



## NEPAL-INDIA POLITICAL RELATIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL DYNAMICS, CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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### Abstract

*This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical dynamics, contemporary challenges, and future prospects in Nepal-India political relations. The diplomatic ties between the two nations, rooted in shared history, cultural affinities, and geographical proximity, have witnessed both cooperation and discord over the centuries. While historical documents highlight periods of mutual respect, the study delves into the complexities of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950, solidifying diplomatic bonds. However, recent years have seen a shift in this narrative, marked by territorial disputes, economic imbalances, and evolving geopolitical dynamics. Contemporary challenges include territorial disputes leading to diplomatic intricacies and economic imbalances raising questions about the equitable nature of the bilateral relationship. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining historical analysis, policy examination, and stakeholder perspectives to offer timely and relevant insights. Key informant interviews with political leaders, diplomats, and professionals provide a diverse understanding of the multifaceted issues at hand. The study identifies territorial disputes and unequal diplomatic treaties as major challenges, contributing to tensions in Nepal-India relations. It emphasizes the need for a peaceful discourse to resolve border encroachments and calls for a revision of existing treaties in light of changing regional and international circumstances. Additionally, socio-cultural affinities between the two nations are explored, with strategies proposed for bridging gaps and fostering a sense of shared identity. The research concludes with strategies for future cooperation, advocating for a balanced diplomatic relationship that considers the changing global landscape. The equidistance principle is discussed, urging both nations to adapt their mindsets and refrain from micromanaging each other's domestic politics. The study underscores the importance of recognizing the historical ties between Nepal and India, emphasizing the potential for multifaceted alliances in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Nepal-India Relations, Historical Dynamics, Territorial Disputes, Economic Imbalances and Geopolitical Landscape.*

### Introduction:

The foundation for India-Nepal relations was laid by the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 and the secret letters that followed, outlining the two countries' security relations and an agreement encompassing both bilateral commerce and trade

beyond Indian territory. The relationship between India and Nepal has seen ups and downs recently (Timalsina, 2019, p. 729). The "special friendship" between India and Nepal was cemented by these accords. The agreement also granted Indian citizens and enterprises preferential treatment in Nepal over other

countries, while providing Nepalese citizens with the same economic and educational opportunities as Indian citizens in India. The border between India and Nepal is open, allowing inhabitants of both countries to live and work there without the need for a passport or visa. However, Nepalese citizens are permitted to work in Indian institutions; Indians are not permitted to own land or hold positions in government organizations in Nepal (Sood, 2014, p. 65).

The diplomatic entwining of Nepal and India spans centuries, marked by a shared history, cultural affinities, and a close geographical proximity that has influenced their political relations. Over time, this relationship has evolved, experiencing both periods of harmony and moments of discord. The intricacies of Nepal-India political relations are multifaceted, influenced by a complex interplay of historical dynamics, contemporary challenges, and future prospects that demand a thorough examination.

Historically, the ties between Nepal and India have been characterized by mutual respect and cooperation, shaped by common values, traditions, and a rich cultural heritage. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in 1950 further solidified the diplomatic bonds between the two nations, reflecting a commitment to collaborative economic, political, and socio-cultural endeavors. However, recent years have witnessed a shift in this historical narrative, with both nations grappling with emerging challenges that have strained their relationship.

Contemporary challenges in Nepal-India political relations encompass a range of issues, from territorial disputes to economic imbalances and geopolitical considerations. The evolving global landscape and changing regional dynamics have added layers of complexity to this relationship, requiring a nuanced understanding of the underlying factors at play. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to analyze the historical

trajectories that have shaped this bilateral connection, confront the current challenges head-on, and explore avenues for future collaboration.

As we embark on this journey of exploration, it is essential to recognize the significance of Nepal-India political relations not only for the two nations involved but also for the broader South Asian region. A robust and cooperative relationship between these neighboring countries has the potential to foster regional stability, economic growth, and cultural exchange. Conversely, unresolved challenges may have far-reaching consequences, impacting not only bilateral ties but also the intricate web of geopolitical relationships in this part of the world.

