



Nepal-India Borderland Geopolitics from Mental Border Perspective: A Brief Case Study of Susta (Nepal)

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Abstract: Borders—synonymous with nation-states protects people against a risky environment, but protection might also turn into its opposite: the fence that encloses instead of excluding. Borders are social constructions in geographical space: they determine perceptions of people, dividing between known and unknown, native and foreign, and us and them. There are various types of borders like: physical, cultural, religious, economic, political, psychological, mental, etc. This paper has investigated the nature, characteristics, trends, and practices of the political border between India and Nepal at the state level and mental borders at the people's level. In doing so, the research has focused on assessing the Nepal-India political border, people's perception of it, and their daily lifestyle from the mental border and borderland geopolitical perspective. Theoretically, the borderland theories are applied to this study. The paper adopts a qualitative method based on a systematic approach under descriptive and critical analysis. Some authentic readings of borderlands are reviewed as the secondary data analysis and also visited a Nepal-India border point Susta and collected opinions of local leaders as the primary data. The research concludes that mental borders are becoming prominent in analyzing the borderland geopolitics and the state's political border has to address the issues of mental borders to defend and expand the national interest.

Keywords: Borderland, Border Dispute, Mental Border, Nepal-India Relations, Borderland Geopolitics

Received : 06 September 2024

Revised : 10 October 2024

Accepted : 15 October 2024

Published : 29 December 2024

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Hari Prakash Chand (2024). Nepal-India Borderland Geopolitics from Mental Border Perspective: A Brief Case Study of Susta (Nepal), *Society and Culture Development in India*, 4: 2, pp. 257-273. <https://doi.org/10.47509/SCDI.2024.v04i02.03>

Introduction

Borders are social constructions in geographical space: they determine perceptions of people, dividing between known and unknown, native and foreign, and us

and them. There are various types of borders such as physical, cultural, religious, economic, political, psychological, mental, etc. The study of borderlands can be mostly limited within the boundaries of various social science disciplines. They represent the viewpoints of diverse societies and their notions. In societies, people practice multiple disciplines, so it is hard to theorize the borderlands from a single perspective because interaction among multiple perspectives evolved in the societies makes the process of theorization of the borderlands complex. Emmanuel (2005) writes that the range of border scholars has expanded from geographers, and economists to anthropologists, historians, political scientists, ethnographers, lawyers, sociologists, psychologists, and other social scientists (p. 634).

Borders between and among states are part of International Politics more specifically borderland geopolitics and International Relations because it separates one state from another and demarcates citizens of one state from another. So, geopolitical and IR scholars argue that border and borderlands studies are part of world politics and international affairs. Tripathi argues that borders are an important issue in the discipline of International Relations (IR) because of their intrinsic relationship with the state, although borders are primarily viewed from a security perspective as maintaining territorial integrity is a fundamental duty of the state (Tripathi, 2021, p.3). But borders and borderlands are not only related to geopolitics and IR but also relate to the aforementioned diverse disciplines from another perspective. For example, the nature of the border impacts livelihood, health, education, psychology, financial activities, lifestyle, opportunities, science and technology, and people-to-people bond. Such kind of impacts demands the scope of the role of diverse disciplines in theorizing the borders and borderlands from the perspective of borderland geopolitics.

Research Problem

The Nepal-India border is open, unique, and complex in nature not only because of the unrestricted flow of goods and people across the border but also disputes, debates, and unilateral actions in the borderland areas by the Indian side. This border has not only created ample opportunity for the people of both countries but also has become problematic in several locations of the border points. Nepalis have been working in India since long ago and vice versa as a people-to-people bond i.e. *Family Economic Interdependence*. Many times, Indian security forces enter Nepali territory because of the open border and create threats to Nepali citizens as the Nepali borderland community reports (Pokharel, 2021, para. 8). Nepali territory has

been encroached on several border points despite having cordial bilateral relations between these two countries (Shrestha et al., 2020; Paudyal, 2013). There are marital relations among the borderland communities which is termed by the Indian side as *Roti-Beti relations (family and economic relations)*. In this context, how people have perceived the border in their mind is quite important to analyze the postmodern Nepal-India relations. Therefore, this paper aims to assess the perception of Nepali borderland communities on the Nepal-India open borders from the Mental Borders and Borderland geopolitical perspective.

