



MULTILINGUAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.46886/MAJESS/v12-i1/11087>

DOI: 10.46886/MAJESS/v12-i1/11087

Received: 27 September 2024, Revised: 26 October 2024, Accepted: 20 November 2024

Published Online: 13 December 2024

In-Text Citation: (Bhattarai, 2024).

To Cite this Article: Nepal-India Territorial Dispute and National Identity: A Qualitative Study of the Understanding of Nepali Youth Living in the United States. *Multilingual Academic Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 12(1), 68–93.

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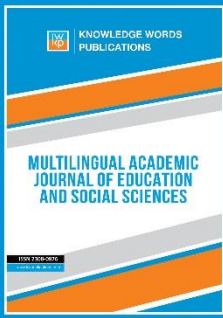
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Vol. 12, No. 1, 2024, Pg. 68 - 93

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Nepal-India Territorial Dispute and National Identity: A Qualitative Study of the Understanding of Nepali Youth Living in the United States

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the impact of the Nepal-India territorial dispute on the national identity of Nepali youth residing in the United States. The dispute originated from the Treaty of Sugauli (1816) and has been exacerbated by the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950). This research investigates how Nepali youth understand the dispute and how it affects their sense of national identity while living abroad. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with six Nepali youths in the U.S., the study reveals varying degrees of awareness about historical and current aspects of the dispute. Findings indicate that while participants are informed about the Treaty of Sugauli and the historical conflict, fewer are knowledgeable about the Treaty of Peace and Friendship and its implications. The study highlights how the dispute influences their national identity, with perceptions differing by gender and personal experiences. Male participants often view the conflict through a realist lens, comparing it to other international disputes, while female participants express concerns about the impact on cultural heritage and future relations. The research underscores the necessity of enhancing educational resources for diaspora communities and suggests that the territorial dispute continues to shape the national identity of Nepali youth even in a global context.

Keywords: Nepal-India, Territorial Dispute, National Identity, Nepali Youth, Qualitative Research

Introduction

After the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–1816) fought between the Gurkha army of the Kingdom of Nepal and the British forces of the East India Company Nepal was forced to sign the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816. As a result, Nepal lost approximately one-third of its territory to the east, south, and west reducing its land area by about 176,000 square kilometers. The Treaty of Sugauli dramatically reshaped its borders and established the legitimate boundaries of present-day Nepal (Baral, 2018; Basnyat, 2020). After the British withdrawal from India in 1947 a new phase in Nepal-India relations began. On July 31, 1950, Nepal and India signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship to establish formal diplomatic relations, secure mutual security interests, and maintain close economic and political ties between the two nations

(Dhungel & Pun, 2014; Adhikari, 2018). To ensure mutual security interests with Nepal, India formally repudiated all previous treaties, including the Treaty of Sugauli, signed by the British East India Company on behalf of India under Article 8 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship. The Indian government then recognized Nepal's full sovereign rights over the territory it lost in the Anglo-Nepalese War.

However, despite this recognition, the legal status of the lost territories remains contentious. While the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship nullified the terms of the Treaty of Sugauli, India has maintained control over certain territories originally ceded by Nepal. A key example of this ongoing dispute is the Kalapani region, located in western Nepal near the border with China. Since 1962, Indian security forces have occupied the Kalapani area, sparking continued debates over territorial sovereignty (Poudyal, 2014). This situation highlights the complexity of Nepal-India relations, where historical treaties and contemporary political actions create friction over boundary issues. Territorial sovereignty plays a vital role in shaping national identity, especially regarding its influence on Nepali youth. This paper explores the understanding of the territorial dispute between Nepal and India among Nepali youth living in the United States. To examine this understanding, the paper assesses their awareness of the causes behind the dispute and how their physical distance from Nepal has shaped their perception of national identity. By analyzing these factors, the paper seeks to provide deeper insights into how diaspora communities engage with and perceive territorial conflicts involving their homeland contributing to a broader understanding of identity, belonging, and geopolitical awareness among Nepali youth abroad.

Literature Review

The purpose of this review is to examine the literature on territorial disputes and national identity in perspective and to examine the theoretical frameworks used in this study. It establishes the context for the current study by reviewing existing knowledge on territorial disputes and national identity. Existing literature gaps and scholarly discussions that need to be expanded about the territorial disputes and its impact on national identity will be identified in the respective sections. It also examines findings on the relationship between territory and identity to locate the Nepali context in the wider study and to answer the above research question.

Historical Ownership, Territory, and National Identity

Most of the existing literature on national identity has focused on how its perception is linked to a sense of belonging to a particular region (Kaplan and Herb, 2011; Bernhardsson 2007; Wimmer, 2013). The diversity of the Nepali community and the history of their migration into what is now the modern state of Nepal reflects the history of more than 200 years ago when these communities began to integrate territories captured by military force into a single state (Kraemer, 1994). In the years following the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–16), negotiations began between the central power of the state and the various population groups in the conquered territories. As a result of this dialogue, the ubiquity of nationalism established Nepali identity as a socio-cultural concept, with the belief that everyone should have one national identity, established under modern Nepal. Kaplan and Herb (2011) argue this notion of national identity as an underlying geographical concept that seeks to unite a self-identified group of people, within a sovereign, bounded territory, a 'state'. Because the reality of nationalism cannot be imagined without the presence of nationalistic territorial integrity,

national identity must always contend with its territorial manifestations where spaces are bounded, textured, and embody meanings that represent different elements of identity.

Scholars with diverse disciplinary perspectives, including social psychology and cultural studies, have looked at territorial dispute from a psychological perspective (Breuille 2013; Wimmer 2013; Stephens 2013). The experience of losing territory historically owned by a nation and recurring territorial disputes in the present can affect national identity where the nation and its people view the event or process as unjust and humiliating (Fang and Li, 2020). While the content of national identity, defined as the sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, may vary across countries, a nation's unique history and its territorial boundaries are important components of national characteristic (Herb and Kaplan 1999; Newman 1999; Diehl and Goertz, 1992). Thus, when a territorial dispute invokes a nation's painful historical memory, the claim has the potential to question present national identity. Aligning with this argument, Fang, and Li (2020) argue that traumatic historical memories and present territorial disputes can cause youths of that country to respond with different emotional intensities to events that threaten the recovery of their lost territory. Supporting this argument, Sasada (2006) concluded that increased support for a strong state defense policy and negative attitudes towards neighboring countries due to the colonization of the region affect the ideology of national identity among the youth population.

