

# Nepal and Bhutan the two similar nations with different strategic approach towards their big neighbors- India and China

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## Abstract

There have been instances when powerful neighboring countries are observed as being difficult for the smaller ones. Moreover, the phenomena of subjugation roots back to imperialism era and its loitered notion of superiority is still practiced by most of the developed and sturdy countries. But the most vital thing here to be considered is the other nations' (or smaller nations') action against the dominance, which sometimes is demonstrated either in a resilient fashion or completely in submissive manner. In the era of globalization where nations' relationship is intricate in a complex web of dependency, the nations with limited resources, weak diplomacy and instable politics are mostly compelled to succumb itself in front of relatively huge powers. And if the powerful states happens to be the immediate neighbors than the things might get more complex.

In addition to this, the situation can be worse if the nation is a Least Developed Country (LDC hereafter) and also Land Locked States like Nepal and Bhutan. This research paper intends to analyze situation of such two nations, namely Nepal and Bhutan that are squeezed between China – a rising global power and India- an aspiring regional power. The interfering and controlling nature of these giants, at times, through diplomatic and coercive tactics has been evident in both the nation. But, despite the similarities these two small countries are seen to have adopted different strategies while dealing with their neighbors. If we look at Nepal we can see that it has developed bilateral relation with its both neighbors. And Bhutan has bilateral relation only with India and still has not welcomed China in its friendship zone, and this puzzle drives the research paper.

The paper attempts to understand the situation from the lens of realism, as the theory implies that the nation is the nucleus and whatever action it undertakes is based on the advantage and mostly concerned in their individual power growth. It believes that any nation's behavior does not involve the utopian notion but functions solely on the self-indulgence manner. Furthermore, the paper has tried to make an analysis with the help of inductive theory.

The research finds that realism along is to sufficient to understand the small country's perspective. There are many other factors that have contributed in making the strategic choices that these small countries have opted in order to establish a certain kind of relationship with their neighbors. Along with this the area of study needs to be broadened in order to comprehend the situation completely.

**Key Words:** Land Locked, Neighbors, Realism, Foreign Policies, Domestic Politics

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Small states and their neighbors**

*“Jai Katak Nagarnu, Jhiki Katak Garnu” (Do not go to attacks but should retaliate if it was attacked) –Prithvi Narayan Shah (Unifier of Nepal Kingdom) (Baral, 2020).*

The world we live in now comprises of 195 unique independent nations. These nations differ from each other in terms of geographical territories, natural resources availability, demographic composition, socio-political condition, economic condition, religious practice, ethnicity and similar things. These fundamental differences are the most significant factors in conditioning or shaping a particular nation in its current existent structure. And, along with this it not only determines its global presence, but also remarkably defines its relationship with its close neighbors. These distinction are some parameters as per which the countries are classified either as big or small states. Big states are powerful, influential and are capable of deciding the policies which are globally accepted. Whereas small states relatively in comparison to the bigger states lack these capacities and are basically struggling to either survive as a distinguished entity or racing to fit in the power category.

Moreover, the position of small states can be further understood through different definition incorporated in Jelena Radoman’s article. As per a journal article, one definition suggests, “small states are incapable of making a significant impact on international system as they have limited diplomatic or material resources” (Radoman, 2018). Another definition says, “Small states do not compete with big powers, but rather with similar small states that often offer services and resources that exceed their power status” (Radoman, 2018). These definitions suggest that generally small states appear to be in a marginalized position in terms of power, influence and resources. In contrary to this, James argues that small state can play a vital role in global politics and as well as have significant value for big countries (Carafano, 2018). In support of his argument he mentions that, despite being small with no armed forces, Iceland became one of the twelve founding member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), because its location makes it essential for transatlantic security (Carafano, 2018).

However, there has been no consensus over the definition or concrete understanding of small states (Efremova, 2019), so this paper will make the distinction under the parameters of geographic construction and size, political stability, economic vulnerability and dependency in accordance to their powerful neighbors. Small states have to deal with numerous challenges and hegemonic behavior or dominance in certain manner from bigger nations is one among them; and unfortunately these bigger nations at times happen to be small states' neighbors. For instance, Russia's hegemonic attitude towards Ukraine in 21<sup>st</sup> century, can be one strong example of being bullied by the huge nation. Anton Bebler states that, the Russian government interfered with the internal politics of Ukraine, made it internally vulnerable and annexed its part known as Crimea, with a well-executed plan (Bebler, 2015).

Even one of the developed Nordic countries, Finland is under the threat radar due its "unpredictable giant neighbor Russia" (Martikainen, et al., 2016). The instances of Kenya which is being accused of interfering in domestic politics of a fragile neighboring state Somalia, can be seen as the impact that a strong nation can have upon another comparatively weaker nation (Halakhe, 2020). Likewise, a small gulf state Qatar also had to face the boycott from powerful Arab neighbors for not settling to their demands (Anon., 2017). These examples make it evident that the power play is prevalent in every part of the world, and even the developed nation could not excuse themselves from this ordeal

Moreover, the phenomena of subjugation roots back to imperialism era and its loitered notion of superiority is still practiced by most of the developed and sturdy countries. But the most vital thing here to be considered is the other nations' (or smaller nations') action against the dominance, which sometimes is demonstrated either in a resilient fashion or completely in submissive manner. As an instance, if we look at the Qatar's case, which imported 90% of its food consumption before the cut off by other stronger Arab nations, was able to develop self-sufficiency in regard to food, agriculture, transport sectors, in order to survive (Ibrahim, 2020). Along with this, it also developed alternative trade links and flight routes (Ibrahim, 2020). It was possible for Qatar to resist the cut off as it has the capability to mobilize the resources and generate maximum benefits. But, for the nations that are limited in resources and has restricted knowledge in the technical field, are not able to withstand the pressure created by the powerful nations.

In the era of globalization where nations' relationship is intricate in a complex web of dependency, the nations with limited resources, weak diplomacy and instable politics are mostly compelled to succumb itself in front of relatively huge powers. And if the powerful states happens to be the immediate neighbors than the things might get more complex.

In addition to this, the situation can be worse if the nation is a Least Developed Country (LDC hereafter) and also Land Locked States (LLS hereafter), which is to say, the countries lacks access to oceans as they are surrounded by one or more other countries from all sides (Dempsey, 2017). This research paper intends to analyze situation of such two nations, namely Nepal and Bhutan that are squeezed between China – a rising global power and India- an aspiring regional power. The interfering and controlling nature of these giants, at times, through diplomatic and coercive tactics has been evident in both the nation.

The above quote is famously known as “Divya Upadesh” from King Pritvi Narayan Shah (P.N. Shah hereafter) of Nepal, who unified small states known as 22 (Baishya) and 24 (Chaubisya) rajyas and turned it into one nation named Nepal. The quotes summarizes his defensive diplomatic strategy, as Nepal lies between the then imperial British India and sleeping giant China (Baral, 2020). The strategy conceived then is still being applicable in the post-colonial era, as Nepal still seems to be defending itself against the imposing attitude of India at times. And for a country like Nepal, retaliation against the coercive power often comes with a heavy repercussion in the present context. For instance, Nepal had to face the unofficial trade embargo in the year 2015 from India after it issued its constitution; the embargo directly affected the day to day live of Nepalese who were trying to recover from the damage caused by earthquake, the same year (Ojha, 2015). The relation further became sourer after India's recent inauguration of road, which is constructed over the disputed land area between Nepal and India (Aljazeera, 2020).

Likewise, Bhutan with structural similarities like Nepal is also an immediate neighbor with India and China. Bhutan is not only geographically connected to India, but they both share special relationship. Despite this Bhutan had to face a similar kind of situation like Nepal, as India decided to halt subsidy on gas and petroleum. A news article published in The Times in India says that, Indian cut in subsidy in gas and petroleum has spiked the price double in tiny kingdom of Bhutan in the year 2013, which has brought strain in their bilateral relationship (Parashar & Datta, 2013). The incident was condemned by Bhutanese and it also received global criticism.

The event raises eyebrows as Bhutan is believed to be the only untroubled neighbor of India and also is completely dependent upon India in almost all of its nation's functional aspects. These two above mentioned incidents presented here are only representative examples that highlights the kind of immoral behavior that a bigger and powerful neighbor imposes over their smaller counterpart, in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Moreover, the bilateral relationship established between Nepal and India, with an intention of mutual growth have experienced multiple friction in due course of time. Similarly, India have established a close relationship with Bhutan to an extent that Bhutan completely relies upon India for its nation's economic and governance aspect. In addition to this, another big neighbor China is also making its presence more visible in Nepal through huge economic assistance for infrastructural development and have also promised a relationship of mutual benefit (Pandey, 2020). Likewise, China is constantly making an effort to lure Bhutan so that both the countries can officially begin a diplomatic bilateral relation. Both the nation believe in Buddhism which bridges their cultural and religious proximity. China is trying to strengthen this bridge through tourism and cultural exchange and bring Bhutan under its influence (Kumar, 2019).

## **2. The puzzle and research question**

In reference to the information mentioned above it is evident that Nepal and Bhutan are on the same page in terms of geographical structure, have more or less same economic status and are hugely dependent over India for trade and transit. But, despite the similarities these two small countries are seen to have adopted different strategies while dealing with their neighbors. If we look at Nepal we can see that it has developed bilateral relation with its both neighbors. And Bhutan has bilateral relation only with India and still has not welcomed China in its friendship zone. Nepal has chosen the strategy of balance in maintaining relationship with its neighbors whereas Bhutan has chosen the strategy of bandwagon. The concept of bandwagoning “is defined as the joining the stronger side” (Ratti, 2012). This difference in strategic approach of these two similar small countries is an interesting factor in analyzing their behavior with their immediate neighbors. It might be anticipated that, the two similar countries opt for similar strategy while dealing with similar situation, but here the scenario is completely different. This distinction in the approach is intriguing and therefore it establishes a concrete base for the further study of the research.

The relevance of Nepal and Bhutan comparison is that, though they are two separate nations and one falls under the small nation category (i.e. Bhutan), they have many things in common. And these similarities works as a foundation and supports in making the comparison pertinent. Both of them are situated in the lap of Himalayas and also share the similar faith of being sandwiched between China and India. Furthermore, they both come under UN’s list of 47 LDCs meaning, “the low income countries that face significant structural challenges to sustainable development” (Chen, 2020). And as per the criteria of “population principle” used by World Bank and Commonwealth Secretariat Bhutan is classified as small state (Misra, 2004). However, Nepal does not fit to this definition of small state on the basis of population, but in comparison to its immediate neighbors India and China, it can be evaluated under a small state (Misra, 2004).

Another similarity is that both of them are “sole state survivors of an old regional order, have managed to escape colonization and are late in opening to modernity” (Mathou, 2007). Additionally, “both of these countries have witnessed the integration of Tibet to People’s Republic China (PRC) and independent Sikkim into India in 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Mathou, 2007). During the British rule in India, Sikkim was granted a sovereign status and was promised to be exempted from

colonial governance (Roychowdhury, 2017). The initial independent status of Sikkim turned into a “colonial periphery state” after coming in contact with the British India (Roychowdhury, 2017). What is more interesting is that both these small state share bilateral relation with India and it is widely known as a “special relation”, and both are the beneficiaries of Indian foreign aid. One more similarity is the border dispute, where Nepal is facing the border issue with India and Bhutan is struggling to strike a deal for the border issue settlement with China since long time. Moreover, Nepal and China’s diplomatic relation is strengthening in the present scenario. Also, the Chinese government is keen to develop diplomatic ties with Bhutan. Thus, the comparison becomes relevant in order to comprehend the situation of small state situation that are locked in-between two giant neighbors.

Nepal and Bhutan despite having a very intricate and unique relationship with their powerful neighbor India, unfortunately had to face the episodes of economic embargo and subsidy cut-off respectively. In this regard, Nepal’s dissatisfaction was expressed in strong high pitched and aggressive fashion. But, Bhutan’s dissatisfaction was voiced in low pitch, voices were scattered and appeared more subtle. The above mentioned incidents are exemplary representation of difference in behavior that Nepal and Bhutan exhibit while maintaining their relationship with their neighbor. And these kind of differences raises question:

1. Why does Nepal and Bhutan which are structurally similar react in different ways in similar kind of situation, against its powerful neighbor?
2. To what an extent this difference can be explained by the theory of Realism?

### **3. Aim/ Objective**

The aim of this research paper are:

- a. To investigate about the strategic choices of Nepal and Bhutan in dealing with their powerful neighbors namely India and China.
- b. To comprehend India and China’s influence over Nepal and Bhutan.
- c. To recognize the historical, cultural and religious similarities and differences of Nepal and Bhutan. And its implications over their relationship with their bigger neighbors.
- d. To understand the similarities and differences of foreign policy implementation between Nepal and Bhutan. And also to understand the domestic politics of Nepal and Bhutan.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

The research focuses on the study of two smaller nations in comparison with their bigger neighbors. In accordance to that, the situation is attempted to be analyzed and comprehended from the theoretical perspective of realism, as it appears to be relevant. The research will try to explore theory of realism from the perspectives of different theorist first and then make an attempt to apply it in accordance to the topic. The paper will compliment realism with analysis of four empirical factors through comparative analysis method.

##### **4.1 Definition of Realism**

According to Duncan Bell, “realism focuses on the perennial role of power and self-interest in determining state behavior” (Bell, 2018). This definition implies that the nation is the nucleus and whatever action it undertakes is based on the advantage and mostly concerned in their individual power growth. It believes that any nation’s behavior does not involve the utopian notion but functions solely on the self-indulgence manner. It is also termed as, “spectrum of ideas rather than as a fixed point of focus with sharp definition” (Wohlforth, 2009). Furthermore, when realism is studied under international relationship it basically searches for the power position, what are the nations’ areas of interest, and what and how the role of power relation functions in reconciling conflicts of interests (Wohlforth, 2009). Thus, in a general term what we can figure out about realism is that, its coverage area is primarily around the state, about the state’s interest and state’s necessary actions in achieving those interest.

Furthermore, Hans Morgenthau while defining realism states that, “realism believes that politics like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature” (Morgenthau, 1993). He further goes on to say that, “the main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power; assumes the concept to be universally valid but not as fixed” (Morgenthau, 1993). The concept of power that Morgenthau proposes does not imply that “only power relations control political action” (Algoasibi, 1965). Furthermore, “power serves as a criterion that distinguishes politics from other spheres” (Algoasibi, 1965). In reference to his definition it can be said that it is in human nature to thrive for power and which is what reflected in nations’ plan of action. However, the concept comprises of changing variables, like for instance in older days the variable was war victory but now it is economy and prosperity.

But whatever might be the variable the core concept believes that nation always remains central and priority is to increase and maintain nation's power.