In the pages that follow, we will delve into the historical intricacies, critically assess contemporary challenges, and envision potential strategies for building a resilient foundation for Nepal-India political relations. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute valuable insights to policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders involved in navigating the complex landscape of diplomatic engagement between these two nations.

### **Statement of Problem:**

The historical tapestry of Nepal-India political relations, woven with threads of camaraderie and collaboration, has encountered contemporary challenges that demand urgent attention and careful analysis. As we navigate the intricate landscape of this diplomatic relationship, it becomes evident that there exists a pressing need to address and comprehend the multifaceted issues that have emerged in recent years. One of the primary concerns lies in the territorial domain, where disputes have arisen, leading to tensions and diplomatic intricacies. The historical context of the Nepal-India relationship, while fostering mutual respect, has also witnessed moments of discord over territorial boundaries. These disputes, if left unattended, have the potential to

escalate and cast shadows over the broader diplomatic engagement between the two nations.

Economic imbalances represent another critical facet of the contemporary challenges facing Nepal-India political relations. Disparities in trade agreements, economic dependencies, and development projects have raised questions about the equitable nature of the bilateral relationship. Addressing these economic concerns is paramount to ensuring a sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership. Furthermore, the evolving regional and global geopolitical landscape introduces new complexities to the Nepal-India relationship. The dynamics of strategic alliances, shifting power structures, and the influence of external actors pose challenges that necessitate a recalibration of diplomatic strategies to safeguard the interests of both nations.

Grasp the distinct ties that exist between nations and cultures requires a grasp of international politics. These connections have the potential to affect security, diplomacy, governance, international politics, law, and economics. Determining the current state, underlying principles, and main obstacles of relations between Nepal and India is so crucial. In order to overcome the obstacles and develop the connections throughout time, it is crucial to have a solid grasp of the elements that are impeding the political relations between two countries today and, more crucially, those that will affect in the near future. In order to improve mutual relations and make appropriate policy interventions, it can be important for both governments to have knowledge of the underlying elements that are likely to effect their political ties in the future as well as what can be done to develop such connections. As a result, this study looks at the things that are really impeding the political ties between Nepal and India in order to be able to recommend some long-term steps for improving those ties. There has never been a research study on the political ties between India and Nepal in

Nepal that chooses this area of inquiry. The following are the main queries that have been posted for this study:

- a) What are the status and foundations of Nepal-India political relations?
- b) What could be the strategies and policies to foster the bilateral relationship between two countries?

#### **Research Objectives:**

- To identify and assess contemporary challenges affecting the bilateral ties.
- To explore potential strategies and historical context for strengthening diplomatic, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation.

#### **Research Questions:**

- What are the key historical dynamics that have shaped Nepal-India political relations?
- What are the contemporary challenges and issues affecting the bilateral ties?
- How can diplomatic, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation be strengthened for mutual benefit?
- What policy recommendations can be derived to enhance Nepal-India political relations?

#### **Method and Materials:**

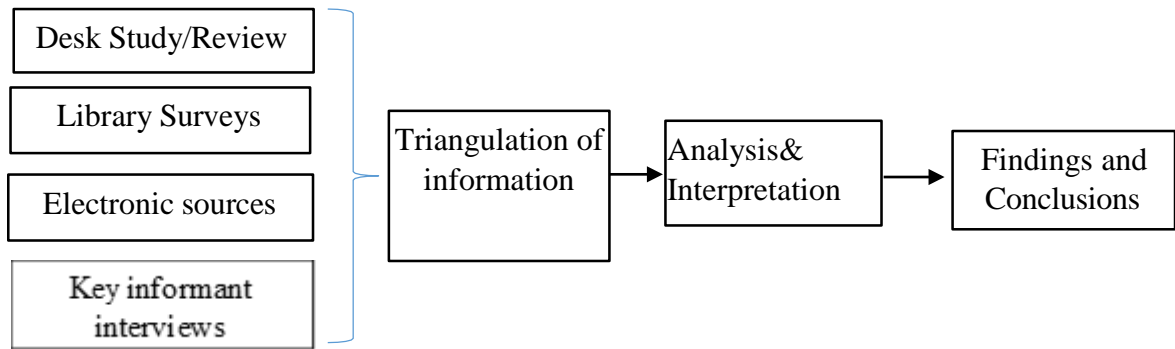
**Research Design:** This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive analysis of Nepal-India political relations. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a nuanced exploration of historical dynamics and contemporary challenges.

