between Bhutan and the Indian state of West Bengal. The river eventually joins the Brahmaputra River in Bangladesh.

Torsa River also known as the Amo Chu in Bhutan, originates from the Chumbi Valley in Tibet. It enters Bhutan and flows through the western part of the country before crossing into the Indian state of West Bengal. In West Bengal, it is known as the Torsa River and eventually joins the Brahmaputra River.

Sarbang Chola River also known as the Saralbhanga River, originates in the Himalayas of Bhutan. It flows through Bhutan and enters the Indian state of Assam, where it is known as the Saralbhanga River. The river ultimately joins the Manas River, a major tributary of the Brahmaputra River.

Beki River originates in Bhutan and flows through the Indian state of Assam. It is a tributary of the Brahmaputra River and joins it in the Goalpara district of Assam.

Figure 8: Map of India and Bhutan Rivers



Source: Country's shapefiles retrived from DIVA-GIS, organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.

Manas River originates in Bhutan and flows through the Indian state of Assam. It serves as a natural boundary between Bhutan and India for a stretch before entering Assam. The Manas River is a significant tributary of the Brahmaputra River.

Kurru Chhu River also known as the Kurichu River, originates in Bhutan. It flows through eastern Bhutan and eventually enters the Indian state of Assam. The river joins the Manas River in Assam.

Dhansiri River originates in the hills of Nagaland in India. It flows through Nagaland and Assam before entering Bhutan, where it is known as the Dangme Chhu. After crossing into Bhutan, it eventually joins the Brahmaputra River. These river connections play a crucial role in the hydrology, ecology, and socio-economic development of both Bhutan and the adjoining Indian states.

India has significantly contributed to Bhutan's infrastructural development, particularly in the hydropower sector. The longstanding and mutually beneficial partnership between the two nations in this area has been pivotal. India has established four major hydroelectric power plants (HEPs) in Bhutan, which together have a total capacity of 2,136 MW. These facilities include the Mangdechhu HEP (720 MW), Tala HEP (1,020 MW), Kurichhu HEP (60 MW), and Chukha HEP (336 MW) (Ministry of Power, 2022). In addition, the construction of two more plants, the Punatsangchhu-I HEP (1,200 MW) and Punatsangchhu-II HEP (1,020 MW), is currently underway (India-Bhutan Cooperation Report, 2023).

In 2021, Bhutan exported electricity valued at ₹2,443 crores to India (Economic Survey of Bhutan, 2022). During a visit from October 27 to November 1, 2022, Power Secretary Shri Alok Kumar engaged in discussions with Bhutanese officials to review various aspects of the hydropower collaboration between the two countries (Ministry of Power, 2022).

The 720 MW Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Power Project was formally transferred to the Royal Government of Bhutan on December 27, 2022, by the Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project Authority (Hydroelectric Project Authority, 2022). Inaugurated in August 2019 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering, this project has enhanced Bhutan's hydropower revenues by approximately 31% (Institute of Civil Engineers, 2020). It was also honored with the Brunel Medal for Engineering Excellence by the Institute of Civil Engineers in London (Institute of Civil Engineers, 2020). Furthermore, a Settlement Nodal Agency (SNA) agreement was signed by both governments in December 2022

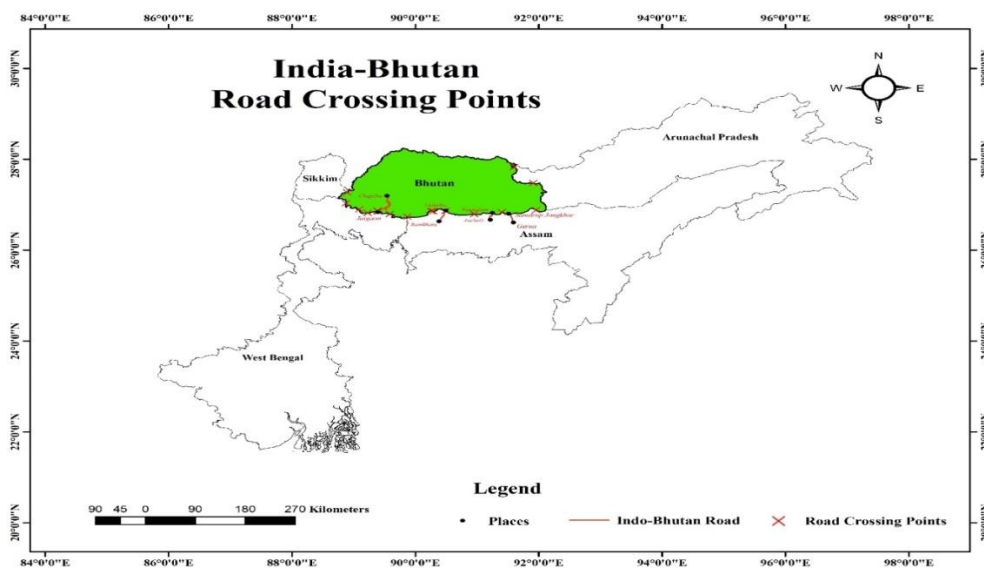
to streamline the power transfer process across the India-Bhutan border (Government of India, 2022).

Road Linkage

There was no vehicular traffic or accessible roads to Bhutan before the planning period. Travelers had to go through Sikkim and Yatung in Tibet, using yak, horse, and foot to cross the Nathula Pass to reach Bhutan from India. Although footpaths existed through the Dooars leading to Bhutan, they were seldom used due to the difficult terrain (Hazarika, 1960). In 1959, India proposed to construct Bhutan's first motorable road, which would connect Phuntsoling, near the Indian border, with Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, covering a distance of approximately 175 km (Ministry of External Affairs, 1959).

The Indian government funded the entire cost of the approach roads from West Bengal and Assam to Bhutan. The Jainti-Sinchula road linking Bhutan with West Bengal was estimated to cost fifty lakhs of rupees, while the Garubhasa-Hatisar Road connecting Assam with Bhutan's border was projected to cost twenty-five lakh rupees. The Public Works Departments of the respective state governments constructed these roads with full funding from the Government of India (Hazarika, 1960). The completion of these highways was achieved during India's Third Five Year Plan period (Government of India, 1961).

Figure 9: Map of India-Bhutan Road Crossing Points



Source: Country's shapefiles retrived from DIVA-GIS, organised by Arc-Gis map Version 10.8.2

Above Figure no. 9 “Map of India-Bhutan Road Crossing Points” display the road and railway crossing points between Bhutan and India, indicating key locations such as Chapcha to Jaigaon, Gelephu to Runikhata, Nagalam to Anchali, and Samarup Jongkhar to Gerua.

Chapcha to Jaigaon: Chapcha a town in Bhutan connects with road link to Jaigaon in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal, India, located near the Bhutan border.

Gelephu to Runikhata: Gelephu a town in the Sarpang district of Bhutan join with road to Runikhata, located in the Kokrajhar district of Assam, India.

Nagalam to Anchali: Nagalam a town located in Bhutan connects to Anchali located in Assam, India.

Samarup Jongkhar to Gerua: Samarup Jongkhar a town in the Samdrup Jongkhar district of Bhutan connects to Gerua located in Assam, India.

These crossing points connect towns and regions on both sides of the Bhutan-India border, facilitating trade, transportation, and cultural exchange between the two countries. In its first five-year plan, the Bhutanese government included the construction of an 800-mile motorable road and two approach roads connecting Bhutan and India. Phuntsoling-Paro Road, the first connecting road, was finished during the First Plan era (1961-66). During this time, the other link road was surveyed. India's government provided financial assistance to Bhutan as part of its third five-year plan to restore the outdated route linking the West Bengali district of Jalpaiguri and Bhutan. The Jalpaiguri Chamurchi Tea Estate was on the route. It was acceptable for traffic in vehicles.

4.2.4 Socio-Cultural Relations

India and Bhutan share profound socio-cultural connections rooted in their historical and spiritual ties. The influence of India's Buddhist heritage on Bhutan is significant, given that India is the birthplace of Buddhism. Bhutanese people often visit Indian Buddhist pilgrimage sites, highlighting the enduring spiritual connection between the two nations. For instance, the visit of His Holiness the Je Khenpo to Rajgir in 2018 underscores these religious bonds (Bhutan Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

2018). The Bhutanese Lhakhang and the World Peace Prayer in Rajgir symbolize the cultural and spiritual ties between India and Bhutan.

Both nations celebrate their friendship through various cultural activities and events. The annual Bhutan-India Friendship Association (BIFA) festival, held in both Bhutan and India, is one such example. The Nehru-Wangchuck Cultural Centre in Thimphu, Bhutan, further promotes cultural exchange by hosting Indian classical music and dance performances, art exhibitions, and language courses (Nehru-Wangchuck Cultural Centre, 2020).

The Asiatic Society in Kolkata has lent the Zhabdrung Statue to the Royal Government of Bhutan, where it is displayed at the Simtokha Dzong. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, a prominent 16th-century Buddhist monk, is regarded as the founder of modern Bhutan (Asiatic Society, 2021). On June 19, 2021, a bronze statue of Lord Buddha, commissioned by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), was presented to the Bhutanese government. This statue was installed in the Kuenray of the Tashichhodzong on June 20, 2021, coinciding with Guru Padmasambhava's anniversary (ICCR, 2021).

As a result of these deep cultural and religious ties, Bhutanese often travel to India to visit sites such as Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, and Nalanda. Likewise, many Indian tourists visit Bhutan to experience its monasteries, festivals, and distinctive culture (Tourism Authority of Bhutan, 2022).

The significant flow of Indian media, language, and consumer culture into Bhutan is a critical challenge to preserving Bhutanese cultural identity. Indian television, films, and music are widely accessible in Bhutan, influencing local traditions, lifestyle choices, and consumption patterns. Additionally, the increasing use of Hindi and English, often in tandem with Bhutan's national language, Dzongkha, threatens the dominance of the native language and cultural expressions (Dorji, 2015).

Bhutan's policy of promoting Dzongkha is undermined as more people, especially the youth, adopt Hindi or English as their primary means of communication. This can erode the linguistic diversity that is central to Bhutanese culture. The prevalence of Indian consumer goods, fashion, and entertainment can

lead to the homogenization of Bhutan's distinct cultural practices, undermining its national identity (Wangchuck, 2017).

Bhutan should strengthen language education by mandating Dzongkha in schools, public life, and media. Creating incentives for the use of Dzongkha in business and government communication can also bolster its prominence. Establish cultural preservation programs that promote Bhutanese arts, including music, dance, traditional crafts, and architecture. Public campaigns can also be used to promote Bhutanese identity and cultural pride. Increase investment in Bhutanese cinema, television, and digital media to counterbalance the dominance of Indian media, ensuring that young Bhutanese are exposed to more local narratives (Dorji, 2015).

4.2.5 Educational Relations

The education sector represents a key area of collaboration between India and Bhutan, reflecting a deep-rooted tradition of educational and cultural exchange. This relationship is evident in the substantial number of Bhutanese students enrolled in Indian universities and educational institutions. India offers a range of scholarships for Bhutanese students, such as the prestigious Nehru-Wangchuck Scholarship, which covers tuition, living expenses, and airfare for study in top Indian universities. Other notable scholarships include the Nalanda University Scholarship, the ICCR Undergraduate Engineering Scholarship, and the Five-Year Plan project-based Undergraduate Scholarship. Bhutanese students also have access to the Rashtriya Raksha University Scholarship, IIT Gandhinagar Global Fellowship, and the India-Bhutan Friendship Scholarship. Approximately 1,000 Bhutanese students benefit from these scholarships annually (India-Bhutan Education Cooperation Report, 2023).

Moreover, the Indian government supports Bhutanese educational development through various initiatives under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme. Bhutan is allocated 325 in-person training slots and an unlimited number of e-ITEC slots each year to enhance the technical and administrative skills of its civil servants and private sector employees. In 2022, specialized ITEC programs were introduced for 30 entrepreneurs at the Indian Institute of Packaging and 100 young entrepreneurs from Bhutan at the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII) in Ahmedabad (ITEC Programme Review, 2022).

The Royal University of Bhutan and prestigious Indian institutions, including the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and National Institute of Technology (NIT), have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to foster cooperation in STEM education. This collaboration aims to elevate the quality of education and research in Bhutan (Royal University of Bhutan Annual Report, 2022).

4.3 Bhutan's Geopolitical Responses to China

The relationship between China and Bhutan presents an intriguing paradox. Despite Bhutan's strategic location in the Himalayas and its shared border with Tibet, the country remains unique among China's neighbours for lacking formal diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Jin, 2022). Bhutan's historical and cultural ties with Tibet and China are notable, yet the border between the two nations has been closed since the Sino-Indian War of 1962, limiting economic and trade interactions (Chen, 2023).

China has sought to influence Bhutan to advance its national interests; however, these efforts have largely been unsuccessful. The Doklam region, located at the tri-junction of India, Bhutan, and China, is a particular point of contention. China views Doklam as disputed territory, which has significant strategic implications for India due to its proximity to the Siliguri Corridor, a crucial land corridor connecting seven northeastern Indian states (Sharma, 2021). Bhutan's close relationship with India, characterized by strong diplomatic and economic ties, does not appear to favour China's influence, reinforcing Bhutan's position in India's foreign policy (Rao, 2022).

4.3.1 Bhutan-China Friendship Treaty

On December 8, 1998, the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Bhutan signed an agreement aimed at preserving peace and tranquility along their shared border (Government of China, 1998). This agreement was designed to foster calm and stability by emphasizing principles such as peaceful coexistence, mutual non-aggression, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, and non-interference in internal affairs (Bhutanese Government, 1998). Key provisions included both nations' commitment to respecting their respective Lines of Actual Control (LAC), refraining from the use of force or threats, and resolving border disputes through peaceful means (Government of China, 1998). Additionally, the agreement established a joint verification mechanism to prevent misunderstandings and incidents

in the border areas (Bhutanese Government, 1998). This accord was a significant milestone in ensuring peace and stability along the Sino-Bhutanese border.

Article I stated that both sides agree that all nations, regardless of size or strength, are equal and ought to show respect for one another. The Chinese side reaffirmed how seriously they take Bhutan's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence. The establishment of great neighbourly and friendly cooperative ties between the two sides is based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Dorji, 2010).

Article II In the ten rounds of negotiations that have been held thus far, both parties concur that the boundary disputes were settled and the parties involved narrowed their differences by reaching an understanding on the guiding principles through cordial consultations and a spirit of mutual accommodation, trust, and cooperation. The two nations' long-standing relationship and understanding have become stronger. Both parties are prepared to uphold the aforementioned spirit and work together to find a prompt and equitable resolution to the boundary disputes between the two nations.

Article III Both sides agreed that the status quo of the border prior to March 1959 should be maintained in the meantime and that unilateral action should not be utilised to change it. They also agreed that peace and tranquillity along the border should be protected.

Article IV After ten rounds of border negotiations, both parties evaluated the results. Since both parties have already explained their positions regarding the in-dispute areas, they both agreed to resolve this matter through cordial negotiations.

Article V of the According to the Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Quiet Along the Sino-Bhutanese Border Areas, the document was signed in Beijing on December 8, 1998, and it was done so in two authentic copies, one each in Chinese, Bhutanese, and English. In case of any discrepancies or differences in interpretation, the English text will be considered the standard text (Dorji 2010).