Similar ideas is shared by Jack Donnelly and he says, "Realism emphasizes the constraints on politics imposed by human nature and the absence of international governments. Together, they make international relation largely a realm of power and interest" (Donnelly, 2000). Here, too the central idea discussed about the theory is about the nation's interest and the significance of power. In addition to this, "realists view human beings as inherently egoistic and self-interested to the extent that self-interest overcomes moral principles" (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). Donnelly's book elaborates about the egoistic human nature, which says, "realists characteristically give primary emphasis to egoistic passions and "the tragic presence of evil in all political action" (Donnelly, 2000). And because these passions are ineradicable, "conflict is inevitable" (Donnelly, 2000). Thus, it is to be understood that the desire of a state makes it to overlook the probability and significance of cooperation with other state. Their every action is only focused in making maximum profit for its individual state and in order to achieve it they do not hesitate to take any extreme steps.

Another scholar Hobbes says the theory suggests that, "independent states are like independent individuals, are enemies by nature, asocial and selfish, and that there is no moral limitation" (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). Furthermore, E.H. Carr also challenges the idea of idealism saying that, "morality can only be relative, not universal; and states that the doctrine of the harmony of interests is invoked by privileged groups to justify and maintain their dominant position" (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). These ideas shared above indicates that a nation by its nature cannot or it is difficult for it to befriend another one and even if it does, it is usually guided by their vested interest.

This actively demonstrates that, "state is the dominant political units in international relations and do not show much inclination to abandon their sovereign powers" (Chiaruzzi, 2012). Also in international relations, power and its immediate expression, force remain central preoccupations" (Chiaruzzi, 2012). In realism state's interest is significant but it also understands international politics requires certain principles in order to function smoothly. George Kennan describes principles as, "a general rule of conduct by which a given country chooses to abide in the conduct of its relations with other countries" (Jorgensen, 2010).

Additionally, Sandrina Antunes and Isabel Camisao, mentions that, as per realism the principle actor 'the state' takes decision on the rational basis which is motivated to achieve their self-interest (Antunes & Camisao, 2018). They further state, "Realism suggests that all leaders, no matter what their political persuasion, recognize this as they attempt to manage their state's affairs in order to survive in a competitive environment" (Antunes & Camisao, 2018).

In analyzing classic realism it is evident that it keeps its theoretical foundation rooted in the human nature. As per classic realism the state represents human behavior which functions as per their need, interest and fear. With the essence of classic realism, neo-realism came into an existence and it proposes the idea that power and political structure of international system are the most important factor in the conduct of international politics and relations. In other words, neo-realism or structuralism re-formulates the traditional realist theory in contemporary approach. Keith L. Shimko's analysis of neo-realism states that, "neo-realist treat states as self-interested, rational, unitary entities whose tendencies toward conflict and/or cooperation are primarily a function of systematic forces-anarchy, power distribution and the presence or absence of factors which inhibit or exacerbate the conflicting consequences of anarchy" (Shimko, 1992). The political structures are defined as, "their ordering principle, differentiation of functions, and distribution of capabilities; that is, how units are related to one another, how political functions are allocated, and how power is distributed" (Donnelly, 2013). Furthermore, "there are only two basic political ordering principles, hierarchy and anarchy" (Donnelly, 2013). Additionally, "neo-realism explains different kinds of state behavior, including balancing, bandwagoning and seeking relative or absolute gains" (Jorgensen, 2010).

Moreover, lately realism was further divided into two important divisions, namely defensive and offensive realism. As per Tang Shiping, "offensive realist state seeks security by intentionally decreasing the security of others, whereas defensive realism state does not seek security in this way, as defensive realism does not believe that states must necessarily end up in actual conflicts whenever they have conflict of interests (Shiping, 2015). To sum up everything that has been stated so far, it is to be understood that the state is the main actor who thrives for power. Also, all state's action are conducted with a motive of keeping itself secure in this world of competition and with a desire to achieve relative or absolute gain in comparison to other nations.

## **5. Methodology**

This section covers the research approach, research design, data analysis and the data collection method from the study.

### **5.1 Research Approach**

The research is conducted through the qualitative research method. The qualitative research accentuates on the words rather than quantification in collection and analysis of data as per Bryman (Bryman, 2015). Furthermore, through the explanatory approach, the paper attempts to gather descriptive information, which would help to generate a better understanding of the topic. Moreover, the investigation occurs under two parts, through the theory of realism and through the empirical explanations of four different themes of the countries involved here in the discussion.

### **5.2 Research Design**

The design of this research is Ex Post Facto research design. In this concept of research design the researchers conduct their research based upon the fact that has already occurred, without having any contribution and interference in its occurrence (Sharma, 2019). This research design fits in this research paper as the analysis is conducted over the factual data, incidents and events that has occurred in the past and the present time, between the entities involved in the investigation.

### **5.3 Data Collection Method**

The data for the analysis of the research paper is obtained through secondary resources. All the grey and academic literature are taken as the data for the analysis process in the research. However, there are some limitation to this data collection method and the major one is that, at times it might not be specific according to the researcher's need (Farhan, 2020). As the data is not collected by the researcher its quality cannot be ensured (Farhan, 2020). And the information acquired from second hand sources could impart biased information and also has the risk of being outdated (Farhan, 2020). By taking these limitation into consideration and in an attempt to minimize the limitation, as much as possible only the verified sources are considered while collecting the data. Therefore, the information collected through the data can be expected to be reliable, unbiased, and qualitative and also has the timeliness value.

#### **5.4 Data Analysis Method**

The first part of data analysis is done on the basis of realism theory. And then in the later part the analysis is conducted by the comparative method of analysis. As per Todd Landman, the comparison of few countries using qualitative analysis is called the “comparative method” (Landman, 2005). This method being more intensive and less extensive incorporates the more nuances of each country (Landman, 2005). In the second part of the analysis, four major themes will be discusses widely, in order to generate the output. Due to the time limit and constrained of resources only four themes could be discussed here. However, the four themes included here are among the core elements that helps regulate a nation, therefore, it can be expected that the analysis of those theme could generate a desired result.

## **6. Literature Review**

All four countries in the discussion are the Asian countries where, Nepal and Bhutan, along with India falls on the Southern part of Asia and China on the Eastern side. In comparison to the size China is the biggest, followed by India, then Nepal and finally Bhutan is the smallest. The geographic construction and each nation's interest have weaved all the four nations in a way that they have to interact either willingly or unwillingly. This interaction have established a relationship between them which is persuaded in the form of bilateral treaties, policies and so forth. The analysis from different scholars about the aspects of relationship among them will be discussed in this section. It will be divided into three parts, where the first part will discuss about the available literature information and its limitations. The second and third part will include the relationship of Nepal with its neighbor India and China respectively, followed by the third and fourth part including information about Bhutan's relationship with the same neighbors.

### **6.1 Discussion on Literature Review: The Need for More Research**

The scholars' work that has been included in this section are insightful and assists in understanding the small states relationship with their big neighbors. However, there are some limitations that restrict the in-depth comprehension. The information available in some of the work appear to be analyzed only from unilateral perception, justifying almost every action conducted by a particular states. There are some articles that have attempted to take neutral stand and has been able to disseminate unbiased information which are appreciable. Another shortcoming about the available sources of information is that they lacked extensive comparison about the strategic difference that Nepal and Bhutan exhibit while dealing with their neighbors.

Also the sources available mostly see the events and incidents from the bigger nations' perspectives and keeps the small nations in margin. In some of the available sources, the essence of theories namely realism and liberalism are found to be present, but they are not seen to be applied in an elaborative manner that could explain the argument in convincing manner further. The restricted work done in making an assessment from the small country perspectives indicate the need of more research. Thus, keeping these limitations of available resources in consideration, this research will make an attempt to make an in-depth study of these two small nations in regard to their relation with their big neighbors. And with this explicit information, this research intends to figure out the reason that makes Nepal and Bhutan to prefer different strategy.

Before, dwelling more in the topic let us have a general information about the countries involved in the discussion here with the help of the table below:

| Country | Size                         | Population    | Religion                                                                                 |
|---------|------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NEPAL   | 174,516 km <sup>2</sup>      | 28.61 million | Mainly Hindus, then Buddhist, Islam, Kirat and so forth                                  |
| BHUTAN  | 38,394 km <sup>2</sup>       | 763,092       | Buddhism                                                                                 |
| INDIA   | 3.287million km <sup>2</sup> | 1.366 billion | Mainly Hindus, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhism, and so forth                           |
| CHINA   | 9.597million km <sup>2</sup> | 1.398 billion | No dominant religion<br>Follows communal religion, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Christianity |

Table 1. The basic information of Four Countries involve in the discussion

## 6.2 Nepal relationship with India

These two nations not only share cultural similarity but also have a long standing bilateral relationship that have completed more than 70 years now. The establishment of Nepal and India relationship can be observed under two sections- Nepal with British ruled India and Nepal with independent India, as both are crucial in shaping present relationship structure. In reference to a article, “although Nepal never became a colony of Britain, many aspects of the Nepal-India, relations were constituted during the British Colonial era in India from the ideological plinth built on the British colonial power” (Karki & KC, 2020).

As per Ranjit Thapa, “Nepal’s relationship with British India was based on 1816 Treaty of Sugauli, which happened after Nepal’s defeat in Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16, followed by Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1923” (Thapa, 2010). Further he mentions that, Nepal and independent India established its bilateral relation based on the “Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950” (Thapa, 2010). The main purpose for independent India to develop diplomatic and bilateral ties with Nepal appears to ensure its own security.

In reference to Satish Kumar, “India inherited British pre-eminence in Nepal” (Kumar, 2011), which considered Nepal as an inner buffer state and Nepal became more crucial for India, after China’s annexation of Tibet (Kumar, 2011). This action from Indian side can be seen guided by the realist’s essence, as per which nation acts according to its self-interest. And having Nepal under Indian control would strengthen power position of India in the region.

Moreover, Surya P. Subedi’s article states that the Tibet incident alarmed India and in attempt to prevent communist influence spreading in neighboring Himalaya’s kingdoms, India carried forward the “Himalayan Frontier Policy” of British India with peace treaty (Subedi, 1994). Though this treaty claims to have established “special relation” between two nations, it has aroused dissatisfaction and problems in both nation relationship. According to Subedi, “the treaty was signed in a discreet manner and objectionable provisions were exchanged through letters” (Subedi, 1994). Furthermore, “the existence and contents of the letter were hidden for nine years and were not attached to the treaty when it was registered with United Nations” (Subedi, 1994). This act of the then Indian government arouses a feeling of distrust in regard to their intentions towards the people of Nepal. Another scholar, Dhurba Raj Adhikari writes that, “This policy of special relationship despite having strong roots in domestic politics of Nepal as well, was rather an idea enforced by the Indian establishment than a voluntary foreign policy formulated by Nepal” (Adhikari, 2018). In addition to this, “the treaty have reduced Nepal to the virtual status of an Indian protectorate” (Ghori, 1964).

Likewise, Fahmida Ashraf’s article manifestation agrees with the ideas proposed by the above mentioned scholars in regard to the treaty. It states, “Treaty provides for special political and economic relations between the two countries but, because of India’s assertion for the status of a regional power and the then disturbed internal political situation in Nepal, the treaty is tilted towards Indian dominance” (Ashraf, 1989). This shared information highlights the fact that the treaty which was designed to provide a mutual benefit, however, could not escape the dominant attitude of Indian government towards its small neighbors.

In contrary to the above mentioned information, Deeptima Shukla presents completely different outlook towards the Peace and Friendship Treaty in her article. She states that, “the 1950 treaty has brought India and Nepal closer to each other” (Shukla, 2006). She further mentions that, as per the treaty India recognized Nepal’s independent status, committed to assist in Nepal’s economic development and Nepal concurred cooperation with India in its defense matters (Shukla, 2006). Along with this, Nepal’s the then monarch and government also acknowledged the significance of India in establishment of democracy in Nepal and Nepal remained politically and economically dependent with India in cordial terms (Shukla, 2006).

Similarly, Sangeeta Thapliyal presents the identical notion as Deeptima Shukla, regarding the peace and friendship treaty between India and Nepal in her article. She mentions, “Treaty intends to take care of their mutual interests within a particular regional context” (Thapliyal, 2012). She further makes a claim that, “a holistic approach was adopted in the Treaty, which took into consideration the external and internal dimensions of the relation” (Thapliyal, 2012). This analysis indicates that the proposed treaty from Indian government at that time was guided by the intention of mutual benefit. It was not conceived by India, with an agenda of imposing power and influence over Nepal. Neither does it intends to make Nepal completely dependent over India in aspect of socio-politics, economic and security.

In addition to this, this treaty also brewed the economic ties between two nations and has become one of the pivotal component in shaping their bilateral relationship named as “Treaty of Trade and Commerce- a watershed in Indo-Nepali economic relation” (Baral, 1992). He further mentions that the unequal status developed by the treaty among India and Nepal had ignited the feeling of resentment among Nepalese people (Baral, 1992). Along with this the treaty have been amended time and again as Nepal tried to garner an equal status and on the economic aspect (Baral, 1992). And in this regard, “the trade and transit issues of 1970-71 and 1989 were important as controversy arouse whether Nepal should have same treaty or separate treaty for trade and transit with India” (Baral, 1992). He also illustrates that Nepal’s initiative for diversifying its trade became the source of coldness in the relationship between two nations (Baral, 1992).

Additionally, Hasan-Askari Rizvi in his article indicates the reason that had then developed the feeling of dissatisfaction among the people of Nepal (Rizvi, 1982). It reads, “Unfavorable and unequal provision for Nepal as it imposed Indian tariff policies on the Nepalese Government and took away its right to determine the prices of commodities imported from, or exported to foreign countries” (Rizvi, 1982). This implies that Nepal’s trade transaction was in a handicapped status and had no rights to take decisions freely. However, the article by Shree Govind Mishra and Asha Mishra state that this treaty provided Nepal with an opportunity to practice in the trade and develop economically (Mishra & Mishra, 1995). As per the treaty, “Nepal gained right to import and export goods through India without the payment of Indian export and import duties” (Mishra & Mishra, 1995).

Furthermore, another part of Nepal and India relationship was based on the Indian economic assistance which commenced after the establishment of formal bilateral relationship. It is argued that the Indian aid is not only intended to promote national interest but also guided with benevolent thought of nurturing friendship and also an attempt to assist friends and neighbors (Kumar & Kumar, 2015). Likewise, Surendra Kumar Sharma states that, Indian economic aid to Nepal should be seen as a genuine humanitarian concern rather than investment encouraged by diplomatic reasons (Sharma, 1994). It is undeniable that the technical and economic support in the field of communication, transport, power generation, irrigation, education, infrastructure development have benefitted Nepal (Rizvi, 1982). Furthermore, it is also needs to be considered that, “a small amount given in the form of advice and technical assistance and training creates a multiplier effects by creating goodwill and prospects for further improvement of relation” (Kumar & Kumar, 2015). But the problem in mutual cooperation and genuine concern of a neighbor for another commenced after, “political bickering between Nepal and India, and India receiving greater share of benefits of these joint ventures” (Rizvi, 1982).

Moreover, Nepal and India also agreed on utilizing the vast water resources of Nepal in order to meet water crisis in India for irrigation purpose and generating electricity for bilateral use, which was eventually expected to strengthen Nepal’s economy. Nepal is not technically and economically capable to pull a mega scale hydro power project, thus Indian assistance is vital. Despite the project are designed to extract maximum benefits for both the countries, it is not critic free.