*Qualitative Approach:* Historical analysis and policy examination will form the qualitative arm of the research, delving into archives, official documents, and scholarly works to trace the historical trajectories and understand the

intricacies of diplomatic agreements and conflicts.

*Quantitative Approach:* Stakeholder perspectives and contemporary challenges will be explored

through structured interviews and surveys, providing quantitative data to complement the qualitative findings.



**Figure 3.2:** Research methods and processes (Researcher 's design)

**Sample of the Study:** The study encompasses a diverse sample to ensure a holistic understanding of Nepal-India political relations. Key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who know what is going on in the community. The purpose of key informant interviews is to collect information from a wide range of people including community leaders, professionals, or residents who have first-hand knowledge. In this regard, 20 key informants were interviewed with the prime aim of collecting the data and information relevant to the study. They included: political leaders, diplomats, professionals, and others.

**Data Collection Procedures:** The data collection process involves a systematic approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative information.

1. *Historical Analysis:* Archives, libraries, and online repositories will be explored to collect historical documents and conduct a comprehensive historical analysis.
2. *Policy Examination:* Official government websites, publications, and policy documents will be reviewed to analyze

current political stances and diplomatic initiatives.

3. *Stakeholder Interviews:* Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with political leaders, diplomats, policymakers, and scholars, employing open-ended questions to elicit diverse perspectives on current challenges and future prospects.
4. *Structured Surveys:* A structured survey will be designed to gather quantitative data on stakeholder opinions regarding contemporary challenges and potential strategies for cooperation.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative data will provide a robust foundation for a comprehensive analysis of historical dynamics, contemporary challenges, and future prospects in Nepal-India political relations.

## Results and Discussions:

### 1. Historical Dynamics: Unraveling the Tapestry of Diplomacy

In the early eighteenth century, Nepal was not a single nation as it is today. The Kathmandu valley was divided by the Baisirajyas (22 mini-states) and Chaubisrajyas (24 mini-states) in the west,

and by Kirat and Limbuwan in the east. There were several small principalities in the south. King Prithvi Narayan Shah started his campaign for Nepal's unification in 1768 when he took control of the Kathmandu valley. His descendants expanded Nepal from Kangra in the west through Tista in the east by the first decade of the nineteenth century, establishing the Gorkha Empire as far west as Kashmir. From the second half of the eighteenth century to the first decade of the nineteenth, Nepal's Royal Palace developed an imperial grand strategy to establish itself as a strong sub-regional force. The philosophy of Prithvi Narayan Shah was to bring the rulers of the sub-petty region together, rather than causing rifts with the British colonialists in the south and the Chinese empire in the north.

But in practice, the overriding goal of maintaining the neutrality of major countries while annexing minor subregional states into the Gorkha Empire was not achieved. Nepal unexpectedly found itself at odds with the major powers of both the north and the south. From 1814 to 1816, Nepal engaged in a two-year war with the British, which it lost badly. In 1792, Nepal engaged in a two-year war with China that left a permanent border (Adhikari, 2018m, pp. 51–52). Nepal suffered far more losses in the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–16). It ended in 1816 with the Sugauly Treaty, which saw Nepal cede a sizable portion of its territory to the British East Indian Company. During the British-Nepal war, Nepal made frantic attempts to enlist the help of the emperor of China, the main power to the north. However, the Chinese declined to help the then-Nepalese authorities because they believed they were opportunistic and untrustworthy (Rose, 1970, p. 86). Two small Indian republics, Punjab and Gwalior, wanted to join forces with Nepal (Stiller, 2017, pp. 334–339).