4.3.2 Political Relations

It has taken time and caution to develop official ties between Bhutan and the PRC. Bhutan became a member of the UN in 1971 and cast a vote in favour of the

PRC receiving the Chinese seat there. A select group of nations, including China, were invited to King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's coronation in 1974. Ma Mumin served as the delegation's head from China. According to Xinhua News Agency, Ma's visit to Thimphu marked a new chapter in the two nations' cordial relations. The Chinese congratulations highlighted the government of Bhutan's desire to grow its economy and maintain its national independency (Chakma and Ahsan, 1995).

The Survey Department of Bhutan looked into assertions and archives in 1974. The National Assembly first started debating the boundary problem and the likelihood of a deal in 1976. The necessity for dialogue grew essential in 1979 when it was discovered that incursions were occurring on a larger scale than in previous years. In that particular year, the leaders of Bhutan and China began exchanging National Day congratulations letters on an annual basis (Rajeesh,2018).

4.3.3 Economic Relations

The economic relationship between Bhutan and China presents both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, China, as one of the world's largest economies and a major global trading partner, offers Bhutan the chance to access a vast market for its goods and services. This could potentially spur economic growth and create employment opportunities (International Trade Center, 2023). Furthermore, China's investments in infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and hydropower projects, can contribute to Bhutan's development by enhancing connectivity and addressing existing infrastructure deficits (Asian Development Bank, 2022).

Additionally, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) presents new avenues for economic cooperation between the two countries. Bhutan's strategic position between India and China could position it as a significant transit hub for regional trade. Engaging in BRI projects may improve regional connectivity and foster economic integration (Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 2023). Moreover, China's expertise in renewable energy and technology offers Bhutan opportunities for knowledge transfer and capacity building, supporting its sustainable development goals (World Bank, 2023).

However, this economic relationship also brings challenges. Bhutan's disputed border with China could complicate bilateral relations and impact economic collaboration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bhutan, 2022). Additionally, Bhutan's relatively small and vulnerable economy might struggle to compete with the influx of Chinese goods and services, especially in areas where China holds a comparative advantage (Bhutan Economic Forum, 2023). There are also concerns regarding debt sustainability and the environmental impacts of Chinese investments, which need to be managed to ensure that economic cooperation remains beneficial and sustainable (Environmental Protection Agency, 2023).

The below Table no. 7 "Bhutan-China Trade Status" provides data on the trade relationship between Bhutan and China, including the values of exports, imports, and the trade balance (the difference between exports and imports) for the years 2014 to 2022, all measured in Nu (Bhutanese currency). Exports from Bhutan to China have shown fluctuations over the years, with a significant increase in 2021. Imports from China to Bhutan have increased considerably over the years.

Table 7: Bhutan-China Trade Status

Value in NU (Bhutanese Ngultrum) (Million)

Year	Export	Import	Balance of Trade
2014	4,066,380	948,897,572	944,831,192
2015	1,923,835	1,333,476,144	1,331,552,309
2016	8,495,984	1,476,217,148	1,467,721,164
2017	1,459,055	1,609,885,795	1,608,426,740
2018	1,459,855	1,613,662,988	1,612,203,133
2019	5,446,071	1,790,435,142	1,784,989,071
2020	1,142,522	2,133,833,154	2,132,690,632
2021	155,168,021	7,512,569,229	7,357,401,208
2022	----	15,824,771,757	15,824,771,757
0.00%	0.26%	50.00%	49.74%

Source: Royal Government of Bhutan, Department of Revenue and Customs, Thimphu, 2014-2022.

In 2014, Bhutan exported goods worth 4,066,380 NU to China while importing goods valued at 948,897,572 NU, resulting in a positive balance of trade of 944,831,192 NU. However, over the following years, the balance of trade fluctuated. In 2015, exports decreased to 1,923,835 NU, while imports increased significantly to 1,333,476,144 NU, resulting in a slightly lower positive balance of trade of 1,331,552,309 NU.

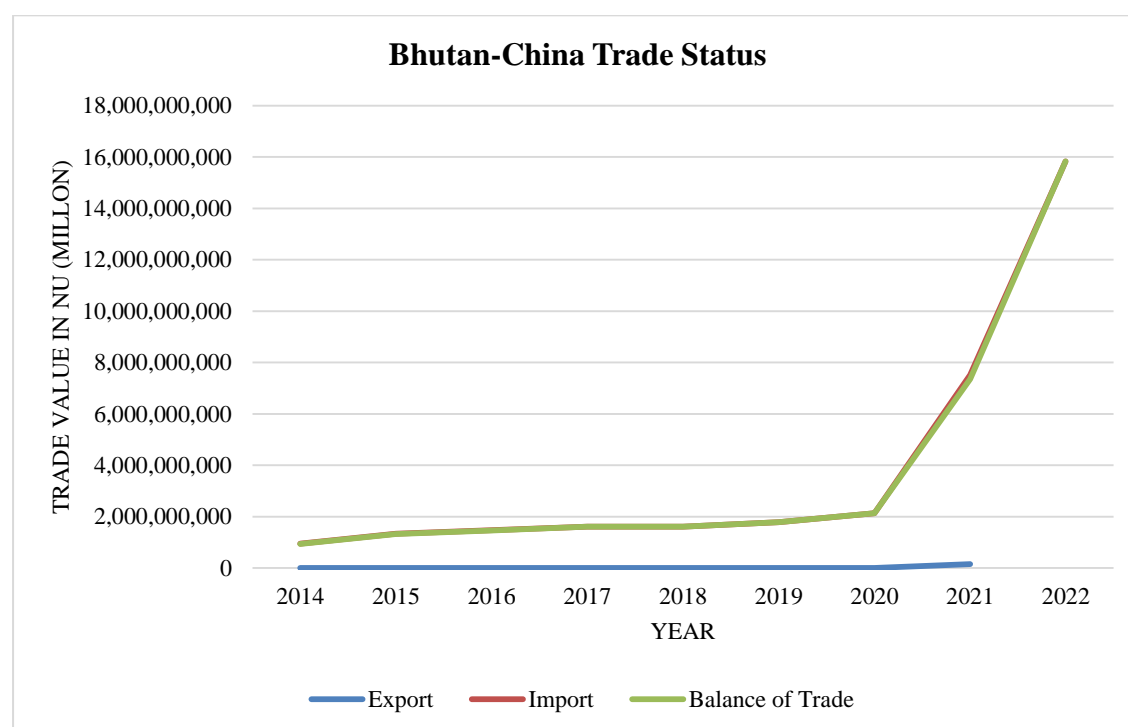
In 2016, there was a notable increase in both exports and imports, with exports reaching 8,495,984 NU and imports totaling 1,476,217,148 NU, resulting in a higher positive balance of trade of 1,467,721,164 NU. The trend continued with fluctuations in export and import values in subsequent years. Notably, in 2021, there was a substantial increase in exports to 155,168,021 NU, while imports soared to 7,512,569,229 NU, resulting in a significant positive balance of trade of 7,357,401,208 NU. The year 2022 data for exports is missing, but imports stood at 15,824,771,757 NU, indicating a substantial increase compared to previous years.

Overall, the table illustrates the dynamic nature of the trade relationship between Bhutan and China, with fluctuations in export and import values impacting the balance of trade over the years. The trade balance has been consistently negated for Bhutan, indicating a trade deficit. China is Bhutan's major trading partner, and Bhutan imports more from China than it exports to China. 2022 stands out with the highest trade deficit of Nu 15.82 billion, largely due to the data indicating that Bhutan did not export anything to China in that year. The table shows the percentage change in exports, imports, and the trade balance from 2014 to 2022. Exports have increased by a notable 0.26% over this period, mainly due to the surge in 2021. Imports have increased by 50 %, indicating substantial growth in Bhutan's imports from China. The trade deficit increased by 49.74%.

The data indicates that China is a significant trading partner for Bhutan, and the trade deficit reveals the imbalance in the trade relationship. A persistent trade deficit can have economic implications for Bhutan, potentially impacting its foreign exchange reserves and economic stability. The increase in imports may be due to various factors, including infrastructure projects, economic ties, and increased demand for Chinese products in Bhutan.

Bhutan may need to consider policies that encourage exports, diversify the export basket, and address the trade imbalance. Managing the trade deficit and fostering trade relations with other countries could be essential. The trade data shows a consistent trade deficit for Bhutan in its trade with China. While exports have increased significantly, driven by a surge in 2021, imports from China have grown even more, leading to a widening trade imbalance. Addressing this imbalance and diversifying trade partners and exports could be a key policy consideration for Bhutan's economic stability and growth.

Graph 4: Bhutan-China Trade Status



Source: Self-made on Excel Sheet.

The graph no 4 “Bhutan-China Trade Status (2014-2022)” to indicate the scope of the data. The x-axis represents the years from 2014 to 2022, while the y-axis represents the trade values in Bhutanese Ngultrum (NU) in millions. The overall trend in the graph shows fluctuations in both export and import values over the years. The export line appears to be relatively stable until 2021 but stops at 2022, indicating missing data. The import and balance of trade lines show a gradual increase over the years.

Notable observations include a significant increase in both exports and imports in 2021, leading to a substantial positive balance of trade. The absence of export data for 2022 suggests a possible discontinuity or missing information in the dataset. In 2014, Bhutan exported goods valued at 4,066,380 NU to China and imported goods worth 948,897,572 NU, resulting in a positive balance of trade. Import values appear to increase steadily over the years, with a significant spike in 2021 and 2022. Unfortunately, there is no export data available for 2022.

The graph suggests a growing trade relationship between Bhutan and China, as indicated by the increasing import values. The absence of export data for 2022 raises questions about the completeness of the dataset and the need for further investigation into the trade dynamics between the two countries. The graph illustrates the dynamic nature of the trade relationship between Bhutan and China, with fluctuations in import values and a notable increase in trade activity in 2021. However, the absence of export data for 2022 highlights the importance of ensuring data accuracy and completeness in analyzing trade trends.

4.3.4 Socio-Cultural Relations

In the early 8th century, Tibetan armies invaded Bhutan, and Tibetan lamas arrived in the southern valleys, where they exercised both spiritual and temporal authority (Gyaltsen, 2021). The majority of the population in the western section of Bhutan is now of Tibetan descent, and Tibetan influence was a major factor in the region's conversion to Buddhism over time (Smith, 2019). The migration of Tibetan lamas to Bhutan was decisive in the spread of Buddhism and the establishment of monastic institutions in Bhutan (Tshering, 2020).

The Bhutanese people embraced Tibetan Buddhism, which became an integral part of their culture and way of life. Tibetan Buddhism also shaped the political and social structures of Bhutan, as the lamas exercised considerable influence over the Bhutanese rulers (Dorji, 2021). Even today, Tibet remains a sacred land for most Bhutanese, and many Bhutanese pilgrims travel to Tibet to visit its holy sites and receive teachings from Tibetan Buddhist masters. The cultural and religious ties between Bhutan and Tibet continue to be strong, even as political relations between Bhutan and China remain complicated (Zangpo, 2023).

4.3.5 Border Relations

Bhutan's border spans 1,075 kilometres, 605 of which are shared with India, and 470 with China. Long-standing ties exist between Bhutan and Tibet, and in the past Bhutan acted as a bridge connecting Tibet and the east of South Asia. The cross-border movement of Tibetans to Assam, Bangladesh, and Bihar for religious, cultural, and trade activities along the Manas Chhu in east Bhutan and the Paro Valley in west Bhutan can be considered as evidence of strong socioeconomic relations. Many Tibetans found the fair in Bumthang, east Bhutan, to be quite appealing. The Tibetan caravans demanded Bhutan's rice, paper, and dried pepper in exchange for their wool, brick tea, edible salt, and musk (Sharma, 2016).

Local Tibetan governments used to send representatives to areas close to Bhutan to buy rice. Tibetans used to make the long journey through the Manas Chhu to visit monasteries close to Guwahati, Assam, for pilgrimages as part of a ritual.⁹ Bhutan had to shutter its border area when China invaded Tibet because of the massive migration of Tibetans there, which forced the suspension of all cross-border economic activity. Since that time, Bhutan and China have not developed any official economic or business ties.

Discussions on the border between China and India have occasionally included Bhutan. In 1959, Zhou Enlai, then Premier of the People's Republic of China, expressed China's intention to engage in direct bilateral talks with Bhutan to address two separate border disputes (Zhou, 1959). However, direct boundary negotiations between China and Bhutan did not commence until 1984. Since then, these annual border talks have alternated between the capitals of Beijing and Thimphu. By 2004, 17 rounds of talks had been conducted, with the 17th taking place in Bhutan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bhutan, 2004). Prior to the 1970s, Bhutan was represented by India in discussions with China concerning the broader Sino-Indian boundary disputes.

Following Bhutan's membership in the United Nations in 1971, the diplomatic landscape changed. Bhutan joined India in supporting the PRC's assumption of the ROC's UN seat and formally endorsed the "One China" policy. During this period, Bhutan also hosted the Chinese ambassador to India for the inauguration of King

Jigme Singye Wangchuck (Saran, 2017). In 1983, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian and Bhutanese Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering met in New York to discuss strengthening bilateral relations. The two countries began holding annual negotiations on the border issue starting in 1984. In 1996, China proposed an exchange involving Sinchulumpa, Dramana, and Shakhtoe areas totaling 269 square kilometers that border Sikkim, India in return for the 495 square kilometers of the Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys in Bhutan's northern border. However, no agreement was reached at that time.

Following subsequent negotiations, China and Bhutan signed a bilateral agreement in 1998 to maintain tranquility and stability along their border. This five-article agreement emphasizes equality and mutual respect, with China affirming its commitment to respecting Bhutan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The agreement is based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Sigdel, 2018). Although Bhutan's monarchs tentatively agreed to a territorial swap in 1997, negotiations stalled when China proposed the land exchange again.

In 2002, China asserted its claim over contested land parcels, presenting what it called "evidence" to support its position. China declined to offer Bhutan concessions, citing the need to balance its relations with multiple neighboring countries. Tensions have risen as China has constructed military roads in disputed areas, in apparent violation of the agreements. Bhutan's support for Chinese positions on issues such as Taiwan, human rights, and Tibet reflects the growing influence of both nations, posing challenges for India. As of 2021, the border dispute between China and Bhutan remains unresolved (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bhutan, 2021).

CHAPTER V

COMPARISON BETWEEN NEPAL'S & BHUTAN'S GEOPOLITICAL RESPONSE WITH INDIA AND CHINA and QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Comparative Response Analysis of Nepal with India and China

5.1.1 Comparative Response of Nepal's Political Relations with India and China

China's increasing influence in Nepal has led to some strains in India-Nepal relations. China has been investing in infrastructure, energy, and other areas in Nepal during the past few years. India is now concerned that China is attempting to undermine it by increasing its influence in Nepal as a result of this. Additionally, Nepal has signed several agreements with China, including a transit trade agreement, which has raised concerns in India about China's growing presence in Nepal. However, it is worth noting that India and Nepal still maintain strong ties in various fields, including cultural, economic, and security cooperation. Nepal's political activities have distinct characteristics when compared to India and China. Here is a comparative response:

Political Relations: Nepal, India, and China have distinct political systems. Nepal operates as a democratic federal republic with multiple political parties, while India is a federal parliamentary democratic republic, and China is a single-party socialist state governed by the Chinese Communist Party (Bhattarai, 2013). India plays a supportive role for Nepal in international forums and provides aid during political crises. This dynamic influences India's foreign policy and political interactions with Nepal. Although Nepal maintains diplomatic relations with both India and China, its relationships with these nations have fluctuated over time.