The Nepalese perceives that, India exercises its powerful neighbor position and takes undue advantage from water agreement at the cost of Nepal's right (K.N.Adhikari, 2014). Whereas, India believes that "Nepalese politicians are rendered so paranoid by nationalist sentiments that they are incapable of striking sensible deals with New Delhi" (K.N.Adhikari, 2014). He further mentions that, through the agreement India has managed to quantify water and electricity for Nepal but not for itself, which ironically puts Nepal in receiving and India in donor end (K.N.Adhikari, 2014).

Besides, the structural construction of Nepal and open border arrangements have further increased trouble and tensed situation between Nepal and India. The recent event of November 2019 where Indian defense minister inaugurated 80km long road connecting to China border at the Lipulekh pass (Parajuli, 2021). This action of Indian government was condemned by Nepalese government by accusing it of "changing status quo without diplomatic consultations" (Parajuli, 2021). In addition to this, apart from this, Nepal suffers border encroachment in other areas too like Susta and Mechi (Timalsina, 2018). As per Biswas Baral, India has installed its army base in the kalapani region since the early 1950s (Baral, 2020). Though the contemporary government was successful to make India withdraw its 16 to 17 border army post but failed to do so in the kalapani region, as the then monarch did not want to completely alienate India, because India considered him as a close ally of China, and Nepal was not in state to face the southern power exertion (Baral, 2020).

However, after the revival of democracy in 1990, successive Nepali government have made effort to remove the post and get its land back but India has been turning deaf ear to it (Baral, 2020). But there is another angle to it where, Indian side has refuted the accusation and said that Nepal's action of releasing a new map with including India's territory in it, was unilateral and have come without historical facts and evidences (Dixit, 2020). Both the countries have been facing problems in the border and the recent development from both the side have made the matter serious which demands for a fair investigation.

Another significant component that has have a direct impact upon the relationship between Nepal and India is, Nepal's diversified foreign policy since its unification days. In reference to Aliou's article foreign policy can be understood as actions and decisions that establishes appreciable relation between one state and others (Bojang, 2018). In other words, the foreign policy is a process through which a nation attains its objectives and also assures its sovereignty; and establishes a healthy and cooperative relation with other countries.

When India attained its freedom, Nepal was under autocratic Rana regime and this regime with a motive to garner support for its rule from Indian government chose to align its policy with Indian policy (Adhikari, 2018). Even after the end of autocracy and establishment of democracy in Nepal, the special relations continued, until King Mahendra (Nepal's ruling monarch then) opted for Non-aligned and Neutrality policy (Adhikari, 2018).

This approach of Nepal to establish its diplomatic relation with China, USA and other country was not well appreciated by India. And Nepal have been accused of playing China card against India many times (Adhikari, 2018). Similarly, Nepal's policy of equidistance also did not go well with India as it said, "Nepal's policy of equidistance was impractical and false. It created a "credibility gap" and insecurity dilemma and injected mistrust in its relationship with India" (Singh & Shah, 2018). Thus, the foreign policy changes at times have created a situation of friction among the neighbors, where one intends to overcome the dependency and other seems to continue the influence.

In the present context, Nepal is making an attempt to shift its foreign policy towards the concept of "Trilateralism", which implies that Nepal intends to serve as a bridge between its two powerful nations and expects to yield mutual benefits in the areas ranging from trade, economy and security through partnership and interdependence (K.C. & Bhattarai, 2018). In one hand this concept can make Nepal a "golden bridge" where India gains access to Tibet, and along with this it will construct a passage for China in order to elaborate its market reach (Baral, 2019).

But in other hand, "for Nepal it is problematic to run together with the partner having asymmetric position in terms of size, development and numbers of population as well" (Baral, 2019). Along with this the fact that India and China's association with Nepal is predominantly guided by the notion of domination and competition, it can create a hurdle for Nepal to execute this plan (Baral, 2019). Though the new approach appears to be promising and fulfilling, Nepal needs to examine the repercussion meticulously and implement it cautiously, as per Baral's evaluation.

However, there is another side of the argument which talks about the problems in Nepal's foreign policy. Madan's article states, "Nepal's foreign policies lack sustained homework and failure to keep momentum on various matters that have crucial role in augmenting and reinforcing bilateral ties" (Bhattarai, 2018). It implies that Nepal's loosely constructed and conducted diplomatic actions could be a reason for Nepal's incapability to garner favorable result while dealing with its neighbor and other countries. Along with this, the changes in the Indian foreign policy that began with friendly non-aligned cooperation to politics of domination, then it shifted to inclusion, followed by neighborhood policy and then finally to politics of friendship has also played role in shaping its relationship with its neighbors (Chattopadhyay, 2011). There is a probability that the changes in foreign policy in due course of time, despite of having the timeliness value, somewhat practically has failed to produce desired result through its implementation.

Along with all the above mention factors, some scholars also focus on the inefficient, unstable and troubled domestic politics of Nepal, as a factor of failure to establish itself as a significant partner while dealing with India and other neighbors. Chandra Pandey expresses his disappointment of Nepalese government and political leaders selfish attribute and narrows though process, which reads, "visionless Nepali leaders have always been overjoyed just to receive the same facilities at the further expense of Nepal, and least concerned about vital issues like security and rivers" (Pandey, 2011). As we study about the relationship between these two countries it appears that is more than the power push and pull. Their relationship manifest tension at one part and a complete mutual compromise on the other, which makes it complicated to comprehend.

### **6.3 Nepal relationship with China**

In analyzing Nepal's relation with its immediate neighbors, India and China both appear in the frame. China's inclusion becomes fundamental at the present context as Nepal is seen extending and strengthening its bilateral ties with China. However, the recent border dispute between India and China have brought coldness in Sino-India relationship. Though Nepal has close relationship with both the nations, it cannot be denied that Sino-India equation will either directly or indirectly effect Nepal. The basics about the formation of relationship becomes vital in analyzing the chosen strategy by the nation in discussion here.

Nepal is a birth place of Lord Buddha, preacher of Buddhism and many Buddhist value believers reside in Nepal. Many Chinese also hold the same religious belief and Buddhism is part of their life as well. Thus, the preaching and practice of Buddhism in both the nations establishes a sense a religious and cultural proximity, along with structural geographical vicinity. Buddhi's article states that though Nepal and China's diplomatic ties were established late in 1955, the exchange of culture, economy and trade dates back to 400 to 750 A.D. (Sharma, 2018).

People's Republic of China (PRC) founded in 1949 took the initiative to seek resolution for border issues among Nepal and with India; and establish diplomatic relation based on mutual trust, famously known as "Five Principles of Peaceful Existence" (Sharma, 2018). Nepal adherence to China's "One China Policy" and China's "non-interventional" approach in Nepal's domestic policy have played a vital role in smooth relation of Sino-Nepal. (Sharma, 2018).

Nepal and Tibet have long history of trade and cultural propinquity, and after Tibet's annexation by China, Nepal and China came to share physical boundaries (Lama, 2013). Tibet is still a sensitive area for China and its geographical closeness with Nepal, makes Nepal extremely important for China (Lama, 2013). After the occupation of Tibet, the relationship between Nepal and China was bound to happen, especially for Nepal it became significant to commence cordial relation with its newly formed powerful neighbor (Kumar, 1963). Given to the structural connection, it became necessary for both to resume and regularize their relation according to normal international practice (Kumar, 1963). It can be said that the dissatisfaction of Tibet being occupied by China still resides in Tibetan heart and some forces are acting against Chinese invasion. China wants to prevent these forces from exercising revolutionary acts in Nepal's soil by establishing a strong bilateral connection. The relationship between China and Nepal have grown from, "Chinese traditional approach of low-key engagement to more pro-active approach in recent times" (Adhikari, 2012).

However, another argument states that, Chinese expansion of bilateral relation with its neighbor was to "neutralize partially Indian influence in small states falling between the Chinese and Indian Politico-cultural frontiers, and to befriend them so firmly as to ultimately win their favor in case of a military show-down between India and China (Kumar, 1963). Furthermore, Satish Kumar in his article mentions that, China's motive of involvement in Nepal comprises of three phases, first

to create infrastructure to ensure close ties, second to overturn Indian dependency and third to completely weaken Indian presence and influence (Kumar, 2011).

Also, Nepal and China share trade but the ratio is not huger than Nepal-India trade. Nepal receives economic assistance from China for infrastructural development as well. The Chinese aid to Nepal is perceived from two different school of thoughts, one school believing it be a genuine concern of a neighbor and other rather have a skeptic view which argues that it is motivated by vested interest of China (Dhakal, et al., 2019). Likewise, China's investment follows "no strings attached" policy which makes it popular among the receiver nations (Adhikari, 2012). However, China's economic help is often viewed as an effort to present itself as a "reliable and non-exploitative partner" and in Nepal's context also as an "attractive alternative to Big Brother India" (Adhikari, 2012).

Moreover, Nepal's pledge to associate with the China's ambitious project of Belt Road Initiative (BRI) has set the new milestone in Nepal-China relationship. The project is anticipated to bring the huge investment in varied areas of Nepal and enhance the economic condition of Nepal through development flow from local to national level (Bhattarai, 2019). Along with the dream of prosperity the project on the other hand also brings the suspicion of China's debt trap policy. As per this argument it implies that, the project brings the concern of increasing overdependence on Chinese loan and land grab as experienced in Sri Lanka raise the eye in caution and concern over the probability of China's modern imperialism over small states like Nepal in the name of connectivity and revolutionary infrastructural development (Murton & Plachta, 2020).

#### **6.4 Bhutan relationship with India**

Bhutan and India's relation records back to 747 A.D, during which an Indian saint introduced Buddhism to Bhutanese people which later became integral part of their lifestyle from then to now (Choden, 2004). The long standing historical, cultural and religious ties along with the geographical vicinity have contributed in establishing them as a reliable neighbors since decades (Letho & Karma, 1994). Similarly, like the case of Nepal, Bhutan's relationship with India can be viewed under two sections- Bhutan with British India and Bhutan with independent India. British influence and treaties signed in the past, have huge significance in construction of present Bhutan-India relationship. Dorji Penjore states that, the cordial relation of Bhutan and British India touched rock bottom when they collided in Anglo-Bhutan war in 1772 (Penjore, 2004).

After that, in the due course of time both the nation signed “Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 and it made Bhutan give away most of its land, in return of monetary compensation to British India (Penjore, 2004). Later, when the Chinese influence increased in the north, it alarmed British India and as a result “Treaty of Punakha in 1910”, came into existence; which allowed Bhutan to establish external contacts if necessary, but first had to acquire British consent (Penjore, 2004).

These series of events between them ended making Bhutan merely a British protectorate (Penjore, 2004). These treaties later became a foundation in the continuation of diplomatic relationship between independent India and Bhutan.

Furthermore, after the independence of India, a proclaimed new dimension of bilateral relation was secured with Bhutan, quoted as “special relation”, with “The Treaty of Peace and Friendship” (Sharma & Sharma, 2016). The treaty pledged adherence to non-interference policy in respective nation’s internal affairs and peaceful co-existence (Sharma & Sharma, 2016). Dorji sates that the treaty between these two nations is considered vibrant and dynamic and it also sets an example of good bilateral relation in the region, as both cooperate for common interest (Penjore, 2004). This view implies that Bhutan and India both consider their friendship to be based on the foundation of equality and mutual prosperity. Both the parties appear to be acknowledging each other’s significance in maintaining peace and security in their respective land. In addition to this, Tuhina Sarkar mentions that the treaty of friendship between India and Bhutan have never hinder the cordial relationship that these countries have maintained so far, as India have been flexible and receptive towards Bhutan’s request to review and revise the treaty at times (Sarkar, 2012).

However, a contrary perception imparts a view that the treaty initiated by India was the continuation of British “Himalayan frontier policy”. According to which these states considered as “buffer states” were needed to be kept under scrutiny, in order to restrict any kind of threat from slithering through it. Dorji mentions that the Chinese side have always considered this treaty to be an “unequal relation” (Penjore, 2004). T.T Poulouse’s article present the argument which states that India’s actual intention over the proposal of treaty that happened immediately after its freedom, was only to extend its control over the region (Paulose, 1971). It reads, “The treaty carefully preserved the essence of the British policy, namely safeguarding the vital national interest of India in a strategically important area” (Paulose, 1971). The treaty was believed to have made Bhutan a partially independent country as mentioned by the Bhutan’s Prime Minister (Choudhary, 2005).

He has expressed his feelings in Bhutan's National Assembly, stating that, "We don't consider ourselves to be protectorate of India. We consider ourselves independent. But we are not 100 per cent independent because of the treaty" (Choudhary, 2005).

Therefore, it can be understood that the relationship was more a diplomatic measure than proclaimed benevolent act. The Indian approach towards bilateral relation towards Bhutan was more in India's favor during its conception. The rising communist power in north can be observed as one of the probable guiding force for India to conclude such treaty with Bhutan (Malik & Sheikh, 2016). It was important for India to avoid communist school of thought reaching its plains which could have disturbed its practice of democratic notion and also could have challenged its integrity (Malik & Sheikh, 2016).

Similarly, Bhutan and India's relationship was further strengthened with trade and transit treaty and along with India's economic assistance to Bhutan. As per the transit treaty India gave Bhutan access via India for goods import and export without any custom and transit duties (Taneja, et al., 2019). Furthermore, Tuhina Sarkar states that, "mutually benefitted economic inter-linkages between India and Bhutan have been an important element in Indo-Bhutan bilateral relation" (Sarkar, 2012). Through her article, she highlights that India as a responsible neighbor has helped Bhutan to take the path of economic development with monetary as well as expert technical guidance (Sarkar, 2012). Likewise, L.K Choudhary disseminates the similar idea stating that, "Bhutan has been dependent over India for its socio-economic development and India has been helpful in establishing its linkages with outside world" (Choudhary, 2005). In addition to this, Holsti states that India has become a huge support for a country like Bhutan that lacked professional expertise in every aspect of modern nation building process. Also, mentions that Bhutan's journey towards modernization can be categorized under India's normative persuasion and socialization (Holsti, 1982).

Despite, India's massive contribution in economic aspects of Bhutan it could not preserve its benevolent image, as some critical views were voiced time and again. Arif and Dr. Nazir argue that, "Bhutanese have perceived the Indian model of economic assistance as exploitative, which tends to serve Indian interest" (Malik & Sheikh, 2016). Furthermore, they also mention India's failure in building an effective strategy that would provide balance economic interdependence between the two nations (Malik & Sheikh, 2016).

Furthermore, some views on India's initiation of road construction that established direct connection of Bhutan with India, opposes the benevolent concept, like in Monja's article. As it mentions, "politically it was said that India provided Bhutan with infrastructural assistance such as roads, but behind the scene it was to allow the movement of Indian troops to the northern part of Bhutan" (Sauvagerd, 2018). Furthermore, the economic aid is seen as India's objective in gaining access to vital energy resources, which had commenced with the security interest in the past (Sauvagerd, 2018).