Method and Materials

This research paper has explored how the political borders reflect in the minds of borderland communities¹ in Nepali side and how the communities in the borderlands perceive and understand the borders. The paper has adopted the qualitative method under descriptive and critical analytical approaches. Philosophically, this paper has tried to consider the constructivist approach as epistemology and the Nepal-India mental borders as ontology. Both primary and secondary qualitative data are collected and the case study is the main design of the research. Authentic books, journal articles, and some websites are reviewed as literature. As a case study design, the researcher visited Susta (Lumbini Province, Nepal) as the study area, and conducted a few Key Informants, Interviews (KII). For KII, purposive sampling is adopted. As there is a lack of literature on Nepal-India mental borders, researchers focused on the analysis and interpretation of expressions of borderland communities on the Nepal side. In addition, the researcher has reviewed some historical documents as well written and published on the Nepal-India borders to triangulate the primary and secondary data.

Philosophical Debates

Borders and Borderlands

Borders are the symbol of their sovereignty. These are such areas between countries that are divided by state boundaries. Actual boundary lines can be demarcated by certain physical structures like posts, stones, flags, fences, walls, or other landmarks. Borders are highlighted by customhouses, border guards, security forces, and checkpoints as the backbone of the borders. Such provision of statehood symbolizes each state's attempt to maintain special control over its border areas. States as actors,

markets where states act and cultures that belong to the states provide important descriptive and analytical lenses to analyze borders and borderlands (Emmanuel, 2005, p. 634). Therefore, the borders are the ultimate symbol of its sovereignty.

A crucial factor of borders and borderland geopolitics is international political structure. The borders between and among countries are influenced by the nature and characteristics of international structure which is mostly analyzed from the perspective of neorealism or structural realism. The international structure is mostly related to the level of power of supra-national circumstances and the world political network. As neorealists argue that the powerful international system and structure create limitations on state leaders' domestic and international roles, they cannot play the role openly and sufficiently to well demarcate and manage the international border. The present Russia-Ukraine war (Which started on 24 February 2022) for their territory and borders is one of the best examples of this argument. Because neither Putin nor Zelensky is able to demarcate the border unilaterally. This is because of complex international systems and structures like NATO, US's role, the EU, Russia itself etc which do not allow work independently however different historical contexts cannot be ignored for investigating regional and global geopolitics precisely. This is only an example relating to borderland geopolitics which is different than main streaming geopolitics. The border is a state power that is surrounded by local political networks and connects two sides and is therefore also international. If cross-border political networks are strong enough, they can successfully protect border interests. Therefore, the political matter is one of the dominant factors of borders and borderlands.

Emmanuel (2005) argues that literature available on borders, boundaries, frontiers, and borderland regions suggests four equally important analytical lenses: a) market forces and trade flows, b) the particular political clout of the borderland communities, c) policy activities of multi-levels of government on adjacent borders, and d) the specific culture of borderland communities (p. 634). In the post-1990 period when the era of globalization and liberalization began, international business and trade flows through the borders are massively increased. Diverse communities residing nearby borderlands have a greater impact on the nature of borders. Cultural practices and traditions of the communities on both sides also challenge the state's provision however they cannot violate the national laws. Local and provincial governments are generally closer to issues and concerns of the borderland communities and they can report the situation immediately to the central government when the situation becomes adverse. Such a situation is also an important analytical lens of borders and borderlands. Cross-political influence in the borderlands may also impact the borders' existing management.

Pine writes that borderland is like a bridge between states of polity, states of mind, states of language, and states of sexuality etc (Pine, 2021, p.2). It connects different polities of states, different minds of people of several states, different languages of countries, and different sex of multiple states as per Pine. He further argues:

There is a range of differences in the border. There are also lines that differentiate them, from the hard provision of a political frontier to the soft provision of the laws of the state which should not be violated. There are the geographical contours of the landscape and the metaphysical contours of the mindscape as mental and psychological patterns of the border. There are also psychological disputes between the hemispheres of the brain, the "soft" borders between real and unreal, trust and distrust, and place and displacement (2021, p. 3).