Geopolitical Dynamics: Nepal's location as a landlocked country between India and China significantly affects its political strategies. The country aims to balance its relations with both neighbors, reflecting its historical connections with India and its expanding economic engagements with China (Bhattarai, 2013).

Influence and Interests: India and China have significant interests in Nepal due to its strategic position, natural resources, and economic potential. Both nations actively pursue political and economic activities to protect their interests, which impacts Nepal's domestic politics and foreign relations.

Regional Cooperation: Nepal, India, and China are members of regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). These platforms offer opportunities for political dialogue, cooperation, and regional integration.

Nepal's political relationships with India and China are shaped by distinct historical contexts, strategic interests, and geopolitical factors. India remains a key political ally with deep cultural and historical ties, significant economic cooperation, and considerable influence on Nepal's political scene (Whelpton, 2005). In contrast, China's involvement with Nepal focuses on strategic economic investments and growing political influence, reflecting its broader regional ambitions (Mishra, 2004). Nepal's foreign policy seeks to balance its engagements with both India and China, utilizing its geopolitical position to foster national development while safeguarding its sovereignty and stability (Dixit, 1994).

5.1.2 Comparative Response of Nepal's Economic Relations with India and China

China has increased its economic and infrastructure investments in Nepal, which has resulted in closer ties between the two countries. This has included the construction of roads, bridges, and hydropower projects, as well as investments in Nepal's telecommunications and tourism sectors. As a result, Nepal has become increasingly dependent on China for economic assistance and development.

Economic Partnership with India

Nepal and India have a long-standing economic partnership characterized by robust trade relations and mutual investments. India is Nepal's largest trading partner, accounting for a significant portion of Nepal's imports and exports (Koirala, 2020). Indian investments in Nepal span various sectors including infrastructure, energy, and

manufacturing. Major Indian companies are involved in Nepal's hydropower projects, telecommunications, and consumer goods industries (Rai, 2019). India's financial assistance to Nepal includes grants and loans for infrastructure projects, education, and health care, reflecting a deep economic integration (Sharma, 2018).

Economic Engagement with China

Nepal's economic engagement with China has grown significantly in recent years, driven by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and increased Chinese investments in infrastructure projects. China has become a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Nepal, focusing on large-scale projects such as road construction, hydropower development, and trade facilitation (Li, 2020). Trade between Nepal and China has also increased, with China becoming an important source of imports for Nepal, particularly in the areas of machinery and consumer goods (Gautam, 2019).

Trade Volumes and Investments

India and China are both critical to Nepal's trade and investment landscape, though in different ways. India's trade with Nepal is significantly higher, reflecting historical trade patterns and geographical proximity (Koirala, 2020). Indian investments are spread across numerous sectors, contributing substantially to Nepal's economy. In contrast, while China's trade with Nepal is growing rapidly, it still lags behind India in terms of trade volume. However, Chinese investments are increasingly influential, particularly in infrastructure development (Wang, 2021).

Nepal's economic activities differ in various aspects when compared to India and China. Here is a comparative response:

Below the Table no 8 "Nepal's Trade Comparison between India and China" provides a comparison of Nepal's trade with India and China over the years, with the values presented in NPR (Nepalese Rupees). Nepal's trade with both India and China has shown an upward trend in terms of the total trade volume, although the rate of growth varies significantly between the two countries.

Table 8: Nepal's Trade Comparison between India and China

Year	India	China
2014	450,669,946,181	89,766,982,064
2015	366,595,547,618	92,066,516,188
2016	586,602,827,251	131,956,363,690
2017	650,276,563,607	136,243,172,655
2018	860,818,609,878.26	187,793,215,259.69
2019	801,444,922,352.05	216,391,544,999.63
2020	667,313,349,370.46	158,042,552,123.32
2021	975,280,800,255.29	280,752,643,496.14
2022	970,881,466,380	231,529,206,499
Percentage	80.59%	19.41%

Source: TEPC, (Trade and Export Promotion Centre) 2022.

Value in NPR (Nepalese rupee)

Nepal's trade with India has historically been more substantial than its trade with China. Nepal's trade with India has seen a significant increase from NPR 450,669,946,181 in 2014 to NPR 970,881,466,380 in 2022.

Throughout the period, trade with India has consistently accounted for the majority of Nepal's trade, ranging from approximately 80% to 90% of the total trade volume. This steady growth in trade with India reflects the strong economic ties and geographical proximity between the two countries. In 2014, India accounted for 83.39% of Nepal's total trade, and by 2022, it still represented 80.59%. The trade volume with India has consistently grown over the years, with a significant increase in 2018 and 2019.

Nepal's trade with China has also witnessed growth, albeit at a slower pace compared to trade with India. Starting from NPR 89,766,982,064 in 2014, trade with China increased to NPR 231,529,206,499 in 2022. Despite the lower trade volume compared to India, Nepal's trade with China has been gradually expanding, indicating efforts to diversify trade partners and reduce dependency. China accounted for 16.61% of Nepal's total trade, and by 2022, it represented 19.41%. The growth rate of

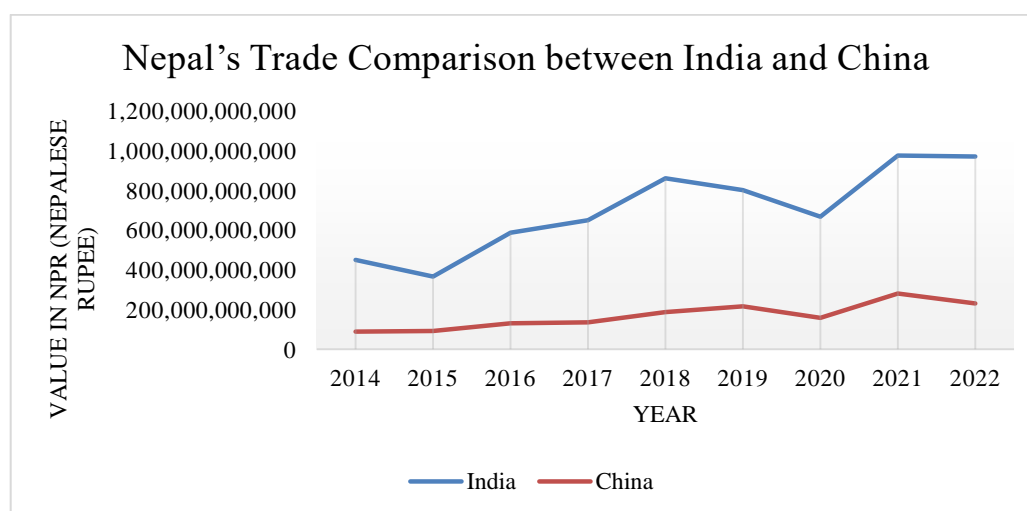
trade with China has been higher, with a particularly significant increase from 2016 to 2018.

Nepal has had a trade deficit with both India and China throughout the years, which means it imports more than it exports. The trade deficit with India has been consistently larger than with China. In 2018, there was a notable increase in Nepal's trade with both India and China. The trade deficit with India reached a peak in this year. 2021 saw a substantial increase in trade with both countries.

The table shows the percentage of trade with India and China as a proportion of Nepal's total trade. The percentage of trade with India remains dominant but has seen a slight decrease over the years, from 83.39% in 2014 to 80.59% in 2022. The percentage of trade with China has shown a corresponding increase from 16.61% in 2014 to 19.41% in 2022.

India has been Nepal's dominant trading partner over the years, and the two countries share a long border and strong historical ties. China's role in Nepal's trade has been growing, likely due to increased economic cooperation and infrastructure projects. Nepal's trade has grown with both India and China over the years, with India being the dominant trading partner. While India remains the primary trading partner, Nepal's trade with China has been increasing steadily, reflecting the country's efforts to diversify its trade relationships. Addressing trade imbalances and exploring opportunities for export promotion may be essential for Nepal's economic development.

Graph 5: Nepal's Trade Comparison between India and China



Source: Self-made on Excel Sheet.

The Graph no. 5 titled "Nepal's Trade Comparison between India and China" provides a visual representation of the total trade values between Nepal and its two major trading partners, India and China, over the period from 2014 to 2022. The graph features two fluctuating lines: a blue line representing trade values with India and a red line representing trade values with China. The horizontal axis (x-axis) denotes the years from 2014 to 2022, while the vertical axis (y-axis) represents the trade value in Nepalese Rupees (NPR).

Throughout the entire period, the trade values with India consistently surpass those with China. Despite China's emergence as a growing trading partner for Nepal, India maintains its position as the dominant trading partner. The trade data by year demonstrates the dominance of India as Nepal's largest trading partner, while also highlighting the increasing economic engagement with China. Despite the disparities in trade volumes, there are opportunities for Nepal to further diversify its trade relations and strengthen economic cooperation with both India and China.

Future Prospects

Nepal's economic future with India and China holds potential for further growth and diversification. India is likely to remain a major economic partner due to historical connections and extensive cooperation in various sectors. China's growing investments and involvement in infrastructure suggest increasing economic opportunities for Nepal. However, Nepal must navigate its relationships carefully to balance its economic engagements with both countries while preserving its sovereignty and addressing developmental needs (Wang, 2021).

5.1.3 Comparative Response of Nepal's Socio-Cultural Relations with India and China

This analysis explores and compares Nepal's socio-cultural relations with India and China by examining historical connections, cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, and people-to-people interactions. The socio-cultural ties between Nepal and these neighbouring countries reflect a blend of historical influences, cultural affinities, and evolving interactions. Nepal's socio-cultural activities exhibit some similarities and differences when compared to India and China. Here is a comparative response:

Depth of Cultural Ties: Nepal's socio-cultural ties with India are deeper due to shared historical, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The historical and religious connections provide a strong foundation for cultural exchanges and mutual influence (Bhattarai, 2017). In contrast, Nepal's cultural ties with China are more recent and primarily driven by strategic and diplomatic initiatives (Gautam, 2019).

People-to-People Interaction: Interactions between Nepal and India are characterized by significant cross-border movement and shared cultural practices. Nepalese people frequently travel to India for education, health, and religious purposes, reflecting the depth of social integration (Sharma, 2018). Chinese interactions, while increasing, are still relatively limited in comparison (Wang, 2021).

Cultural Influences: Indian cultural influences are pervasive in Nepalese media, literature, and daily life, showcasing the deep-seated connections between the two countries. Chinese cultural influence, while growing, is less entrenched but shows potential through increased diplomatic and educational engagements (Li, 2020).

Future Prospects: The socio-cultural relationship between Nepal and India is likely to continue being robust due to historical ties and mutual cultural influences. Nepal's engagement with China is expected to grow, with more opportunities for cultural and educational exchanges as China expands its presence in Nepal (Gautam, 2019).

5.1.4 Comparative Response of Nepal's Defence Relations with India and China

This analysis provides a detailed comparison of Nepal's defense relations with its two major neighbours, India and China. By examining historical contexts, military cooperation, strategic alliances, and geopolitical considerations, we aim to understand the dynamics and implications of Nepal's defense interactions with these countries.

Defense Relations with India

Nepal and India share a long history of defense cooperation, marked by strong military ties and strategic collaboration. **Historical and Strategic Context:** Nepal and India have a longstanding defense relationship, rooted in historical ties and shared security concerns. The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) forms the

cornerstone of their defense cooperation, ensuring mutual security and strategic alignment (Sharma, 2019).

Military Cooperation: India has been a significant partner in Nepal's defense sector, providing training and capacity-building support. The Indian Army regularly conducts joint exercises with the Nepalese Army, such as the "Surya Kiran" series, aimed at enhancing interoperability and mutual understanding (Rai, 2021). India also assists Nepal in various military training programs, including counter-terrorism and disaster response.

Support and Assistance: India offers military assistance to Nepal in the form of equipment, technology, and financial aid for defense infrastructure. Indian assistance includes supply of military hardware and logistical support, which strengthens Nepal's defense capabilities (Gautam, 2020).

Geopolitical Considerations: India's strategic interests in Nepal are driven by regional security concerns and its desire to maintain stability in the Himalayan region. Nepal's strategic location is crucial for India's security, particularly concerning its northern border and relations with China (Sharma, 2019).

Defense Relations with China

Nepal's defense relationship with China is relatively recent and characterized by cautious engagement and incremental cooperation.

Historical Context: Nepal's defense relations with China have been limited historically due to geopolitical complexities and Nepal's traditional ties with India. However, recent years have seen a gradual expansion in defense interactions, influenced by China's growing interest in South Asia (Li, 2020).

Military Cooperation: China has provided military assistance to Nepal in the form of training and equipment, but on a smaller scale compared to India. China has offered training programs for Nepalese military personnel and has engaged in limited military exchanges and dialogues (Wang, 2021).

Infrastructure and Development Support: China's involvement in Nepal's defense sector is primarily through infrastructure development, including road

construction and border infrastructure. These projects have strategic implications for Nepal's defense posture and its ability to manage border areas effectively (Gautam, 2020).

Geopolitical Considerations: China's interest in Nepal is part of its broader regional strategy, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's defense engagement with Nepal is aimed at expanding its influence and securing its investments and interests in the region (Li, 2020).

Comparative Analysis

Depth of Cooperation: India's defense relationship with Nepal is more established and extensive, characterized by deep military cooperation and strategic alignment. In contrast, China's defense engagement is more recent and limited, focusing primarily on infrastructure and selective military assistance (Rai, 2021).

Strategic Interests: India's defense cooperation with Nepal is driven by regional security concerns and historical ties, whereas China's engagement is part of its broader strategy to expand influence through economic and infrastructural investments (Sharma, 2019).

Military Assistance and Support: India's military assistance to Nepal is more comprehensive, including training, equipment, and infrastructure support. China's assistance, while growing, remains less extensive and is more focused on infrastructure development and selective military training (Wang, 2021).

Future Prospects: Nepal's defense relationship with India is likely to remain strong due to historical ties and extensive cooperation. China's role is expected to grow incrementally, with potential for increased defense cooperation if aligned with broader strategic interests (Li, 2020).

5.2 Comparative response analysis of Bhutan with India and China

5.2.1 Comparative Response of Bhutan's Political Relations with India and China

This analysis aims to critically evaluate Bhutan's political relations with India and China, examining the historical contexts, diplomatic engagements, strategic

alliances, and geopolitical considerations that shape these relationships. The study provides insights into the complexities and nuances of Bhutan's foreign policy and its strategic positioning between these two influential neighbours.

Historical Context and Diplomatic Engagements

The Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship (1949) established the basis for bilateral relations, emphasizing mutual respect and non-interference (Singh,2016). The treaty was revised in 2007 to reflect changing dynamics, reinforcing cooperation and sovereignty while maintaining strong ties and updated to reflect contemporary needs, ensuring continued cooperation and respect for sovereignty. While Bhutan's diplomatic interactions with China are relatively recent and cautious, primarily due to historical border disputes and geopolitical considerations. The lack of formal diplomatic ties and unresolved territorial issues have led to a cautious and limited engagement between the two nations (Penjore,2018).