Moreover, India has also been questioned and criticized for its failure in establishing the notion of equal partnership with Bhutan. Some scholars have pointed towards the issue that India's behavior towards its smaller counterpart appears to imposing superiority. Miriam Prys's book to an extent provides this information where he writes, "Indian government has not put significant emphasis on the notion of equal partnership; rather it much more deliberately portrays itself as a generous stronghold in the family of the south Asian economies" (Prys, 2012). In addition to this, Monja mentions that, "in development cooperation India's action can be described as intermediate hegemonic as it is centered on the provision of material benefits and rewards to Bhutan as the subordinate state" (Sauvagerd, 2018).

Likewise, the economic cooperation between these two countries have also been perceived from the angle of over dependency and is thought to be problematic. Damber Kharka puts forward this argument based on the concept that the over dependency of Bhutan towards India, could probably reduce Bhutan's prospect of self-determination in attaining self-sufficiency, which is must for a country (Kharka, 2018). Similar argument is shared by Shelly Mahajan, where she states that fact that due to Indian subsidy on almost all the essential products to Bhutan have crippled the Bhutanese domestic market (Mahajan, 2018). Also, the huge dependency have been accused of giving undue advantage to India over Bhutan's trade and commerce (Mahajan, 2018).

In addition to this, the most significant economic collaboration between India and Bhutan is in the field of hydropower project. In reference to Dorji's claim, the hydropower generation have enabled strengthened the "special relation" between India and Bhutan. The projects have enabled Bhutan to heighten its status from receiver to an equal partner to India (Penjore, 2004). It is believed to be a win-win deal for both, with India receiving inexpensive energy and Bhutan receiving growth in its GDP (Taneja, et al., 2019).

However, some critical voices about the project have analyzed it as India's attempt of maintaining control over Bhutan and have termed it as "electricity colonization" (Sauvagerd, 2018). In addition to this a article published in People's Daily Online discusses that Indian have been curtailing Bhutanese right to express their views on the political and internal affairs matters (Anon., 2017). Due to the deep influence of India in Bhutan's every aspect from security to economy to politics and so forth, the special relation have now turned to become a relation of control (Anon., 2017).

Along with this, foreign policy of a nation whether small or big plays a vital role in shaping its relationship with its immediate neighbors and also with other countries in the world. Bhutan's geostrategic position has always become a nucleus in shaping its foreign policy, which primarily focused in its survival in the initial days (Swain, 1991). Bhutan's traditional foreign policy was "policy of isolation" or "withdrawal from international politics" with sole objective of ensuring its independence and prominent identity (Ahsan & Chakma, 1993). The analyses of the circumstance where there existed continuous encroachment of Bhutanese border by China and with strong Tibetan's revolt against China in the scene, Bhutan agreed to align its foreign policy with India (Swain, 1991).

However, the problem in the paradise arose when Bhutan attempted to diversify its foreign policy and extend relation with China. This action irked India making it cut the subsidy to Bhutan, which was called out by Bhutan as India's "Carrot and Stick Policy" (Malik & Sheikh, 2016). This gives a glimpse that Indian behavior towards its small neighbor cannot be solely evaluated as a benevolent act as there lies India's motive guided by self-interest to some extent. However, Bhutan has become the central focus for India's – "the Neighborhood first policy" and "the Act East Policy", and so far the bilateral relation have been conducted tension free (Mahajan, 2018). Thus, it can be analyzed that alignment with Indian policy in one hand have benefitted Bhutan but on the other hand have made it more dependent and restrictive. Bhutan, a young democracy in the world might have difficulties in detaching itself from the Indian hold and also in diversifying a productive foreign policy for itself.

## **6.5 Bhutan relationship with China**

Additionally, China also holds a significant position in analyzing Bhutan relation with its immediate neighbors. However, despite having a cultural and traditional similarities along with geographical proximity Bhutan has not been able to establish a diplomatic relation with China so far. But the coldness in the relation has been reduced in the present condition as China has made an attempt to extend cordial relation. Both the country have undergone several rounds of talk since long time in order to solve the border dispute. Chinese presence can be seen in the Bhutanese soil through tourism and cultural exchange, which probably is a Chinese attempt to build a diplomatic ties.

However, these attempts of China is also perceived as pursuing its self-interest agenda over Bhutan. Tilak Jha's argument suggests the same notion which states, "Bhutan can be beneficial for China's 'Western development strategy' that could allow Tibet to regain a central position in Himalayan region, giving China more leverage in Bhutan" (Jha, 2013). Furthermore, the increasing Chinese attempt is also taken as China's strategy to weakened Indian influence around the periphery in order to impose it sole power reign in the entire region (Jha, 2013). In the present context, not only China but Bhutan also seems interested in building relationship with China. Bhutan which had taken its own sweet time to open up and trust China, now seems to have deeper engagement with China which is visible in the areas of tourism, education, culture, agriculture and so on (Mahajan, 2018). The Chinese occupation of Tibet have brought China and Bhutan as a close neighbor and it also contributed in igniting the border dispute between them (Ramachandran, 2017). China and Bhutan have tried to solve border dispute where china has offered Bhutan a packaged deal along with economic aid (Ramachandran, 2017). However, an argument presents the view that Bhutan's hesitance in accepting the deal and economic assistance is due to Indian influence (Ramachandran, 2017). This argument suggests that India has been the most crucial and pivotal in Bhutan's socio-economic, political as well as external relation.

## **7. Analysis of the case from Realist Perspective**

### **7.1 Examining China and India's behavior towards Nepal and Bhutan through realism perspective**

This chapter intends to seek to what an extent realism can provide a reasonable explanation for the cases discussed in the paper. In accordance to the theory of realism which believes that a state behaves in a particular fashion, the big countries will be evaluated first. For instance, as mentioned in the literature review when India became independent from British rule, it continued the British India's "Himalayan Frontier Policy (Subedi, 1994)", according to which the two small countries Nepal and Bhutan are considered as inner buffer state. This act of India was performed in order to ensure its security at that time, since it was itself in a transition phase i.e. from colonialism to democracy. Also, the rising communism in China was perceived as prominent threat by India. In order to stop Chinese influence from slipping to its periphery India tried to spread its influence in these small nations, with the help of "Peace and Friendship Treaty (Subedi, 1994) and (Sharma & Sharma, 2016)".

Also, one of the argument claims that the peace treaty between India and Nepal was initially kept discreet (Subedi, 1994)", and more tilted or favorable towards India (Ashraf, 1989). This act also justifies that the countries acted in line with realism, which means that realism can explain some aspects of the relationship. This step of India under the lens of classic realism can be further analyzed as an action driven by India's own insecurity and fear. And also motivated to ensure its power position or firm grip over small nations which would strengthen its power status in the region. India appears to have conducted its power exercise over its smaller nations under the cloak of friendship and equal partnership.

Likewise, China's annexation of Tibet (Kumar, 2011), can be explained by the arguments made by realism theory, according to which for a nation power is the most significant factor. Chinese occupation of Tibet came with a claim that Tibet was part of China since ancient time (Sperling, 2009). The new established government at that time in China called PRC (Sharma, 2018), took a step to bring Tibet under its wing; which was a clear action performed with an agenda to establish its power position and further extend its influence over other smaller nations around the region. The development of conflict in Sino-India's relationship due to border issue and pursuit of power, also demonstrates traits of realism.

As per Donnelly, “the powerful nations’ joint interest in maintaining their superior position over all others restrains the pursuit of competitive interests that might lead to war” (Donnelly, 2000). And both nations’ sole agenda to excel their own position in the region and establish only their suzerainty, have governed them to consider each other a rival and declare war against each other. The friction between them when viewed from the realistic perspective it can be evaluated as a mere act of power play. The conflict between them in recent times have caused the Indian military forces to confront the Chinese forces and have created the scenario of war (Golman, 2020).

Moreover, according to S.M. Burke, “the border between India and Tibet China lying in the world’s highest mountain range, is broken in three places by the states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan” (S.M.BURKE, 1963). And given to this structural formation it has constructed a situation among India and China, that whichever country has control or influence over these three small states, is likely to enjoy the powerful position in the region. Furthermore, Maira states, “both India and China being ancient civilizations, growing economies and nuclear powers” (Qaddos, 2018) have made them a strong competitor. Both India and China appear to be pursuing realism’s values which supports and justifies nation acting in a way that assures achieving their self-interest and increasing their own power in the neighboring countries. Also, it justifies to a larger extent the theoretical analysis made by Donnelly where he claims, “Superpowers still compete with one another and are driven apart by their mutual fears and suspicions” (Donnelly, 2000).

In global power position India appears to be behind China but the amount of growth it has achieved and impression it has made in the global platform, makes it a potential competitive power. And both the powers are in continuous process of stretching their influence over their smaller neighbors. And again going back to literature review, it is clear that India in comparison to China have kept Nepal and Bhutan under its influence since long. However, China at the present time is continuously increasing its footprint with high speed in Nepal and also trying to enter the premises of Bhutan. Bhutan and Nepal are significant for India due to its security reason, and for China influence over Nepal and Bhutan would mean the assurance of instilling its dominance over the region. From the realism perspective, the actions of India and China can be analyzed as action driven by the egoistic and self-centered attitude of these countries.

Moreover, these acts can also be seen from the angle of offensive realism as one of the two powerful nation China is making a gradual effort to decrease another competitive nation's impact over the smaller nations. As evidently, for a growing power China, India is a sole counter power and neutralizing Indian effect among the neighborhood will work in China's favor.

In addition to this, India's negligent attitude towards its smaller nation in terms of trade and transit as mentioned above in the literature review also justifies the essence of realism. India's approach of imposing economic blockade over Nepal which is completely dependent over it for trade transit, as a repercussion of Nepal's attempt to diversify its trade, especially with China, (Baral, 1992), is another action that demonstrates the taint of realism. However, this is not a single episode as similar blockades have taken place four time so far, year 2015 blockade being the latest (Ojha, 2015). This kind of action only suggests India's power exertion and control tactics over a small nation as per its desire. Lately, India's construction of 80km long road connecting to China border at the Lipulekh pass (Parajuli, 2021), brought stir in Nepal's domestic politics as it was built in disputed area. But the situation worsened when India denied the encroachment of border (Dixit, 2020) and showed cold shoulder against Nepal's diplomatic efforts to solve the issue. This episode suggests that there is a hierarchical construction in the relationship status between India and Nepal, where India with power and capabilities occupies the dominant position, as explained by neo-realism.

The similar situation of border dispute since long time is ongoing between Bhutan and China, where China enjoys the dominant position given to its powerful status in the modern world. Also, the Indian influence over Bhutan does not allow it to decide independently over China's package deal to solve the border issue (Ramachandran, 2017). Here, Bhutan is in a complex situation and suffers from power exertion from both of its neighbors. Thus, it can be concluded here that the activities conducted by the powerful nations, to a larger extent follows the value of realism. The age old power tussle and recently reignited tension between India and China also can be a strong factor in determining their role and relationship towards their smaller neighbors. These two growing powers are meticulously concerned over their individual security and power position in the region. And in order to maintain and increase their power, they appear to be exercising their influence over the small neighboring nations by presenting themselves as trustworthy alliances.

The application of power at the present era if to be analyzed from the realist perspective, it can be said that they are disguised in the form of mutual benefit and cooperation; but at times the powerful nation do not shy away in blatantly revealing their assertive and hostile nature.

## **7.2 Examining Nepal and Bhutan relationship with India and China from realism perspective**

The theory of realism extensively revolves around the state and its interest. Thus, it has been largely useful in decoding the functional attributes of India and China while dealing with each other and their respective smaller neighbors Nepal and Bhutan. As the theory focuses about states and its priorities, it might also be equally helpful in analyzing the conduct of smaller nations Nepal and Bhutan here. In the light of this theory, the behavior of Bhutan can be classified as “bandwagoning. Bhutan being recognized as a small state have chosen this strategy and have had formed a strong bilateral relation with India. Bhutan since the beginning have distanced itself from China, however the ice seems to be melting in the present context.

However, as mentioned in the literature review, in the past Bhutan had to face Chinese suzerain mentality and probably it could have been a driving force for Bhutan to consider India as its reliable friend. From the theoretical explanation of bandwagoning by Waltz, “the weaker the state, the more likely it is to bandwagon. Balancing may seem unwise because one’s allies may not be able to provide assistance quickly” (Gunasekara, 2015). Furthermore, “states that are close to a country with large offensive capabilities (and that are far from potential allies) may be forced to bandwagon because balancing alliances are simply not viable” (Gunasekara, 2015). Since Bhutan is small and weak state and it is not capable of defending itself against China which has the history of being hostile, and the incident of Tibet’s annexation proves China’s hostile behavior as well.

Bhutan realizing itself being in a vulnerable position might have turned towards India, which apparently for Bhutan appeared to be more friendly and reliable. Also, Bhutan’s isolation policy in the initial days curtailed it from establishing bilateral and mutually benefitted relationship with other countries and institutions. Due to this situation it had only India left as a strong alliance which could probably protect itself from presumed Chinese coercion.

Also, being located in the lap of Himalayas, with minimal or almost zero infrastructural development it was difficult for other powers to come for Bhutan's rescue quickly, even if it had other powerful nations as allies during that time. But, being closely connected through land it was possible for India to intervene in case of Chinese attacks against Bhutan.

Another argument about bandwagon states that, "weaker states choose instead to align themselves with the aggressor, in the hope that they will either be rewarded for their support or spared the harmful consequences of resisting" (Lawson, 2016). Indian approach of acknowledging Bhutan's sovereign status against Chinese suzerain approach theoretically might have played a crucial role for Bhutan to adopt the strategy of bandwagoning with India. Bhutan might have considered Indian approach as a reward or win-win situation for both the nations. Moreover, structural realism argues that, "bandwagoners attempt to increase their gain (or reduce their losses) by siding with the stronger party" (Donnelly, 2013). This hints that possibly Bhutan was trying to increase its prospect to establish itself as a sovereign nation by aligning with India, as India accepted Bhutan as independent nation wholeheartedly.

Despite having the similar geographical construction Nepal's approach in conducting its relationship with its neighbors is different than that of Bhutan. Along with Bhutan's adopted bandwagoning strategy, the structural realism also advocates balance, and Nepal appears to be pursuing this particular strategy by maintaining mutually benefitted bilateral relation with both its powerful neighbors. If we analyze the information mentioned in the literature review it indicates that Nepal and India is intricately interrelated. However, Nepal does not seem to completely succumb under wings of Indian influence and it is evident from the information shared above in the literature review section. In accordance to the information it is evident that India was trying to put a grip over Nepal in regard to its external relation and also in its domestic affairs. This interfering attitude of India might have evoked a thought, which probably indicated that Nepal merely would end as one of the many states of India. Here, Nepal seems to be guided by realism's perspective which discusses about great power's nature becoming a threat. This particular phenomena is described by Waltz, which reads, "the power of others-especially great power-is always a threat when there is no government to turn to for protection" (Donnelly, 2013).

Furthermore, “balancers attempt to reduce their risk by opposing a stronger or rising power” (Donnelly, 2013). In regard to this explanation, Nepal might have tried to adopt balance strategy in order to survive the supremacy of one of its neighbors. Nevertheless, Nepal still does not give the impression that it has completely incorporated and implemented the essence of balance strategy while conducting itself. Nepal’s journey as a balancers still shows sign of struggle as it has not been able to place itself at a strong position while dealing with its neighbors. The incompetent attitude demonstrated by Nepal government at times seemingly makes it journey as a balancers questionable and also difficult to attain.