Additionally, they declined to cooperate with Nepal, claiming that the country's people were the greatest threat to the subsistence. The region's

attempt to unite against the vast forces in the south by forming alliances with significant northern powers was unsuccessful. It also failed to unite the petty rulers of the subcontinent in an anti-British alliance. Ultimately, Nepal's imperial strategic vision came to an end when it was compelled to sign the Sugauly Treaty due to its inability to withstand the might of the British. Following that, Nepal had to abandon its imperial system altogether. (Adhikari, 2018, p. 53).

The historical analysis reveals a nuanced tapestry of Nepal-India political relations, marked by periods of cooperation, mutual respect, and occasional discord. Examining key historical documents and treaties provides valuable insights into the foundational elements that have shaped the bilateral relationship. From the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950 to subsequent agreements and conflicts, this section of the study uncovers the intricate historical dynamics that continue to influence the diplomatic landscape. Unraveling the tapestry of diplomacy through historical analysis provides a solid foundation for understanding the intricate dynamics that have shaped Nepal-India political relations. This section sets the stage for further exploration into contemporary challenges and strategies for future cooperation, offering a holistic perspective on the evolving diplomatic landscape between these two neighboring nations.

## **2. Contemporary Challenges: Navigating Territorial Disputes and Economic Imbalances**

a. *Territorial Disputes*: The study identifies ongoing territorial disputes as a significant contemporary challenge, contributing to diplomatic tensions. The historical context of these disputes is explored, shedding light on the roots of the issue. Stakeholder perspectives, obtained through interviews, provide diverse insights into potential pathways for resolution. Nepal's border is mostly unmanned, but India has

robust border guards to secure its borders. Indian security forces have often invaded Nepali land and murdered citizens there. Nepali migrant workers leaving India have frequently been extorted by Indian border guards. Anti-Indian sentiment is also often fueled by these instances in Nepal. It is imperative that the territorial nationalist discourse end today and that the foundation for a constructive dialogue be established. In order to address the issue of border encroachment, we need to have a conversation, a discussion, and mutual comprehension. India has not replied to Nepal's repeated requests that it stop pushing on its border. India is usually in the lead. As a result, Nepal is facing territorial encroachment. In addition, the security problem is getting worse every day.

*b. Unequal Diplomatic Treaties and Agreements.*

A new era of cooperation between the two countries began with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Trade, and Commerce in 1950. The right to work, reside, and own property was granted to the citizens of both countries under this treaty, which also granted them "national treatment" on the other's territory. Despite the fact that the treaty gave Nepalese exports to India no special treatment, India allowed commodities to be imported and exported by Nepal through India. Following then, the two nations signed a number of accords in 1971, 1978, 1996, 2002, and 2009. In addition to the treaties, 131 mutual trust and friendship have served as the cornerstones of collaboration between the two nations, resulting in generally stable relationships.

These accords created a "special relationship" between India and Nepal, giving Indian citizens living in Nepal equal access to the country's economic and educational opportunities. The border between India and Nepal is open; inhabitants of both countries can live and work anywhere in the world and cross it with ease without a passport or visa (Kavitha, 2016, pp. 10-15). The Treaty of Peace and Friendship between

India and Nepal in 1950 forged a strong alliance between the two South Asian countries. The Treaty of July 31, 1950, was signed. The treaty allows for robust defense and foreign policy collaboration, as well as unrestricted travel and trade between the two nations.