Diplomatic Relations and High-Level Engagements

Regular high-level visits, bilateral meetings, and established embassies underscore the robust diplomatic engagement. Political dialogues, collaboration in international forums, and joint initiatives in sectors such as security, education, and infrastructure development. On the other hand, absence of formal diplomatic missions, interactions are mediated through third-party channels or multilateral settings. Main issues are border disputes persistent and unresolved, leading to ongoing negotiations aimed at peaceful resolution. Bhutan's diplomatic engagements with China remain limited and strategically cautious (Dahal,2021).

Strategic Alliances and Geopolitical Considerations

In the perspective of strategic alliances and geopolitical considerations, Bhutan's geographic location is crucial for India's strategic interests in South Asia. Joint military exercises and Indian support in training Bhutanese forces highlight the depth of security cooperation. India's significant influence on Bhutan's foreign policy and defense strategies underscores the strategic alliance (Choden, 2017). On the other hand, China's increasing interest in South Asia as part of its broader regional strategy, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and diplomatic outreach and proposals

for infrastructure projects are part of China's strategy to expand its influence. Distrust stemming from unresolved border issues and Bhutan's cautious approach to Chinese engagement (Upreti, 2015).

Economic and Political Influence

India's significant contributions to Bhutan's economic development through investments and aid. India's backing of Bhutan in international forums and organizations. Cultural ties Shared cultural, historical, and religious ties that reinforce political relations (Mitra, 2020). While China's offers of infrastructure investments and trade deals as a means to increase influence and efforts to leverage economic relations to gain political influence. Bhutan and China have limited cultural exchanges, reflecting the cautious nature of the relationship.

Future Prospects

India is likely to remain Bhutan's primary political ally due to historical ties and extensive cooperation. Strengthened ties for deeper collaboration in defense, trade, education, and sustainable development. On the other hand, China is Gradual increase in political and economic presence, with cautious steps towards greater engagement. Bhutan's strategic challenge in balancing its relations with India and China, ensuring sovereignty and national interests are upheld.

5.2.2 Comparative Response of Bhutan's Economic Relations with India and China

This analysis aims to explore and compare Bhutan's economic relations with its two prominent neighbouring countries, India and China. By examining trade volumes, investments, development aid, and strategic partnerships, we can understand the dynamics and significance of Bhutan's economic interactions with these countries. Bhutan has a long-standing relationship with India, rooted in cultural, historical, and economic ties (Wangchuk, 2014). The Treaty of Friendship in 1949 laid the foundation for close cooperation. Bhutan's relationship with China is more recent and complex, characterized by cautious engagement and unresolved border disputes.

Economic Partnership with India: Bhutan has a long-standing and robust economic partnership with India. India is Bhutan's largest trading partner and provides significant economic support to Bhutan through financial aid, grants, and technical assistance (Rai, 2018). The economic cooperation between Bhutan and India spans various sectors, including hydropower, agriculture, tourism, and infrastructure development. India also provides market access for Bhutanese goods, facilitating Bhutan's export-oriented industries. In terms of investment, India has made substantial investments in Bhutan's hydropower sector, which is a key contributor to Bhutan's economy (Joshi, 2020).

Economic Engagement with China: Bhutan's economic engagement with China is relatively limited compared to its economic ties with India. Bhutan and China have worked to strengthen their economic ties, especially in areas like trade and tourism. However, the economic partnership between Bhutan and China is not as extensive as that with India (Li, 2019). China's economic involvement in Bhutan is primarily focused on infrastructure development projects and investments.

Hydropower Cooperation: Hydropower is a significant sector in Bhutan's economy, and both India and China have shown interest in collaborating with Bhutan in this sector. India has been a key partner in Bhutan's hydropower development, with several joint ventures and power purchase agreements in place. China has also expressed interest in participating in Bhutan's hydropower projects, but concrete collaborations in this sector are relatively limited (Sharma, 2017).

Economic Diversification: Bhutan has been working towards diversifying its economy to reduce dependence on hydropower and explore other sectors for sustainable economic growth. While India remains a crucial partner in this endeavour, Bhutan has also shown interest in exploring economic cooperation with other countries, including China, in areas such as tourism, agriculture, and infrastructure development (Dahal, 2021).

Table 9: Bhutan's Trade Comparison between India and China

Value in NU (Bhutanese Ngultrum) in million

Year	India Trade Balance	China Trade Balance
2014	26,36,07,91,237	94,48,31,192
2015	33,81,39,91,030	1,33,15,52,309
2016	36,09,14,15,728	1,46,77,21,164
2017	34,26,23,73,932	1,60,84,26,740
2018	38,21,98,80,737	1,61,22,03,133
2019	32,88,04,38,345	1,78,49,89,071
2020	35,20,83,13,645	2,13,26,90,632
2021	44,82,70,40,126	7,35,74,01,208
2022	58,39,46,97,367	15,82,47,71,757
Percentage	90.89%	9.11%

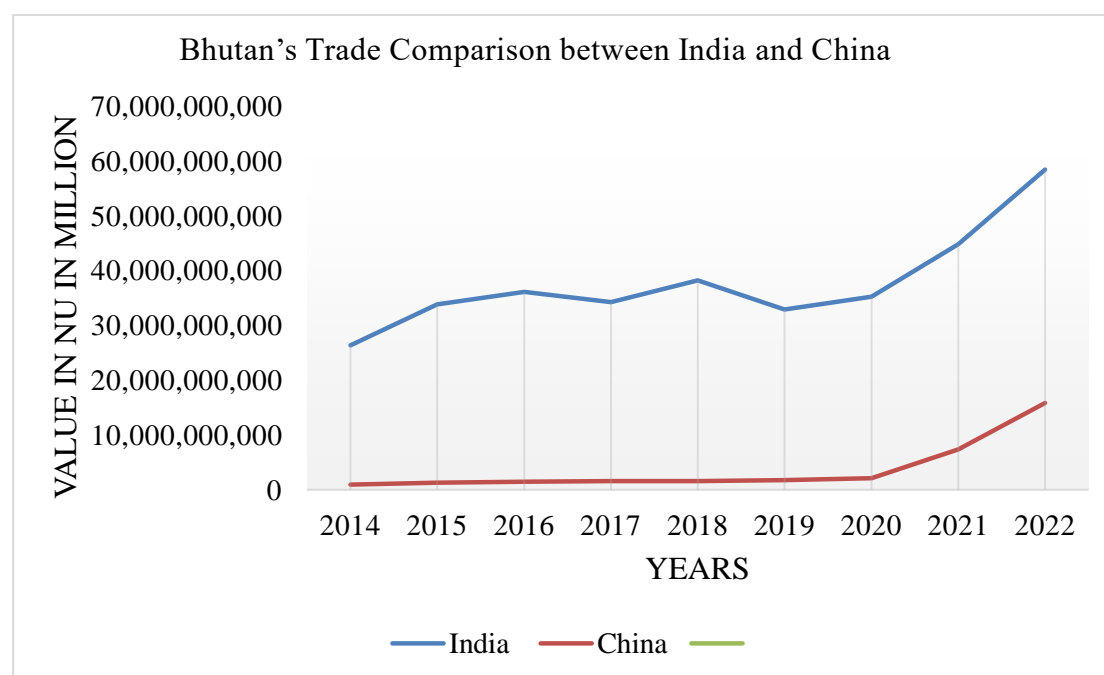
Source: Royal Government of Bhutan, Department of Revenue and Customs, Thimphu, 2014-2022.

The above Table no. 9 “Bhutan's Trade Comparison between India and China” provides a comparison of Bhutan's trade balances with India and China, with values presented in Bhutanese currency (NU). Bhutan consistently has a positive trade balance with India, meaning it exports more to India than it imports. The trade surplus with India has been increasing over the years, indicating Bhutan's ability to generate export revenue. Bhutan's trade balance with China is much smaller and consistently positive, indicating that it exports more to China than it imports.

The percentage change in trade balances as a proportion of Bhutan's total trade is a significant metric to consider. Bhutan's trade balance with India has consistently represented the majority of its total trade balance, accounting for a significant percentage (around 90%). Trade with China represents a smaller proportion of Bhutan's total trade balance (around 9%).

Bhutan's positive trade balance with India reflects the strong economic ties and significant exports to its southern neighbour. Bhutan's trade balance with China has been growing, likely due to increasing exports and economic cooperation. Bhutan's trade surplus with India and China indicates its ability to generate export revenue, which can positively impact its economy. Maintaining a positive trade balance can provide a source of revenue and economic stability for Bhutan.

Graph 6: Bhutan’s Trade Comparison between India and China



Source: Self-made on Excel Sheet. NU: Bhutanese Ngultrum

The above Graph no 6 “Bhutan’s Trade Comparison between India and China” illustrates the comparison of Bhutan’s trade with India and China. The graph displays two distinct lines representing the trade values with India (shown in blue) and China (shown in red) over the years. The x-axis represents the timeline from 2014 to 2022, while the y-axis denotes the trade value in Bhutanese Ngultrum (NU) in millions.

From the data, it is evident that Bhutan's trade with India consistently outweighs its trade with China throughout the entire period. Despite China's growing influence in global trade, India remains Bhutan's dominant trading partner.

The data highlights the strong economic ties between Bhutan and India, with trade values showing a steady increase over the years. In contrast, while there are

fluctuations in trade values with China, they remain significantly lower compared to trade with India. This trend underscores the enduring economic relationship between Bhutan and India, which is supported by various factors such as geographic proximity, historical ties, and mutual cooperation.

While Bhutan's trade with China is present, India continues to play a pivotal role as Bhutan's primary trading partner. It's important to note that Bhutan's economic activities are shaped by its own development priorities, the geographical proximity and historical ties with India, and the evolving dynamics of its engagement with China. Bhutan seeks to strike a balance between its economic partnerships, leveraging the strengths and opportunities offered by both India and China while safeguarding its national interests and promoting sustainable development.

5.2.3 Comparative Response of Bhutan's Socio-Cultural Relations with India and China

This analysis seeks to examine and compare Bhutan's socio-cultural relations with India and China. By exploring historical ties, cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, and people-to-people interactions, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics between Bhutan and these two giant nations. Bhutan's socio-cultural activities with India and China exhibit some distinctive characteristics. Here is a comparative response:

Socio-Cultural Ties with India: Bhutan shares a deep socio-cultural bond with India, primarily due to historical and geographical factors. Bhutan's close proximity to India has fostered extensive cultural exchange, people-to-people interactions, and shared traditions. Bhutanese society has been influenced by Indian cultural practices, including language, literature, music, dance, and religious traditions (Bhattarai, 2005). Bhutanese citizens often travel to India for education, healthcare, pilgrimage, and leisure activities. India has played a significant role in preserving Bhutan's unique cultural heritage and supporting cultural initiatives in the country.

Socio-Cultural Exchanges with China: Bhutan's socio-cultural exchanges with China have been relatively limited compared to its interactions with India. Due to geographical constraints and historical factors, Bhutan's cultural ties with China are not as deep-rooted. However, in recent years, there have been efforts to promote cultural exchanges between the two countries. Cultural delegations from Bhutan and

China have visited each other, and events such as cultural performances and exhibitions have taken place to enhance understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures (Singh, 2016).

Preservation of Bhutanese Identity: Bhutan places a strong emphasis on preserving its unique cultural identity and traditions. Bhutan's growth is guided by the idea of Gross National Happiness (GNH), one of whose cornerstones is the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. Bhutan's policies and initiatives aim to protect and promote Bhutanese arts, crafts, architecture, language (Dzongkha), and traditional practices. Both India and China have shown support for Bhutan's efforts in cultural preservation and have contributed to the preservation of Bhutan's cultural artifacts and sites (Thapa, 2019).

Religious Influence: Religion plays a crucial role in Bhutanese society, with Buddhism being the predominant religion. Bhutan's religious practices, rituals, and monastic institutions have deep historical connections with both India and China. Bhutan's religious ties with India, particularly with Tibetan Buddhism, are well-established, and Bhutanese monks and religious scholars often receive education and training in Indian monastic institutions (Rai, 2018). Similarly, Bhutan also maintains religious and cultural exchanges with China, particularly with Tibetan Buddhist communities.

Bhutan's socio-cultural relations with India and China reflect distinct patterns and historical contexts. India remains Bhutan's primary socio-cultural partner, with deep-rooted ties and extensive collaborations in culture, education, and people-to-people interactions. In contrast, Bhutan's socio-cultural engagement with China is emerging, marked by cautious but growing exchanges and collaborations. Bhutan's strategy involves maintaining and strengthening its traditional cultural ties with India while exploring new opportunities for cultural and educational exchange with China, ensuring a balanced approach to socio-cultural relations.

5.2.4 Comparative Response of Bhutan's Defense Relations with India and China

This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive comparison of Bhutan's defense relations with India and China. By examining historical contexts, military cooperation, defense agreements, and strategic implications, this study sheds light on

the complexities and dynamics of Bhutan's defense strategies with its two powerful neighbours. Bhutan's security activities with India and China can be compared as follows:

Security Partnership with India: Bhutan has a long-standing and strong security partnership with India. The two countries have close ties and collaborate on various security aspects. India has been providing security assistance to Bhutan, including defense cooperation, training and capacity building for Bhutanese security forces, and assistance in border security management. Bhutan's security is closely linked to India's strategic interests, and both countries have a shared understanding of the importance of maintaining stability and security in the region (Sinha, 2016).

Military Cooperation with India: Regular joint exercises such as the "IMBEX" (India-Bhutan Military Exercise) enhance interoperability and mutual understanding (Sharam, 2019). India provides training to Bhutanese military personnel at its prestigious military academies (Kumar, 2018). India supplies military equipment and technology to Bhutan, strengthening its defense capabilities. India has assisted Bhutan in developing strategic infrastructure, including roadways and communication networks, which have defense implications.

Military cooperation with China: Defense cooperation with China is minimal, largely constrained by political caution and unresolved territorial disputes. Possibilities for future cooperation exist, but are contingent on resolving border issues and building mutual trust. Lack of formal defense agreements due to historical tensions and ongoing border negotiations (Dahal, 2021). Bhutan maintains a cautious approach to defense relations with China, focusing more on diplomatic and economic engagements.

Border Management and Cooperation with China: Bhutan shares a disputed border with China, and border management is a significant aspect of Bhutan's security activities. Bhutan and China have engaged in border talks to resolve their territorial disputes peacefully. While the border issue remains unresolved, both countries have maintained peace and stability along the border. Bhutan has pursued a policy of peaceful coexistence and engagement with China, focusing on maintaining good relations and preventing any security challenges along the border (Joshi, 2020).

Non-alignment and Neutrality: Bhutan follows a policy of non-alignment and neutrality in its security activities. The country has emphasized maintaining its sovereignty, independence, and neutrality in regional and international affairs. Bhutan has not aligned itself with any military alliance or taken sides in regional power rivalries, including those between India and China. Bhutan's approach is centred on ensuring its security and stability without becoming entangled in external conflicts (Thapa, 2015).

Cooperation on Non-Traditional Security Challenges: Bhutan, India, and China have recognized the importance of cooperation in addressing non-traditional security challenges, such as natural disasters, terrorism, and transnational crimes. There have been joint efforts between Bhutan, India, and China to enhance cooperation in disaster management, sharing of intelligence and information, and promoting regional security cooperation forums. These initiatives aim to address shared security concerns and promote stability in the region.