Conventional wisdom regarding national identity assumes that it is the notion of a shared belief in the legitimacy of a country's geopolitical system (Chayinska et al, 2022; Bar-Tal, 2000; Sodhi, 2022). Hobsbawm (1996) argues that identity can be embodied in formal laws and institutions that dictate, for example, which language or languages will be considered official, or which schools will teach children about their country's history. On the other side the findings of Guibernau (2017) suggest that national identity also extends to the range of culture and values of a particular region. It includes the stories people tell about themselves, such as where they come from, what they celebrate, their shared historical memories, and their expectations of what it takes to be a true member of a community. Much of the literature in this context emphasizes national identity over historical values, cultural practices, territory, and social constructions that explain state efforts and behavior (Demmers, 2017; Butcher and Hallward, 2019, Kłodkowski, 2016, Ferguson and McKeown, 2016). Keeping this as a central concept, the findings of Kłodkowski, (2016) argue that Nepal's national identity is primarily based on deep-rooted religious beliefs, linguistic bonds, and a shared sense of cultural heritage and the history of the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16.

In summary, the impact of territorial dispute on youth can play an important role in their national identity. Historical ownership of present disputed territory can be particularly important in contexts such as the reality of loss of territory (Dreifelds, 2001; Fang and Li, 2020). Thus, individuals may respond with nationalistic sentiments due to the desire to reclaim their country's territory. Such sentiments can lead to a belief in territorial indivisibility because the full recovery of territory is linked to the resolution of past injustices and present disputes. The findings of Fang and Li (2020) further explains the relative importance of national identity in the development of such beliefs, that is, those who identify more strongly with their national identity and interests are more likely to develop a belief in territorial indivisibility, while those who do not define their identity in the same way accept an alternative present legality of the territory.

Territorial Dispute and Nepali Identity

After Prithvi Narayan Shah became King of Nepal in 1743, Nepal's national and ethnic identity has introduced into a harmonious and diverse society extending from Tista in the east to the Sutlej in the west which is the geographical, religious, cultural, and ethnic origin of the country (Shrestha, 2020; Bhandari 2016; Dahal, 2015; Hutchinson, 1999). Many stories in Nepal's academic textbooks describes those territories under the control of the Indian administration as a national identity and entity of Nepal giving high priority to history. The bravery of Nepali youths (recognized as Gurkhali) in the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816) is an important aspect of establishing Nepal's primordial social identity (Basnet, 2020; Bhandari, 2016; Adhikari, 2017).

Along with the empirical findings, some research has analyzed the territorial disputes related to ethnic and cultural identity of Nepal. Both Baral (2018) and Hachethu (2007) argued that the new geographical structure and border between Nepal and India raised the issue of ethnic and cultural identity, especially among the Nepali youths. However, Nepal's internal political instability has overshadowed the geographical integrity of the territory to be returned to Nepal since the signing of the 1950 peace and friendship treaty. Although some studies have concluded that the main reason for Nepal's failure to resolve its territorial disputes are unstable government, weak politics, lack of youth political interest, weak foreign policy, and conflict of interest between the major political parties, the factors and causes of lack of political interest among youth are still unanswered (Adhikari, 2017; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Deraniyagala (2005) and Macours (2011) concluded that due to weak governance, the involvement of youth in the 10-year-long civil war in Nepal from 1996 till 2006 also underestimated the government's efforts in addressing territorial disputes.

Understanding Nepalese perspective, cultural practices, and historical values, it usually encourages people to be structurally involved in history and in territory which is now controlled by India (Upreti, 2014; Stiller, 1976). The development of social construction and cultural practices revolves around the story of origin, descent, culture, and blood of Nepali youths defeated in the Anglo-Nepalese war (1816) (Siddiqui, 2005; Stiller, 1976). In this sense, territorial disputes affect Nepal's socio-cultural values, as Nepal recognizes territories controlled by India as an important part of its history (Forsberg 1996, Gellner, 1997).

In recent years, much research has been conducted to understand Nepali youths' national identity. Bhandari's (2016) study of the national identity focuses on history, language, symbol, and culture to shape the way other nations view and understand Nepali youths. According to Bhandari, King Mahendra (ruler of the Ninth Shah Dynasty of Nepal) was a cultural nationalist of Nepal who prioritized the national identity of the youth as having unique origins, identities, history, culture, religion and socio-political practices (Bhandari, 2016). During his regime, Nepal's education system focused on building a national identity among youths. For example, during the Panchayat system (a non-party political system under the direct rule of the king from 1962 to 1990), cultural nationalism was strongly encouraged to educate Nepal's youth (Basnet, 2020; Baral 2018). There were many stories describing the bravery and sacrifice of Nepali soldiers during the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816) as a pedagogical approach influencing youths (Basnet, 2020). Similarly, Bennett and Karki (2012) have studied that the increasing involvement of youth in political parties has provided an opportunity to bring about some positive changes in the country and show the power to preserve the identity of Nepal.

Besides this, Hutt's (2012) analysis argues that the adoption of the new Nepali national anthem in 2007 reflects the decision to establish a new inclusive national and political identity for youth and many minority communities. Both Bandu (1989) and Hutt (2012) argue that Nepali language plays an important role in building the national and ethnic identity of the youth in Nepal. As it differs from the Indian language (i.e., Hindi), empirical research shows that Nepali-speaking youths living in the Indian territory which was previously owned by Nepal have raised the issue of their national identity since the India has not fully recognized Nepali language in their territory (Subba, 2008). Similarly, Phyak (2021) argues that new language policy which teaches English, shadowing indigenous language education in Nepal, contributes to colonization. According to Phyak (2021), due to neo-liberal rule and higher influence of English speakers, the promotion of misleading ideology about Nepal's history has become a big challenge to preserve the identity of indigenous youth.

