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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ANALYZING FOREIGN AID TO NEPAL FROM A CRITICAL RACE THEORY PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

The foreign aid given to Nepal has not been properly utilized due to our prevalent racism and gender bias. Critical race theory, feminism and translanguaging offer important tools for examining the activities of the Nepalese government in terms of deploying foreign aid to uplift the conditions of minorities of the country.

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Introduction:-

Foreign Aid to Nepal, one of the 20 poorest countries in the world, has brought about mixed results – the good and the bad. The good is that Nepalese have been able to receive the essential services like health and education, establish major infrastructure like the road and hydropower. All these sectors are partly funded by the donor. In fact, the Ministry of Finance Development Cooperation Report 2012 says, “the main sectors receiving external support are education, local development, health, roads followed by drinking water, energy, agriculture, and peace and rehabilitation” (p. 9). Though the purpose of the foreign aid is to help racial minorities and women in the country, Nepal has not been able to utilize the aid in a positive way, and the aid has not been spent for the minorities due to rampant racism and patriarchy in the country. It is worth noting an influential critical race theory scholar Ashok Bhusal’s (2017) work titled “The rhetoric of racism and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States” where he states that “What is necessary at this point is, with the tools offered in critical race theory, is to complete a deeper study of minorities and bring their stories, their voices, into academic scholarship” (p. 88). Bhusal further adds that “Using personal (counter) narratives, increasing exposure to multicultural education, and incorporating the study of all minorities in critical race theory may prove to be effective practices in the effort to overcome the racism that many say is still prevalent in American society” (p. 88). Non-traditional rhetoric may also help provide voice to the minorities. Suresh Lohani (2019) in “Constructing Nontraditional Rhetoric: Critical Study on Gloria Anzaldua and Suresh Canagarajah” asserts that he is “convinced to a degree that nontraditional rhetoric is perhaps more engaged with the rhetorical use of language bent on providing a voice to the ones rendered voiceless” (p.122).

It means we need to talk about the pains and sufferings of minorities and at the same time work toward uplifting their current situations and utilizing the foreign aid. Bhusal (2019) in his “The rhetoric of racism in society” says that “the racist attitudes and behaviours of the majority ... have caused many problems for the marginalized” (p. 114). Often the legal documents do not contain any racist or discriminatory language. However, members of society who are pregnant with dominant discriminatory ideologies may ignore the spirit of these unbiased legal documents and continue with their discriminatory practices. Suresh Lohani (2016) in “LGBTI in Nepal, Pakistan, and India: Law, Religion, and Individuals” states that “translation of constitution and legality into the social level is also missing point in the context of Nepal, which has its own hazards” (p.38). Thus, when written legal documents are overshadowed by societal practices, marginal voices continue to be suppressed.

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While critical race theory provides a framework for studying racial minorities, feminist theory emphasizes female voices in society. In Ashok Bhusal and Suresh Lohani's (2019) book *Pedagogy, language ideology, and multimodal composition*, Ashok Bhusal says that "What is needed now is to integrate courses such as feminist rhetoric, social rhetoric and cultural rhetoric into our field to examine the nuances of dominant patriarchal and canonical norms and remap the rhetorical tradition" (p. 6). Similarly, Ashok Bhusal (2017), in his "Emphasizing the suppression of feminist voices," emphasizes the achievements of female rhetors across four centuries— "Mary Astell, eighteenth-century English author Mary Wollstonecraft, the nineteenth-century American writer Margaret Fuller, and the later nineteenth and early twentieth-century African American writer Ida Bell Wells" (p. 54).

Even the inclusion of multimodal assignments in the curricula would help make the marginalized female voices more audible as these help resist the clout of dominant linguistic ideologies. Suresh Lohani (2019) in "The history of multimodal composition, its implementation, and challenges" opines that "Multimodality, speaking from the translanguaging perspective, is a challenge to autonomous orientation to literacy that advocates for the conformation to the dominant language conventions" (p. 124). The bad is that Nepal is suffering from dependency syndrome and it has been a playground for clashes of interests of the major powers in the world – US, China and India. However, the way these powers are working in Nepal shows that they are not really bothered about what they project - help Nepal develop - but rather interested to serve their own interests. After all, there is no "free lunch" in the world. On this backdrop, this paper looks primarily into the intent of aid given by India, China and the US to Nepal. However, before that the paper will broach into the geopolitical importance of Nepal and linkage between foreign aid and foreign policy of these countries.

Strategic importance of Nepal for India, China and the US. Coined in 1899 by Swedish professor of Political Science Rudolf Kjellén, geopolitics "has often been taken to signify hard-nosed or a more realistic approach to international politics that lays particular emphasis on the role of territory and resources in shaping the condition of states" (Dodds, p. 24). Nepal has truly become the hotbed of geopolitical game play of India, China and the US: Competing rising powers with the ambition of being regional and world powers in recent years - India and China - "the key to the future of world order" (Baral, p. 198) and the United States – the only remaining superpower wants to naturally keep a watch on these powers. Nepal being between the rising world powers, no location is better for the United States. For China which is deeply suspicious of the United States and India finds its presence here essential. And for India which considers Nepal its backyard and a buffer between it and China cannot take the risk of making a strong presence here. This geopolitical reality needs a further dealing.