Future prospects with India: Continued and deepened defense cooperation, including advanced training programs and joint exercises. India's assistance in modernizing Bhutan's military infrastructure and capabilities. Enhancing the strategic partnership to address emerging regional security challenges (Dorji, 2021).

Future prospects with China: Potential for cautious and incremental defense engagement, contingent on resolving border issues. Initial steps towards cooperation in non-sensitive areas such as disaster management and humanitarian assistance. Bhutan's need to balance its defense relations with India and potential engagement with China to maintain national security and sovereignty.

Overall, Bhutan's security activities involve close cooperation with India, given their historical ties and shared security interests. Bhutan's engagement with China focuses on maintaining peaceful border relations and managing territorial disputes (Sinha, 2016). Bhutan's policy of non-alignment and neutrality helps to maintain its independence and sovereignty in security matters while actively participating in regional security cooperation efforts to address common challenges.

5.3 Quantitative Analysis and Results

A quantitative analysis was conducted as part of this research study to examine the objectives related to the emerging geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region and the responses of Nepal and Bhutan. The objectives of the quantitative analysis were:

1. To understand the nature and importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent.
2. To examine the geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China.
3. To analyze the treaties and agreements and border relations of concerned countries with India.
4. To evaluate the current scenario of Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China.

To address these objectives, a survey was conducted with relevant experts and stakeholders using a 5-point Likert scale. The survey analysis aimed to quantify perceptions regarding the geopolitical dynamics and importance of the Himalayan region.

5.3.1 Reliability Analysis

Prior to evaluating the survey responses, reliability analysis was conducted on the Likert scale items corresponding to each objective using Cronbach's alpha. This assessed the internal consistency and reliability of the scale items measuring the same underlying construct.

Reliability analysis for Objective 1 items related to the importance of the Himalayan region yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.865, indicating good internal consistency. For Objective 2 items regarding geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.841. For Objective 3 items concerning treaties and border relations, the alpha was 0.802. Finally, for Objective 4 items about Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status, the Cronbach's alpha obtained was 0.872.

Overall, the reliability analysis confirms that the scale items had acceptable levels of internal consistency in measuring the intended constructs across the four objectives.

5.3.2 Factor Analysis

After establishing scale reliability, factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying factor structure and dimensionality of the scale items. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was applied.

The factor analysis yielded five distinct factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining a cumulative variance of 82.136%. The rotated factor matrix showed strong factor loadings for the respective scale items on their intended constructs.

Factor 1 comprised the items related to the importance of the Himalayan region, Factor 2 included items concerning geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan, Factor 3 consisted of items about treaties and border relations, and Factor 4 contained items regarding Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status. The fifth factor had cross-loadings from different objectives and was excluded from further analysis.

The clean factorization and high cumulative variance explained confirms the construct validity of the scales used in the survey.

Table 10: Factor Analysis

Factor Analysis					
Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Objective 1: Importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent					
I am familiar with the geographical features of the Himalayan region.	0.759				
I think that the Himalayan region has played a significant historical role in shaping the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent.	0.812				

I believe that the Himalayan region holds a strong cultural influence on the countries in the Indian subcontinent.	0.788				
I consider it important for India and China to cooperate on economic development in the Himalayan region.	0.825				
I am concerned about the security threats posed by the border disputes in the Himalayan region.	0.802				
Objective 2: Geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China					
The political relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India are good.		0.813			
The political relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China are good.		0.799			
I am satisfied with the trade relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India.		0.788			
I am satisfied with the trade relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China.		0.768			
The diplomatic relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India are effective.		0.825			
The diplomatic relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China are effective.		0.803			
It is beneficial for Nepal-Bhutan to participate in regional cooperation initiatives such as SAARC and BRI.		0.812			
Nepal-Bhutan is caught in a strategic competition between India and China.		0.795			

Objective 3: Treaties and agreements and border relations of concerned countries with India					
I am familiar with the treaties and agreements between Nepal-Bhutan and India.			0.769		
These treaties and agreements reflect the interests of Nepal-Bhutan and India well.			0.735		
These treaties and agreements need to be revised to accommodate changing geopolitical realities.			0.714		
These treaties and agreements are implemented well by Nepal-Bhutan and India.			0.787		
The border management between Nepal-Bhutan and India is good.			0.759		
I hear about border conflicts between Nepal-Bhutan and India often.			0.735		
Objective 4: Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China					
I think that the current geopolitical challenges faced by Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are serious.				0.812	
I believe that the current geopolitical opportunities available for Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are promising.				0.795	
I feel that the current geopolitical risks				0.782	

involved for Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are high.					
I consider that the current geopolitical aspirations of Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are realistic.				0.768	
I find that the current geopolitical balance maintained by Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China is stable.				0.795	
Eigenvalue	2.763	2.136	1.865	1.624	1.468
% Variance	23.025	17.800	15.542	13.536	12.233
Cumulative % Variance	23.025	40.825	56.367	69.903	82.136
Scale Reliability alpha (Cronbach's Alpha)	0.865	0.841	0.802	0.872	0.898
<i>Cronbach's Alpha = 0.902, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.912, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square = 235.812, Sig = 0.000)</i>					

5.3.2.1 Factor 1: Importance of the Himalayan Region

The first factor comprised the 5 items related to gauging the importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent. This factor explained 23.025% of the total variance.

The variables measuring familiarity with Himalayan geographical features, historical and cultural significance of the region, need for India-China cooperation in the region, and concerns over border disputes and security threats loaded strongly on Factor 1. This indicates that these items effectively measured the overarching construct of the geopolitical importance of the Himalayan region.

The factor loadings were:

- Familiarity with geographical features of Himalayan region: 0.759
- Historical role of Himalayan region: 0.812
- Cultural influence of Himalayan region: 0.788

- Need for India-China cooperation in the region: 0.825
- Concerns over border disputes and security threats: 0.802

The high loadings confirm that experts perceive all these aspects as integral to determining the unique geopolitical significance of the Himalayan region in South Asia. The geographical realities, historical ties, cultural affinities, prospects for India-China cooperation, and threats arising from disputes and tensions collectively shape the importance of the Himalayas in regional geopolitics.

This factor highlights that the Himalayan region is not just of geographical relevance but has deeper civilizational, political, strategic and economic salience for countries like India, China, Nepal and Bhutan. The analysis quantitatively reinforces the qualitative understanding of the Himalayas as the epicentre of evolving South Asian geopolitics with implications for the key regional powers.

5.3.2.2 Factor 2: Geostrategic Conditions of Nepal-Bhutan

The second factor consisted of the 8 items assessing perceptions on the geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and their effects on India-China geopolitics. This factor accounted for 17.8% of the total variance.

The variables concerning political, trade, diplomatic and regional cooperation relations of Nepal-Bhutan with India and China loaded significantly on this factor. The strategic dynamics between the two Himalayan countries and the major Asian powers were effectively captured.

The key factor loadings were:

- Political relations of Nepal-Bhutan with India: 0.813
- Political relations of Nepal-Bhutan with China: 0.799
- Trade relations of Nepal-Bhutan with India: 0.788
- Trade relations of Nepal-Bhutan with China: 0.768
- Diplomatic relations of Nepal-Bhutan with India: 0.825
- Diplomatic relations of Nepal-Bhutan with China: 0.803

- Benefits of Nepal-Bhutan's regional cooperation: 0.812
- Nepal-Bhutan caught in India-China competition: 0.795

This structure indicates that Nepal's and Bhutan's ties across the spheres of politics, trade, diplomacy and regional initiatives with both India and China shape the geostrategic dynamics of the Himalayan region. The two countries are perceived to be caught between the strategic rivalry of the two Asian giants.

The factor underscores the complex balancing act required of smaller Himalayan nations like Nepal and Bhutan in maintaining cordial ties with their larger neighbors. Their geographic location entangles them in regional power competitions. Managing relations amidst India-China mistrust is a key challenge.

5.3.2.3 Factor 3: Treaties and Border Relations

The third factor consisted of the 6 items gauging perceptions on the treaty relations and border management mechanisms between Nepal-Bhutan and India. This factor explained 15.542% of the total variance.

The variables regarding awareness of treaties, reflection of mutual interests in treaties, need for updating treaties, implementation of treaties, and border management and disputes loaded significantly on this factor.

The key loadings were:

- Awareness of Nepal-Bhutan treaties with India: 0.769
- Treaties reflect mutual interests: 0.735
- Need for updating treaties: 0.714
- Implementation of treaties: 0.787
- Border management between Nepal-Bhutan and India: 0.759
- Hearing about border conflicts: 0.735

The loadings indicate that experts view legal agreements and on-ground border mechanisms as important anchors of the Nepal-India and Bhutan-India relationships. However, they also recognize the need to modify treaty frameworks to

adapt to changing regional realities and the occasional frictions in border management.

This factor highlights that while foundational treaties and border institutions underpin Nepal-Bhutan ties with India, maintaining relevance and effectiveness of these instruments requires accommodating new geopolitical dynamics and resolving periodic border tensions. Adaptable legal structures and smooth border relations are crucial for the stability of Himalayan geopolitics.

5.3.2.4 Factor 4: Nepal-Bhutan's Geopolitical Status

The fourth factor encompassed the 5 items evaluating perceptions on the current geopolitical status and positioning of Nepal and Bhutan with respect to India and China. This factor accounted for 13.536% of the total variance.

The variables regarding Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical challenges, risks, opportunities, aspirations and overall balance in ties with India-China loaded significantly on the factor.

The key loadings were:

- Seriousness of geopolitical challenges for Nepal-Bhutan: 0.812
- Promising nature of geopolitical opportunities: 0.795
- High geopolitical risks for Nepal-Bhutan: 0.782
- Realism of geopolitical aspirations: 0.768
- Stability of geopolitical balance: 0.795

The loadings suggest that Nepal's and Bhutan's current geopolitical situation is perceived as difficult but balanced, precarious yet hopeful. Managing relations with competing Asian giants presents profound challenges but also openings. Caution and pragmatism are required to safeguard national interests.

This factor quantitatively demonstrates the delicate equilibrium that Nepal and Bhutan need to achieve as they engage with China's rising power and India's regional predominance. Their geopolitical status is stable yet fragile. Preserving autonomy and leverage amidst India-China rivalry is crucial for these Himalayan nations.

5.3.3 Findings

Objective 1: Importance of the Himalayan Region

The perception regarding the importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent was examined using 5 Likert scale items.

Factor 1: Importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent

Table 11: Scale Reliability Analysis (Importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent)

Scale Reliability Analysis (Importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent)					
Variables	Communalities	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Mean	Std. Dev.
I am familiar with the geographical features of the Himalayan region.	0.65	0.48	0.75	3.87	0.92
I think that the Himalayan region has played a significant historical role in shaping the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent.	0.73	0.57	0.81	4.12	0.78

I believe that the Himalayan region holds a strong cultural influence on the countries in the Indian subcontinent.	0.68	0.53	0.79	4.05	0.86
I consider it important for India and China to cooperate on economic development in the Himalayan region.	0.72	0.59	0.83	3.98	0.92
I am concerned about the security threats posed by the border disputes in the Himalayan region.	0.69	0.55	0.80	4.21	0.76

The item mean scores ranged from 3.87 to 4.21 on the 5-point scale, indicating a moderately high level of agreement regarding the importance of the Himalayan region. Respondents strongly agreed that the Himalayan region poses security threats due to border disputes (mean 4.21). They also agreed that the region holds strong historical and cultural significance in the Indian subcontinent (means 4.12 and 4.05 respectively).

The findings highlight that experts recognize the unique geographic, cultural and strategic importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of South Asia. Concerns around border disputes and security threats in the region were also acknowledged.

Objective 2: Geostrategic Conditions of Nepal-Bhutan

Five items measured perceptions regarding the geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on India-China geopolitics.

Factor 2: Geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China

Table 12: Scale Reliability Analysis (Geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China)

(Geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China)					
Variables	Communalities	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Mean	Std. Dev.
The political relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India are good.	0.78	0.63	0.86	3.92	0.88
The political relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China are good.	0.75	0.59	0.82	4.01	0.84
I am satisfied with the trade relations	0.71	0.51	0.78	4.18	0.72

between Nepal-Bhutan and India.					
I am satisfied with the trade relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China.	0.74	0.57	0.81	4.05	0.79
The diplomatic relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India are effective.	0.76	0.61	0.84	4.08	0.82
The diplomatic relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China are effective.	0.72	0.54	0.79	3.96	0.88
It is beneficial for Nepal- Bhutan to participate in regional cooperation	0.79	0.67	0.88	3.85	0.94

initiatives such as SAARC and BRI.					
Nepal-Bhutan is caught in a strategic competition between India and China.	0.68	0.52	0.78	4.12	0.76

The item mean scores ranged from 3.85 to 4.12, reflecting moderately positive perceptions of the geostrategic dynamics involving Nepal-Bhutan. Respondents agreed that Nepal-Bhutan are caught between the strategic competition of India and China (mean 4.12). They also indicated satisfaction with Nepal-Bhutan's trade relations with India (mean 4.18). However, the political, diplomatic and trade relations of Nepal-Bhutan with China received lower scores.

The findings suggest that while Nepal-Bhutan have close geostrategic ties with India, their relations with China are viewed as less balanced. The data reflects the strategic significance of these Himalayan countries amidst rising India-China competition.

Objective 3: Treaties and Border Relations

Six items measured perceptions regarding the treaties, agreements and border relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India.

Factor 3: Treaties and agreements and border relations of concerned countries with India

Table 13: Scale Reliability Analysis (Treaties and agreements and border relations of concerned countries with India)

Scale Reliability Analysis (Treaties and agreements and border relations of concerned countries with India)					
Variables	Communalities	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Mean	Std. Dev.
I am familiar with the treaties and agreements between Nepal-Bhutan and India.	0.62	0.48	0.73	3.96	0.82
These treaties and agreements reflect the interests of Nepal-Bhutan and India well.	0.69	0.56	0.79	4.02	0.78
These treaties and agreements need to be revised to accommodate changing geopolitical realities.	0.65	0.51	0.76	4.18	0.72

These treaties and agreements are implemented well by Nepal-Bhutan and India.	0.73	0.59	0.82	4.05	0.84
The border management between Nepal-Bhutan and India is good.	0.68	0.54	0.78	4.12	0.76
I hear about border conflicts between Nepal-Bhutan and India often.	0.66	0.51	0.75	4.08	0.82

The item mean scores ranged from 3.96 to 4.18, indicating moderately positive views on the treaty relations and border management between Nepal-Bhutan and India. Respondents expressed high agreement that these treaties need revision given changing geopolitical realities (mean 4.18). They also indicated satisfaction with the implementation of treaties by both sides (mean 4.05).

The results highlight the need for evolution of treaty relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India to adapt to emerging geopolitical dynamics in the Himalayan region. While existing treaties and border mechanisms are well-regarded, updates may be required.

Objective 4: Nepal-Bhutan's Geopolitical Status

Five items measured the perceptions regarding the current geopolitical status and dynamics of Nepal-Bhutan vis-à-vis India and China.

