

Production of the Narratives of Climate Change and Climate Justice through Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The present research investigates the role of mass media in producing the narratives of climate change and climate justice in Nepal. For this purpose, sample of the date were extracted from the online edition of *The Kathmandu Post* daily, the largest circulating English newspaper of Nepal. The study has used Critical Discourse Analysis as the methodological tool to analyze socio-cognitive as well as linguistic elements prevalent in the texts of the newspaper. Particularly, through the philosophical impetuses of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. Van Dijk we have tried to unveil the power dynamics imbedded into the text. Our findings reveal that, the mass media play important role in shaping the meaning of climate justice and this is executed through linguistic as well as pictorial representation of climate change. When the mass media intend to serve the interest of the state that further exacerbates the climate change induced sufferings of the marginalized community.

Keywords: climate change, environment, discourse analysis, Nepali media

Introduction

Anthropogenic climate change has become one of the prominent threats humanity has been suffering from in 21st century. Climate change is not only the environmental issue, rather it is also a critical problem pertaining to socio-economic as well political spectrum (Islam & Kieu, 2021). On the other hand, people are disproportionately affected by the repercussion of this environmental hazard. People from the marginalized community are the ones to suffer more whereas they have negligible role in exacerbating the effects of climate change.

Generally, climate change is considered to be the area of the concern of Natural Science. However, to deal with the complex socio-political dynamics of it, the role of social science research has also been highly acknowledged by the academics in recent time (p.2). In our research paper, we will try to examine how the discourses of climate change has been created via newspaper articles and how the people at the margin of power relations are affected by it. To this end, we will use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the methodological tool.

Generally, discourse is understood as the use of language in a certain context. Norman Fairclough opines that, “Language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research has to take account of language” (p. 2). Similarly, Michael Foucault uses the term discourse to denote a social fact resulted by asymmetrical power relation between center and margin. He calls to question the existing discourse and destabilize the fixity of the truth (Foucault, 1972). Likewise, according to van Dijk “Critical Discourse Analysis is a discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimized and resisted by text and talk in the social context” (p. 352). In such a theoretical backdrop, we will browse the newspaper articles, editorials and Op-eds related to climate change published in the online version of *The Kathmandu Post Daily* and analyze the discursive patterns.

This paper will explore how the powerful groups have been taking hold of the public narratives about the climate change through the mainstream media in Nepal. Therefore, our endeavor is not only limited to exhibiting the linguistic patterns of the newspaper, rather we will also excavate the underlying dynamics of power and hegemony which impedes climate justice in Nepal. The dichotomy of vested interests and power relationship imbedded in the language makes the discourse a prominent “hegemonic device” (Newell, 2001). Therefore, the extended outline of our methodological framework will also encompass the philosophical tenets of Michael Foucault and Antonio Gramsci as well.

The prime objective of our research is to examine the way mainstream media is creating the narratives about climate change and climate justice. The application of Critical Discourse Analysis to these issues will provide us the insight about the power dynamics disseminated through the media discourse. As the climate change has been the burgeoning environmental concern, local as well as global, we will also look into its repercussions to the marginalized people.

Our paper will be structured in this way. After the introductory part, we will illustrate the overview of existing academic literature on climate change in Nepal and elsewhere. Literature review will help us to find out the research gap and establish the relevance of our work. Further, we will elaborate the significance of Critical Discourse Analysis as the appropriate methodological tools for this particular research project. Afterwards, we will collect data via internet and analyze according to the previously elaborated methodological tool, which will engender the research outcome for the concluding part.

Literature Review

Media is one of the major sources of information which plays vital role in establishing public agenda in people’s mind. The media can produce and reproduce the specific narratives about climate change and shape public’s perspectives on it. Illustration of the climate induced problems in media can influence people’s understanding about the issue which ultimately gives direction to mitigate the problem (Carvalho, 2010). However, the mainstream media often reproduces the discourses as per the will of the power which ultimately distorts the factual reality. Maxim T. Boykoff and Tom Yulsman (2013) argue that the mass media has the capacity of converging knowledge and interpretation about the climate change and provide necessary guidelines to the general public as well as the policy makers at the same time (p. 368). However, there always remains the risk of misrepresentation and discrepancies.

Obviously, news media are the most popular sources of information of climate change across the world. But the selection and publication of any particular piece of news article is extensively influenced by the subjectivity of the journalist (Shoemaner and Rose, 2013). Therefore, critical evaluation of the issues related to climate change and climate justice depicted in mass media requires objective methodological tool.