A fundamental element of the unique connection between India and Nepal is the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Nepal has not pulled out of the agreement, despite reservations about it and political posturing. Nepal has taken action to oppose India's improper influence on multiple occasions. China has been used to offset India's influence. It broke the spirit of the treaty by enacting licenses for Indian laborers in 1988 and a host of other discriminatory measures against Indians. India has used a range of tactics, which the Nepalese have characterized as forceful and oppressive, to try and obtain their acquiescence. Surprisingly, the agreement has lasted to this day in spite of opposition from both countries on a few issues. In addition, it is widely acknowledged that the treaty has to be revised in light of evolving regional and global conditions. This explains why Nepal would continue to be dependent on India due to geographical realities. India needs to acknowledge its historical connections with Nepal as well as the strategic need of developing a broad coalition going forward. India needs to work closely with its security policy and adopt a liberal stance in order to facilitate trade and transit with Nepal and address the growing threats posed by non-state actors.

### **3. Socio-Cultural Affinities: Bridging Gaps for Future Cooperation**

South Asian nations all have distinct nationalities, but they all have similar lifestyles. South Asian societies are deeply rooted in the principles and precepts of Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, and Hinduism. Every nation and civilization in the region can attest to the existence of these religious and cultural luminaries and their influence on

local arts, customs, and traditions, even though the number of adherents varies by nation. However, Nepal still plays a significant role in the history and cultural traditions of the Indian subcontinent because of its unique location, past, and cultural inheritance. As they say, culture has no boundaries. Despite being a part of South Asian civilization, Nepal and India have a unique relationship and a lot in common.

Both have significantly enhanced the religious and cultural heritage of the area and beyond. Lord Buddha, who originated in Nepal, has made his mark not just in South Asia but also globally. Hindus all throughout the world hold a special place in their hearts for Sita, a Nepalese princess who wed Ram, the prince of Ayodhya in India. We don't need to go into detail about the contributions made by Indian saints and intellectuals. These illustrious locals have made significant contributions to the growth, diffusion, and evolution of the legacy and culture that are today proudly referred to as South Asian culture. Every year, hundreds of pilgrims from Nepal travel to India.

The Char Dham yatra, which is a pilgrimage to four Hindu shrines in India Badrinath/Kedarnath in Uttarakhand, Jagannath (Puri) in Orissa, Rameshwaram in Tamilnadu, and Dwarka in Gujarat—is a goal shared by almost all Hindus. Numerous more locations in India are revered by the Nepalese people. They include, among others, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Banaras, Gaya, and Vaishnodevi. Similar to this, many religious sites in Nepal are well-liked by Indian tourists as "must-visit" destinations since they are seen as significant and holy. The study explores the sociocultural facets of interactions between India and Nepal with the goal of pinpointing areas in need of development. Perspectives on promoting a feeling of shared identity and understanding are obtained through interviews with important stakeholders. Methods for overcoming

sociocultural differences are explored as essential elements of upcoming diplomatic initiatives.

#### **4. Strategies for Future Cooperation: Building Bridges for Stability**

The legal concept known as the equidistance principle, or the principle of equidistance, stipulates that a country's maritime boundaries in maritime boundary claims should line up with a median line that is equally spaced from the coastlines of neighboring nation-states. The need to settle disagreements over neighboring countries' borders on a contiguous continental shelf gave rise to this idea. Although its significance is based on other factors like history, the concept of equidistance is included in customary international law. A notion in international law known as equidistance provides the basis for normativity in marine delimitation. It is outlined in Article 6 of the 1958 Continental Shelf Convention and reiterated in Article 15 of the 1982 UNCLOS. "The median line, each point of which is equidistant from the nearest points of the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea of the two States is measured," as defined by the definition. "The phenomenon of distance continues to divide global and local politics, even though globalization processes are now connecting them" (Hendrickson, 2002, pp. 437-466).