Baral's (1991) study focuses on youth nationalism and national identity from a constructivist perspective to address ethnic, racial and class exploitation and suggests political solutions to address these problems. Snellinger (2009) argued that political movements play an important role in shaping the national identity of each generation. As the tools of the political movement deployed by the parties are the youth, they can gain a sense of autonomy and raise their voice in the streets while debating territorial disputes with India (Snellinger, 2009). Snellinger (2009) suggests that public forums on the streets and growing media platforms allow Nepali youth to focus on political demands, including the lost territory. Apart from the political perspective, the issue of national identity of youth has also been studied from different perspectives in recent years, including new debates on equality, nationalism, social exclusion, and inclusion, which have refined the concept of Nepal's national identity (Giri 2010; Gurung et al. 2014; Bhattachan 2009).

Nepal-India Relationship

Analyzing the Nepal-India relationship in the present context, much research has argued that Nepal has not been able to secure its territories in the treaties which have been made for the interests of India (Bagale, 2020; Pun, 2009). Bagale (2020) has argued that India has historically exploited much of Nepal's territory and resources by referencing to the Mahakali Treaty (1996). The findings shows that India is benefiting more from the treaty because there was insufficient study of benefit sharing and existing usage norms before signing and ratifying the treaty. Accepting this notion, Pun (2009) claims that India has a strategy of working first and negotiating later to maintain control over Nepal's border areas and territory, because of which all past cooperation between Nepal and India can be seen because of hegemony rather than reciprocity. Regarding the Treaty of Friendship (1950), Shukla (2006) has argued that the treaty is constantly being criticized in Nepal. Both Subedi and Timalsina (2021) and Bagale (2020) states that since India is a large economy, regional player and technologically advanced which should come forward to cooperate with Nepal for the proper and honest use of resources for the mutual benefit. Subedi and Timilsina (2021) argue that India, one of the world's emerging powers, is pursuing national interest by dominating neighboring Nepal. By strengthening military and political power, India has controlled its neighbors to advance national interests by expanding its territory as a strategic autonomy (Subedi and Timilsina (2021). While India's national interest is concerned with strengthening military power, maintaining relations with neighboring countries and balancing external threats, maintaining

friendly relations with neighboring countries in practice have been largely affected by India's forcible control over Nepal's territory (Shukla, 2006; Shrestha, 2000; Shrestha, 2020).

The growing controversy over the territory and geographical structure of Nepal, established after the Sugauli Treaty (1816), has raised questions about the legitimacy of the territory among Nepali youth population. Although Nepal has awakened national identity by stating that Nepal has never been a colony despite many invasions by the British ruling in neighboring India, the understanding of territorial dispute among the youth population still requires more attention to analyze whether it is impacting the national interest of Nepal (Basnet, 2020). Mentioning the 1950 treaty with India in particular, it is not seen in the literature how the Nepali youth have understood the present recurring territorial dispute and national identity referring those lost territory at present. As Cotillon (2017) argues that the role of territorial disputes is important in various expressions of national identity, empirical research is important to analyze its understanding among Nepali youth.

National Identity and Age

Identity is a complex phenomenon which is psychological and deep in the human mind (Westle, 2014). National identity building as a social identity cannot be separated from the social environment. This means that the age and duration of the socialization process can affect the formation of national identity. This includes how long a person is exposed to national and other social identities. Barret et al (2004) examined the development of national identity among youth using social identity theory. Barrett (2000) found that conceptions of national identity change as people age. The findings suggests that young people adapt physical appearance, media, and political environment that underlie the concept of national identity of a particular country.

Age is decisive in the acculturation process in relation to national identity. The younger a person is, the easier it is to adapt to a new country (Renshon, 2005; Barret et al, 2004). Life processes such as marriage, residence, education, and work are also some of the factors that influence a person's national identity (Barrett et al, 1999; Hussak, 2017). Perceptions of national sentiments in the context of territorial disputes show that national identity attachment is affected by physical location, which depends on youth's age based on cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Hussak, 2017). National identity attachments related to faith, place of birth, and ancestry/bloodline fall under the category of broader concepts of ethnocultural or social identity (Westle, 2014). Attachment to national identity changes with development and age indicating that older generations across countries tend to associate themselves with ethno-cultural conceptions of national identity that can greatly influence the issue of territorial disputes within the country where they belong.

Theoretical Framework

Realist Theory

The territorial dispute between Nepal and India is analyzed through realist point of view. Realist theory of international relations argues that the state plays a major role in securing its territory, fight for power, and fulfill the national interest (Karpowicz, 2010; Donnelly, 2000; Butcher & Hallward, 2019). Realists consider the state to be a unitary actor which is driven by power and are motivated not only to pursue power for their own security but also to allay fears and enhance prestige. For realists, the relationship between two states is zero-sum,

where one state gains what the other has lost. The focus of realists relatively on these gains is largely influenced by the benefits perceived from the other state (Donnelly, 2000; Butcher & Hallward, 2019). Therefore, one state should doubt the agreement with the other state, where even if both the states benefit, the other state always seeks to have more benefit (Burghart, 1984; Simmons, 2005).

Realist theory warns states that if one state becomes more powerful than another, disputes between states is likely. Although both Nepal and India existed as neighbors, the conflict is recurring in the form of territorial dispute with the intent of fulfilling each of their own national interest (Huth, 1996; Gustafson, 2000). Regarding the Treaty of Sugauli (1816), British India was more inclined to sign a treaty as there was a significant advantage in expanding the maximizing their territories which now benefitting India in a direct way (Thakur and Sahani, 2018; Kumari and Kushwaha, 2019). As states are motivated by self-interest, the objective of states is to maximize its power and security beyond its geographical location (Karpowicz, 2010; Williams, 2004). Realist theory describes this situation of dispute as a power struggle between the states where military power, territory, and national interests are its core components to protect the identity of the country.