### **7.3 The Threat Perception**

The perception of threat is one of the most significant factor considered by the theory of realism and it has a major role to play in understanding Nepal and Bhutan relation with their respective neighbors. It is obvious that whenever a nation feels threatened by the other powerful nation it takes necessary measures to keep itself safe. This could have worked as a foundation of their choices in developing their relationship with their powerful neighbors. In order to investigate the threat perception, it is important to have the information about size measurement of both big and small states involved in the discussion here. In terms of China, “it stretches for about 3,250 miles (5,250 km) from east to west and 3,400 miles (5,500 km) from north to south” (Suzuki, et al., 2021). The size of China makes it the largest nation among all other Asian nation and also the most populated one (Suzuki, et al., 2021). And according to National portal of India, “India covers an area of 32, 87,263 sq.km extending from the snow-covered Himalayan heights to the tropical rain forests of the south” (India, n.d.). This size makes India stand as the 7<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world (India, n.d.).

Moreover, as per the AQUSTAT Survey report, the small country Bhutan geographically measures total area of 38,390 km<sup>2</sup> (FAO, 2011). The report further elaborates Bhutan geographic construction stating, “it shares 470km border with Tibet to north and northwest and 605 km with the Indian states of Sikkim to the west, West Bengal to the southwest, Assam to the south and southeast and Arunachal Pradesh to the east” (FAO, 2011). In other hand Nepal occupies the total area of 147,181 km<sup>2</sup> as per the information published in a website (Anon., n.d.).

Furthermore, “Nepal borders the Indian states of Uttarakhand in the west, Uttar Pradesh in the south, Bihar in the southeast and West Bengal and Sikkim in the east and shares border with Tibet in north” (Anon., n.d.). The idea behind presenting the size of all four states here is to understand the ground reality of the states involved in the comparison. It is also an attempt to understand how size and geographical construction can develop a feeling of fear and make small countries vulnerable in front of their powerful nations.

Furthermore, it is evident from the above mentioned information that Nepal and Bhutan are comparatively smaller than their neighbors in the geographical size. And both of them are completely squeezed between their powerful neighbors with no outlet to escape. Also, it has been observed number of times and experienced by many smaller countries, that a country which is bigger in size, always in a certain way intimidates them. Thus, the huge size of China and India can be a valid reason for Nepal and Bhutan to feel threatened and act in a certain manner which favors their neighbors. The natural bigger shape and size of India and China place them in a dominant position and gives them the power of control to much of an extent.

### **7.3.1 Bhutan’s threat perception**

Moreover, with size being a foundational factors, other events also have contributed in building threat in the mindset of Nepal and Bhutan. In consideration of Bhutan’s strategy it is clear that its threat perception needle is excessively tilted towards China which have made it join hands and establish firm relationship with India. The rise of Chinese political party PRC and its action have acted as a catalyst in driving Bhutan away from it and one of it being the invasion of Tibet. In reference to Bhawana Pokharana, Chinese have attempted multiple times to intervene Tibet during ancient and medieval times (Pokharna, 2009). Finally in the beginning of the year 1950 they announced the merger of Tibet in China and by the end of the year were successful in establishing their control over Tibet (Pokharna, 2009). In addition to this, Chinese state went a step further and published a map in “A Brief History of China” in 1954, where it laid its claim over Bhutan (Jha, 2013). Furthermore, “in 1958 China not only published another map claiming large tracts of Bhutanese land but also occupied about 300sq. miles of Bhutanese territory” (Jha, 2013). Bhutan became more skeptic and cautious over Chinese intention when China made a declaration stating that, “Bhutanese, Sikkimese and Ladakhis form a united family in Tibet” (Jha, 2013). Also, “they always have been subject to Tibet and to the great motherland of China” (Jha, 2013).

The territorial encroachment and aggressive expansionist attitude of China undoubtedly might have alarmed Bhutan. Bhutan at that time must have been concerned about the threat lingering over its sovereign status and also worried about facing the similar unfortunate fate like Tibet.

Besides, David's journal highlights the fact that Bhutan is emotionally attached to Tibet as they share religious and cultural heritage since the ancient time (Andelman, 2010). Due to this close attachment and deep regards and respect towards Buddhist heritage, Bhutan could not agree in China's occupation of Tibet (Andelman, 2010). Moreover, David elaborates Bhutan-Tibet relation as, "historically has been the closest country, with which there have been lot of differences but also lot of interaction" (Andelman, 2010). Bhutan and Tibet is not only connected with the cultural link but they also had been engaged in the exchange of trade between each other at older days (Sherpa, 2013/2014). In the above mentioned scenario the Chinese intervention of Tibet was definitely not welcomed by Bhutanese and also Chinese behavior was an alarming situation for them. The rising Chinese expansion did not only threaten their sovereignty but also was putting a risk upon their religious, cultural values. Bhutan must have perceived the Chinese power as threat to their identity along with their existence as independent nation.

On the other hand Bhutan was not skeptic about Indian attitude and intention, neither had it felt strong intimidation from Indian side. Despite India being multiple times bigger and resourceful than Bhutan, it felt joining hands with India was a wise choice. As India was willing to acknowledge Bhutan as an independent nation, gave Bhutan a comfortable space and also did not impose pressure over it. This behavior of India encouraged Bhutan to lower its guard and befriend India. In reference to Leo E. Rose, when the negotiation for a new treaty between independent India and Bhutan began, Bhutan came up with simple and straight forward demands (Rose, 1974). He further mentions that, in the new "Peace and Friendship Treaty" Bhutan wanted assurance from Indian side that it recognizes its independent status and also restore the Dewangiri hill strip on the frontier. (Rose, 1974). Moreover, India was receptive on both the issues and it came as a great sense of relief for Bhutan (Rose, 1974). In addition to this, as per the new treaty Bhutan not only got its demands fulfilled but also received an increment in the subsidy and they started receiving five lakh Indian rupee (Rose, 1974). Since the conception of the new treaty, to the present time Bhutan have always stood as a trustworthy ally of India.

Besides, Bhutan is directly connected to Sikkim by land and it had witnessed the procedure and measures taken by the then Indian government in order to bring Sikkim under its control (Rose, 1969). This incident might have given Bhutan the impression that India could also be an intimidating power. Bhutan was already being threatened by the vehement nature of Chinese power at that time and it was not in a position to encounter the Chinese force. In this situation, it would not have been wise for Bhutan to irk another power that surrounds it from all three sides. Also, during that period India was only an immediate savior for Bhutan, in case of China's invasion. At least India was extending a friendly hand without offending and undermining Bhutan's stature. Thus, in that complex scenario, Bhutanese authority conscience must have felt that the alignment with India was the only option left for their survival.

### **7.3.2 Nepal's threat perception**

As, Nepal have had maintained cordial relationship with both India and China calculating its threat perception might not be simply understood as of Bhutan. Given to the Nepal's vulnerable geostrategic position, the choice that it has made in maintain relationship with its two neighbors raises curiosity. Nepal and independent India began their bilateral relation after agreeing on the "Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950" (Thapa, 2010). But the twist here is that the treaty was signed between the Indian government and the then autocratic Rana rulers of Nepal and it is also claimed that the process was conducted in a very discreet manner (Subedi, 1994). The then Rana rulers were in their last days of their rule (Subedi, 1994) and in that desperation they agreed to whatever clauses were included in the treaty; in a mere hope that India would help them like British did in order to maintain their rule (Vashistha, 2003).

In reference to Chandra Prakash Singh, "during the Rana Oligarchy rule the king of Nepal remained de jure heads only and Ranas were the de facto rulers" (Singh, 2004). Furthermore, they have also given themselves hereditary title of Maharajas and forced Nepalese people under their dictatorship (Singh, 2004). Since, Ranas were able to take away power from the ruling monarch and enjoyed British India's leverages also, they were in no mood to give away their power position. But to their dismay, there came a surge of change in Nepal after the coronation of King Tribhuvan (also known as the father of the nation) who showed courage to voice against Rana rule and also commenced the anti-Rana movement (Singh, 2004).

In addition to this, other events that then followed after, such as the massive backlash from Nepalese people due to the people's revolution reaching to its prime, King Tribhuvan's flee to Indian Embassy seeking political asylum with his family, suddenly brought Nepal in the global news (Singh, 2004). These developments brought Ranas into difficult situation and as a last resort they agreed upon India's proposal of the continuation of friendship treaty that was earlier done with British India. The treaty was the only hope for Ranas to remain in power and were sure that aligning with independent India like they did with British India, will protect their rule. But, to their shock, India granted political asylum to King and later helped him to establish democracy in Nepal (Singh, 2004). Thus, it can be speculated that Nepal did not get a fair chance like Bhutan to put forward its concern and demands during the conception of the treaty. Therefore, there stands a very little chance that they might have perceived or evaluated any sort of possible threat at that the treaty could generate at that point of time.

Moreover, Nepal started to experience that Indian government had started to intervene in almost all the domestic affairs of Nepal after assisting Nepal in its freedom journey. For instance, "it was in practice that Indian ambassadors to Nepal had to attend the cabinet meeting and Govinda Narayan the home secretary of Uttar Pradesh was deployed as the special secretary of King Tribhuvan" (Baral, 2018). At that time Nepal was in a phase of transition and leaders had responsibility to institutionalize democracy and also they were not in the position to counter the intervention tactfully (Baral, 2018). In addition to this, Dhurba Raj Adhikari mentions that, in an individual level King Tribhuvan and Nepali congress leaders always felt a sense of indebtedness towards India for their help in establishing democracy in Nepal, therefore, there were no firm objections raised against this openly practiced Indian interference (Adhikari, 2018).

Moreover, Nepal not only had to institutionalize the democracy but also had nation building task in hand and it was a massive challenge for Nepal as it lacked the necessary resources and expertise for the process. According to Dhurba Raj Adhikari's journal, "the modernization of bureaucracy, security agencies and the government was proving to be herculean task for the new establishment" (Adhikari, 2018). Also, "the state was not able to monopolize the legitimacy use of political violence within its territory" (Adhikari, 2018). At that time Nepal did not have strong and skilled military force due to which it had to seek India's help to suppress rebellions like KI Singh and Bhim Datta Panta in the Western Nepal (Adhikari, 2018).

Furthermore, some elites of Nepal were suspicious about China's intention after Tibet annexation, which also worked as a driving force for Nepal to build proximity with India (Adhikari, 2018). These incidents and Nepal's weak position allowed India to openly channelize its power and take Nepal under its firm grip.

In addition to this Nepal had witnessed how Indian government had succeeded to merge Sikkim in India, which once used to be in Nepal's possession. And also Nepal was experiencing India's presence and influence not only in the royal palace but also in the domestic politics. In regard to this Pashupati J.B. Rana writes that, "in 1947 when the British handed over the reins of government to independent India, the latter expected to succeed to Britain's dominating influence over Nepalese affairs" (Rana, 1971). These incidents were enough to alarm any farsighted ruler about the potential threat it could possess for the country in the future. The then crown prince Mahendra was aware of this happenings and he ensured that Nepal comes out of this web of interference. And immediately after his coronation he tried to unleash Nepal from Indian threat by extending a friendly relation with China (Baral, 2018). He further assured Nepal's sovereign status by taking the membership of UN (Baral, 2018).

Along with this an event in history where Nepal had invaded Tibet and made it sign, "Treaty of Kerung" according to which Tibet had to pay yearly tribute to Nepal (Adhikari, 2018), suggests Nepal-Tibet relation. Tibet refused to do so after a year and demanded Nepal to end the treaty but Nepal in response attacked and looted the monasteries of Tibet (Adhikari, 2018). In request from Tibet, China came in their rescue and defeated Nepal in the war of 1792 (Adhikari, 2018). This encounter definitely had made Nepal realize China's mighty power and also understood that China could be a possible threat for Nepal. Also, Nepal once having invaded Tibet probably did not hold any sort of emotional connection with Tibet like Bhutan does, due to which it readily accepted Chinese suzerainty over Tibet. Furthermore, Nepal till present have shown its solidarity over China's "One China policy" and has never allowed its soil to be used against any hostile anti-Chinese activities (Dahal, 2018).

Moreover, it can be seen that the Nepal was threatened from both of its neighbor, however the threat from one side was more prevalent, gripping and increasing gradually than the other one. And given to the intricate relation between India and Nepal, and also Nepal was hugely dependent over India for trade and transit, keeping India completely out of the scene would have proven disastrous for Nepal. Also, Nepal knew that India is strong enough to overpower Nepal but still Nepal needed to do something to be able to run itself independently and at that time, there entered China. T.R. Ghoble writes that, king of Nepal was aware of the fact that India could solely help in its economic journey but its intention on extending friendship with China was to use it, “as a corrective to India’s overbearing attitude” (T.R.GHOBLE, 1992). Nepal’s strategic move appears to have been taken with an intention to keep the possible threat form its neighbor away, by keeping its both neighbors close to it.

## **8. Limitations of Realism and the need for other Perspectives**

The philosophy of realism discussed assists to unravel a kind of behavior and attribute that a powerful state possibly portrays while dealing with its comparatively smaller neighbors. In case of both bulky states China and India the motive of relationship building is apparently based on their self-serving. Both of these ancient civilization and promisingly rising powers have demonstrated a similar motive and strategy in terms of pursuing their affiliation with their smaller neighbors. Both of them clearly want to keep these smaller neighbors under their own radar of influence by whichever means possible. This similar strategic approach has brought them within the explanatory periphery of realism theory.

Moreover, the strategic approach of small states Nepal and Bhutan in terms of managing their relationship with their powerful neighbors is not same. Despite being in similar structural situation, have poor economic condition, no powerful government, limited resources and are also highly dependent on one of the big neighbors, their methodology is different. And this particular distinction is difficult to be comprehended if it is only perceived through the lens of classical and structural realism. Because, in accordance to Donnelly, “purely structural theory, no matter how sophisticated, rarely produces sufficiently determinate predictions to offer adequate understanding” (Donnelly, 2013). He further mentions that, “states often react differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities, and their responses may be less motivated by systemic-level factors than domestic ones” (Donnelly, 2013). This suggests that there is a probability that a state is guided by other factors and it motivates them to behave in either a typically expected or at times in an unexpected manner. Thus, “realist, therefore, must ‘open up’ the state, which in structural theories is treated as a ‘black box’ (Donnelly, 2013). This thought process advocates that the realists need to stretch their boundary of study areas, and explore the aspects that they have presumed to be insignificant. Though this aspect is being considered in the recent work of realism study but still has not been developed in in-depth evaluation and study. Thus, it can be said that due to this limitation in realism theory, Nepal and Bhutan’s difference in strategic approach cannot be analyzed solely with it.