Therefore, the border and borderlands are not only the traditional physical and geographical frontiers but also non-traditional dimensions like feelings, thinking, culture, and innate behaviors of the borderland communities associated with borderland geopolitics. Such non-traditional dimensions are even more crucial in the post-modern world order along with the beginning of the globalization era. Globalization and liberalization have broken the traditional frontiers with the emergence of the post-modern world. Tripathi writes, "Notably, both regionalism and globalization challenge the centrality of sovereignty and a pristine border" (2021, p.4). Likewise, Yndigegn writes, "Postmodernism is often associated with globalization and a historical era where borders disappear and otherwise lose their significance. (2006, p.33). So, borders have to be analyzed as per the changed global and regional context. Local context generally is not the same in every region of the world. For example, the borders in Europe may not carry the same characteristics of the Asian world. In Europe, the concept of physical borders disappeared, and the European Steel and Coal Community (later developed as the European Union) emerged and thus a borderless region evolved. But, in South Asia, the significance of physical borders is still crucial including non-traditional borders specially for those countries having less population.

Non-traditional borders are more spatial, conceptual, spiritual, mental, cultural, linguistic, and psychological and shape the dynamics of identity, community, and governance however national borders are political notions that have had a significant impact on the minds of authors and the ways in which they create historical narratives. People living near the borderlands have often been rather less impressed by physical borders, as their attempts to create their own local historical

demonstration. But, to maintain the country's sovereignty in the borderland, the state enforces its laws to establish its physical borders and borderland communities strongly support their government despite having their contextual differences than the government. Because local people largely care about the sovereignty of the borderlands not excluding their local historical best practices, traditions, values, and belief systems. Physical borders and borderlands are the political borders that operate under the constitution, treaties, and international law but sometimes, borderland communities' perspectives and local practices are quite different from the constitutional provision and international law. Therefore, this paper has been more focused on the mental borders of the borderland communities making the political and physical border stronger and systematic. Borders are so complex in nature because diverse identities in the country and borderland areas may allow for the management of a borderless world, however, they may also reveal the problems of a global society. While intended mobility creates life changes, unintended mobility or lack of mobility does the reverse (Yndigegn, 2006, p.41). The former term leads society towards traditional borders whereas the latter represents the non-traditional. Both mobilities are equally important for traditional and non-traditional borders. Because no country can be alive with absolute management of the first without the next in the post-modern world. The post-modern world integrates both traditional and non-traditional borders which reflects also in countries of this era.

Theoretically, national borders should be strongly protected and not permitted for any kind of penetration as per the realist school of thought. Realists argue that the state is the main actor in International Relations and the sole responsibility to protect the borders is of that state as it focuses on anarchy and power (Tripathi, 2021, pp.3-4). As per Tripathi, a realist approach remains skeptical of attempts to create permissive borders and rejects the possibility of integration—regional and global—that would in a way reduce the political and economic gap between states, making borders obsolete if not unnecessary. Liberal thought is different than the realist thinking. liberals believe in cooperation between and among states. They believe that international and regional organizations create politically favorable conditions for cooperation. These organizations operate under agreed rules and regulations that shape the behavior of states over time—like many regimes (Tripathi, 2021, 4). Therefore, when realpolitik based on liberal ideas began under the liberal actions of Reagan and Thatcher in 1970s, traditional boundaries began to weaken and foundation of global cooperation built. From constructivist perspective, the border is not only the physical posts, pillars, wall, and impermissible fencing as realists' belief, and not only the border can be porous

for regional and global cooperation under liberal thoughts, but also it should represent the identity, values, belief system, innate behavior of the people, and mental and psychological factors of the citizens as constructivists argue. Therefore, this paper mostly influenced by this latest approach and research design is also adopted the constructivist notion.