Social Identity Theory

National identity is analyzed in this study using social identity theory based on Anderson's (2016) "imagined community" which states that national identity exists in an imaginary realm. According to Anderson (2016), the notion of national identity is an imaginary community because members will never know, meet, or even hear about most of their fellow members, yet the image of their community lives on in everyone's mind. Which means that the process of socialization and the sense of belonging to a particular community are equally relevant to build the concept of Nepali national identity. The social identity theory argues that an individual identifies a group to reduce uncertainty and increase security through various characteristics such as nationality, gender, religion, and caste (Demmers, 2017; Butcher and Hallward, 2019). Cultural contributions such as language, religion, territory, and nationalism are by birth. It is often an important story from which insiders analyze and act on the dispute. In-group members often believe that their ethnicity is indispensable and that the collective bond between groups is given by nature, which is in the blood of group members and is therefore irreversible (Ferguson and McKeown, 2016).

The concept of social identity theory will be used to analyze the ways in which Nepalese youth understand territorial disputes and express their national identity. The need for a sense of belonging is considered a key factor in maintaining the national identity of the youth. According to Volkan (1997), national identity is the result of social identity that includes geographical reality, historical continuity, the myth of a common beginning, and other common culture and values that naturally evolved. This notion of social identity in the context of national identity can be analyzed through the theoretical approach of age and gender.

Methodology

This interview was conducted by recruiting participants of Nepalese youth who are adults (18 years and older). These participants were recruited from the Facebook community called US-NEPAL Help Network (UNHN) which includes about 38,900 Nepalis living in the United States. However, participation was restricted to youth who have Nepali citizenship and are currently

living in the United States. The group admin was the gatekeeper of this research as they allowed access to the community page to conduct the research. Because there have been requests for this type of participation in the past in this Facebook community, the researcher was familiar with such requests and reached out to participants by posting an announcement on the community page requesting youth's voluntary participation. Age and citizenship status are the important characteristics for the purpose of this case study, so purposive sampling was used for this research where informants are selected based on their age and citizenship status (Yin, 2018). A semi-structured interview was conducted among 6-7 Nepalese youth collected from a purposive sample. The rationale behind including Nepalese youth living in the United States is because individuals with a relatively high level of education within the age group of 20-40 seem to migrate in the United States from Nepal. Migrants tend to be young (75 per cent were under 30 years old) with an almost equal proportion of males (52.5 per cent) and females (47.5 per cent) with the primary purpose for education. Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and Teams at the participants' flexibility. The researcher conducted in-depth semi structured interviews with participants after office hours and on weekends. The interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes per person depending on the participant's time and circumstances. The interview period started from mid-September 2022 and lasted till the end of November 2022, which is about three months.

Validity and Reliability

It is important for researchers to check members (participants) and test emerging findings with research participants to increase the validity and reliability of the findings and to ensure that the researcher is not mistaken in the analysis (Buchbinder, 2011; Durdella, 2019). This includes, for example, regular contact with participants during the data collection and analysis process in our research and verifying certain interpretations and themes that emerge from that data analysis (Curtin and Fossey, 2007). To control the influence of the researcher's knowledge and assumptions on emerging interpretations, if the researcher is not clear about what the participant said, the researcher sent him/her a request for verification based on which the participant's stated meaning or interpretation was confirmed (Stake, 1995; Keen and Packwood, 1995). Second, it is important to adopt a follow-up validation interview strategy to ensure that the information is valid (George and Bennett, 2005; Yin, 2018). A validation interview strategy was applied in this research to externalize and re-evaluate the given concepts to verify the findings and ensure that they are correct (Buchbinder, 2011). Finally, member checking was the tactic used in this research by sending the interview transcripts to the participants and having them read them to provide any necessary comments or corrections with the aim of increasing reliability in the qualitative research (Curtin and Fossey, 2007).

Study Limitations

This research was limited to Nepalese youth who are currently residing in the U.S. Youths who are above 40 years of age was not be eligible for this case study. Nepali youth living in countries other than the US and Nepali youth living within Nepal were also limited in this study. Another limitation of this research is that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other groups of the Nepali population due to the limited size of the sample. Because qualitative research is open-ended, participants have more control over the content of the data collected (Mohajan, 2018). Therefore, the research is not able to objectively verify the results against the scenarios stated by the respondents. Similarly, the research is not

statistically representative because it is a perspective-based method of research where the responses given are not measured (Lune and Berg, 2017, Hill 2012). Comparisons can be made, and it can be repeated, but for the most part, data are needed for situations that require statistical representation which are not part of the qualitative research process (Mohajan, 2018; Hill, 2012).

Findings

This research provides a case study analysis of 6 youth resettled in the United States and still considered citizens of Nepal. The conclusion is based on the data collected from the in-depth interviews with the participants related to the Nepal-India territorial dispute. The purpose of this research is to investigate some important issues, such as, the understanding of the Nepal-India territorial dispute among the youth, the factors that determine their national identity, how updated they are about the historical and current situation of the dispute, how the dispute is resolved in their understanding, how the understanding of the territorial dispute and national identity differs between men and women, and to understand what should be done in resolving this dispute. The main goal is to deepen the level of understanding of the youth living abroad about how the territorial dispute between Nepal and India affects their national identity.

The table below (Table 1.1) provides some demographic information of the participants and the summary of the study presented in Table 1.2 provides the themes and subthemes of the study. As mentioned earlier, this case study analysis has been used in this research as the primary analytical strategy. This process involves a two-step process – first highlighting participants understanding and emphasizing the central argument, and second examining context and analyzing the major theme (Larkin et al, 2006). The presentation of results and analyzes in this research is done separately.

