

Causes of Ambivalence in Nepal and America Relations

Mahendra Gautam*

Abstract

The United States of America and Nepal have worked together in many different fields after establishing bilateral diplomatic relations in 1947. The USA has been contributing to development sectors like infrastructure development. Still, there is a growing ambivalence among Nepali Youths, especially on the nature of their bilateral relationship. However, Nepal's political parties have different perspectives on how America is engaged in Nepal. In 2022 Nepal ratified Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) from the parliament under fierce criticism and strong protests from some political parties, their sister wings, and even Civil Society Groups. Their protests were primarily concerned with the feeling that both countries have no equal status in the bilateral relationship. There are a few questions on the nature of American presence in Nepal. Nepal is a geopolitically significant land between two emerging nations of the world; India and China. There is a history of American interference in different countries of the world that has become a source of ambivalence in Nepal. Left wings politicians are very doubtful of the role of the USA in Nepal, especially how it showed desperation in turmoil to ratify the MCC project. This context has fuelled mistrust against the USA in Nepal. Though the majority of the youths of Nepal dream of going to America at any cost, they are still protesting against the American presence in the country. The attraction of Nepali youths to Diversity Visa applications and strong street protests against MCC are full of juxtapositions. Why this duality exists in the mind of Nepali youths? This article aims to study the causes of ambivalence in the relationship between the nations.

Keywords: Ambivalence, bilateral relation, communism, decolonial

Background of the Study

The United States of America and Nepal have established bilateral diplomatic relations for more than seventy-six years. In those years of friendship, the countries have shared numerous ideas in several international forums. Being the second state to establish diplomatic relations with Nepal, The USA has been providing aid in

* Mr. Gautam is a Lecturer at Department of International Relations and Diplomacy (DIRD), Tribhuvan University. Email: mahengautam5@gmail.com

different development sectors like infrastructure development. America's keenness to develop bilateral relations with Nepal is significant in many aspects, especially after it emerges as a global superpower. After World War 2nd, the United States of America led the liberal democratic wings and started controlling the spread of communism. The socialist block led by the USSR promoted communism in many European countries through economic assistance under the policy of 'perestroika'. The USA was very concerned with the spread of communism in different parts of the world. In Asia, countries like the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, and North Korea were emerging socialist states. Context dragged America to establish diplomatic relations with Nepal from where they could take a look at Asian giants India and China. Professor Dr. Jay Raj Acharya thinks America came to Nepal sensing the geopolitical sensitivity of this nation in which it visualized the Himalayas not only as the border between Nepal and China but also between autocratic communism and a liberal democratic world (Acharya 2012). America's assistance to Nepal is with a clear purpose that it does not want to lose its grip as an influential partner in Nepal, the sensitive geopolitical landscape. The bilateral relationship that started during Rana Regime flourished well even after the establishment of democracy. Development aid kept coming to Nepal even after every political transition. The USA always advocated for democracy and kept working harmoniously even after the introduction of Panchayat, the restoration of Democracy, and at present in the Republic era. But it is not free from accusations of expansionist and imperialist behavior in Nepal. The USA is working as the panoptic on China and India from Nepal. From Nepal, it can take a very close look at India and the Chinese autonomous province of Tibet. It shows America's vested interest is in surveillance from here. American surveillance is on political activity, geopolitical issues, and even economic ones (Fluri and Shrestha 2022). Despite the contribution to the development of Nepal, there is a mixed feelings about America

among Nepali youths. Even among the majority, there is a dream to go and settle in America. Here is a question why does this ambivalence reside in the mind of Nepali People against their dreamland? This research primarily centered on this issue.

Causes of ambivalence in Nepal-America relations

It has already been more than Seventy-Five years of bilateral relations between Nepal and the United States of America. Still, there is ambivalence in the mind of Nepali Youths about the role The USA plays in Nepal. Nepali youths keep dreaming of going to America seeking a better life, better income, and better opportunities, but still, they are accusing the USA of imposing their interest in economic or political policy making. Why this type of duality exists in the mind of the majority of citizen? The fundamental concern is on the nature of their bilateral relationship, especially on sovereign equality between the countries. The USA is displaying its hegemonic nature in political and economic policy-making in Nepal. It is similar to the expansionists who always interfere in Nepal's sovereign status. The feeling of nationalism that emerged during the Maoist revolution helped foster that feeling among many youths in Nepal. Maoists instructed their cadres to declare America as expansionist during and even after the insurgency. The print in the mind of those rebellions is still working as a stimulus to promote sentiment against America (Giri 2013). However, there is a juxtaposition between their thought and practice. After the comprehensive peace agreement signed between the Government of Nepal and CPN Maoists in 2005, many Maoist cadres went for foreign employment. Some of them went to America by taking illegal routes. They spent millions of rupees to enter America through land and waterways. Some of them lost their lives in the process. Janak Raj Sapkota writes (The Kathmandu Post); the Maoist Youths from their strongholds who started their revolt declaring