Saraswat & Kumar (2016) argue that people from vulnerable communities are immensely affected by the repercussions of climate change but they are deliberately excluded from the policy making process (p. 68). Consequently, mainstream media give less space to the voices of the voiceless people. Such double victimization of the people from the margin is one of the major concerns of this research work. On the one hand, climate change has contributed in perpetuating impoverishment of the community, on the other, the media also ignores them.

At present, climate change has been the major socio-political issue throughout the world. It has also become a critical component of social change and our attempt is to uncover how the news media discursively generate narratives about the climate change. In this regard, scholars point out that discourse analysis of mass media is instrumental in unravelling social relations and ideological standpoint of those who are the helm of power (Chouliaraki, 2008). Though the news produced and disseminated

by the mass media is claimed to be impartial and apolitical, political agendas influenced by the power relations are imbued in very subtle way (Pyles, Svistova & Ahn, 2017). Peter Haas argues that even the truth produced by science is influenced by political process (p. 238). The interaction of power and knowledge is the root cause of generating truth. The power emanates from the state and knowledge, in our context, is generated by the newspaper narratives. Therefore, we are trying to uncover the nexus between knowledge and power in the discourse of climate change.

The mass media is one of the most important apparatuses that provides knowledge about climate to the general public (Doulton & Brown, 2009). But, media does not function in vacuum, rather it is predominantly affected by the existing power relation. As a result, the agency of media is controlled by the elites in power and people at the margin are further oppressed. Public understanding of climate change is affected by various political intricacies of the contemporary time (Newell, 2001). Generally, the mass media is considered to be the effective tool to check the despotic tendency of the state, but in reality, it is mostly the other way around. Mainstream media is hugely manipulated by the after-effects of the corporate-state partnership.

Some critical thinkers understand that, climate change discourse is laden with multiple social identities which are context sensitive, and our relationship with the climate crisis is shaped by such discourses. The media creates a discourse and meaning is derived through its multiplicity. Fundamentally, the dominant discourse becomes the platform of power struggle (Wodak, 2002) where the voices of marginalized communities are always ignored or silenced.

Audet opines that, it is very hard to define climate justice as it is a normative judgement determined by social actor and their critical manipulation (p. 29). The issue of climate justice is prone to subjective interpretation of various stakeholders with different interests of their own. The developed countries and the developing ones engage in a never ending debate and blame each other for being less responsible in the issues of climate change and climate justice (Scillington, p.17). Our study will demonstrate how the issues of climate justice has been abstracted to the community level and how have the media been giving space to them.

The previous investigations outlined above demonstrate that Critical Discourse Analysis is an appropriate methodological tool to study narratives related to climate change. Numerous studies have been conducted using CDA to examine the power relationships insinuating in the media discourses. But such study in the context of Nepal is very scant. Therefore, our research work will add a new critical approach in the field of research and scholarship related to climate change and climate justice in Nepal.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a research approach that involves analyzing the language and communication used in media coverage of climate change and climate justice in order to understand how these issues are represented and constructed. CDA can help to uncover the underlying assumptions, values, and ideologies that shape media narratives about climate change and climate justice, as well as the ways in which these narratives are used to influence public opinion and policy decisions.

The language and framing used to describe climate change and climate justice is an important aspect of understanding how these issues are represented in the media. The way these terms are defined and used can vary depending on the context, and can shape the way audiences perceive and understand the issues. Additionally, the sources and experts who are quoted or cited in media coverage can also have a significant impact on how the issues are represented. The perspectives and views of these sources and experts can shape the way the issues are discussed and understood. Another important aspect is the ways

in which media coverage presents different perspectives on climate change and climate justice, and how these perspectives are balanced or biased. This can include the representation of different stakeholder groups, such as industry and environmental groups, as well as different political perspectives. Finally, the broader cultural and political contexts in which media coverage of climate change and climate justice takes place can also shape the way these issues are represented and understood. This can include the influence of political ideologies, social norms, and historical contexts on the way these issues are discussed and understood.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method of analyzing language use in various forms of communication, such as media texts, to understand the ways in which power and ideology are constructed and negotiated. CDA can be used to examine the narratives surrounding climate change and climate justice in the media, to understand how these issues are represented and how they are connected to broader political, social, and economic structures.