Militarily, China has the largest army – though not the strongest - in the world with nuclear arsenals at its disposal and India is a nuclear power too with considerable strength on the air, sea and land. Moreover, both China and India have fought a war with each other. India has also fought three wars with Pakistan, a nuclear power as well. As for the United States, its "economy is still more than double the size of the Chinese economy" (Parent and MacDonald, p. 36) and it is the mightiest military power: it has 16 million-strong army and "invests more in its military manpower and hardware than all other countries combined (p. 34); and has "a robust joint military presence in the Asia-Pacific region" which it thinks "serves as critical guarantor of stability" in the words of US General Raymond Odierno, the Chief of Staff (p. 8).

Moreover, the United States has forged strategic relations with Pakistan in "the war against terrorism" and with India in the nuclear front, popularly known as 123 agreement. China too has strategic relations with Pakistan which it calls "an all-weather friend". However, this strategic surrounding of China by the US has been seen by China as "part of a sophisticated conspiracy to frustrate China's rise" (Indyk, Lieberthal and O'Hanlon, p. 33). Constrained as it is in the Asia-Pacific and in the Middle East with US military presence in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Qatar, China naturally would seek to influence South Asia, including Nepal to not only prove that it is a regional power but also to prevent its rival powers – India and US – harming its strategic interests. This Chinese aspiration is met with Indian hostility, for India does not want any other power than itself to play in Nepal, which it considers to be its backyard.

These powers in order to secure their geopolitical interests have a game plan of their own to implement in Nepal: the West led by the US, and India would like to see Nepal embracing "liberal democracy" (Baral, p. 41) while China would like a government "pliant" (Bruno) to it and does not distinguish between a democratic or a communist one. And India wants to "micro-manage" Nepal in its political maneuverings. As a result, they push and pull the

Nepalese political elites giving Nepal political instability and, in the words of Leo, “struggle for survival” using both muscles and money.

Evidently, India, China and the US use diplomatic muscle and soft instrument of aid to achieve their interests. Foreign policy, aid and security are taken by most states together. They complement and bolster each other. For example, India’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs houses Development Partnership Administration (DPA) responsible for managing “development cooperation”. Similarly, USAID is a wing of the US State Department and so is ChinaAid of the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

According to Development Cooperation Report 2012/13, the top 10 sectors receiving donor support were: education, health, local development, road transportation, energy, drinking water, agriculture, peace and reconstruction, economic reforms and social sector. The report shows that the United States has been supporting in education, health, local development, agriculture, peace and reconstruction and the social sector. Similarly India has been supporting in energy sector, road transportation, local development and education. Yet China has supported in the energy sector only among the top 10 sectors receiving donor support. In terms of the volume of support USAID is the second largest bilateral donor and India is the fourth largest donor and China the sixth largest. In terms of volume, USAID supports 7% to total foreign aid, India 6.6% and China 3.6%. Now let us look into each country’s foreign aid to Nepal and how they have been used for furtherance of their own interests.

Aid from India

India does not only use diplomacy that have most of the times taken the shape of blatant interventions in Nepal’s internal politics, but also use its financial aid strategically. Mihaly writes “the entire Indian programme as implemented... can be seen as a vehicle to advance India’s strategic interests” (p. 172). Bolstering Mihaly, Gautam and Pokhrel claim, “after 1962 China-India war, India’s aid was shaped largely by security concerns in relation to China and its intention to deter the influence of other countries on Nepal” (p. 3). The reason why India does what it does with its aid is because India sees Nepal as an “extension of India strategically” (p. 172) in the words of Mihaly. Given that the Himalayas work as a barrier to China in India’s north, the same cannot happen in areas occupied by Nepal. Its greatest fear was that China could be building infrastructure in the plains of Nepal and the valleys so that from there on in any eventuality the Chinese could penetrate the Indian plains. This strategic thinking nudged India to build road to and the airport in Kathmandu and built all-weather airfields in the south of the Nepal. Moreover, it also had village development programme during 1959-62 in India bordering areas and towns like Patan, Pokhara so that it will be able to build trust of the people in these areas about India (p. 173). Mihaly says Indian aid is geared towards “cutting down the strategic influence of China in Nepal.” Even scholars within India agree that “Indian foreign aid promotes both her strategic interests as well as her image as an important regional power and an emerging one” (Ghosh, p. 13).