Table 1.1
Participant Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	ID	Age	Gender	Highest Degree	Year Left Nepal	Occupation
Ritu		27	Female	Bachelors	2018	Student
Priya		30	Female	Bachelors	2017	Business Owner
Aamosh		25	Male	Bachelors	2014	IT Professional
Anita		32	Female	Masters	2017	Data Analyst
Gijnesh		33	Male	Masters	2016	Photographer
Raj		34	Male	Masters	2015	Lawyer

The purpose of this study is to explore and better identify participants' understanding of territorial dispute and its impact on national identity, including embracing primary identity, history, culture, values, traditions, and beliefs, as well as dispute resolution techniques;

historical and current understanding of dispute; information flow; communicating dispute with friends and family; listing of highly contested areas; the relationship between dispute, nationality and culture, etc. has also been observed. Using the authentic voices of the participants, the current knowledge of the participants, how the dispute situation is affecting their lives and identities abroad is discussed in depth. In each of the above subtopics, the current occupation of these immigrants who decided to leave Nepal and settle in the United States is provided. As mentioned earlier, age and gender were considered to elicit different opinions from the participants.

Main Question- What is the understanding of the territorial dispute between Nepal and India among the Nepali youth living in the United States?

- How do youth understand the dispute started?
- Which area/region do youth consider to be highly disputed at present?
- Why do youths believe that there is a territorial dispute between Nepal and India? Why is it important for them to learn about this dispute?
- What sources of information do young people rely on to get updates about territorial dispute while living abroad?
- Do they showed keen interest to keep informed about the dispute?
- How do Nepali youths introduce their identity while living in the United States?
- Do the Nepali youth believe that the territorial dispute between Nepal and India is affecting their national identity?
- How is this dispute affecting their national identity when they are away from Nepal?
- What do the Nepali youth think can be done to address this dispute?

Seven main themes and several sub-themes emerged from the answers derived from the above questions. These themes were created by analyzing their responses from the interviews. Sub-themes elaborate on the concepts defined in the themes. During the interview an attempt was made to collect many different opinions. Each participant had some unique facts that differed from other interviews. Participants were given sufficient time to answer the questions so that strong themes and sub-themes could be developed for a robust examination of the answers. These sub-themes are discussed in detail in the discussion section.

Table 1.2
Emergent Themes and Subthemes from Interviews

Themes	Sub-Themes
Access to information	social media (Facebook, Twitter) news Portal/News Paper (Online Khabar) TV Presenter/ Reporter/Journalist family members academic books published books/articles
Origin/Causes of dispute	Sugauli Treaty (1816) Treaty of Mahakali (1996) legitimacy of 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty new map published by India India's road construction connecting Tibet in 2019 India's control over the borders shifting borders encroaching Nepal's territory
Disputed regions/areas	Western part: Lipu-Lekh; Kalapani; Susta; Limpiyadhura; Mahakali river; Eastern Part: Sikkim; Darjeeling all regions/territories bordering India
Defining National Identity	highest peak of Mount Everest birthplace of Gautam Buddha Nepali language and other ethnic languages Hindu religion and values (greeting Namaste) wearing Dhaka Topi/other costume from different region territory from Mechi to Mahakali/landscape/ natural resources ethnic background: Newari, Gurung, Chhetri, Brahmin Nepali citizenship and ancestry
Territorial dispute impact on national identity	dispute imitates patriotism territory is our history/reconsider the border affected emotionally there's a mixed feeling we are a sovereign nation/never colonized personally, it has not affected my identity not immediately but if it continues then in future losing our heredity, history, values, and culture diverting from original identity people think Nepal is a part of India not an independent country
Perception towards India	hatred is developing this is just a beginning serving its national interest Acting like Russia/ bad neighbor imposing power/dominating Nepal trying to control entire nation's values, culture, and history Indians don't care what their government is doing to Nepal Nepal's government is weak, let's not blame India dissatisfaction raised when the India published its political map Nepal made a mistake, so India is benefitting revenge/imposed blockade
Dispute resolution recommendation	Nepal government should stand for their national interest table talk with the with Indian government get the experts opinions and collect strong evidence negotiate with India with right terms strong political leadership diplomatic effort should be initiated from Nepal reach out to international organization (like UN) for help take advice from lawyers, and experts in this field

Discussion of the Themes

There was a general understanding of the study participants regarding the territorial dispute between Nepal and India. A clear picture of frustration and concern emerged when they explained that they were aware of the dispute. Understanding the study participants' perceptions of the dispute and how it is affecting their national identity reveals how they responded to their attitudes towards India. It also reveals their views on how this dispute can be resolved to maintain peace and friendly relations between these countries. The major themes listed above are discussed below with their related subtheme.

Access to Information

This theme covered the question of how participants receive updates on the recurring territorial dispute between Nepal and India. Most of the participants recalled reading about the territory of Nepal in school, where they learned that "Nepal signed the Treaty of Sugauli (1816) and at that time the border between Nepal and India was determined". After reading 'Shastradatta Pant's book', Raj said that he got information about this dispute, he continued, 'I read this book, I forgot the name, but it was related to the Nepal-India territorial dispute and the author presented various facts related to this issue. In some archival documents for strong evidence of Nepal's claim to territory, I also tried to find those documents from the Central Bureau but could not find them.'

Most of the participants expressed that they receive updates about the dispute through social media. Ritu conveyed deep interest in the matter and voiced:

"Mostly I am updated because I follow some pages on social media that write about this issue. The reason I am so active in this is because of my father who used to update me frequently when I was in Nepal, and even now he explains what is happening on this issue over the phone."

Aamosh explained, "my main source of information is mainly blog posts, online portals, or social media posts shared by my relatives, or my parents sharing something related to this issue." Anita is a little "frustrated" when it comes to socio-political news related to Nepal, as she argues that there is "nothing good" about "Nepal's geopolitical issues" that she hears from her family and social media and tries to avoid talking about it. On the other hand, Gijnesh does not update himself frequently on this matter. His social media pages "do not cover news topics like territorial disputes" and he doesn't even talk about the issue with his family members and friends.

The participants' explanations illustrate their background knowledge about this topic of territorial dispute and how they perceived the information. Most of their sources of information are YouTube channels and social networks, but some have also questioned the legitimacy of the information. They have doubted whether the information they have received is correct with the facts. However, it can be concluded that in the school life of the participants, even from the school curriculum such as social studies, they learned that India has a territorial dispute with Nepal.