Previous studies demonstrate the utility of CDA in analyzing the narratives of climate change and climate justice in the media, and highlight the importance of considering the social, political, and economic contexts in which these narratives are constructed. For example, Baysha & Tawil, (2015) found that media coverage of the UNFCCC COP meetings tended to focus on technical and scientific issues, rather than on the social and political dimensions of these issues (p.473). Similarly, Kennedy (2017) found that media coverage of the Paris Agreement tended to focus on the actions of individual countries, rather than on the collective actions of the international community (p.174). These findings discuss on media narratives that can obscure the connections between climate change and climate justice and broader issues of inequality and social justice. Bowerm & Manns (2014) also found that media coverage of the Copenhagen Climate Summit tended to focus on the failure of the summit to reach a binding agreement, rather than on the underlying issues of climate justice and the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities (p. 1014). Khan found that media coverage of the 2014 United Nations Climate Summit tended to portray climate change as a technical and scientific problem, rather than as a social and political issue (p. 257). Smith & Roberts (2017) found that media coverage of the COP21 in Paris tended to focus on the actions of individual countries, rather than on the collective actions of the international community. These studies, such as Baysha & Tawil (473), Kennedy (174), Bowerm & Manns (1014), Khan (257) and Smith & Roberts (49) all demonstrate the utility of CDA in analyzing the narratives of climate change and climate justice in the media, and the ways in which these narratives are shaped by the social, political, and economic contexts in which they are constructed.

Discussion

Media and Climate Change: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Climate Change Related Contents Published in *The Kathmandu Post Daily*

The mass media plays significant role in shaping the discourse about climate change and climate justice. As, discourse is the result of complex network of power, control over discourse is a powerful mechanism for sustaining power (Fairclough, 1999). There always exists interplay among the multitude of discourses, but the dominant discourse has dominant influence in production of meaning (Wodak, 2002, p.55). For example, if mass media portray the humanitarian crisis caused by climate change only as an environmental issue that will mask the socio-political realities behind it.

Under the heading of “A Drying Country” *The Kathmandu Post* has published an editorial with a photograph in which the predicaments of rural women due to climate change is succinctly depicted. The

photograph exhibits a clear picture of how the anthropogenic activities on global climate change have affected lifestyle of rural women in Nepal.

The visible proof of climate change experienced in Nepal and elsewhere is unusually dry winter and scanty rain which has caused drying out of water sources. Consequently, people have to travel long distance to fetch drinking water. In a traditional society, most of the household chores, including managing drinking water, is on the shoulders of the women. This is how, climate change has added hardship in their lives. However, it is not only the gender, but also there are multitudes of intersections that are being overlooked in policy responses. As a result, a large section of people have been victims of contemporary environmental injustice. (Gay & Antaki, 2020, p. 17). But due to longstanding patriarchal mindset, women are deprived from articulating their voices in the policy formulating forums of the government. As a result, their suffering perpetuates. Researchers also argue that, women in the third world are more susceptible to the effects of the climate change due to their gender role in the family and society. (MacGregor, 2009, p.112).

The following excerpt suggests that people from vulnerable strata have been experiencing the detrimental effects of the environmental hazard but the state has been doing nothing to mitigate the problems.

A big part of the problem is the government's inability to set up a sturdy resilience mechanism. As the state remains mostly clueless, people are left to deal with the crisis themselves. In the short term, the communities should be empowered through local level units by teaching them low-cost solutions such as the use of cheap, plastic-lined rainwater harvesting ponds during dry spells. In the long run, the government should help strengthen resilience by building solid irrigation and drinking water infrastructures that help people stay put in their traditional habitats. While doing so, it should also consider the vulnerability of socially marginalised communities such as poor people, *Dalits*, religious minorities and women who bear the brunt of inequities brought about by the climate crisis. (A Drying)



According to Gergio Agamben, bare life is created by forcing a person's existence in between the status of human and animal, in between nature and culture (p. 39). He derives the term *homo sacer* from the ancient Roman law in which individual's judicial status was determined through its exclusion (Leban, 2017). Due to the persistent impact of climate change, significant portion of population of particular areas is converted into bare life and they are compelled to flee their homeland. Such phenomenon is igniting "Violent conflicts in several parts of the world as food and land scarcity become acute" (A Drying).

The mass media has limitation of its own. It is always not possible to cover the stories of sufferings of the people in remote area. Neither that is financially lucrative, as collecting such stories may cost huge amount of time and money. Therefore, the newspapers tend to cover the fancy incidents related to climate change happening in the cities. Consequently, the discourse created by such illustrations trivializes the real agony of the people caused by climate change. In such context, Van Dijk opines that, "Many level of structure of context and talk can in principle be more or less controlled by powerful speakers and institutions and such power may be abused at the expense of specific recipients, groups or civil society. (p. 472).