As a historical strategy, diplomatic balance has been a forte of all ruling parties in Nepal, including the royal power, the democrats, and the communists. Nepal had the chance in the past to utilize the "China card" to win against India. The smart move to win over India was to tilt toward Beijing. Even if such a cunning strategy has frequently worked in the past, as the balance of power shifts, it is likely to encounter new difficulties that will heighten the likelihood of a Sino-Indian clash. Given the situation, the diplomatic relationship should be balanced; nonetheless, this does not imply "equal."

Equidistance was a Cold War tactic employed by smaller nations in a bipolar world; nevertheless, it seems to be a notion of the past in the current multipolar world. Nepal, on the other hand, makes no secret of the fact that it adheres to the equidistance policy, even in the case of the Trilateralism plan.

When assessing the trilateral relationship with China and India, many of our leaders, swayed by idealistic notions, employ terms like "Equiproximity" or "Equi-distance," although it is debatable if any country can uphold Equi-distance in international relations. Is China able to keep a similar distance from Pakistan and India as the US has from Canada and Mexico? Consequently, our leaders need to realize that Beijing cannot replicate New Delhi's multi-sectoral familiarity, nor can Nepal or China sustain a relationship with it that is comparable. On the other side, the recent visit by the Indian Prime Minister signaled the start of a reshaping of the relationship between India and Nepal. Kathmandu must avoid the 'Equi-distance game,' and India must refrain from micromanaging Nepal's domestic politics, both of which are vital for the development of Nepal-India relations.

The relationship between India and Nepal has fluctuated in the past. India and Nepal now have unstable and turbulent relations marked by both amicable and hostile interactions. Since this new constitution was adopted in 2015, there has been a lack of mutual confidence in Nepal-Indian ties, preceding an unexpected trade ban from India. India-Nepal relations are influenced by various variables. The degree to which the two nations move closer or farther apart is greatly influenced by these factors. Open borders, disputes over border demarcation, security concerns, unfair diplomatic treaties and agreements, sporadic blockades, India's big brother behavior, water issues, trade and transit, migration, citizenship issues, and the extradition treaty issue are the main obstacles to Nepal-Indian political relations.

Both nations, along with their authorities and leaders, need to modify their respective mentalities. It is crucial to understand that formal political-diplomatic links are not the only foundation of the relationship between India and Nepal.

**Conclusion:** The nation's leaders have always been leery of outsiders due to its unusual geographic location, especially its two close neighbors. Due to its strategic geographic location, Nepal is required to have a separate foreign policy in order to safeguard and advance its domestic interests. Nepal must appropriately direct its foreign policy maneuvers to ensure survival because of its vulnerability to external threats. The historical tie between India and Nepal is profound. People-to-people interactions between Nepal and India are particularly strong because of their open borders as well as their shared culture and ancestry. In a similar vein, India accounts for the bulk of Nepal's international trade with and via it.

India-Nepal Because of factors including geography, population, religion, philosophy, culture, politics, economy, military, history, science and technical advancement, and mass media, relationships at the government level have always had ups and downs as well as twists and turns. Despite Nepal's desire for a good relationship with India, the two countries have turbulent and occasionally confrontational relations. However, the foundation of human relations has always been friendship, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Over the past seven decades, there has been a history of political and economic failures, such as shifts in political regimes, the rise of new political powers, blockades, changes in leadership, etc., roughly every ten years. The ups and downs in bilateral relations were brought on by these particular political upheavals.



Without a question, the foundation upon which the political connection between Nepal and India is constructed is their shared religious, cultural, and economic links. A number of issues are pulling the two nations apart, including border disputes, unfair diplomatic treaties and accords, India's growing interest in micromanaging Nepal's politics, and other internal issues. This thorough analysis has examined historical dynamics, current issues, and potential future developments in an effort to better understand the intricacies of the political relations between Nepal and India. The combination of these components offers a comprehensive picture of the two countries' bilateral relationship and insightful information for academics, policymakers, and other interested parties following the diplomatic path between them.

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