Nepal-India Borders: Brief Historical Assessment

Nepal never celebrates the Independent Day. It means Nepal never been colonized by any super powers in the thousand years of history. Founding father King Prithvi Narayan Shah led the great campaign of unification of more than fifty tiny states which were disintegrated within the territory of a single, unified, and stable country Nepal (Manandhar, 2022, p. 19). The Nepali army under the leadership of King Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered Kumaon and Grahwal and several small kingdoms between the Yamuna and Sutlej rivers. Paudyal writes that at some period in the history of Nepal, the border was extended to Tista in the East and to Kangada Fort in the West (2013, p. 35). But, the current border from Mechi river in the East to Kali (Mahakali) river in the West with India was demarcated after the Sugauli Treaty signed on 2 December 1815 and ratified in March 1816 (Cox, 1824, p. 952). There are some provisions which have demarcated the border between Nepal and India. Article 2 of the Treaty says, "Acknowledgement of the Company's (British East India) sovereignty over the disputed lands between the two countries before the war. Article 3 provisions, "Surrender of the entire territory occupied by Nepal in the east of the Mechi river i.e. between rivers Mechi and Tista. Similarly, there is written in Article 5 that these territories should be evacuated by Nepal within forty days. Renunciation of entire territories viz. Kumaun, Garhawal and other small states, in the west of Kali (Mahakali) River to the Company with a promise on the part of Nepal not to have any connection with those countries or the inhabitants thereof in the future" (Manandhar, 2022, p.20; Bhandari, 2073 BS, p.4). But Nepal was dissatisfied with the treaty. The British East India Company was aware on it and returned the plain territory between Koshi River to Rapti River to Nepal government on 8 December 1816. The plain territory between Rapti River and Kali (Mahakali) River was returned to Nepal government only after 1860. (Bhandari, 2073 BS, p.5). Thus, the Sugauli Treaty of March 1816, British Memorandum of December 1816 and the supplementary treaty of December 1860 finally fixed the boundary between and British India, which is in force till date (Manandhar, 2022, p. 22).

Empirical debate-I

Sugauli Treaty Vs 1950 Treaty

The Sugauli Treaty re-demarcated the border between Nepal and India in 1860 as the latest revision when the territory between Rapti River to Kali (Mahakali) River was handed over to Nepal. The then Prime Minister of Nepal, Late Jang Bahadur Rana, supported the British government in suppressing the Indian rebellion which is known as the Sepoy Mutiny. As a reward for this support, in December 1860, the British Indian government handed over the lowlands from Rapti to the Kali River to Nepal through a supplementary treaty (Aitchison, 1929, pp.71-72). In the present context, there are so many border points where problems exist, which is a different story but the current border between Nepal and India is based on the supplementary treaty. After the Sugauli Treaty, Nepal lost some of the lowlands of the Terai and as compensation, the British Government of India agreed to pay two lakh rupees annually to the Government of Nepal according to Article 8 of Sugauli Treaty (Manandhar, 2022, p. 20). After the Supplementary Treaty, Nepal received such important Terai and Fertile Plains and created the present border.

For Nepal, two treaties are important for Nepal's relations with its southern neighbor. The first is the 1816 Sugauli Treaty and the second is the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950. Articles 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Sugauli Treaty are the articles on the Nepal-India border. Article 2 says that Nepal must give up the disputed territories between the two states before the war. Article 3 deals with the surrender of the entire territory occupied by Nepal to the east of the Mechi river, i.e. between the Mechi and Tista rivers, and the vacating of that territory within forty days. Similarly, Article 4 mentions that compensation will be received from the British Government of India for the loss of the lowlands of the Terai. And, in Article 5, there is a provision to give up all the territory of Kumaon, Garhwal and other small states of the west from the river Kali (Mahakali) to the company from Nepal with a promise not to have any affairs with those lands and their inhabitants in the future (Manandhar, 2022, pp. 20-21; Bhandari, 2073 BS. p. 4; Kumari & Kushwaha, 2019, p.42).