A news article by Arati Ghimire (2022) under the title of “Climate Activists Decry Unwelcome Move in Climate Finance” in *The Kathmandu Post Daily* features a protest of climate activists in Kathmandu. A few activists are protesting against the government’s decision of accepting loans from the World Bank. The activists are “infuriated at Nepal’s acceptance of the loan. Their biggest worry is that their regular aid could once again be simultaneously converted towards meeting both climate change obligation and development commitment, also known as double counting” (Ghimire, 2022). On the other hand, people from rural areas and marginalized community have very limited access to mass media and it is very hard for them to make their voices heard. In the context of climate change discourse too, the concern of dominant group is easily integrated in legislation, policies, rules, norms which ultimately take form of what Gramsci says *hegemony*.

It is generally agreed that, the states that have contributed the most in global warming must be the ones bearing more responsibility and cost of their transgressions (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). This discourse is also known as the polluter-pays principle (PPP), which is the kernel of climate justice. Since Nepal has negligible role in global warming, the protesters are against of the climate loan, rather they are demanding to convert the amount into grant. According to them, if Nepal is asked to “pay back on climate finance, then they will be penalizing us doubly- for bearing the brunt of climate change and for having to pay back the debt they forced us to take” (Ghimire).

Gender perspective of climate change is still a novice field of research (Macgregor, 2009, p.102). It is an obvious fact that women are more vulnerable than their male counterparts to be exposed to the socio-environmental hazards caused by climate change. On January 13, 2022, The Kathmandu Post has published a news article entitled “A Visual Intersection of Women and Climate Change” which is about screening of a documentary followed by a panel discussion. The news is followed by a photograph in which majority of the panelists are women who speak on the impact of climate change in the lives of rural women.

The gender implication of climate change does not merely refer to the connection between gender and risks of climate change. Rather it also exhibits how gender intersects with other factors such as caste, economic status, ethnicity etc. and ultimately resulting multitude of vulnerabilities of the women. Often, media highlights the selected events of women representation and generalizes the particular incident as the all-encompassing truth, which ultimately creates a false discourse. The main aim of Critical Discourse Analysis is “to explore the hidden and transparent gender discrimination in discourse (Kayed et al, 2017, p.246).

The Kathmandu Post also publishes the news stories about the mitigation activities in the remote areas, but frequency of such news is less in number than that of the urban areas. On the other hand, such news get space mostly when the ministers or other high ranked politicians are participating in the events. In its edition of March 9th 2023, The Post has published a feature about an event held in a remote village of Khumjung in Sankhuwasabha district. The program had special significance because it was conducted in a village which has already experienced the hazards of climate change. According to the news, the “women shared their grievances on the impact of climate change on their daily lives including reduced harvests, owing to less rainfall and low soil fertility” (Niraula).



The photograph has the semiotic importance. The indigenous women clad in traditional attire are participating the program entitled “Differential Impacts of Climate Change on Women”. According to the news report, the speakers of the program had highlighted the importance of indigenous knowledge to resolve environmental issues including climate change. Tyson Yunkaporta, (2019) in his book *Sand Talk* outlines the importance of indigenous worldview in safeguarding the nature. He further explains, “Perhaps we need to revisit the brilliant thought paths of our Paleolithic Ancestors and recover enough cognitive function to correct the impossible messes civilization has created, before the echidnas decide to sack us all and take over as the custodial species of this planet” (p.12).



According to Norman Fairclough (1999), the social text has discursive ability and can also influence people’s knowledge and behavior in micro level and whole social and political setting in macro level. He further asserts:

Most immediately, texts can bring about changes in our knowledge (we can learn things from them), our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth. They also have longer-term causal effects – one might for instance argue that prolonged experience of advertising and other commercial texts contributes to shaping people’s identities as ‘consumers’, or their gender identities. Texts can also start wars, or contribute to changes in education, or to changes in industrial relations, and so forth. (p. 8).

Sometimes, the mass media creates a grand narrative and disseminates among the public, which immensely influences the belief system of the mass. Such opinionated endeavor engenders a distorted discourse that serves the interest of the people in power. The Post has published an op-ed article entitled “Climate Change and National Security” by Surendra Singh Rawal (2021). The so called grand narrative of national security camouflages the real problems faced by the vulnerable people. On the other hand, internally displaced people, refugees, children etc. are more concerned to mitigate their everyday problem rather than indulging into the intellectual debate pertaining to national security.