Causes/Origin of Dispute

This theme depicts the participants' reasoning behind the cause of the dispute. Most of the participants are aware of the "Treaty of Sugauli (1816)" between the former King of Nepal

and the then British East India Company and shared their dismay about India's control of Nepalese territory based on that treaty at present. Aamosh likened India's control of Nepalese territory to "Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022)" and said that behind the dispute "India is serving its national interest and Nepal is failing to do so" distressing the Nepali identity as a group that is a key aspect in the dispute. This reflects realist theory as explained in the theoretical framework above which argued that states act in their rational self-interest and extend their territory as survival is the primary goal of superpowers.

On a similar note, aligning with the view of realism of power struggle and zero-sum relations, Gijnesh claimed that the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816) was the main cause of the dispute, arguing, "Nepal lost its territory and now the Indian leaders are vexing to control the wholesome of Nepali land and steadily they are trying to make Nepal as their part of India as a one country, I think this is what is happening."

The period after the Anglo-Nepali War (1814-1816), Raj added, "After the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816) between Nepal and Britain, the two signed the Treaty of Sugauli (1816), according to which Nepal lost one-third of its territory, and with it, this dispute also arose. With that treaty, the British East India Company laid the foundation of Nepal's official borders with India, but after India became independent, the British left India and another new treaty was signed between these two countries, not many people point to that treaty, but I want to say it. It is a peace and friendship treaty between Nepal and India of the 1950s where there should be Article 8, which states that all treaties made by any other entity on behalf of India are null and void. Therefore, it raises the question whether the treaty between Nepal and India in 1816 is valid or not. If it is accepted, the border of Nepal will be between Mechi and Mahakali, otherwise there will be a very sensitive question that Nepal will get the rest of the territory lost to the British from India. If India has not given legitimacy to the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, then more debate and research is needed on this matter. But in my understanding till now India is silent on whether Sugauli Treaty (1816) is valid or not and this has increased the conflict between countries on this issue. In the absence of a clear statement from both sides, the latest treaty i.e., the treaty of 1950 can be assumed to be valid which abrogates the Sugauli Treaty of 1816."

Mentioning further, Raj argued that "although Nepal's territorial dispute was recently raised in 2019 when India started construction with Tibet, the real cause of the dispute dates back to 1816 when Nepal and Britain signed the Treaty of Sugauli after the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1815) and later signing other treaties such as the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 and Mahakali treaty (1996). However, from the observation of the participants, it can be said that most of the participants have mentioned the latest state of road construction from the territory of Nepal to India to Tibet as the main reason for the dispute instead of reflecting on its historical background. In that note, Rita assumed, "India's construction of a road without any diplomatic consultation with Nepal is the main reason for this dispute." Aamosh and Anita also claimed that India's publication of a new map including the territory of Nepal was the main reason for this dispute.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that although the youth are aware of the territorial dispute between Nepal and India, only a few are aware of the origin of the dispute. Although the Treaty of Sugauli (1816) is well-known, few mentioned the Treaty of Peace and

Friendship (1950) while making an explanation about the understanding of this dispute. From this theme we can conclude that the historical background and the origin of the dispute is not clearly delivered to the youth. Many participants stated that since they live far from their homeland, this type of information is not readily available because social media manipulates information. Elaborating on this, Priya argues that "I don't find social media as a reliable source of report to get information about such a sensitive topic and I don't try to dig deeper."

Disputed Regions/Areas

This theme captures the regions or areas that participants believe are majorly contested. Some of those areas includes Susta, Limpiyadhura, Kalapani, Lipulek in the western part of Nepal, and Darjeeling and Sikkim in the eastern part of Nepal. Apart from these areas, Gijnesh said, "I think Terai region is the most disputed area. I am not sure about the exact location. But that is near Biratnagar or somewhere else where most of the Bihari community lives." Rita shared her opinion, "I don't know which area is disputed, but India occupies most of the territory of Nepal and I keep hearing in the media that India has occupied a few meters of Nepal's land every time." There were also some stories of Terai region that participant shared about waking up in Indian land after the border changed overnight while people were sleeping in Nepali land. In a similar comment, Raj added, "every land from the eastern part of Nepal to the western part is disputed because of the legitimacy of the Sugauli Treaty (1816)" and Aamosh claimed that other "terai areas of Nepal" are also disputed because India has occupied those territories.

From the above statements we can say that most of the youth are aware of highly disputed areas and regions. Due to increased media and news coverage, participants also receive timely updates on disputed areas as conflict regions are highlighted. All these participants do not belong to any of the disputed regions, and none of their immediate family members live in those locations. Some of the participants shared their friends' stories stating that they have a dispute with the Indian administration regarding their land belonging in Nepal's territory and that the Indian administration was taking control claiming that it belongs to India.

Defining National Identity

This theme explores what the participants' national identity symbolizes and whether it contributes to the social identity discussed in the theoretical approach of the study. The current study has shown that participants are more connected to their national identity. There were different aspects that the participants believed were part of their identity. Some of the participants expressed their sense of nationalism and started remembering their country and family with emotion. They showed deep devotion and faith in the nation and most seemed determined to return to their homeland after spending a few years in the United States.

Some of the primary factors as expressions of national identity expressed by participants include language, national flag, national anthem, landscape, territory, citizenship, ethnic background, costumes, and natural resources. Depicting this, Priya states,

"The flag, the music, the language, the literature, the religion I follow, the food I like, everything is very much connected to me, and it can never go away. Therefore, legally, if I express my identity through my passport and citizenship, socially I want to identify myself as

a Nepali through my values, including emotion, religion, and culture, I will continue to speak Nepali language even when I am in America, and this identity will never be far from my life. " Apart from this, the participants also listed Mount Everest, the world's highest peak, and Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, as part of their national identity. Some participants linked family values, lineage, custom, religion, and tradition as a symbol of their individuality, while others linked their ethnic language and customs as part of their identity. Aamosh remembered King Prithvi Narayan Shah as "the person who re-introduced the national identity by unifying Nepal into one country." In addition, the participants remembered the Anglo-Nepali War (1814-1816) as an important contribution to the protection of Nepal's territory and the definition of Nepal's national identity.