Foreign aid from China

In connection with Chinese aid to Nepal there are two schools of thought. One school strongly believes that China too uses its foreign to further its interests and the other school believes that its foreign aid is benign. Gautam and Pokhrel posit that “China started its aid in transport and industry sectors, and used its influence on Nepal in regard to its sensitivity on Tibet” (p. 3). However, the Chinese aid to Nepal though does not look as strategic as India’s or America’s according to Mihaly. Except for the building of the Kodari Highway, there is not much we can read about the strategic intent of Chinese aid to Nepal. But the way the aid has been delivered to Nepal by China has substantially improved its image against its rivals – India and the United States. The Chinese aid comes to Nepal without any “strings” attached (Mihaly, p. 179). Isaacson claims “except for China, the response was resoundingly negative” to the question posed to donors by Hugh Wood: “If all other donor countries agreed, would your country be willing to make your contribution in cash and allow the Nepalese Ministry of Planning to apply it to their master plan in accordance with their priorities?” (p. 85). So at most the Chinese aid to Nepal can be read as “prising Nepal loose from India” (p. 178) in the words of Mihaly.

Aid from the United States

In a similar vein, the United States also uses its aid programmes to serve its interest - to effect democratic change in Nepal. Isaacson in *Half-a-Century of Development: The History of US Assistance to Nepal* quotes AID Administrator Ronald W. Roskins as saying, “AID believes that democracy is an economic development issue, as well as a political one” (p. 305). United States was Nepal’s first and one of the largest donors to Nepal to date has contributed in “women empowerment, democracy, agriculture, forestry, rural development, health, family planning,

education and training, transportation and communications, and the private sector” (Isaacson, p. 2). Behind all this aid to Nepal is based on Point IV Agreement for Technical Cooperation signed between Nepal and the US which reflected as quoted by Isaacson:

Point IV Program represented an expression of US concern with the need for material progress in underdeveloped countries, as a humanitarian end in itself, “and because such progress furthers the advance of human freedom, the secure growth of democratic way of life, the expansion of mutually beneficial commerce and the development of international understanding and good will. (1)

Clearly, the US assistance to Nepal is strategic in intent and political in nature. One proxy indicator for knowing whether foreign aid has been used for the donors’ own benefit or for the recipient country’s benefit is the area of investment by donors and aid effectiveness. Let’s look into these areas. When foreign aid is given to serve one’s own interest by these powers, there cannot be any aid effectiveness - “the impact that aid has in reducing poverty and inequality, increasing growth, building capacity, and accelerating achievement of the Millennium Development Goals set by the international community” (WB) - in Nepal. Without aid effectiveness, Nepal, which depends upon foreign aid to fund more than a quarter of its development budget, cannot develop in the pace it wants.

According to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness there are five principles of aid effectiveness that donors and the recipient country should adhere to. They are: ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for development results and mutual accountability. None of the criteria relevant to donors - alignment, harmonization, managing for development results and mutual accountability - are followed through by donors including these strategic rivals in South Asia – India, China and the US. On Nepal’s part, it has not been able to assert its development agenda to its donors. While the priorities of Nepal are infrastructure – road, power, irrigation canals, hospitals and schools – these donors are found investing more in the areas of their interest like the social sector – education, health, peace and reconstruction and energy. Nepal is having to take loans in areas of infrastructure from the ADB and the World Bank. Moreover, donors have been spending their funds off-budget – in the areas they like. 90 percent of the United States’ aid money is spent off-budget. Similarly, India and China do the same. We often get to read about the US and the Indian Ambassador touring Nepal distributing aid, handing over ambulances, inaugurating schools against diplomatic norms. So holding the donors to accountability is a far cry.

It is understandable that powers like India, China and the US have interest in South Asia in general and Nepal in particular for its strategic location between the two Asian giants – India and China. However, according to Kusum, Nepal’s strategic location is “disadvantageous to the state” because “external powers can play a strategic game in order to fulfil their own vested interests.” However, we should be able to turn Nepal’s strategic location into an advantage for the development of Nepal. One of the reasons why Nepal has been abused by these powers is because our government has not been able to address their security interests. And they have gone on their own to secure their interests, being suspicious of each other and losing confidence in us. If Nepal can ensure that India, China and the United States’ security concerns are addressed, all the countries will be happy to assist Nepal in its priority areas. In addition, we need to make sure that we pay attention to the needs of minorities. It is important that we highlight the importance of using foreign aid properly. Critical race theory, feminism and critical race theory might provide good frameworks for discussing discriminatory behaviors aimed against minorities. In the context of teaching ESL students, it is important that we change a deficit approach to understanding language differences. As Ashok Bhusal and others (2018) state, “the field of Rhetoric and Composition has traditionally ignored students’ language differences. Instructors are often not taught about multilingual writers and writing, and students are frequently told to go to the Writing Center or find some other assistance outside of their writing class” (n. p.). Therefore, we need to cultivate a habit of liking differences in writing.

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