The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship is another crucial treaty in analyzing Nepal-India relations. This treaty has ten articles and several letters of exchange. In Article 1, the two countries have accepted each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. In Article 2, it is mentioned that in case of conflict with neighboring countries, they should inform each other. Articles 5, 6, and 7 deal with the arms import of Nepal, the national treatment to each other's citizens in economic

matters, and the reciprocal treatment of citizens in matters related to residence, protection, and trade. Article 8 has canceled all the past treaties between the Government of Nepal and the British Government. Articles 9 and 10 deal with the renewal and termination of treaties (Manhas & Sharma, 2014, p.1). According to the above articles of Sugauli Treaty-1816 and Peace and Friendship Treaty-1950, it is clear that the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship is silent about the Nepal-India border. In the meantime, Article 8 of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship says that all the past Treaties between Nepal and the British government of India were canceled. It means the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship cancels the Sugauli Treaty. If the Sugauli Treaty is cancelled, the Nepal-India border demarcation by the Sugauli Treaty will also be cancelled. In such a situation, from the perspective of Treaty provisions and laws, the border automatically extends up to the greater Nepal. So, the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship either should be revisited or should be replaced by a new treaty to maintain the current Nepal-India border provisions. But due to limitations in Nepal's capability and international influence, Nepal cannot claim the greater Nepal and hence better to replace the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship by new one. Importantly, if the paper is on the Susta issue, I think it would be better to focus on Susta issue and the previous efforts of border management be taken as the reference only. But due to

Physical Border Issues

Despite having a unique border since being an open and unrestricted flow of people across the borders from either side, Nepal and India have had border issues or disputes for a long time. If there is no clear boundary line, if there is no interpretation of the boundary agreement or treaty, and if there is a cold relationship between two or more countries, is called a border dispute. A border dispute is a dispute between two or more countries about an imaginary boundary line (Paudyal, 2013, p. 36). Nepal and India have agreed on the Fixed Boundary Principle to determine their river boundaries, meaning that the original boundaries will be restored from time to time after major floods or changes in river flow (Sharma, 2022, p.162). But, in reality, this agreement is not perfectly implemented. The Susta issue emerged only because of the violation of this provision by the Indian side. Initially, India agreed to follow the fixed boundary principle while demarcating the boundary in the Mechi River, but she said that the same provision was not appropriate for the Narayani (Gandak) River and that the fluid boundary principle is only the option in that region of Susta (Shrestha, 2000, p. 33). The border issue in the Susta, Lumbini

Province, Nepal is mainly based on this Indian wrong and unlawful argument. From such malpractice in Susta Area, Nepal, and Nepali citizens are loser.

Nepal shares more than 1850 kilometers long borders with five Indian states: Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim. Despite having bilateral relations cordial, harmonious, and interdependent, there are so many border points where border disputes are there. Paudyal writes:

“After the Sugauli Treaty, the encroachment gradually increased. Specifically, after 1947, i.e. after the independence of India, the dispute between Nepal and India started to increase in the border areas. The source of Mechi River, Antu Hill region, Ramnagar region, forest on the north side of Chure Hill to the southern side, etc. are regarded as the disputed border areas between the two countries. Due to India’s increase in population, India started encroachment in 10 yards (Dashgaja) and at some places Nepali territory too and started to uproot forests or weeds on Nepal side” (2013, p.37).

According to Paudyal, India has encroached on Nepali territory in different time periods like in 1950, 1979, 1989, 2005/2006, and 2008, in various places of Nepal like Tanakpur, Maheshpur, Thori, Susta, Sandakapur, Manebhanjyang, Pashupatinagar, Bhandabari, the *Mechi Pul* Area, etc. specially when Nepal was facing political turmoil. Meanwhile, India constructed dams and Embankments in different locations like Laxmanpur, Rasiyawall-Khurdalotan, Mahalisagar, Kohalawas, Kunauli etc. Because of such dams, Nepali land is submerged in many places during the monsoon floods every year (2013, pp.37-38). Paudyal further provides data as below:

“Of the 26 districts of Nepal sharing the border with India, 21 districts, in 54 places, are facing the problem of violation of their territory by India. It is estimated that more than 60,000 h. land of Nepal has been encroached on by the Indian side. Of this, the most disputed area is Kalapani-Limpiyadhura where the largest chunk of land (37,000h.) has been encroached. Similarly, the land of Nepal has been encroached on in different places in different chunks such as Susta (14,000h.) the region of the Mechi river bank (1,600h.), while constructing Sarada barrage (8.85h.), Sandakpur (2h.), Parasani Pyara Tal (450h.), Bhajani Lalbojhi (330h.) Korobari (40h.), Gulariya (6h.), Guphatal Manebhanjyang (4h.), Jhitkaiya (3h.) and Pashupatinagar (240 sq km) is the least chunk of land encroached area” (2013, 38).