This topic seems to contribute to the literature review of various authors who debate about the factors of Nepal's national identity. The sub-topics presented in the discussion seem to be consistent with the findings of the literature review, especially when focusing on language, culture, and region. Overall, this notion contributes to social identity theory that argues national identity as a process of socialization and a sense of belonging to a particular nation. From this argument, the national identity of Nepal is consistent with the theory of social identity.

Impact of Territorial Dispute on National Identity

This topic illustrates how the territorial dispute between Nepal and India has affected the national identity of Nepali youth living in the United States. About 60 percent of the participants agreed with the analysis that territorial disputes have utterly affected Nepali national identity. Similarly, 20 percent of the participants expressed the opinion that the dispute affected their Nepali identity in some way and the remaining 20 percent of the participants expressed the opinion that the dispute did not affect their national identity in anyway.

The participants agreed that the territorial dispute between Nepal and India would affect their national identity and expressed their concern that Nepalis living abroad are being misconstrued as Indian citizens. They believe that this is a threat to the sovereign nation of their country which has never been colonized in history and today its territorial integrity is being questioned. Reflecting this, Raj claims,

"Now this problem is not affecting the Nepali youths living abroad but if it continues for a long time, it will definitely affect our Nepali identity because India is gradually expanding its territory and our country is shrinking, and if that continues then how will we people identify ourselves as Nepali later, when is the entire territory occupied by India? If we lose all our lands, we will lose our heritage, roots, values, and culture along with the land."

Adding to this point, Aamosh believes that it is not just the disputed region mentioned above, but the "India is trying to control the entire nation." Some of the participants like Anita and Priya got emotional as they shared their views on how the territorial disputes makes them lose their national identity day-by-day. Anita said that as the controversy escalated on social media, it affected her "patriotic feeling". Like Anita, Priya added, "We are losing our language, history, and culture as our territory. We are losing everything, so what I believe is that India has been trying to do this for so long and they are trying to push it little by little. We are very

dependent on India for agriculture and trade, taking advantage of that they are controlling our territory, our government, and our resources.”

Participants like Rita felt that the conflict did not directly disturb her, but that it affected her if someone "misunderstood her identity as Indian" while in the United States, and she believed that the territorial dispute as one of the contributing factors behind this overlap in her identity. On the other hand, Gijnesh does not believe that the dispute has affected the national identity as he is living far away from his homeland. Discussing whether territorial dispute has affected Nepali youth's national identity reminds of Fang and Li (2020) explanation that those who are deeply connected with their territory are more likely to develop a belief in territorial indivisibility, while those who do not in the same way accept an alternative legality of the territory. These differences can be observed in Gijnesh and Rita response compared with other participants where other believes that the territorial dispute has deeply affected their national identity.

Nepalese Youth's Perception Towards India

This section has attempted to analyze the youth's perception of India in the context of the territorial dispute with Nepal. Most of the participants seem to have a negative opinion because of India's imposition of hegemony on the territory of Nepal. While there is a heated debate on the attitude towards India among the participants, most of them are instilled a feeling of hatred while some are claimed that India has not done anything wrong because it is in its national interest and Nepal has failed to protect its national interest in this conflict. Participants like Raj and Aamosh argued that since “India is an emerging power, it is impossible to go into conflict with India, rather it is Nepal's duty to protect its territory.”

Some of the participants referred to Sugauli Treaty (1816) and Mahakali Treaty (1996) as Nepal's fault and complained that India was imposing its hegemony on Nepal and taking advantage because of those treaties. They believe that by signing this treaty, India is not only trying to control the territory but also erasing the history by domineering the values and culture of the entire nation. Priya pointed to the 'undeclared blockade' imposed by India after the 2015 earthquake that caused massive loss of life in Nepal to take revenge and impose its power over Nepal.

While discussing this dispute with an Indian friend living in the US, some participants felt that the Indian people did not show much interest in this dispute and other political matters related to the dispute. While other participants felt vulnerable because the Indian people ignored their national identity and territorial integrity. A participant like Ritu has a different view of Indian media and how it claims Nepal's territory. She explains,

“I don't like how the Indian media manipulates people to some extent which makes many Indians believe that it is their land, but I am 100 percent sure that the disputed territory is our land because there is evidence to claim that it is ours.”

This hegemonic control of India over the resources and territory of Nepal has already been discussed in the literature review above. These participatory statements of India's attitude towards Nepal give the literature stronger evidence. The answers presented by the participants are included in the realist theory which emphasizes power and self-interest

regarding the relevance of moral norms in relations between states. Some participants statements aligned with Bagale (2020) and Pun (2009) findings by supporting that Nepal has not been able to secure its territories in the treaties which have been made for the interests of India. Therefore, agreeing with the participants, we can argue that India is concerned about its security, pursues its own national interests, and struggles for power.

Dispute Resolution Recommendation

The sub-theme of dispute resolution revolves around techniques that are particularly suited to mitigating and resolving problems in the context of Nepal's region. All the participants have claimed that they want this dispute to be resolved. However, they believe that the Nepalese government has failed to reach diplomatic initiatives and to protect the geographical integrity. A significant number of participants believed diplomatic initiatives are necessary to address this problem. Aamosh clarifies, "at least we citizens can elect people in government who stand for the national interest and not for their own." Both Aamosh and Priya lament, "there is a lot of corruption in politics which has left us behind to speak on this issue because these leaders are busy making money and lining their pockets." Priya wants to call on "international media" and "international organizations" to draw attention to the Nepal-India territorial dispute. In addition to these recommendations, Gijnesh believes that "negotiation" is one of the appropriate approaches. Anita adds to this point, "have a good round table discussion with the government of India, get a common understanding, involve experts, and have their input. There should be research and examination related to this issue through historical maps and books of history. There are so many ways, why aren't they acting?"