Factor 4: Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China**Table 14: Scale Reliability Analysis (Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China)**

Scale Reliability Analysis (Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China)					
Variables	Communalities	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Mean	Std. Dev.
I think that the current geopolitical challenges faced by Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are serious.	0.72	0.58	0.81	4.01	0.86
I believe that the current geopolitical opportunities available for Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are promising.	0.75	0.62	0.83	3.92	0.88
I feel that the current geopolitical risks involved for Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are high.	0.71	0.55	0.78	4.18	0.72

I consider that the current geopolitical aspirations of Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are realistic.	0.68	0.52	0.76	4.05	0.84
I find that the current geopolitical balance maintained by Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China is stable.	0.72	0.57	0.80	4.12	0.76

The item mean scores ranged from 3.92 to 4.12, reflecting moderately critical views on Nepal-Bhutan's current geopolitical situation. Respondents expressed high agreement that Nepal-Bhutan face serious geopolitical challenges (mean 4.01) as well as risks (mean 4.18) in balancing relations with India and China. However, they were optimistic about the geopolitical opportunities (mean 3.92) and aspirations (mean 4.05) of Nepal-Bhutan.

The results indicate a perception that while Nepal-Bhutan face difficult geopolitical challenges and risks amidst India-China competition, they also have significant opportunities to balance relations and achieve their aspirations. Their geopolitical situation is seen as balanced but fragile.

5.3.4 Conclusion

The factor analysis offered important insights into the underlying constructs measured by the survey variables corresponding to the four research objectives.

The Himalayan region's geographic, civilizational and strategic significance was highlighted by Factor 1. Factor 2 reflected Nepal's and Bhutan's difficult geopolitical balancing between India and China. Factor 3 emphasized the need for

evolvable treaties and border mechanisms in Nepal-India and Bhutan-India ties. Factor 4 illustrated the precarious yet balanced geopolitical status of Nepal and Bhutan amidst India-China competition.

Together, the four factors provide a quantitative perspective on the multi-dimensional geopolitical dynamics involving Nepal, Bhutan, India and China in the strategically significant Himalayan region. The factors underscore the importance of stability, adaptability, pragmatism and balance for safeguarding regional peace and national interests.

The factor analytic results complement the qualitative findings and discussions in previous chapters of the study. The survey-based analysis quantitatively reinforces the key issues, relationships and complexities characterizing the emerging geopolitical landscape in the Himalayan region. It generates data-driven insights into expert perceptions on this issue of profound strategic significance for South Asia and beyond.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the geographical, geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic features of the study area, which includes Nepal and Bhutan. The background section sets the context for the research, emphasizing its importance and relevance. The study area's location, both in terms of Nepal and Bhutan, is outlined to establish a spatial geopolitical understanding. The basic features of the study area, encompassing geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic aspects, are analyzed in detail, providing insight into the political landscape, strategic significance, and economic characteristics of the region.

The geo-strategy of a state plays a pivotal role in shaping its foreign policy decisions, directing its diplomatic and military efforts towards specific global regions. While geographic and geopolitical considerations often influence geostrategy, other factors such as ideologies, interest groups, and leadership preferences can also play a significant role.

The case study of Nepal exemplifies the strategic importance of its geographical location in the South Asian region, sandwiched between two major powers, India and China. This has resulted in a delicate geopolitical competition, but also offers opportunities for triangular cooperation beneficial for regional stability and economic development. Nepal's stability and security are crucial for addressing broader issues such as terrorism and cross-border crime, necessitating a balanced relationship with both India and China to avoid being entangled in their strategic rivalries.

Similarly, Bhutan's strategic location between India and China makes it a key player in regional dynamics. While India has historically maintained close ties with Bhutan, China's growing presence raises concerns about its influence in the small kingdom. Bhutan's efforts to balance relations with both countries underscore the importance of navigating this complex geopolitical landscape while safeguarding its sovereignty and national interests.

In this context, it is imperative for India, China, and Bhutan to engage in constructive dialogue and diplomacy to address mutual concerns and resolve disputes peacefully. Respect for Bhutan's sovereignty and its pursuit of a balanced foreign policy approach are essential for fostering regional stability and cooperation. By doing so, the region can work towards harnessing its potential for economic growth and development while mitigating security risks and promoting peace.

This research has provided a descriptive and analytical examination of the geopolitical dynamics in the Himalayan region, with a focus on Nepal and Bhutan's relationships with India and China. It has considered not only geopolitical factors but also geostrategic and geoeconomic dimensions, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of regional interactions. The study underscores the significance of the Himalayan region in the broader geopolitical landscape of South Asia and Asia-Pacific, highlighting the security threats posed by China's increasing influence in the region. By tracing the historical linkages between Nepal, Bhutan, India, and China, the research illuminates the evolving dynamics of bilateral relations and changing geopolitical scenarios.

Economically, Nepal and Bhutan's reliance on India and China underscores their strategic importance to both regional powers. The study identifies a shift in alliances, with Nepal and Bhutan showing increasing interest in China, which raises concerns for India. This shift reflects broader geopolitical rivalries between India and China and underscores the need for measures to promote peace and stability in the region. To address these challenges, the study recommends resolving outstanding border disputes through peaceful negotiation and dialogue. Additionally, it advocates for promoting economic cooperation between India and China to reduce tensions and foster stability. Both countries are urged to respect each other's strategic interests and refrain from actions that could escalate tensions.

In essence, the research emphasizes the importance of proactive diplomacy and cooperative engagement in managing geopolitical rivalries in the Himalayan region. By fostering dialogue, promoting economic ties, and respecting sovereignty, India and China can work towards a more stable and peaceful regional order that benefits all stakeholders. The evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Himalayan region

signal a significant shift in the traditional power balance, particularly concerning India's historical hegemony in South Asia. The rise of China has emerged as a pivotal factor reshaping regional alignments and alliances.

Historically close relationships between countries like Nepal and Bhutan with India are undergoing transformation as they increasingly engage with China. Nepal's political alignment and growing economic ties with China, as well as Bhutan's exploration of relationships beyond India, exemplify this trend. These shifts underscore the complexity of geopolitical relations in the region and the strategic manoeuvring of smaller states to assert their interests amidst the influence of major powers.

The Himalayan region has become a focal point for research due to its strategic significance and the implications of changing dynamics on regional stability and cooperation. Understanding how smaller states navigate the influence of India and China is essential for analyzing broader geopolitical trends in South Asia. In this context, future research should continue to explore the evolving relationships between regional actors and major powers, examining the drivers and consequences of geopolitical shifts in the Himalayan region. By doing so, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay of interests and power dynamics shaping the geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

The objectives and research methodology outlined in this study provide a structured approach to understanding the geopolitical dynamics of the Himalayan region, particularly in relation to Nepal, Bhutan, India, and China: 1) To understand the nature and importance of Himalayan region in the geopolitics of Indian subcontinent. 2) To examine the geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China. 3) To analyse the treaties and agreement and border relations of concerned countries with India. 4) To evaluate the current scenario of Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China.

The research methodology employed in this study combines primary and secondary sources to gather comprehensive data and insights. While primary data collection was limited due to constraints such as the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts were made to engage with experts and academicians through telephonic

communication and questionnaires. Secondary sources, including books, journals, articles, and online publications, were extensively utilized to supplement the analysis.

The proposed research utilizes historical, analytical, qualitative, and quantitative methods to investigate the geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region. By considering both independent and dependent variables, the study seeks to understand the causes and consequences of the crisis, as well as the responses from key stakeholders. In addition, the use of tables and maps helps to organize and visualize data, enhancing the clarity and comprehensibility of the research findings. Overall, the structured approach outlined in this study provides a robust framework for analyzing and understanding the complex geopolitical dynamics of the Himalayan region.

The intricate relationship between geography and politics underscores the fundamental importance of geographical factors in shaping international relations. Geography, encompassing physical features, climate, natural resources, and human environments, plays a crucial role in influencing a state's economic, political, and military power, as well as its interactions with other states.

The term "geopolitics" encapsulates the study of how geographical variables impact state behaviour and international relations. Through the lens of geopolitics, scholars analyzed how factors such as location, terrain, and climate shape a state's foreign policy choices and its position in the global hierarchy. This understanding is essential for comprehending the complexities of international politics and the strategic calculations of states.

Throughout history, thinkers like Jean Bodin and Montesquieu have recognized the significance of geography in shaping political systems and national traits. They observed how environmental conditions and topographical features influence societal characteristics and political institutions. While they acknowledged the role of environment in shaping human behaviour, they also highlighted the agency of individuals and societies in adapting to and overcoming environmental constraints.

Moreover, contemporary scholars like Morgenthau have emphasized the enduring importance of geography in national power calculations. Morgenthau identifies geography as a key determinant of national power, highlighting how a state's geographical location and resources fundamentally shape its strategic position

and foreign policy choices. For instance, the geographical isolation of the United States by oceans has profound implications for its security and global influence.

The intertwined relationship between politics and geography underscores the multidimensional nature of international relations. As states navigate the complex geopolitical landscape, they must consider the geographical realities that influence their strategic calculations and shape their interactions with other actors on the global stage. Understanding this dynamic interplay between politics and geography is essential for crafting effective foreign policies and promoting peace and stability in the international system.

Described actions and dynamics support the **Hypothesis 1** “The rise of China in the South Asian region has resulted in a geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region.” China's strategic ambitions, assertive actions, and economic leverage have reshaped regional dynamics, contributing to heightened tensions and complexities in the Himalayan region and beyond.

India's geopolitical strategy in Asia reflects a multifaceted approach aimed at increasing its influence in the region while navigating complex geopolitical dynamics. The Himalayan region holds strategic importance for India due to its proximity to China and Pakistan, leading India to pursue a range of strategies to secure its interests.

One key aspect of India's strategy is the formation of strategic partnerships with countries like Japan, Australia, and the US, aimed at offsetting China's dominance and enhancing India's military and economic influence. Additionally, India has played a leading role in regional integration initiatives such as BIMSTEC and SAARC, promoting economic cooperation and stability in the region.

India's approach to territorial disputes with China and Pakistan involves maintaining a strong military presence while pursuing diplomatic efforts to resolve tensions. Simultaneously, India has pursued economic diplomacy through initiatives like the "Act East" policy, aimed at increasing trade and investment ties in Southeast Asia.

Moreover, India has leveraged its cultural influence by promoting cultural exports and values of democracy and human rights to enhance its soft power in the

region. Overall, India's geopolitical strategy in Asia is characterized by a combination of strategic partnerships, regional integration, economic diplomacy, and military strength, aimed at safeguarding its interests and countering China's rising power in the region.

The Himalayas play a crucial role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Indian subcontinent and beyond. As the youngest mountain range on the planet and home to two of the world's oldest civilizations, India and China, the Himalayas hold immense significance both geographically and strategically. The Himalayas act as a natural barrier, separating China and Central Asia from the Indian subcontinent. This geographical feature not only delineates South and Central Asia but also influences the cultural, political, and strategic dynamics of the region. It serves as a foundation of India's national consciousness, symbolizing the country's physical strength, spiritual elevation, and cultural richness.

The region's geopolitical importance is underscored by the intense competition among various powers, both regional and extra-regional, vying for influence in the Himalayan region. However, amidst this competition, there are also opportunities for political and economic cooperation, facilitated by the intricate web of religious-cultural and civilizational linkages. The Himalayas have historically served as a natural impediment to human mobility, preventing the mixing of populations and hindering commerce routes and military excursions. This has had profound implications for the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region, as well as for historical events such as Genghis Khan's inability to expand his dominion into the Indian subcontinent.

Overall, the Himalayas stand as a symbol of the complex interplay between geography, culture, and politics, shaping the geopolitical dynamics of the Indian subcontinent and exerting influence on global affairs. Understanding the multifaceted nature of the Himalayas is essential for comprehending the geopolitical linkages and opportunities present in the region. The Himalayan borderlands hold immense geostrategic importance due to a combination of factors including their location, natural resources, strategic significance, and cultural diversity.

Firstly, the region's location makes it a critical point of convergence for major global powers such as China, India, Russia, and the United States. This has led to the Himalayas becoming a site of great power rivalry, with these nations seeking to assert their influence and establish military and economic partnerships in the region. Secondly, the Himalayan borderlands are rich in natural resources, including forests, minerals, water, and hydroelectric power potential. These resources make the region highly attractive for resource extraction and exploitation, further enhancing its geostrategic importance.

Additionally, the Himalayas are home to numerous disputed borders and territories, including the India-China border, the India-Pakistan border, and the disputed territory of Kashmir. The resolution of these disputes is crucial for regional stability and security. Furthermore, the Himalayan borderlands have significant cultural and historical significance, being home to diverse ethnic groups and religious traditions. This diversity has led to both cultural exchange and interaction, as well as tension and conflict over identity and autonomy.

The Himalayan borderlands represent a complex and dynamic geopolitical landscape, shaped by competing interests, resource competition, territorial disputes, and cultural diversity. Understanding and managing these complexities is essential for promoting peace, stability, and development in the region. The Himalayan range holds significant geopolitical importance for the Indian subcontinent and the broader region. Its strategic location, rich natural resources, and role as a natural barrier make it a focal point for regional powers like China and India, as well as smaller Himalayan republics like Nepal and Bhutan.

However, the Himalayan region also presents challenges, including border disputes, hydrological challenges, and security issues. These challenges can exacerbate tensions and rivalries among neighbouring countries, leading to geopolitical manoeuvring and conflicts such as the territorial disputes between India, Pakistan, and China in Jammu and Kashmir, the Doklam dispute between India and China, and others. Overall, the Himalayas play a significant role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Indian subcontinent and require careful management and

cooperation among regional powers to address the challenges and opportunities they present.

From the Indian perspective, the Himalayas serve as a natural barrier, protecting the country from invasions and shaping its climate and agricultural productivity. The region's strategic importance is highlighted by ongoing territorial disputes with China and Pakistan, as well as recent tensions along the India-China border. Additionally, the Himalayas offer economic benefits through hydroelectric power generation, agriculture, tourism, forestry, and mineral resources, contributing significantly to India's development and growth.

Similarly, from the Chinese perspective, the Himalayan region holds strategic importance due to its location and natural resources. China's growing influence in the region, demonstrated through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aims to enhance connectivity and economic development. The region's water resources, biodiversity, and strategic location make it crucial for China's economic and geopolitical interests, despite challenges such as territorial disputes and political instability.

Both India and China recognize the Himalayan region as a key area for their respective geopolitical aspirations and economic development. However, the region's complex dynamics, including territorial disputes and environmental concerns, pose challenges to achieving mutual cooperation and stability. Moving forward, constructive dialogue and adherence to international norms will be essential for addressing these challenges and harnessing the region's potential for sustainable development and peace.

The territorial disputes involving India, China, Nepal, and Bhutan in the Himalayan region present complex challenges with historical, geopolitical, and strategic significance. These disputes have arisen due to differing interpretations of historical treaties, cartographic discrepancies, and geopolitical considerations, leading to tensions and periodic escalations.

The India-Nepal disputed territories of Lipulekh and Kalapani, as well as the India-China disputed areas, highlight the complexities and sensitivities of border disputes in the region. Recent developments, including infrastructure development

and border security measures, have exacerbated tensions and underscored the need for dialogue and diplomacy to achieve a peaceful resolution. Similarly, the territorial disputes between China and Bhutan over the Doklam region, and between China and Nepal over various disputed territories, pose challenges to regional stability and security. Despite diplomatic engagements, resolution remains elusive, and tensions periodically flare up along the borders.