## **9. An Empirical analysis of the four themes**

The above information on the perception of threat alone is not sufficient to explain the difference in the strategies, therefore, it demands for a different approach in analysis. And in order to fulfill the demand raised, an approach of comparative analysis of the empirical factors is pursued further in this research paper. In application of comparative method, here few possible aspects of both Nepal and Bhutan will be analyzed further, in order to understand the strategic difference exhibited by these small nations. And the paper anticipates that the puzzle that has been built due to their choice of strategies like bandwagoning and balance respectively, probably could be comprehended with these aspects in discussion below:

### **9.1 History**

The comparison of events in the history in some ways places Nepal and Bhutan in same page and it might offer some amount of explanation in order to comprehend their individual strategic choices. The journey of Nepal and Bhutan in becoming a one solid nation is almost similar. In regard to Nepal, King P.N. Shah from the then Gorkha kingdom of Nepal, unified other scattered small principalities of Nepal into one single nation (Baral, 2020). Likewise, in Bhutan Jigme Namgyal took the initiative to end the internal conflict of Bhutan and gave it a shape of one united nation and therefore, he is also known as the father of united Bhutan (Wangchuk, 2016), after which it can be said Bhutan was brought into one monarchical solidarity. Thus, this both country had established itself as a sovereign entity under the rule of monarch in history. The another most vital event in the history is the emergence of British India in the scene. Both Bhutan and Nepal had encountered and confronted British India's attack but unfortunately had to accept the loss in front of British India's military might. But the fact cannot be denied that both the nations had praiseworthy warriors who stood their head held high in front of a powerful enemy.

Bhutan's loss in the battle was followed by a "SINCHULA TREATY-1865" as per which Bhutan had to compromise its control over some of its significant territory possession, in return of yearly subsidy of fifty thousand rupee (Wangchuk, 2016). British India's dominance went to an extent of making Bhutan sign "Punakha Treaty" (Penjore, 2004), and curtailed Bhutan's rights to practice diplomatic relation as a sovereign nation with other nations, unless British government's would give them consent to do so. Similarly, in the context of Nepal, though it fought as bravely as Bhutan did, but ultimately lost the battle against the resourceful British India.

As the consequences of the loss Nepal was forced to sign the embarrassing “SUGAULI TREATY-1816” (Thapa, 2010). This unequal treaty made Nepal lose its territory that included, “whole of Sikkim to the east, Darjeeling to south-east, Nainital to the south-west and Kumaon and Garhwali to the west” (Thakur & Sahani, 2018).

In addition to this a political change in Nepal in the year 1846, shifted the power of governance from ruling monarch to the then prime minister Junga Bahadur Rana (Vashistha, 2003). The internal conflict in persuasion of power continuously threaten the rule of Ranas at that time. This situation of friction in domestic politic made Ranas to align with the British India which later extended to “Peace and Friendship Treaty-1923” and with this British India also acknowledged the independent status of Nepal (Thapa, 2010). Nepal was forced into accepting British suzerainty at the beginning but later Rana rule willingly chose to bandwagon with British rule for their personal interest. The Ranas’ primary concern was only to sustain itself in the power and ensure no other voices or power threatens their position. While on the other hand Bhutan being a small country also had no other choice then to surrender in front of British rule. It can be seen that no matter what the background scenario was, both the nation had either willingly or forcefully accepted to bandwagon with the British rule then. Though the events in history works as a foundation in constructing the current relationship between Nepal-India and Bhutan-India, it does not provide any concrete explanation to the strategic choices made by small nations.

## **9.2 Culture and Religious values**

The culture and religious values are among the most vital factor that builds the foundation of a society and a nation. They are deeply rooted in a conscience of an individual living in that particular space and thus have a direct influence over people’s thought process. The scholars who study about culture have tried to understand it through different definitions and among them this paper have chosen to understand it form Antonio Lebron’s perspective. According to him “culture refers to society and its way of life” (Lebron, 2013). He further mentions, “It is defined as a set of values and beliefs, or a cluster of learned behaviors that we share with others in a particular society, giving us a sense of belongingness and identity” (Lebron, 2013). In general it is a process according to which, the members of a certain society and nation chose to function their daily lives.

The term religion can be understood as a part of cultural practice of a society, in other words a subset of culture. In superficial understanding religion is a practice of having faith over a supreme entity who possess supernatural powers and also considered as a creator and protector of the world. As it is a vague concept, explaining it in a single concrete definition is not possible. However, as per Georgios Gaitanos, one way of defining it is, “a system of beliefs and practices that relate to supernatural beings and are intended to organize and define the environment in which the religious community operates” (Gaitanos, 2019). These two concepts are the integral part of civilized human life and people with similar cultural and religious belief find it easy to connect with each other. Therefore, these two concepts are included here as parameters of analysis, with an anticipation that they might assist to understand the strategic choices made by Nepal and Bhutan in regard to their respective bigger neighbors.

### **9.2.1 Finding of Culture and Religious Value of Bhutan**

The small nation Bhutan is known for its serene beauty. Furthermore, Dorji writes, “culture and religion can be considered as the cornerstone of Bhutan’s national identity” (Wangchuk, 2016). In addition to this, it also believes that due to culture and religion they have been able to survive as a sovereign state despite several turbulences during different times (Wangchuk, 2016). In the ancient time before Guru Padmasambhava from India introduced Buddhism in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Bhutan used to practice “Ponism”, under which they used to worship the nature (Kharat, 2005). According to the religion it was believed that the source of human misery was the evil forces and could be terminated only with the constant worship of nature (Kharat, 2005). Therefore, the religion was practiced with elaborate mode of ceremonies connected with nature worship (Kharat, 2005). However, “over the years these rituals were superseded and suppressed by the impact of Buddhism” (Kharat, 2005).

In the present time, the state follows ‘kargyu’- a sect of the Mahayana Buddhism as their religion (Dorji, 1997). And also along with this ‘Nyingma’-another sect is also followed widely by the people residing in the eastern part of Bhutan (Dorji, 1997). Bhutanese people life is mostly guided by the teachings and learnings of their religious beliefs, which is why they try to live according to the principles of Buddhism that preaches non-violence, compassion and tolerance (Dorji, 1997). It is also important to know that in Bhutan religion holds the most pious, significant and dominant position (Kharat, 2005).

And it can be seen from a factual instance that happened on 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1968, when the King of Bhutan asked all Lamas to pray for good weather and safe landing of Mrs Indira Gandhi's (the then India's Prime Minister) first official visit to Bhutan (Kharat, 2005).

In addition to this, in order to ensure the cultural integrity of Bhutan, "in 1990s, the king of Bhutan brought a policy of 'Drilaham Namzha', as per which the ideology of 'One Nation. One People' was introduced" (Kharat, 2001). This policy enforced the code of conduct for Bhutanese people in terms of language, religion and dress (Kharat, 2001). This policy was implemented in order to preserve the cultural aesthetics of Bhutan, that distinguishes it from other culture and country (Kharat, 2001). Bhutan's government believed that incorporation of culture in the policy would bring everyone under the umbrella of homogeneity and can establish harmony (Kharat, 2001). Furthermore, Bhutan's present culture has many borrowed elements from its northern and southern neighbors and it has been able to preserve it and keep it unchanged so far (Dorji, 1997). Though Bhutan is connecting to the modern world it has not abandoned its cultural and religious roots.

### **9.2.2 Findings on Culture and Religious Value of China**

In regard to China, "it is one of the world's oldest civilizations with a splendid culture" (Fang, 2014). Along with this, "Chinese believe that not only the positives and the negatives can coexist but they can give rise to each other and transform into each other given situation, context and time" (Fang, 2014). Which is to say, "Chinese culture is both collectivist and individualist, both traditional and modern, both long-term and short-term, both reserved and expressive, and both Communist and Capitalist, all depending on situation, context, and time (Fang, 2014). In regard to the religion, China has witnessed various changes in the religious perception and practice since ancient age to the modern era (Palmer, 2011). China has been home to many religious beliefs ranging from communal religion, Buddhism and Daoism, Islam and Christianity (Palmer, 2011). Furthermore, "China has no dominant religious orthodoxy as state policy has kept religious institutions weak" (Palmer, 2011). Though there is religious diversity in China, a part of it widely known as Tibet practices and holds belief in Buddhism teachings. According to Lobsang Gelek, "Tibetan people practice a religion known as Lamaism, which is actually a branch of the school of Mahayana Buddhism" (Gelek, 2002). However, "Buddhism was introduced into Tibet from India, China and eastern Turkestan during the seventh century" (Gelek, 2002). This similarity in religious belief is one of the reason that Bhutan feels itself strongly connected with Tibet.

### **9.2.3 Findings on Culture and Religious value of India**

After China, India is the largest population and as Samirah Majumdar writes, “India is a religiously pluralistic and multiethnic democracy” (Majumdar, 2018). Moreover, “India’s religious tapestry has shrinking Hindus, expanding Muslims, and almost stagnant Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Jain religion” (Singh, 2019). And in this heterogeneous religious composition, 80% is occupied by the followers of Hinduism followed by Muslim and followers of other religion (Singh, 2019). In India religion is widely prevalent in the politics. Religious values and sentiments have been used multiple times to create chaos and also to pursue political party’s agenda.

In reference to Milan Vaishnav, “the political manifestation of Hindutva [Hinduism], dates back to Hindu reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj (1828) and the Arya Samaj (1875)” (Vaishnav, 2019). And the concept of Hindu nationalism is seen more prevalent after the Bharitya Janta Party (BJP)’s government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, came to the power (Vaishnav, 2019). Along with richness and diversified religion, India is equally rich in its cultural aspect. In reference to Hitesh Mohapatra, “India is an amalgamation of various thoughts and ideologies” (Mohapatra, 2019). Furthermore, “it is very vast and varied culture rich in knowledge, devotion deeds, emotions and feelings” (Mohapatra, 2019).

In addition to this, Indian culture has the feature of longevity and continuity, believes in unity in diversity, consists of mutual understanding and tolerance, merge of spirituality and materialism (Mohapatra, 2019). Besides, India also has the 4000 years of philosophical and cultural development that dates back to early Aryan civilization (Mohapatra, 2019). This shows that India has its cultural values deeply rooted in the life of people daily lifestyle. India’s cultural and religious teachings have made it a kind of country, which warmly welcomes and incorporates diverse thought and also respects every religion’s faith and values.

#### **9.2.4 Findings on Culture and Religious value of Nepal**

Nepal and India are similar in terms of cultural construction and religious heterogeneity. In reference to Dipak Panta, “Nepal has been big or small, compact or fragmented in different historical periods” (Panta, 2004). Due to this reason Nepal has been home to varied cultural practices (Panta, 2004). Furthermore, after the unification of Nepal by Gorkhali king Prithivi Narayan Shah, practice of Hinduism was widespread (Panta, 2004). Though this religious belief then did not have any influence in the political realm, it created a sense of unity among the indigenous people of Nepal to unite against the Muslim and western conquest happening at that time (Panta, 2004). Therefore, Hinduism which was practiced since long time in Nepal along with other indigenous religious practices, became the religious identity of the nation.

According to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the census of 2011 have reported ten religious categories and according to it the maximum number is of Hindu with 81.3% and Buddhism is practiced by 9% and remaining percentage are distributed among Islam, Kirat, Chritian, Prakirti, Bon, Jain, Bahai and Sikh respectively (MOFA, n.d.). This demonstrates that Nepal is receptive towards every religious ideology and practices religious harmony. Furthermore, “since ancient time Nepal has been characterized as a meeting place for many groups, religions, races and cultures” (Wasti, et al., 2011). This peculiar characteristic of Nepal makes it a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual society. Nepal takes great pride in its culture and religion and this diverse cultural beauty has assisted in the tourism sector of Nepal and also contributed in its economy. Despite the fact that Nepal is sensitive towards it cultural practices and religious beliefs it has not been extensively politicized as in India.

### **9.2.5 Comparative Analysis and Discussion**

The above mentioned information shows that except for Bhutan, prevalence of varied culture, tradition, norms, customs and religion is widespread in other three nations. Bhutan has restricted itself in a cocoon of one particular religious belief and also have had stagnant cultural practice since ages. For Bhutanese people Lhasa, Tibet used to be the main pilgrim center but after China's annexation of Tibet, Bhutanese people were deprived access to their holy place (Dorji, 1997). Bhutan's emotional attachment and solidarity towards Tibet and Buddhism, and also China's inconsiderate attitude towards religion might also have been a reason for Bhutan to distrust China at that time. However, Bhutanese dedicated adherence to Buddhism contradicts their history of fierce warriors who have not only fought their domestic battles but also have faced the mighty military force of British India.

Besides, Bhutan's religious sentiments are strongly connected with India, as a saint from India had brought Buddhism in Bhutan (Dorji, 1997). A place in India known as 'Bodagaya' is a sacred place for Bhutanese because Gautama Buddha (supreme deity in Buddhism) was enlightened there (Dorji, 1997). And India had incorporated many religions along with Hinduism and the values of Buddhism are also immensely respected there. The similarity in religious belief, could had been one of the probable reasons for Bhutan to develop a trust towards Indian government. China at that time was showing extreme imperialistic behavior and was also insensitive towards the religious belief of Bhutanese people. Given to these circumstances it can be assumed that the similarity in the religion, and inclusive cultural attribute of India might have played a vital role in attracting Bhutan in its periphery of influence.

Nevertheless, this same logic is not applicable in explaining the mannerism that Nepal exhibits while dealing with its neighboring countries. Though initially Nepal complied with India but soon it changed its strategy and showed its interest in establishing relation with China as well. In the context of religion and cultural practice, Nepal and India are largely interconnected and almost inseparable. And if this to be considered as a parameter for developing trust and relationship then it does not apply in case of Nepal, as it has not solely aligned itself with India. Both the nations preach and practice Hinduism learnings along with other religion. The majority of Indian practicing Hinduism believe Nepal as a pious land, filled with Hindu deities and temples of religious significance and same belief is held by Nepalese Hindus regarding India.

Thus both of them receive religious tourist annually from their respective neighbors. This cultural assimilation establishes an intricate and unique relationship among these two nations. Despite the fact that the maximum people of both the nation follow Hinduism as their religion and considered each other's land as religiously sacred place, Nepal did not chose to align with India like Bhutan. Nepal did not seem to feel the assurance that the cultural proximity with India will be a contributing factor to help them establish themselves as an independently functioning nation.

In addition to this, two countries with similar cultural foundations are likely to mingle organically but that did not completely happened in the case of Nepal and India. The cultural integration between two nations rather developed a complicated relationship between them. Nepal also had have cultural connection with China since the ancient times which still continues, however, it had not brewed as deeply as it has with India. As Nepal has cultural relationship with both the huge powers it chose to further strengthen the bond with both its neighbors. All this considered, the religion and culture factor to an extent gives a space where once can assume that cultural attribute could be a guiding force for Bhutan to choose the alignment strategy but it fails to justify Nepal's approach of balance.