Analyzing this issue shows that the youth want a positive solution to the dispute that will benefit both countries and Nepal in particular. The participants are hopeful that successful diplomacy can resolve this dispute as such conferences can contribute to conflict prevention by providing a forum for negotiation on the terms of the conclusion of the dispute and lay the groundwork for the development of lasting friendship between these two countries. The participants agree that the purpose of this diplomacy is to help both states when needed and to protect the territory of Nepal by advancing its national interests.

Analysis of the Findings

From the above findings, in response to the research question, we can argue that the Nepalese youth living in the United States have some level of understanding of the territorial dispute between Nepal and India in its current state, although it seems necessary to explore and study more about its causes. The participants showed keen interest in learning more about this topic as they were interested in gaining deeper knowledge about the issue. Most of the participants said that they did not attend any seminars and conferences to continue getting updates on the subject. Regarding the awareness about the dispute, the findings show that the participants are highly dependent on social media to get the latest updates about the topic, and they have some level of information through their school curriculum. Snellinger (2009) analysis complements these findings which suggested above that growing media platforms allow people to focus on sociopolitical demands, including the lost territory.

Similarly, from this finding we can analyze that the youth are aware of the Treaty of Sugauli (1816) and the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1916), but only a few know about the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) between Nepal and India as a contributing factor to the territorial

dispute. Therefore, this research can be a starting point for Nepalese youth in the United States to continue to obtain information and gain a deeper understanding of the dispute with accurate information related to its causes, origin, and present condition. Some participants claimed that since many other documents and treaties of Nepal related to the territory and borders between these countries are hidden from the Nepali people, it is necessary for the youth to demand those archival documents to gather more strong evidence to return the territory that belongs to Nepal. Overall, from the conclusion we can claim that Nepali youth appeal to Nepal's government to initiate diplomatic efforts and protect their region from external influences like India. Some answers were closely aligned with the literature review, for instance, most participants agreed with the point that national identity attachment is affected by physical location which are related to faith, place of birth, and ancestry/bloodline that fall under Hussak (2017) findings.

In terms of national identity, the youth believe in their nationality and are proud to call themselves Nepalese. Although these youth are currently spending their significant time in the United States for employment and education, most of the participants said that they plan to return to their country in the future. Therefore, although the territorial dispute will not have an immediate impact, most of the participants believe that this problem will affect their status as Nepalese citizens by the time they return to Nepal permanently. This dispute has also considered another factor affecting the national sentiments of Nepali youths, addressing them as Indian citizens or that Nepal is a part of India. The participants argued that this dispute was started by India to control the entire territory of Nepal in the future and could endanger its nationalism such as the national anthem, national flag, and history. This perception of youths corresponds with Fang and Li, (2020) findings where most participants agree with the point that the experience of losing territory historically owned by Nepal was an event or process which was unjust and humiliating because of which the present recurring territorial disputes is affecting their national identity. Reflecting this notion from the research question above, it can be argued that the territorial dispute between Nepal and India has affected the understanding of national identity among the Nepali youth population living in the United States.

Analyzing how the understanding of territorial disputes differed between male and female youth, it is found that the perceptiveness of the male population is more inclined towards the realist view where India's interest in the territory is to advance its economy, security, and other advantages for their overall national benefit. This notion can be viewed from Subedi and Timilsina (2021) findings as well which previously argued that India as an emerging power, is pursuing national interest by dominating its neighboring country Nepal. Most of the male participants compared the issue to other international conflicts such as Russia-Ukraine, and the conflict in the Kashmir region, and expressed concern that the dispute in Nepal's territory could lead to violent rivalry like these countries in the future and maximize the frequency and intensity of war. Therefore, most of the male participants suggested that territorial disputes are almost always focused on external security variables which necessitates reaching a diplomatic solution to enforce bilateral relations between Nepal and India.

The female youth population, on the other hand, were more concerned about the impact of territorial disputes on their national identity in terms of understanding as living away from their homeland in the United States, which seemed to lean more towards the theory of social

identity. National identity, like social identity theory, female participants seem to have positive feelings of pride and love for their nation and a sense of responsibility towards their country. The socialization of national identity, such as the socialization of national pride and a sense of country's exceptionalism, contributed to the belief in harmony between their ethnic groups. Participants shared a common destiny, identifying Nepal as an in-group, while at the same time seeing people they identified with as Indian citizens as an out-group. Therefore, territorial disputes have expressed female youths' participants' concern that Nepal's history, ethnicity and culture are at risk and are a threat to Nepali national identity.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study looked at the relationship between territorial dispute between Nepal and India and its impact on the national identity of Nepali youth living in the United States. The central themes and sub-themes in the previous chapter demonstrated the links of realist theory and social identity theory with territorial dispute and national identity that were used to guide the overall analysis and understanding of the case study. Relevant dialogues around important treaties, historical background, origin of disputes, nationalism, and involvement of youth in nationalistic movement are discussed in the literature review. Territorial disputes were often defined within the framework of the interstate conflict between Nepal and India, and specifically India's struggle to control those territories and its legitimacy. Scholars analyzes and conceptualizations of the relationship between territorial disputes and national identity and how it affects the people living in the nation are also thoroughly analyzed. This study adds to the emerging literature on the concept of national identity by considering young people's perceptions of territorial disputes while away from their home country.

The study has brought forward the voices of 6 Nepali youths currently living in the United States. As presented in the findings and analysis, the study participants' understandings and experiences place them deeply concerned about the territorial dispute and how it has affected their national identity. Their interest in learning more about the issue is said to be awareness through news and social media updates. The participants said they strongly plan to return to Nepal and learn about the issue because they are now more focused on preserving their national identity. They suggested to take diplomatic initiative with the leaders of India to solve this problem and find a suitable solution that can protect the national interests of Nepal.

Even though there has been a deep discussion on the territorial dispute related to national identity between Nepal and India, further research can be done by analyzing the effect of the territorial dispute on the population living in the disputed land. Further analysis can be done to understand how their perceptions of national identity and territorial disputes are affecting them in their everyday lives. Nepalese youth should also be encouraged to attend seminars and workshops that focus on this issue. Also, it is important to investigate the origins of the dispute to build a more critical debate and analysis addressing the issue.

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