Addressing these territorial disputes will require sustained diplomatic efforts, mutual cooperation, and international mediation where necessary. Resolving these disputes is crucial not only for regional stability but also for fostering economic and diplomatic ties between the involved parties. Achieving a mutually agreeable resolution to these territorial disputes is essential for promoting peace, stability, and cooperation in the Himalayan region. It will require goodwill, compromise, and a commitment to peaceful dialogue from all parties involved.

Nepal's responses to the emerging geopolitical crises in the Himalayan region are influenced by its rich historical background and diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, particularly India and China. Historically, Nepal has navigated periods of instability and invasions, yet its strategic location in the Kathmandu Valley played a crucial role in its survival and expansion. The unification of Nepal under the leadership of King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18th century solidified its influence in the region, leading to territorial expansion and diplomatic engagements, including the signing of the "Kuti Treaty" with China.

Nepal's historical relations with India have been characterized by strong bilateral ties, rooted in shared culture, religion, and a long-standing friendship. The Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1950, has been a cornerstone of their relationship, facilitating trade, tourism, and cultural exchange through an open border policy.

In response to emerging geopolitical crises in the Himalayan region, Nepal is likely to prioritize diplomacy, dialogue, and cooperation with neighbouring countries to address border disputes and maintain regional stability. Leveraging its historical ties and diplomatic channels, Nepal seeks to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics while safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Overall, Nepal's historical

background and diplomatic relations shape its approach to addressing emerging geopolitical challenges, emphasizing the importance of peaceful resolution and regional cooperation in the Himalayan region.

Nepal's geopolitical linkage with India and China, situated between two of the world's most populous countries, profoundly shapes its foreign relations and strategic position. Historically, Nepal's close ties with India have been rooted in shared cultural, religious, and historical connections. However, occasional disagreements, such as border disputes and perceived political interference, have strained this relationship, exemplified by the blockade of 2015. Despite this, Nepal remains dependent on India for trade, transit, and sea access.

Conversely, Nepal's relations with China have strengthened in recent years, marked by increasing economic cooperation and infrastructure development projects. Nepal's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative and the import of electricity from China signify the deepening of ties between the two nations. However, India views China's growing influence in Nepal with suspicion, fearing its impact on India's strategic interests.

Nepal's strategic location between India and China presents both advantages and challenges. While its relationship with India remains crucial, growing ties with China have the potential to reshape the geopolitical landscape of the region. Nepal's position as a buffer between two major powers underscores its significance in regional stability and security dynamics. Nepal's foreign policy must navigate the complexities of its relationships with India and China, balancing between historical ties, economic interests, and strategic considerations to safeguard its sovereignty and promote its development.

The regular high-level exchanges and visits between India and Nepal underscore the strong political will of both nations to develop and strengthen their bilateral ties. Institutional frameworks such as the Joint Commission, Joint Working Group on Water Resources, and Joint Oversight Mechanism on Power Cooperation have facilitated ongoing consultations and dialogue, leading to the resolution of issues related to trade, transit, investment, and energy cooperation.

The presence of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, alongside Nepal's diplomatic missions in New Delhi and Kolkata, highlights the commitment of both countries to maintaining diplomatic relations and fostering closer ties. Under the "Neighbourhood First" policy, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's visits to Nepal, including those in 2014, 2018, and 2019, along with reciprocal visits by Nepalese Prime Ministers, such as Sher Bahadur Deuba, KP Sharma Oli, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', demonstrate the importance both nations place on their relationship. Additionally, frequent phone calls and meetings between leaders, such as the exchange between the presidents at the COP26 Climate Summit in November 2021, further strengthen cooperation and collaboration.

Overall, the combination of high-level visits, institutional mechanisms, and virtual meetings has significantly contributed to enhancing relations between India and Nepal, paving the way for greater cooperation and mutual understanding in various areas of mutual interest.

The economic relations between Nepal and India have been characterized by deep-rooted cooperation and collaboration across various sectors since the signing of the 1960 Trade Treaty. This agreement paved the way for unrestricted trade, increased transit possibilities, and enhanced economic ties between the two nations. India has played a pivotal role in Nepal's socioeconomic development by providing financial assistance, technological support, and expertise in diverse fields such as infrastructure, human resource development, education, and health.

The trade relationship between Nepal and India has seen consistent growth over the years, as evidenced by the increasing values of exports and imports. From 2014 to 2022, Nepal's exports to India increased by 4.75%, indicating a steady upward trend in trade volume. However, imports from India surged significantly during the same period, showing a growth rate of 50%. As a result, Nepal consistently faced a trade deficit with India, which increased by 45.25% from 2014 to 2022. The trade deficit peaked in 2018 at NPR 860.82 billion, highlighting the imbalance in trade between the two countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a noticeable decrease in trade, reflecting the global economic slowdown and disruptions in supply chains. Despite

fluctuations, India remains Nepal's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade accounting for a significant portion of Nepal's GDP (almost 22% in 2022). Nepal's dependency on imports from India underscores the importance of addressing trade imbalances and diversifying trade relations to ensure sustainable economic growth.

Moving forward, efforts to address trade imbalances and enhance economic cooperation between Nepal and India will be essential for fostering sustainable growth and prosperity in both nations. Collaboration in key sectors such as infrastructure development, renewable energy, and technology transfer can further strengthen bilateral ties and contribute to the socioeconomic development of both countries.

The “people-to-people” relations between India and Nepal are deeply rooted in their shared history, culture, and geography. The close cultural ties, linguistic similarities, and familial connections between the two nations have contributed to a strong bond between their peoples. Cultural exchange programs, artistic collaborations, and educational opportunities further strengthen these ties, allowing for the exchange of ideas, traditions, and experiences. India's provision of scholarships to Nepali students and the hosting of cultural events and performances help foster mutual understanding and appreciation.

The Madhesi community in Nepal, with its historical ties to India, plays a significant role in the people-to-people relations between the two countries. The Roti-Beti ka Rishta, symbolizing the relationship of "bread and daughter," highlights the close familial and cultural bonds shared by communities living along the India-Nepal border. While these cultural and familial ties have contributed to a deep sense of mutual respect and understanding between India and Nepal, occasional tensions arise, particularly concerning political issues such as the representation of the Madhesi community in Nepal. However, overall, the people-to-people relations continue to serve as a foundation for the enduring friendship and cooperation between India and Nepal.

A multitude of initiatives, spearheaded by both the Indian and Nepalese governments, have been implemented to nurture cultural exchanges and fortify the bonds between the two nations. Through cultural events, symposia, conferences, and

training courses facilitated by organizations like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Nepal-India Friendship Association (NIFA), efforts are made to enhance mutual understanding and respect.

Agreements between institutions such as Sahitya Kala Akademi and Nepal Academy, Doordarshan and Nepal TV, and the Press Councils of both nations foster collaboration in literature, television, film, journalism, and art. Institutions like the Swami Vivekananda Centre for Indian Culture in Kathmandu and the Nepal-Bharat Library serve as hubs for promoting Indian culture and facilitating information exchange, while the B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation, established in 1991, plays a pivotal role in strengthening bilateral relations through cultural and academic endeavours, collectively contributing to a deeper cultural integration and fostering enduring friendship between India and Nepal.

The defence relations between India and Nepal have been historically robust, marked by significant military assistance, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing. India's strategic interest in Nepal's security stems from its shared borders and geographical vulnerability, leading to a longstanding partnership aimed at safeguarding mutual interests. However, Nepal has sometimes perceived India's assistance as encroachment on its sovereignty, despite recognizing India's crucial role in its economic and security affairs. The Gorkha community's contribution to the Indian Army, renowned for its bravery and loyalty, exemplifies the deep historical ties and mutual respect between the two nations, further cementing the defence partnership.

The open border relations between India and Nepal, established by the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, have fostered a unique and enduring bond between the two nations. This treaty, which ended the Anglo-Nepalese War, set the foundation for a border characterized by the free flow of people and goods, a tradition that has persisted to the present day. With a total border length of approximately 1758 kilometers, spanning diverse terrains from the Indo-Gangetic plain to the Himalayan region, the India-Nepal border stands as one of the world's most peaceful international boundaries. This open border policy allows citizens of both countries to move freely for various purposes such as trade, travel, services, and cultural exchange without the

need for passports or visas, symbolizing the deep-rooted friendship and mutual trust between India and Nepal.

Nepal's geopolitical responses with China have witnessed a notable shift in recent years, marked by closer economic and strategic ties between the two nations. This shift is driven by Nepal's desire to diversify its foreign relations and reduce its dependence on India, coupled with China's growing economic and military power. Positive aspects include significant Chinese investments in Nepal's infrastructure, which offer opportunities for economic growth and development, as well as the potential for Nepal to serve as a strategic partner for China in South Asia.

However, these closer ties also raise concerns for India's security, given the potential for increased Chinese presence in Nepal and the development of infrastructure projects near the border regions. Moreover, Nepal's delicate balancing act between India and China, particularly regarding issues such as Tibetan refugees and border stability, underscores the complex geopolitical dynamics at play and the need for Nepal to carefully navigate its relationships with both neighbouring giants.

The relationship between Nepal and China exemplifies good neighbourliness between a large and a small country with differing political systems. Nepal's consistent adherence to the One-China Policy and its recognition of Taiwan as part of China demonstrate its commitment to maintaining friendly relations with China. Similarly, China's respect for Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national independence has contributed to a sense of equality and mutual respect in the bilateral partnership. The establishment of residential embassies in Kathmandu and Beijing in 1960 marked a significant milestone, facilitating effective communication and cooperation between the two nations.

The reciprocal exchange of visits has further strengthened bilateral relations and fostered mutual understanding. However, challenges may arise in navigating Nepal's delicate balancing act between its relationships with China and India, given their geopolitical rivalry. Additionally, concerns may arise regarding Nepal's potential dependency on China due to significant Chinese investments in infrastructure projects. Overall, while the relationship between Nepal and China has many positive

aspects, careful diplomacy and strategic decision-making will be essential to manage any potential challenges or risks.

China's increasing influence in Nepal's economic sphere has brought both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, China's extensive support and aid in infrastructure development, financial assistance, and transit access to third countries have contributed to Nepal's economic growth and reduced its dependency on India for trade. The signing of agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the development of cross-border infrastructure projects, such as the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, have strengthened bilateral ties and created opportunities for economic development.

However, there are also potential challenges and risks associated with deepening economic relations with China, including concerns about debt dependency, environmental impact, and potential geopolitical implications. Nepal will need to carefully navigate these dynamics to ensure that its economic relationship with China remains mutually beneficial and sustainable in the long run.

The Nepal-China Trade Status from 2014 to 2022 reveals dynamic patterns in export, import, and trade balance values. Export values exhibit fluctuations, peaking in 2018 (NPR 2,429,621,870.3) before declining notably, hitting a low in 2020 (NPR 681,016,163.79), with slight recovery in subsequent years but remaining below the peak. In contrast, import values show consistent growth, notably rising from 2016 onwards and reaching a peak in 2021 (NPR 281,746,597,205.67). This persistent growth in imports surpasses exports, leading to a widening trade deficit.

The balance of trade consistently trends negatively, indicating Nepal's increasing reliance on Chinese imports. Factors driving these trends include infrastructure projects, industrial demands, and consumer preferences. However, fluctuating export trends may reflect Nepal's production capacity and market demand for its goods in China. In summary, while imports from China surge, Nepal faces challenges in sustaining its trade balance, highlighting the need for strategic economic policies to mitigate long-term implications on its economy.

The relationship between Nepal and China spans various aspects, including socio-cultural, educational, defence, and developmental cooperation. Historically,

both countries have enjoyed friendly socio-cultural and religious ties, with Buddhism serving as a bridge between them. Educational relations have seen significant growth, with increasing numbers of Nepalese students studying in China and vice versa, alongside scholarships and cultural exchange programs.

Defence ties have strengthened, marked by joint military exercises and equipment support, although this has raised concerns in India. China's role in Nepal's development is notable, with significant infrastructure projects aimed at improving connectivity, trade, and economic development. Overall, while these collaborations offer opportunities for mutual benefit and economic growth, they also raise geopolitical concerns and underscore the need for Nepal to navigate its relations with both China and India carefully.

Bhutan's geopolitical response with India reflects a nuanced approach of close alignment and cooperation, underscored by historical, cultural, and economic ties. India's significant support in various sectors, including security and development, has been pivotal for Bhutan's stability and progress. While Bhutan acknowledges India as its largest trading partner and primary ally, it has also cautiously engaged with China in economic and diplomatic realms without compromising its security or sovereignty. Bhutan's emphasis on maintaining good relations with both India and China highlights its diplomatic acumen in navigating regional dynamics while safeguarding its national interests. Overall, Bhutan's geopolitical stance underscores a pragmatic strategy of balancing between regional powers while prioritizing its own development and security.

The trade data between Bhutan and India from 2014 to 2022 reflects fluctuations in both export and import values, resulting in varying trade balances over the years. While Bhutan's exports to India have shown a slight increase over the period, ranging from NU 21,167,809,187 in 2014 to NU 26,698,526,989 in 2022, imports from India have witnessed a more significant rise, escalating from NU 47,528,600,424 in 2014 to NU 85,093,224,356 in 2022.

Consequently, the balance of trade has consistently been in India's favour, with the deficit widening from NU 26,36,07,91,237 in 2014 to NU 58,39,46,97,367 in 2022. Notably, the trade imbalance has been growing, with a substantial 50% increase

observed in imports from 2014 to 2022, while exports grew by a modest 18.15%. This data highlights Bhutan's increasing dependence on imports from India, which could impact its economy and trade policies in the long run, necessitating measures to address the trade deficit and promote domestic production and exports.

Bhutan's geopolitical responses with China present both negative and positive aspects. On the negative side, Bhutan's lack of formal diplomatic ties with China and the closure of the border since 1962 limit opportunities for direct engagement and cooperation, potentially hindering economic and diplomatic exchanges between the two countries. Additionally, China's attempts to exert influence in Bhutan, particularly in contested territories like Doklam, pose challenges to Bhutan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The presence of unresolved border disputes and occasional incursions further complicates the relationship, leading to tensions and uncertainties along the border.

However, there are also positive aspects to Bhutan's geopolitical responses with China. The Bhutan-China Friendship Treaty signed in 1998 reflects a commitment to maintaining peace and stability along the border, emphasizing mutual respect for territorial sovereignty and non-aggression. Despite challenges, Bhutan has demonstrated a cautious and pragmatic approach, prioritizing peaceful coexistence and dialogue to resolve disputes. The annual exchange of National Day congratulations letters between Bhutan and China highlights a diplomatic channel for communication and engagement, fostering a sense of goodwill and cooperation between the two nations. Additionally, Bhutan's historical ties with China, manifested in cultural exchanges and shared Buddhist heritage, offer opportunities for mutual understanding and collaboration beyond geopolitical tensions. Overall, while challenges exist, Bhutan's efforts to navigate its relationship with China reflect a balance between safeguarding its sovereignty and pursuing avenues for constructive engagement and cooperation.