### **9.3 Foreign Policies**

The term foreign policies has already been mentioned and discussed in the earlier section of this paper, and with the previous understanding it has been clear that this particular subject matter is requisite to fathom relationship between countries. And this significant feature of foreign policies, makes it a potentially essential part of analysis, which could explain in comprehending the small countries relationship pattern with their bigger neighbors. Before dwelling in depth with the topic, it would be practical to have a quick recap about the definition of the topic that is going to be one of the parameters of comparison between Nepal and Bhutan, in regard to their gigantic neighbors. In reference to Jesmine Ahmed, "foreign policies are the strategies, methods, guidelines, agreements that usually national governments use to perform their actions in the international arena" (Ahmed, 2020). Furthermore, "it is a direct reflection of a country's traditional values and overall national policies, her aspirations and self-perception" (Ahmed, 2020). Thus, this definition to the much of an extent, justifies that the inclusion of this topic has the probability to produce some valuable result, which would possibly help to solve the puzzle.

### **9.3.1 Findings on Nepal's foreign policy**

The current foreign policy of Nepal according to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is, “The fundamental objective of Nepal’s foreign policy is to enhance the dignity of the nation by safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and promoting economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nepal. It is also aimed at contributing to global peace, harmony and security (MOFA, n.d.). However, the foreign policy of Nepal has witnessed remarkable changes from the time of unification to the present day, which will be discussed further below.

It has already been mentioned that the modern architect of Nepal was made possible after series of invasion of small princely states by Gorkha King P.N. Shah. His imperialist strategy was further carried forward by his successors and as a result Nepal geographical territory extended from “kangra in the west to Tista in the east” by the first decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century (Adhikari, 2018). P.N Shah in his unification endeavor had defeated British troop that intended to assist the then king of Kathmandu (Kafle, 2008). P.N.Shah knew that British India’s expansion would be a threat to Nepal’s sovereignty, so he opted for an “isolation policy” (Kafle, 2008). Since total cut-off was not possible because of the geographical proximity, he maintained diplomatic relation but restrained commercial transaction with British India (Kafle, 2008). Another effective policy he implemented was of “defense and opposition” policy under which Nepal would only confront British India if the latter attacked (Kafle, 2008). Shah had also paved the path of expansion of surrounding small state cautiously without irking China and British India (Adhikari, 2018). During this time the monarch had implemented an effective foreign policy which not only ensured Nepal’s sovereign status but has drilled the significance of self-sufficiency in the mindset of people.

Furthermore, dramatically a power switch happened in Nepal where Ranas imposed a dictatorship and took away the power to rule from Nepal’s monarch. Though at that time Ranas were apprehensive about British India’s increasing involvement in Nepal’s political affairs, still they chose the pro-British policy (Vashistha, 2003). Rana’s leader Junga Bahadur Rana in an attempt to keep British India at the bay applied the policy of “restrictive intercourse and friendly isolation” (Vashistha, 2003). He was not skeptic like previous rulers in terms of commercial ties with British India but was keen to monopolize Indo-Nepalese trade (Vashistha, 2003).

Due to Rana rulers' shortsighted vision and selfishness, the independent India was not hesitant about exercising its power imposition similarly like British India over Nepal in coming days, because Ranas happily aligned their foreign policy as per India's choice.

In addition to this, it is also known that even after the establishment of democratic regime in Nepal, it was excessively facing Indian dominance in regard to its domestic politics and in its external relationship. Indian government then had curtailed Nepal's multiple attempt of diversifying its foreign relation (Adhikari, 2018). For instance, Nepal under the Indian government's pressure was forced to decline US government's request to establish an embassy in Nepal in the year 1951 (Feer, 1953). In addition to this, a similar proposal forwarded by the Chinese government was turned down by Nepalese authority because of the Indian government's behest (Adhikari, 2018).

Moreover, according to Warner Levi, the "Friendship Treaty" that independent India had curated and proudly claimed to provide equal status for both the signatories had many clauses that matched with the treaty that British India had slapped on the face of Nepal in the year 1923 (Levi, 1957). Furthermore, Indian governance had penetrated real deep in Nepalese internal system during that period of time. Some of the events and activities of that period can be seen as open intrusion of Indian authority in Nepalese soil. For instance, "India was visibly active and involved during the nomination of the prime ministers in the short lived consecutive government" (Adhikari, 2018). It even stretched its authority over Nepal by posting Indian Security agencies in the Northern border of Nepal (Adhikari, 2018). India's authoritarian attitude had no sign of backing off which eventually started fueling Nepalese mind with resentment against Indian government. All these cumulative activities by the Indian authority reached to a boiling point after which Nepal was forced to rethink its status in the bilateral relationship between itself and India.

Additionally, the changes in the regional politics then, which brought India and PRC together in signing an agreement regarding Tibet and also formulated the principles of 'Panchasheel' for the first time; came as an opportunity for Nepal to reestablish its diplomatic ties with China (Adhikari, 2018). After this success Nepal further went ahead and secured its diplomatic relation with USA by signing treaty of friendship and commerce (Adhikari, 2018). Nepal did not stop here, it went on establishing relationship with country like German followed by 55 other countries at that time, which was a huge achievement for a country like Nepal (Adhikari, 2018).

In the present context Nepal has been successful in developing diplomatic relationship with 144 countries (Adhikari, 2018).

In addition to this, some incidents in past like, Nepal was able to resolve the issue regarding Mt. Everest with China in its own favor, and was successful in registering protest for border transgression by People's Liberation Army and also received an apology from Chinese side in the 1960s; are some examples that shows the efficiency of Nepalese diplomacy with its northern neighbors (S.D.Muni, 2016). In the due course of time Nepal has been seen attempting different techniques while pursuing their foreign policies. It had opted for Non-alignment policy during cold war era, then in order to be assured its safety opted to establish itself as a peace zone nation, followed by equiproximity and at the present scenario Nepal is aspiring to implement the concept in Trilateralism, in conducting its foreign policy with India and China. These changes in the foreign policies of Nepal have occurred in accordance to the changes in the regional politics and in the global scenario. Nepal has not been stagnant and rigid in the conduct of its foreign policy, which have actually assisted it in securing an independent status in the global map.

### **9.3.2 Findings on Bhutan's foreign policy**

The current foreign policy of Bhutan according to Ministry of Foreign Affairs Royal Government of Bhutan, is "a principle of state policy, the Royal Government of Bhutan strives to promote goodwill and cooperation with nations, foster respect for international law and treaty obligations, and encourage settlement of international disputes by peaceful means in order to promote international peace and security" (RoGB, n.d.). Bhutan opened itself lately towards the modern world and have made gradual change in its foreign policy, since the days of its emergence as a united Bhutan.

It has already been discussed that due to the reason of China's land encroachment in the past and persisting border dispute, Bhutan has restricted itself from establishing bilateral relationship with China. On the other hand, the other big neighbor India has shown the interest of friendship and also keen to assist Bhutan in its journey of modernization. As Bhutan could not afford to irk both its neighbor at once, it chose to align its foreign policy with India, which appeared to be a better option at that point of time. In reference to Leo E. Rose, Bhutan's alignment with India generated numerous economic aid agreements between the two countries during 1959-60s (Rose, 1974).

With the Indian aid and initiation, a direct road linking the central Bhutan with India was constructed (Rose, 1974). Furthermore, in 1961 the Bhutanese authority formally allowed the Indian Army to conduct training program for Bhutanese soldiers (Rose, 1974).

The treaty of friendship brought economic benefit in one hand but in other brought an obligation to consider Indian guidance, to say it more precisely ask for consent before extending its friendship with other nations. However, despite having a closed association with India, Bhutan stuck with the “neutrality policy” or “non-aligned policy” as it thought that would not challenge its security during cold war era (Kharat, 2005).

In addition to this, Bhutan’s belief on Buddhism have encouraged it to incorporate “Non-violence” as one of its significant feature in its foreign policy (Kharat, 2005). According to Rajesh S. Kharat, “the religious belief of Bhutan has become an important factor both in the domestic sphere and at the international sphere” (Kharat, 2005). He further mentions, “in domestic level it maintains the separate identity, values, traditions, and develops the feeling of oneness in Bhutanese society” (Kharat, 2005) . And, “at the international level, Bhutan is able to establish a cordial link with other Buddhist countries, Japan and China and other South East Asian countries” (Kharat, 2005). He argues that, “for a small and weak state like Bhutan, religious identity has become an important asset in its external policy manipulations (Kharat, 2005). The use of religion in marinating relationship with other alike minded nations is an interesting feature of Bhutanese policy.

Also, it has strongly abided by the “Panchasheel- five principles of morality and co-existence” with other countries in the world (Kharat, 2005). It can be seen that during the end of 1970s, Bhutan’s foreign policy was guided with the motive of wider recognition, as it took steps to diversify its external relationship beyond India (Kharat, 2005). Furthermore, with the support of India, Bhutan extended a cordial relation with the outer world and its admission to UN succeed it to ensure its independence and sovereign status globally (Kharat, 2005). Along with this it also made itself visible and heard in the platform like SAARC, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and sought economic assistance from international organization like UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO ,ILO, IMF and from other countries like Japan, Sweden and so on (Kharat, 2005). Thus the parameter upon which the Bhutan’s foreign policy is based can be viewed can be broadly classified under three sections- “a) internal consolidation, b) gradual extension of diplomatic and economic relations and c) active involvement with non-controversial regional forums” (Kharat, 2005).

Bhutan took its sweet time to come out of its cocoon and join itself with the interdependent global village. And most importantly it has ensured not to disappoint India, in its process of diversifying its external relationship. Therefore, with all its other bilateral relation it had very minimal interaction and also their involvement, contribution and penetration was almost nominal in comparison with to the Indian government.

Besides, the treaty between India and Bhutan which acts as a foundation of their relationship has actually clawed Bhutan in the area of it foreign policy, because according to it Royal Government of Bhutan could not conduct their foreign policy without India's guidance. There have been instances when India has smartly manipulated Bhutan agreeing to Indian government's terms and condition while conducting their foreign policy. In regard to this, L.K. Choudhary in his journal has stated that, once in past when Bhutan had a desire to conduct its foreign relations independently, India then alarmed king of Bhutan that such desire would draw country into vortex of politics (Choudhary, 2005). Moreover, when the same issue was discussed in the National Assembly of Bhutan everyone agreed to abide by the advice of the then Indian Prime Minister Nehru and chose to be under Indian guidance for their external relation matters (Choudhary, 2005).

In addition to this, when the then Indian Prime Minister Nehru declared that any attacks and hostility against Nepal and Bhutan would be considered as attack to India, Nepal showed some hesitations publically against this statement, but Bhutan readily accepted it without any doubts, objections and concerns (Rose, 1974). This particular incident can be taken as an example to understand the control of Indian government over Bhutanese government and Bhutanese believe over its proclaimed benevolent friend. Furthermore, Bhutan's decision to accept an Indian advisor in order to assist the then Prime Minister Jigme Dorji in 1963, indicates the depth of relationship between India and Bhutan (Rose, 1974). Bhutan agreed to the appointment of Indian personnel known as Nari Rustomji, who worked as king's consultant and also as a channel of communication between two governments (Rose, 1974). Moreover, Nari Rustomji was trusted by the Bhutanese Prime Minister then and as he was appointed by the Indian authority, he had direct involvement in Bhutan's decision making process (Rose, 1974). Though the voice of resentment was heard in the elite circle of Bhutan about the appointment and over indulgence of Indian authority, Bhutanese King made sure they were subsided as he did not want to upset India (Rose, 1974).

Additionally, for longer period of time Bhutan continued to function according to the obligation listed in the treaty of friendship in regard to their external relationship. But in the year 2007, Bhutan took an initiative to make an amendments in the treaty of friendship with India, and the amendment assured Bhutan's freedom in conducting its foreign relations. The updated India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty was signed on February 2007 between Pranab Mukherjee, the then India's Minister of External Affairs and Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk, the then Crown Prince and now King of Bhutan (Malik & Sheikh, 2016). This amendment brought two significant changes, among which one was the reformulation of Article 2 (Malik & Sheikh, 2016). The agreement to reformulate the article took away the obligation for Bhutanese government to seek the guidance and consent of Indian government to conduct its foreign relations (Malik & Sheikh, 2016).

Along with this, the Article 4 of the amended treaty allowed Bhutan to import arms, immunities, etc. which are essential to strengthen the security of Bhutan in consultation of India (Malik & Sheikh, 2016). The initiation of Bhutanese authority to amend the treaty has, to some extent attempted to bring them to an equal status with their friend India and it can also be evaluated as Bhutan's endeavor to unshackle itself from India's imperialistic attitude. Also, this step has, "laid the basis for a relationship that is responsive to each other's national interests, a relation that is consultative and relation that assures mutually beneficial co-operation" (Malik & Sheikh, 2016).

### **9.3.3 Comparative Analysis and Discussion**

When we look at the beginning of the formal foreign policy practice of Bhutan and Nepal which is after the colonial era, it becomes clear that both the nation's foreign policy was exponentially influenced or more precisely dominated by the then Indian government. And their other neighbor China, especially in the case of Bhutan was forced to make any sort of communication only via Indian government. However, the government of Nepal had taken an initiative to break the thread of influence to a larger extent by independently expanding its foreign relation. On the other hand Bhutan has continued to cling to the thread for longer period of time, though in recent years it has shown some degree of change in order to break the continuity.

Moreover, the over involving and over controlling attitude of Indian government at that time was crippling the officials of both Nepal and Bhutan and restricting them to function independently. The result of Sino-Indian war (where India lost to China) probably have been a reason for India to assume that the necessity to hold its grip over its Himalayan Frontiers (Nepal and Bhutan) is more than before. And for the small countries, the after math of war might have forced them to reconsider their choices. The other power (Chinese power) in the region turned out to be a balancing factor against hegemonic attitude of India, in context of Nepal.

But the interesting thing is that Bhutan did not feel India's presence and strong influence in all its decision making process as India's hegemonic practice. Despite having to endure the same fate like that of Nepal in regard to the nation's foreign policy, Bhutan continued to adhere to India. Bhutan does not seem to let go the feeling of gratitude even after the fact that Indian government's presence is not allowing them to take independent decision in its own nation's important matters, for example on the issue of border dispute with China. Nepal's approach to take its foreign relations decision independently is justifiable as every nation wants to function in its own desired manner. But Bhutan continuation of being under powerful nations shadow and functioning according to its desire contradicts with the Bhutan's wish to establish itself as a sovereign nation. And also it is difficult to find a concrete answer for Bhutan's behavior, as it does not come clear whether its behavior is motivated by gratitude towards India, or due to feeling of threat from China or its inability to formulate a strong policy in making other nations as its trusted allies, or it still does not want to explore beyond its presumed safe bubble.

## **9.4 Political Environment or Domestic politics**

After the attempt to analyze the topic of foreign policy in pursuit of generating a reasonable explanation about the puzzle being discussed here, it becomes extremely important to understand the domestic political environment as well. It is so because domestic politics makes policies that contributes in the smooth functioning of a state and along with that also decides on the foreign policies. Since, the foreign policy is considered as one of the parameter of analysis in the paper, the governing bodies or domestic politics of a nation, which creates the policies also needs to be examined. Furthermore, the domestic politics and the foreign policies have influence over each other. Which is to say, “the political environment of a country includes all laws, government agencies, and lobbying group that influence or restrict individuals or organizations in the society” (Hussain, 2011).