America as Expansionist fell under the network of illegal traffickers to go to the same land. They spend large amounts of money, lost an average of sixty million rupees for that, and were deported even after reaching there (23 June 2023). CPN Maoist blames America as an expansionist. It also instructs its cadres against America but voted for MCC in the parliament. However, its sister wings were protesting against MCC in the street. The report published in The Kathmandu Post on (16th February 2022) says that CPN Maoist Centre has officially against the tabulation of MCC in the parliament. Dev Gurung, the spokesperson of the CPN Maoist Centre, told the national media about the decision made by the party (23 June 2022). At that time party was in government. The party played a dual role in the MCC issue resulting in ambivalence and demonstrating on the street. It is not very difficult to understand the political stunt the communist party used to blackmail people emotionally under patriotism. Not only Maoist Centre, other communist parties like CPN UML, CPN (Masal), Communist Party of Nepal (Biplob), and many others also played a similar role in the case of MCC in both streets and in the parliament (Nepal Press, 9th February 2022). When there was UML's government, the party attempted to table and pass MCC from the parliament. When it was in the opposition bench, it boycotted the entire parliamentary process. Though the party did not protest its sister wing kept heating the street. It promoted negative sentiment against America as political propaganda for the communist parties of Nepal. In reality, they are very much supportive and recipient of it. Nepali Congress's sister wing Nepal Student Union was protesting against MCC while the party went to pass this compact. Though political propaganda was one of the reasons to have mixed feelings against the USA in Nepal, it is not the only reason. America's hegemonic presence in Nepal is visible. It has been interfering in the internal affairs of Nepal, especially in the field of economy, culture, and education. It forced Nepal to implement the new curriculum

in 2028. The US diplomats were involved in developing marital relationships among the Nepali leaders. During the Maoist insurgency, the American army provided special combat training under the anti-terrorism campaign (Shibakoti 2075). These activities of America contributed to developing the feeling of juxtaposition among Nepali youths.

Nepal is geopolitically a sensitive country. It is a common fact that many external powers play distinctly in Nepal's internal and external affairs. The USA shows its presence in Nepal in a hegemonic manner. This hegemonic presence of America kept fostering in the name of promotion and support the democratic practice, its institutions, and economic development through liberalization, conflict resolution, and poverty alleviation. These issues from the US became primary sources of foreign intervention in Nepal. However, it is not limited there. In the Khampa issue, America kept helping them without taking the consent of the Nepali Government (Mage 2007). In Nepal's political transition, the USA is keeping a close look. After the end of the monarchy, it is observing closely to see how the China-Nepal relationship goes ahead. The USA is also concerned about Pakistan's 'Look East Policy' that America never wanted to see executed. India and China were both suspicious of Western hegemonic influence in Nepal that could become unfavorable to both. America got Nepal as a very significant window to see both its neighbors. It applied contentment policy in Nepal to stop the influence of communist China and even the southern traditional neighbor. The interference in the name of the 'war on terror' continued even after the peace agreement in 2005 (Nayak 2014). The hegemonic presence of the US was exposed when it forced Nepali leaders to pass MCC through numerous official and unofficial meetings.

Conclusion

The Nepal-USA relationship is very long in tenure. Their longstanding relationship has been fluctuating in nature. This fluctuation has created ambivalence about America among Nepali Youths. The dreamland of Nepali youths is not far from the feeling of suspicion and a certain amount of hatred. There are three fundamental reasons for generating ambivalence; the first reason lies in the dualistic nature of political parties, the left-wing political power who instruct their cadres against America in the name of nationalism. The second reason for this is the historical hegemonic presence of America in Nepal that started immediately after the establishment of democracy. The third reason is American interference with policy-making in Nepal. It wants surveillance on both neighbors. Nepal needs to be very clear on how to use the powerful nation in the promotion of national interest rather than working in their favor of them. Duality in the theory and practice of left-wing politicians needs to be clarified to erase ambivalence in the mind of youths.

References

Acharya, J. R. (2010). Nepal -USA relations. Shyam Kumar Bhattarai, (Eds.), *International Relations and Foreign Affairs* (2nd ed., pp.379-386). Sopan Monthly Publication.

Cadres of various political parties stage a demonstration against MCC (9th June 2022). *Nepal Press*. <https://english.nepalpress.com/2022/02/09/cadres-of-various-political-parties-stage-demonstration-against-mcc/>

Fluri, J. L. & Shrestha, R. (2023). Geopolitics of security and surveillance in Nepal and Afghanistan: A comparative analysis. *Environment and Planning C:*

Politics and Space, 41(1), 92–108.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544221115952>

Giri, M. (2013). Maoists of Nepal: Their use of nationalism. *Journal of Political Studies*, 8, 09-26. <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/handle/123456789/3706>

Mage, J. (2007). The Nepali revolution and international relations. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(20), 19-25, 1834-1839. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4419603>.

Maoist Centre says it is against MCC compact Tabling. (16th Feb. 2022). *The Kathmandu posts*. <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2022/02/16/maoist-centre-says-it-is-against-mcc-compact-tabling>.

Nayak, N. R. (2014). *Strategic Himalayas republican Nepal and external powers*. Pentagon Press.

Sapkota, J. R. (2023). Desperate youths from Maoist heartland hit the US wall. *The Kathmandu Post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2023/06/25/desperate-youths-from-maoist-heartland-hit-us-wall>.

Shiwakoti, G. (2075). *Nepalese foreign relation in transition*. Pairavi Prakasan.