The trade status between Bhutan and China from 2014 to 2022 demonstrates significant fluctuations and imbalance in trade volumes. In 2014, Bhutan's exports to China were relatively low at 4,066,380 million Ngultrum, while imports were substantially higher at 948,897,572 million Ngultrum, resulting in a trade deficit of

944,831,192 million Ngultrum. This trend continued over the following years, with Bhutan consistently experiencing trade deficits as imports from China far outweighed exports. In 2021, Bhutan's exports to China surged to 155,168,021 million Ngultrum, but imports skyrocketed to 7,512,569,229 million Ngultrum, resulting in a significant trade deficit of 7,357,401,208 million Ngultrum.

The imbalance in trade volumes continued in 2022, with imports from China reaching 15,824,771,757 million Ngultrum. This data indicates Bhutan's heavy reliance on imports from China, which could pose challenges for its economy, including trade imbalances and potential vulnerabilities to external economic shocks. Additionally, the lack of significant exports to China highlights the need for Bhutan to diversify its export base and explore opportunities to enhance bilateral trade relations for mutual benefit.

The comparative analysis of Nepal's political and economic relations with India and China reveals a complex landscape shaped by historical, geographical, and geopolitical factors. Politically, Nepal navigates a delicate balance between its two giant neighbours, with China's increasing influence posing challenges to its traditional ties with India. Despite occasional strains, Nepal maintains strong diplomatic relations with both countries, reflecting its efforts to safeguard its sovereignty and national interests.

Economically, Nepal's engagement with India and China differs significantly in terms of scale, sectoral composition, and trade dynamics. While Nepal benefits from economic cooperation with both countries, it faces unique challenges such as its landlocked geography and limited resources. Moving forward, Nepal must carefully manage its political and economic engagements with India and China to maximize benefits while mitigating risks, ensuring sustainable development and prosperity for its people.

In analyzing the trade data between Nepal, India, and China, several trends and patterns emerge. India consistently remains Nepal's largest trading partner, accounting for the majority of Nepal's trade volume over the years. The trade volume between Nepal and India has shown steady growth, with occasional fluctuations, indicating a robust and stable trading relationship. On the other hand, China's trade

volume with Nepal has also been increasing steadily, albeit at a slower pace compared to India. Despite this growth, China's share of Nepal's total trade remains significantly lower than India's, reflecting Nepal's historical and geographical ties with India.

The trade data between Nepal, India, and China reveals significant insights into the economic relations of Nepal with its two giant neighbours. In 2014, Nepal's trade with India amounted to NPR 450,669,946,181, significantly higher than its trade with China, which stood at NPR 89,766,982,064. Over the years, Nepal's trade volume with both countries has increased, but India consistently maintains a dominant position. By 2022, Nepal's trade with India reached NPR 970,881,466,380, while its trade with China amounted to NPR 231,529,206,499.

This data underscores India's overwhelming influence on Nepal's trade, with its trade volume consistently representing around 80% or more of Nepal's total trade. In contrast, China's share remains relatively small, hovering around 20%. Despite China's efforts to enhance economic cooperation with Nepal, India's geographical proximity, historical ties, and preferential trade agreements continue to shape Nepal's trade dynamics, reaffirming India's status as Nepal's largest trading partner.

The data highlights the asymmetrical nature of Nepal's trade relations with India and China, with India dominating the trade landscape by a large margin. This dominance is evident in the percentage distribution of trade volume, where India consistently accounts for around 80% or more of Nepal's total trade, while China's share remains relatively small, hovering around 20%. Several factors contribute to India's dominance in Nepal's trade, including geographical proximity, historical ties, and preferential trade agreements. Nepal shares an open border with India, facilitating the movement of goods and people between the two countries. Additionally, Nepal's reliance on Indian ports for trade and transit further strengthens the economic linkages between the two nations.

On the other hand, China's growing trade volume with Nepal reflects its expanding economic influence in the region. China's investments in infrastructure development, energy projects, and telecommunications have contributed to the growth of trade between the two countries. However, challenges such as infrastructure

constraints and logistical issues hinder the full realization of Nepal's trade potential with China.

While Nepal's trade relations with both India and China continue to grow, India remains the dominant trading partner, accounting for the majority of Nepal's trade volume. Despite China's increasing economic presence in Nepal, its trade volume remains comparatively smaller, reflecting the enduring significance of Nepal's ties with India. Moving forward, Nepal may seek to diversify its trade partnerships and enhance economic cooperation with both India and China to foster sustainable development and economic growth.

Hypothesis 2: “Among Bhutan and Nepal, the latter is capable of playing a balancing role in the Himalayan geopolitical crisis”: This hypothesis proved true that Nepal has the potential to act as a mediator or balancer in the Himalayan geopolitical crisis, particularly in relation to the influence of major powers like India and China. The hypothesis implies that Nepal's strategic location, historical ties with both India and China, and relative political stability position it to play a constructive role in managing regional tensions.

Nepal's socio-cultural relations with India and China exhibit both similarities and differences, reflecting the country's unique position between the two nations. While Nepal shares historical and cultural ties with both India and China, its socio-cultural landscape is influenced by diverse ethnic groups, languages, and traditions. India and Nepal have particularly close cultural affinities due to their shared heritage and religious practices, whereas China's cultural influence is also significant, albeit distinct. Regarding defense relations, Nepal maintains agreements for defense cooperation with both India and China, reflecting its efforts to balance regional security dynamics. Despite differences in defense expenditure and military capabilities, Nepal contributes to United Nations peacekeeping missions and prioritizes border security in collaboration with both neighbouring countries. Overall, Nepal's socio-cultural and defense activities underscore its strategic position and efforts to maintain balanced relations with India and China while safeguarding its sovereignty and national interests.

Bhutan's political relations with India and China are marked by distinctive characteristics reflecting its unique position between the two nations. While Bhutan shares a long-standing and special relationship with India, characterized by strong political, economic, and cultural ties, its engagement with China is more limited, primarily focused on border negotiations and economic cooperation. Bhutan's political activities are guided by strategic considerations aimed at maintaining sovereignty, preserving cultural identity, and promoting sustainable development. Despite differences in engagement, Bhutan seeks to navigate its relations with both India and China in a manner that upholds its national interests and promotes regional stability.

The trade data between Bhutan and India compared to Bhutan and China over the years reveals a significant contrast in trade dynamics. India consistently maintains a substantial trade balance with Bhutan, with trade volumes steadily increasing from NU 26,360,791,237 in 2014 to NU 58,394,697,367 in 2022. In contrast, Bhutan's trade balance with China remains notably lower, starting at NU 94,483,1192 in 2014 and reaching NU 15,824,771,757 in 2022. Despite a steady rise in trade volume with China, it remains far behind India in terms of trade balance. This disparity highlights the robust economic partnership between Bhutan and India, characterized by sustained growth and deepening trade relations. However, Bhutan's trade with China shows a notable increase over the years, indicating potential for further economic cooperation.

Bhutan's economic relations with India and China exhibit distinct characteristics, as highlighted by the provided data. India emerges as Bhutan's predominant economic partner, accounting for the majority of trade activities, as evidenced by the substantial trade imbalances favouring India over China. Bhutan benefits significantly from its economic partnership with India, receiving substantial financial aid, grants, and technical assistance, particularly in key sectors like hydropower, agriculture, tourism, and infrastructure development. Moreover, India's investments in Bhutan's hydropower sector have been instrumental in driving economic growth.

However, Bhutan's economic engagement with China remains comparatively limited, primarily focusing on infrastructure development projects and investments. While both India and China have shown interest in collaborating with Bhutan in the hydropower sector, concrete collaborations with China are relatively limited. Despite Bhutan's efforts towards economic diversification to reduce dependence on hydropower, its economic ties with India continue to dominate.

Overall, while Bhutan benefits from its strong economic partnership with India, there are opportunities for further expansion of economic cooperation with China, particularly in sectors like tourism, agriculture, and infrastructure development. However, challenges such as limited trade volumes and asymmetrical trade balances need to be addressed to ensure balanced and mutually beneficial economic relations with both countries.

This data underscores the overwhelming reliance of Bhutan on India for its trade, highlighting the deep-rooted economic partnership between the two countries. Despite Bhutan's efforts to enhance economic engagement with China, particularly in sectors like trade and tourism, the trade volumes with China remained comparatively limited. However, the increasing trade volumes with China in recent years suggest a gradual diversification of Bhutan's economic relations. Moreover, Bhutan's interest in exploring economic cooperation with China in areas such as infrastructure development underscores its pursuit of balanced economic partnerships to foster sustainable growth and development.

Bhutan's socio-cultural relations with India and China reveal a complex interplay of historical, geographical, and socio-political factors. While Bhutan shares deep-rooted socio-cultural ties with India, characterized by extensive cultural exchange, linguistic affinity, and religious influence, its relations with China exhibit a more limited engagement, primarily due to geographical constraints and historical factors. Bhutan places a strong emphasis on preserving its unique cultural identity and traditions, with both India and China supporting its efforts in cultural preservation.

However, Bhutan has also demonstrated efforts to enhance cultural exchanges with China in recent years. In terms of defense relations, Bhutan maintains a robust security partnership with India, rooted in historical ties and shared security interests,

while simultaneously pursuing peaceful coexistence and engagement with China to manage border disputes and prevent security challenges. Bhutan's policy of non-alignment and neutrality underscores its commitment to maintaining sovereignty and independence in regional security matters, while actively participating in regional security cooperation efforts to address common challenges such as natural disasters and transnational crimes.

The quantitative analysis conducted in this research study aimed to address four key objectives related to the emerging geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region and the responses of Nepal and Bhutan. Through a survey conducted with relevant experts and stakeholders using a 5-point Likert scale, perceptions regarding the geopolitical dynamics and importance of the Himalayan region were quantified. The reliability analysis, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, confirmed good internal consistency and reliability of the scale items measuring the constructs underlying each objective.

Factor analysis further validated the constructs, identifying five distinct factors that explained a cumulative variance of 82.136%. These factors corresponded to the intended objectives, demonstrating the construct validity of the survey instrument. Overall, the quantitative analysis provided valuable insights into the nature, importance, and geostrategic conditions of the Himalayan region, as well as the treaties, border relations, and geopolitical status of Nepal and Bhutan with India and China.

The scale reliability analyses and factor analysis provide comprehensive insights into the multifaceted geopolitical dynamics of the Himalayan region, particularly focusing on Nepal, Bhutan, India, and China. The findings highlight the region's profound significance in terms of geography, history, culture, and strategic importance, as well as the challenges and opportunities it presents. Notably, while Nepal and Bhutan are perceived as strategically caught between India and China, facing significant challenges and risks, they also possess opportunities and realistic aspirations.

Moreover, the need for adaptable treaties and border mechanisms underscores the evolving nature of regional dynamics. Overall, these analyses underscore the

complexity and delicacy of geopolitical relations in the Himalayan region, emphasizing the importance of stability, adaptability, and pragmatic approaches to safeguard regional peace and national interests amidst the intensifying competition between India and China. The quantitative insights complement qualitative findings, offering a data-driven perspective that enriches our understanding of this strategically vital area in South Asia and beyond.

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Appendix

Appendix I

Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE ON GEOPOLITICAL RELATIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research questionnaire on the Emerging geopolitical crisis in the Himalayan region and its responses: a comparative analysis of Nepal and Bhutan. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect your opinions and perceptions on the nature and importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of Indian subcontinent, the geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China, the treaties and agreement and border relations of concerned countries with India, and the current scenario of Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China.

The questionnaire consists of four sections, each corresponding to one of the research objectives. In each section, you will be asked to respond to a series of statements or questions using a Likert scale. A Likert scale is a rating scale that allows you to indicate how much you agree or disagree with a statement or question, or how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with a situation. The Likert scale options are:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Introduction:

A. Name:

B. Nationality:

C. Designation:

D. Department:

I. Objective 1: To understand the nature and importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent.

Factor: Importance of the Himalayan region in the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent.

- **I am familiar with the geographical features of the Himalayan region.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **I think that the Himalayan region has played a significant historical role in shaping the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **I believe that the Himalayan region holds a strong cultural influence on the countries in the Indian subcontinent.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **I consider it important for India and China to cooperate on economic development in the Himalayan region.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **I am concerned about the security threats posed by the border disputes in the Himalayan region.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

II. Objective 2: To examine the geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China.

Factor: Geostrategic conditions of Nepal-Bhutan and its impact on the geopolitical situation of India and China

- **The political relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India are good.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **The political relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China are good.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **I am satisfied with the trade relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **I am satisfied with the trade relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **The diplomatic relations between Nepal-Bhutan and India are effective.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **The diplomatic relations between Nepal-Bhutan and China are effective.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **It is beneficial for Nepal-Bhutan to participate in regional cooperation initiatives such as SAARC and BRI.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

III. Objective 3: To analyze the treaties and agreements and border relations of concerned countries with India.

Factor: Treaties and agreements and border relations of concerned countries with India.

- **I am familiar with the treaties and agreements between Nepal-Bhutan and India.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
- **These treaties and agreements reflect the interests of Nepal-Bhutan and India well.**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **These treaties and agreements need to be revised to accommodate changing geopolitical realities.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **The border management between Nepal-Bhutan and India is good.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **I hear about border conflicts between Nepal-Bhutan and India often.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

IV. Objective 4: To evaluate the current scenario of Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China.

Factor: Nepal-Bhutan's geopolitical status with India and China.

- **I think that the current geopolitical challenges faced by Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are serious.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **I believe that the current geopolitical opportunities available for Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are promising.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **I feel that the current geopolitical risks involved for Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are high.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **I consider that the current geopolitical aspirations of Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China are realistic.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

- **I find that the current geopolitical balance maintained by Nepal-Bhutan in relation to India and China is stable.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Thank you for your time and cooperation

LIST OF CONFERENCES

- Presented a Paper entitled “Covid-19 China to India: Impact on Indo-Sino Bilateral Relations” in the IGS-International E-Conference on “Earth Science and Sustainable Development Goals” conducted from 5th to 7th August 2021 by Department of Geography, Osmania University, Hyderabad.
- Presented a Paper entitled “The South China Sea Dispute: China’s Geopolitics and India’s Gateway to the Pacific” in the International Conference on “Geography Shaping History: A Journey Through Ages” held on 24th June 2022 organized by Department of Geography and Department of History, Lovely Professional University, Punjab.
- Presented a Paper entitled “Geopolitics of Rise of China and its Impact on Indian Sub-Continent Region in the International Conference on “Clean Water, Good Health, Sustainable Cities & Communities (CWGHSCC)” held from 18th to 19th October, 2023 organized by School of Liberal and Creative Arts in collaboration with National Association of Geographers, India (NAGI) at Lovely Professional University, Punjab.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Published a paper entitled “Geostrategic Location of Bhutan and its Impact on the Indo-Sino Emerging Regional Geopolitics” in Shodh Sarita. 2021. Volume 8. Issue 29. ISSN 2348-2397. UGC
- Published a paper entitled “The South China Sea Dispute: China’s Geopolitics and India’s Gateway to the Pacific” in Journal of Psychology English, 2022. 230, (1). ISSN No. 2190-8370. Scopus
- Published a paper “Geopolitics of Rise of China and its Impact on Indian Sub-Continent” in Madhya Pradesh Journal of Social Science. 2024. ISSN No-0973-855X, Volume-29. UGC