Also, “all the national and international decisions taken by the head of the government depends on domestic politics (Hussain, 2011). Therefore, “the national leaders especially the head of the government has to play a two level game between international and domestic politics (Hussain, 2011). Thus, the above information establishes the link between domestic politics and foreign policies, and makes the term domestic politics an eligible factor in analyzing the Nepal and Bhutan’s approach respectively.

In doing so, this section will try to present the information regarding the present as well as the domestic politics of the time when Nepal and Bhutan made their strategic choice in pursuing their relationship with their bigger neighbors.

### **9.4.1 Domestic Politics of Nepal**

The current domestic politics of Nepal is in total chaotic situation and its unstable condition is not only disappointing but scary as well. During the time of global pandemic everyone is scared, and thriving to survive, and Nepalese people are of no exception. The disastrous situation faced by India due to Covid-19 second wave outbreak, has now found its place in Nepal as well. As per Ben Weissenbach, in comparison to India’s per capita death rate during the second wave of Corona, Nepal has surpassed it and the mortality rate is increasing (Weissenbach, 2021). He further mentions that the death rate of Nepal represent 52% increase over the previous daily high and the bent in the curve is nowhere near (Weissenbach, 2021).

Nepal is bound to face this situation as tens of thousands of migrant workers have travelled back to north of Nepal from India's 1,100 mile open border and have also brought the highly contagious virus with them (Weissenbach, 2021). And the tragedy is that Nepal is highly dependent over India for almost all of its medical resources and currently India itself is facing stressful situation due to Corona crisis; which has made Nepal to face desperate shortages of oxygen, ventilators and other critical equipment (Weissenbach, 2021). The medical personnel along with the help of commoners are trying to fight the virus induced situation, but with the paralyzed health infrastructure, ignorant government, absence of regulating bodies, is a herculean task; and if the situation persist it will sadly turn into a losing battle.

Moreover, in this pathetic situation where all citizens are in pain and despair, Prime minister K.P. Sharma Oli's has asked the citizens not to fear the deadly virus as it can be fought by consuming hot water, guava leaves and turmeric powder (Pasricha, 2021). This statement of nation's head shows the government's negligence towards its citizen and also makes it clear that Nepalese are left without a guardian in the midst of the current chaos. The Corona effect and its handling is stated here as an example, which is enough to understand the failing domestic politics of Nepal. Nepal was forced to face the turbulence in its domestic politics during the end of the year 2020, when the President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives and called for election in April and May 2021 (Thapa, 2021).

The current government was formed after a coalition between the current Prime Minister Oli -led Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist or UML) and the Maoist leader Dahal-led Communist party (Maoist Center or MC) were able to secure two thirds of seats in the election of the year 2017 (Thapa, 2021). Furthermore, these two parties declared their merger in the year 2018, however, this merger made the party volatile and internally weak (Thapa, 2021). Moreover, this overtly advertised merger soon touched the rock bottom when, "the differences between Oli and former Prime Minister Dahal have largely premised on a power-sharing arrangement leading to a vertical division in the party" (Thapa, 2021). Therefore, the division happened in the party which resulted in Oli and Dahal to stand against each other (Thapa, 2021).

In addition to this, in recent times Oli has shifted his inclination towards India and tried to improve the strained developed in their relationship after the disputed territory was accessed by Indian authority for their personal interest and as a reaction Nepal launched a new map including the disputed territory (Thapa, 2021). The sudden shift of Oli was actually guided by the intention of securing his position in the party as well as the parliament with the help of Indian influence (Thapa, 2021). It is not a secret that India previously interfered in Nepal's domestic politics but to this issue it has kept itself away claiming the power struggle to be internal matter, in order "to avoid a potential spillover of political unrest" (Thapa, 2021).

As per the article published in Asia Time, in contrary to India, China has acknowledged the plea from Dahal and had sent a four-member high-level delegation with a motive to halt the split within the ruling party (Sonam, 2021). Oli's stubborn attitude and shift in his inclination has deepened the southern dependency of Nepal and pushed Nepal away from establishing itself as a balancing bridge between its neighbors. The internal disturbance in the ruling party and resources only being focused on solving the political power tussle, have exposed Nepalese unguarded against the crisis caused by Covid-19's second wave. The current political situation of Nepal makes it clear that the political leaders are infested by the notion of only safeguarding their power position in any condition. This infection can weakened their stand while negotiating with their immediate neighbors and other nations; and can also risk Nepal in falling under influence of other nations.

In contrary to the present situation where despite being an experienced players of politics and have had privilege to witness the global politics; the time in past when Nepal went ahead and diversified its foreign policy it had just broken its wall of isolation. Despite this fact, Nepal was capable to administer such dynamic policy for itself and for it the then ruling Monarch king Mahendra must be given the credit. In viewing the present condition, the step that the then government took in regard to the development of their foreign policies generates curiosity about the domestic politics of that time. It has already been discussed earlier in this paper about Nepal's journey of democracy and India's assistance in achieving it, which also opened a way for Indian government to spread its sphere of influence. But, Nepal's domestic politics witnessed change in this phenomena after King Mahendra's accession to the throne. In reference to Gopal Khanal, "king Mahendra was a nationalist monarch though he was ambitious for power" (Khanal, 2019).

Additionally, King Mahendra in his pursuit of power dissolved the first elected government in December 1960, and banned the functioning of the political parties, “charging that selfish and groups’ interests were flourishing, corruption mounting and that anti-national elements were growing stronger” (Schoenfeld, 1963). Moreover, “he accused the leaders of the government of having undertaken economic programs without prior analyses” (Schoenfeld, 1963), and “concentrated all legislatives, executive and judicial powers in his hands” (Bhagat, 1981). Moreover, in order to justify the change he described his new political system as a “Partyless Panchayat System” (Baral, 1976). However, “despite his authoritarian rule, King Mahendra brought a change in foreign relations and therefore he is considered as the architect of Nepal’s foreign policy” (Khanal, 2019).

Furthermore, during his tenure (1955-1972) Nepal was able to maintain relationship with China as well as other many countries, also secured UN membership, became member of Afro-Asian Community and also participated in Bandung conference (Khanal, 2019). King Mahendra had carefully analyzed the gravity of the then situation and had cautiously extended his foreign relations. Gopal Khanal writes that, “the tactics devised to achieve these objectives were, first, a careful balancing of relevant external forces in order” (Khanal, 2019). He further states that, “it was aimed to minimize their capacity to restrict Nepal’s freedom of maneuver, to maximize the benefit (e.g. foreign aid) derived there from and to contribute to a Nepal’s security and secondly, a cautious tackling back and forth between Nepal’s two great neighbors as circumstances seemed to dictate” (Khanal, 2019).

In addition to this, the then Prime Minister of Panchayat System Kirtinidhi Bista issued an explicit statement on June 1969 on the diversification of Nepal's foreign policy, which reads, "It is not possible for Nepal to compromise its sovereignty or accept what may be called limited sovereignty for India's so called security" (Khanal, 2019). This statement gives the clear picture of the perception and thought process of the then government of Nepal, who knew the necessity of Nepal to befriend India; but also seemed to be aware that if excessive interference of Indian government was not curtailed on time, it might have fatal consequences on their sovereign status. And in order to survive the power exertion from southern neighbor, Nepal then needed a courageous and visionary governance. The monarch's approach had threatened the democratic values, but it cannot be denied that his decisions and thoughtfulness in terms of pursuing the external relations helped Nepal to survive with dignity in between its two neighbors.

#### **9.4.2 Domestic Politics of Bhutan**

Bhutan's domestic politics has evolved from absolute monarchy to democratic constitutional monarchy and the most beautiful thing about this transition was that it was initiated by the monarch himself. Bhutanese have embraced the change but are equally connected with their cultural and religious roots, and this uniqueness has made their identity even stronger. Bhutan is the youngest democracy in the world and have few active political parties. Dr. Siegfried O.Wolf's article mentions that, the Bhutanese monarch have made political reforms to established king in the check-and-balance system in the process of making a shift to democracy (O.Wolf, 2012). Furthermore, "on 18 July 2008 the current king signed the constitution which marked the formal end to the century long absolute royal rule and institutionalized the notion of separation of power and check-and-balances (O.Wolf, 2012).

In reference to Thierry Mathou, Bhutan since its transition to democracy has successfully completed two elections and has further deepened the concept of democracy but still lacks the citizen engagement (Mathou, 2017). Moreover, disagreement is one of the feature of democracy and it is being experienced in the Bhutanese domestic politics, like for example heated parliamentary debates regarding national and international issues (Mathou, 2017). The slow and steady development of democratic practice and the participation of political parties so far has not created a ruckus in the nation and therefore Bhutan demonstrates a stable governance for now.

Bhutan's success in tackling the Covid-19 situation is the example of good governance that is guided by high moral of serving its people.

The article published in the diplomat states that the decisive and collective leadership became the most significant pillar in fighting against the virus for Bhutan that shares open border with India and is popular with Chinese tourist (Parikh & Ongmo, 2020). In addition to this, the traditional communal values also acted to be effective in the time of pandemic in Bhutan, where people helped each other, supported the government with donations and by following the instructions (Parikh & Ongmo, 2020). Besides, Bhutanese monarch's personal involvement carried great weight of moral authority and further played crucial role in subsiding any political gamesmanship (Drexler, 2021). Also, the opposition parties in parliament came forward to assist the ruling party against the fight to pandemic (Drexler, 2021).

Likewise, Bhutan has not only ensured its citizen's safety but now will provide 40 metric tons of liquid oxygen to India every day, as India struggles with oxygen shortage due to the upsurge in corona cases (more than 3,00,00 cases registered on daily basis) in the second wave (PTI, 2021). Bhutan's manifestation of solidarity with India has further strengthened their bilateral ties and mutual trust. Along with this, Bhutanese government's visible and effective leadership has created Bhutan's image as a competent and reliable nation in the global platform; and it can be a huge help to Bhutan in pursuing its foreign relations in future.

In contrary to the present stable and democratic scenario, during the regime of "the first two kings, Ugyen Wangchuk (1907-26) and Jigme Wangchuk (1926-52) political power was centralized (Joseph, 2006). There was a conflict between the traditionalist elements and the preacher of modernism, which also later resulted in the ethnic conflict in Bhutan (Joseph, 2006). Bhutan when the bilateral relation was established with India has just peeped out of its isolation. And the persistence threat from China would had been an obvious reason for it to cling with India. Besides, lack of political awareness in Bhutanese people, their religious and culturally guided lifestyle and immense trust in King, might have made the then monarch to take the decision according to the demand of the situation and as per his will.

### **9.4.3 Comparative analysis and Discussion**

Both the small countries have had different political environment in the past as well as in the present and thus straight away comparison will not generate an unbiased result. However, if viewed from the surficial level, the actions of political leaders in the present scenario, Nepalese leaders seem to have lack of morality in comparison to the Bhutanese leaders.

Bhutan has been successful in presenting itself as a visionary and contributor in fighting the pandemic whereas Nepal seems to be lost in the middle of crisis without an escape plan. A nation's ability to act quick and smart is the key to its success and Bhutan seems to be in that path. Bhutan's assistance to India could provide Bhutan an upper hand in the future negotiations with its neighbor.

But the same may not be the case with Nepal. In comparing the domestic politics of Bhutan at the time when it accepted to bandwagon with India and now, it appears that during both the time the leader's decision have brought positive result for the nation. Though Bhutan had to remain submissive towards India for longer time but a gradual change in policies, by the conduct of the Bhutanese leaders can be observed.

On the other hand, the decision made by Nepal in the past were bold, effective and in favor of the nation. The leader then and now both thrived for power but their intentions and aspirations are totally different. Bhutanese leader's choice of bandwagon was to subside the Chinese threat and minimize the potential threat that India could possess. Thus, the strategic move then was guided by the restrictive vision from the leaders. But the case was contrary in the Nepalese side, as despite falling badly in the trap of Indian influence, the then leader had the capacity to execute a domestic and foreign policies that worked as a foundation for independently functioning Nepal. But, the present domestic leaders do not seem to possess the skills to curate an effective foreign policy. The domestic politics and the leaders of Nepal and Bhutan have played a vital role in choosing the strategy, which their nation have implemented while dealing with their powerful neighbors.

## 10. Conclusion

To sum up everything that has been stated so far, the choice of strategic difference pursued by Nepal and Bhutan could probably not be explained solely by the realism theory. The theory of realism elaborately provides the explanation from the bigger countries point of view, but lacks to do the same in regard to the smaller ones. However, the use of realism theory in the analysis helps to understand that the perception of threat is one of the most prominent factor that any country considers, while choosing their functional strategies. Furthermore, along with this, realism theory has also contributed in channeling the discussion towards the exploration of the other significant dimensions of smaller nations. In examining the other dimensions like culture and religion, it appeared suitable to explain the strategic choice made by Bhutan. In case of Nepal it rather left the research in more complicated juncture, as despite having same cultural and religious roots with India, Nepal has rejected the complete alignment with it. Therefore, this aspect could only procure half explanation for the puzzle. Nevertheless, among them the domestic politics appears to be the most convincing factor in guiding the smaller nations in their choice of strategies. Since the domestic politics is be considered as the fulcrum of a nation, its decisions are crucial in shaping and presenting the nation, in its internal as well as external periphery. The manner in which the domestic leaders are schooled, conditioned and motivated and what they aspire have an impact upon the policies they create. Therefore, it can be presumed that the domestic politics of that time when the strategies were chosen could have been the key factor, for Nepal and Bhutan to opt for different strategies.

In addition to this, the domestic politics of Nepal when the strategy was chosen was controlled by a power thriving, ambitious and nationalist monarch who desired to have the control of the nation without any interferences. In contrary to this the domestic politics of Bhutan was controlled by monarch who had readily accepted the powerful neighbor's influence even before the neighbor had asserted it. Besides, Nepal had witnessed the change of rule from autocracy to democracy which has made many Nepalese more or less aware about the domestic politics. But, Bhutan had not experienced such drastic change and also politics had not extensively touched the life of simple Bhutanese people. The Nepalese were vocal about the interferences and control imposed by its neighbor in the name of guidance and assistance because information flowed from the authority to the citizens. Whereas in case of Bhutan the interference was accepted as necessary guidance and

the information did not seem to flow from the authority to the common citizens. If it would have been then probably the case would have been different. It can be assumed so because the in the present time Bhutanese people have raised their voice against Indian paternal attitude. The political environment of Nepal and Bhutan during the time of strategies' selection is likely to have impact upon the governing bodies while making their respective choices. To conclude, though the domestic politics have provided an explanation to the puzzle it cannot be assumed as a whole part of the circle. There possibly can be other factors that might have played role in the selection of the strategy, for instance there can be many minute components that might have shaped the political environment. There are other factors that can be considered which has had the huge impact over the domestic politics of each country. For instance, Nepal's ten years of civil war and its consequences, Bhutan struggle with the terrorist fled from India, also the ethnic conflict in Bhutan due to which many Nepalese living in Bhutan were forced to leave the country and so forth. Therefore, domestic politics cannot be taken as a sole answer for the puzzle's explanation. However, it definitely fits the big chunk of the puzzle and can be useful while digging deeper into the matter.

**[[Word Count: 24,105]]**

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