Empirical debate-II

Susta: A Case study on Borderland Geopolitics

Houtum explains that the ‘production’ of borders will often be top-down (Smith, 1991), a construct of political ambition cited in (1999, p.330). It means the

demarcation of borders relies on the state's leader's decision and mental perception which reflects and implicates the lifestyle of borderland communities. The people's solidarity with the state, as well as with each other, is crucial to the 'reproduction' of the borders. ... or people live at the bottom level of a state and their collective mental perception and efforts sometimes should be addressed by the state to keep intact the national border. But, there should be one condition. The geostrategic location of a particular country should be free from the influence of any powerful global actors. Then only, the people's solidarity will have a meaning for a state. Otherwise, there can always be a dangerous situation in which powerful external players can misguide the people's sentiment in that territory, which can go against the national interest of small powers like Nepal. A nation is therefore mentally reproduced, is an 'imagined community'. If a state itself is mentally reproduced and is an imagined community, the border certainly should be studied from this framework however the same aforementioned condition should be applied or maintained. This researcher basically has conducted this research as Susta Case Study from this perspective. The researcher has conducted this research from three aspects. First, he reviewed some major and authentic readings written by Nepali authors. Second, he conducted a few in-depth. Third, he conducted a brief survey using the Linkert 5 scale and analyzed the mental perspective of 50 people in the borderland communities.

Experts' Views on Susta Border Dispute

Prabhakar Sharma writes that the Narsarhi-Susta dispute has resulted because of several changes in the course of the Narayani (Gandak) River in the last two centuries (Sharma, 2022, p.164). It basically emerged during the monsoon seasons of 1845, 1924-28, 1954, 1972, 1980, and 1989 (ibid). Sharma argues that this region was so remote and massively forested which became a place for the shelter of dacoits and fugitives. Such a shelter of dacoits of out of the border replaced Nepali population from that place and the region became vacant from Nepali population. Then, serious deforestation and encroachment process was geared up slowly by Indian logging contractors. Bhusal and Dhungel write, "The Gandak river was diverted during the construction of the barrage at Bhaislotan in 1963-68. Because of human intervention, the river's flow changed towards Nepal, which continued encroachment on Nepal's territory and resulted in the deaths of four security personnel and a civilian in a conflict in 1962/63 (2022, p.142). They write:

"The flow of the Gandak River has changed many times due to monsoon floods and other causes. As a result, the Susta region of 1816 in the west (Nepal) side of the river is now

in the eastern (Indian) region. Narshahi territory of Nepal in 1816 is now an island between the main and tributary channels of the Gandak River. The area has been in dispute for a long time. According to the information provided to the Rajya Sabha, (Upper House of the Indian Parliament) on 26 June 1962, an area of 3886 hectares from the tri-national confluence of Gorakhpur (UP), Champaran (Bihar), and Nepal to Gandak has been in dispute between Nepal and India since 1884/85" (2022, p. 142).

Like Sharma, Bhusal, and Dhungel also argue the same. They write that the dispute remains mainly due to the constant changes in the course of the river flow that defines the boundary. Similarly, Bhandari writes that due to frequent floods in the Narayani river, along with the change in the course of the river, the Indians tried to encroach on the eastern territory of the river (Bhandari, 2005, p.32). According to him, the borderland community has the same question, "when shall we get rid of the misery of the Indians? Why the Nepali government is silent when we local residents are awake to protect the motherland (2005, p. 37)? Likewise, Shrestha explains based on the local community's statement:

In Susta, at the instigation of the Indian Armed Forces (SSB), Indians destroyed the paddy and sugarcane crops planted there and started seizing the land. About 350 Nepalese families were affected when more than one thousand Bihar Indian citizens entered into Susta. In fact, the Narayani river bank was responsible for the conflict in the land of the Susta region in the past. It is understood that the leaders of Bihar intend to distribute land to the Indian citizens by replacing Nepali people from the region in order to influence their voters in the Bihar assembly elections. If the displaced Nepalese gave a statement that the place belongs to Bihar, they were assured that they would be given land ownership certificates and Indian citizenship immediately by the Indian government (Shrestha, 2005, p.10).