In most of the cases, the state is antagonistic towards the genuine problems of the common people. In such circumstances, the so called issue of national security seldom appeals the vulnerable community. The article further states:

The inter-linkage of the environment and the complexity of South Asia’s socioeconomic and geopolitical situation has made the region more susceptible to climate change. Nepal’s snow-capped mountains are turning bare, adversely affecting the country and the entire South Asian region, thereby amplifying food insecurity, violence and migration in the Himalayan basin area. Due to a monsoon pattern shift, the area suffers from droughts, inundation and landslides. The increasing natural disasters demand extensive humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions, compromising military preparedness for core military operations (Rawal, 2021).

Discourse is crafted out of the trilogy of language, power and ideology. Such articles published in the largest selling national daily insinuate into the people’s mind and produce the intended *truth*, which ultimately converts a large portion of population into the biopolitical subjects. On the one hand, people are struggling for basic survival due to climate hazards, on the other hand, the states are more concerned to the issues of national security. As a result, boarder zones are converted into the space of biopolitical interplay. Therefore, the states are engaged in managing the movement of population rather than assisting them to cope up with everyday problems. (Zevalera, 2017)

According to Bhatia, V. K., Flowerdew, J., & Jones, R. H. (2008) “The text analysis of media discourse captures the broad, societal dimensions of social action, using a Gramscian view of media power as hegemonic articulations of meaning, yet such work is still held accountable for not quite explicating how such struggles of meaning may affect social action in diverse and contradictory ways, in broader contexts of culture and society” (p. 224). In his article, the writer seems concerned to the issues of national security only in the syntactic and semantic level. But, while delving into his intention in the article, a different picture is revealed. By the end of the article, he unintentionally confirms that, he is trying to foster a particular discourse of American Supremacy through the article. He concludes his proposition as “The US must develop a credible national security strategy that incorporates ways and means to address the adverse effects of climate change at home and abroad. And the rest should follow suit” (Rawal, 2021).

The writer is forcibly trying to establish the US as the leader in combatting the battle against climate change. However, in reality, the US is the largest emitter of the greenhouse gasses which is held responsible of global warming. The writer is trying to create a discourse which would portray the US as the leader in fight against global warming which juxtaposes with the reality. However, the climate change perspective is more concerned to social equity and believes in differential responsibilities of the stakeholders (Toker, 2010). It emphasizes on the localized ways of mitigating actions rather than the universal solutions imposed by the international community. On the other hand, the indigenous groups advocating for climate justice stress on incorporating indigenous cosmology as the solution of climate change (IEN, 2010).

According to Encarnacio Hidalgo Tenorio (2011), the pictures published in the newspaper have significant role in the meaning making process (p. 197). The following picture was published on The Post to symbolize climate refugee. The pale background of the global map symbolizes despair and hopelessness. The women leading the exodus depicts the disproportionate effects of climate change on women. The picture depicts the saga of climate refugees who are marching towards the uncertain future.

The Kathmandu Post has also published a counter discourse against the climate change which has tried to deconstruct the popular narrative of climate refugee. In his op-ed article entitle “Abandoning the concept of Climate Refugee” W. Andrew Baldwin (2022) blames the states for playing foul politics in the name of climate change. He blames that:

This is why we should be extremely wary of categories like “climate migrant” and “climate refugee”, which are designed to draw our attention away from historical explanations. When, for example, the World Bank claims that are expected to become “internal climate migrants” by 2050, it leaves little room for more nuanced historical accounts of migration. The World Bank wants us to believe that climate change is the most pressing threat facing the world’s most precarious people and that it will force millions from their homes. However, by fostering this belief, the World Bank masks how its policies have rendered precarious the very people it now claims to be helping. (Baldwin, 2022).



The global discourse on climate change may differ than the national and local discourses. The dynamism of such discourses is relative to the local context but that are interwoven with the global ones (Rai , 2010, p. 169). Therefore, the phenomenon such as climate migration and climate refugees should

not be perceived just as the descriptor of particular reality rather, they should alert the entire humanity about what is going to befall on the human race in near future.

Conclusion

The narratives of climate change and climate justice are power-laden and mediated, which are also the recursive spaces of knowledge and interpretation. The mass media has produced and disseminated the information about climate science which is simultaneously consumed by the general public as well as the policy makers. Therefore, the mass media have significant role in shaping the meaning regarding climate change and climate justice. Our research provides a kaleidoscopic view on how the Nepalese media have been producing and reproducing the narratives of climate change and climate justice. Nonetheless, we are equally aware that our research work is embedded with multiple limitations. The sample of the data we collected is just a miniscule in the ocean of the mass media. However, we firmly believe that, our research finding is a tip of iceberg, of which the significant part is yet to be revealed.

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