In addition, KC explores:

Historical background of Susta After the Sugauli Treaty, according to the map published in 1817, there was no boundary pillar (Jange Pillars) buried in the twenty-four-kilometer area from Tribenighat to Sagardinhi. Narayani River was considered as the border between the two countries in that area. At that time, the river used to flow completely east of Susta. But after 1845, due to several floods, the Narayani River started flowing towards the West of Susta. After repeated floods, finally Susta located out of the Narayani River. Gradually, the Indians started to move towards the west and started claiming that the whole region was their own, considering the new course of flow established by the Narayani River as the boundary line of the two countries (KC, 2005, p.15)..

In this way, the dispute of Susta between the two countries evolved. To solve the border problem, a Joint Boundary Commission was formed in 1929. Meetings

of the commission were held in 1937, 1947, 1952, and 1953 respectively to settle the dispute (Bhasin, 1994). But the problem could not be solved and foreign secretaries were assigned to solve it. After a series of formal/informal talks, both countries again agreed to adhere to the Fixed Boundary Principle, but the issue has yet to be resolved due to India's displeasure. The reason behind India's mindset is that she wants to demarcate boundaries based on a newly changed course of River flow and then Nepali land shifts to the southern part of the river. It means the land will automatically be on the side of Indian territory which is the Indian interest. Nepal is for the fixed boundary principle to keep the territory safe even if the river flow changes. Thus, the Susta problem has remained the same. In this situation, to investigate what the borderland communities in Susta exactly are thinking in mind about the border issue, the researcher physically visited the site talked to local leaders, and conducted a brief survey.

Borders in Mind of Borderland Communities

As already written the researcher visited the borderland area of Susta and talked with five key local leaders. The interview was limited to only five local leaders because the information was almost the same even from many other local leaders. The researcher conducted this research from various dimensions and the findings are more or less similar. Primary data collected from in-depth interviews in the narrative form is given below. All the Key Informants said that the Indian side (Indian People) started encroaching on noMen's Land on the Nepali side and Nepali territory because of no border pillars and demarcation in the border. They claimed based on the recent phenomenon rather than historical facts. In 1963, the then King Mahendra issued an order to establish retired soldiers in the Susta area including other Terai regions as well. In 1965, their settlement was established under the leadership of the Retired Indian Army (Nepali national) Kishor Kumar Gurung. He settled a community of his relatives across the border and other *Chaudhary*, *Kurmi* communities, etc. The local leaders as informants shared an interesting fact that Gurung also settled some of his Indian relatives in Susta area so that they would raise their voices in India about Susta and India would be ready to solve the problem. It seems that his action was tricky and strategic however it could not work well. According to the local informants, out of 40,980 hectares of land of Susta, only about 75 hectares were occupied for farming at that time. In 1970, when trying to measure that land, the security personnel of Bihar put Nepali staff at the *Betia* jail of Bihar who were conducting the measurement and mapping the land. In 1972,

that land was officially measured from Nepal and land certificates were distributed to inhabitants and the rest of the Nepali land was fenced off by the Indian side claiming it as their own.

In 1977, there was a severe flood and the land there became uninhabitable. Then the borderland community was shifted to other safe places and that place was vacant. After two years, Nepalis started deforestation in the Nepali area. In the midst of that, the problem of citizenship arose. It was said that the state would grant citizenship to the local inhabitants, but the commitment was not fulfilled. New community groups were re-settled there to safeguard the Nepali land from the Indian side. Then, cross-border confrontation (fighting) between Nepali and Indian people was started and, in 2002 when *Sashastra Seema Bal* (SSB) camp was established there the SSB started patrolling Nepali land. In 2005, with the help of SSB, Indian people started to encroach on the Nepali land, and then after, the cross-border confrontation between Nepali and Indian people increased every month. Almost 14000 ha. Nepali land was encroached upon by Indians in 2005. At present, 19500 ha. Nepali land is encroached upon by Indian people. In the same year, *Susta Bachau Abhiyan* (Save Susta Campaign) was established and registered. Since 2005, the campaign has regularly raised the voice at the local, provincial, and national levels however the problem remains the same. Very recently, 7.49 ha. Nepali land, which has the land certificate, is lost due to the Indian people, and no Nepali citizens can enter that land. Although the Nepali farmers are farming in their Nepali land of Susta having the land certificate, that land is shown on the Indian side on Google map. Therefore, those Nepali citizens do not even get loans from the Nepali Bank. Likewise, hundreds of citizens are deprived of government jobs, loans, opportunities, and foreign employment as they do not have Nepali citizenship. In such a situation, the issue emerges even beyond the type of boundary principles. First, a common consensus should be made on both sides, google Maps should be corrected and then Fixed Boundary Principles should be agreed. But Nepal-governments have not taken this issue seriously even though it has been requested by *Susta Bachau Abhiyan* in the past 18 years many times to the central government of Nepal to initiate the Indian counterpart to solve the problem. Nepali political leaders (Prime Ministers) generally change their voice after their high-level visit to India on this issue. According to Khan, the then Prime Minister of Nepal Pushpa Kamal Dahal said in 2005 that Nepal would lose a lot of things if Nepal initiated to review and amend the bilateral treaties or wanted to replace them with new treaties. Since India is an indispensable friend of Nepal and the Nepali people in any situation, the border problem with India

should be settled amicably and peacefully. In the 2020 new map of Nepal, Susta's encroached territory could not be included by the Oli government and the total area of Susta is 40,980 hectares.

Discussion and Conclusion

From this research, it is concluded that the political border cannot address all the issues of borderland communities. It seems that the borderland communities have not cared about the state's political border, just expressed what they want and what they have been facing for decades during face-to-face interaction with them. Even in the context of the state's silent behaviour, people time and again have been fighting to safeguard the Nepali land but in the meantime, Nepali people have close relations with Indian people. The people-to-people relations seem good despite having some frequent conflicts at the border. There are Indian relatives of Nepali people on the Indian side and Nepali relatives of Indian people on the Nepali side. They help each other when needed and they invite each other to their local festivals as per their expressions. The people on either side even support working on a seasonal basis during the season of farming. So, borderland communities want to safeguard such culture and relations which is totally from a mental border perspective. But, they also want peace, harmony, and good relations between Nepali and Indian people but Nepali borderland communities want the state should protect the Nepali land and control the illegal patrolling of the Indian security force in Nepali land. The border should be demarcated based on the principle of Fixed Boundary Principle (Fixed River Flow) conceptualized during the period of Sugauli treaty. India should understand the sensitivity of Nepal and Nepali people and control the security force and Indian people to encroach the Nepali land on the border side. After that, the border pillar should be provisioned based on the common consensus. From the Nepali side, the Nepal government should provide citizenship to the borderland communities. The Nepali borderland communities expressed their views that the open border helps the people of either side but it should be regulated by some methods or technology to control and mitigate cross-border crime. The next important issue is that the Nepal government should diplomatically deal with the Indian counterpart to solve the problem of Google Maps so that Nepali people could easily get loans from Nepali banks. The research concludes that mental borders are becoming prominent and the state's political border has to address the issues of Mental borders to defend and expand the national interest of Nepal alongwith strengthening political borders as well.

Acknowledgment

The author sincerely expresses the deepest acknowledgment to the University Grants Commission (UGC) for providing the UGC PhD fellowship and the UGC PhD Research Support Grant to the author in International Relations and Diplomacy, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He is equally thankful to his PhD Supervisor Prof. Dr. Khadga KC (Tribhuvan University, Nepal), and Co-supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dhananjay Tripathi (South Asian University, India).

Note

In this paper, the borderland communities are considered to be those groups of people who live nearby the borderland areas and experience all pros and cons of activities conducted by states.

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