


Chapter 7

India–Nepal Border Dispute, Media and Securitization in Nepal: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Though the role of media in national security matters has been generally understood in academic and public spheres, limited studies have been conducted and published, especially in the context of Nepal. Most studies have been confined to the civil-military relations, post-conflict transformation and media advocacy, international diplomacy, among others. The discourses carried through and by the media has been given limited attention in both academic and professional circles. Conducting critical discourse analysis of the media coverage and documenting perspectives of the national security and international relations scholars as well as media researchers and practitioners, this chapter attempts to understand the inter-relationship between the media and security sector in Nepal through the securitization theory. Examining the patterns of the Lipulekh border dispute, the chapter explores the process of securitization through the ‘speech act’ and how it is shaping and has shaped public perceptions regarding national security and nationalism.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal has gone through a major political shift in the last two decades starting with the ‘People’s War’, transition from monarchy to a republican state and current federalism unrest. National Security has thus remained a core topic of national debates and discourses. Particularly border disputes between Nepal and India have regularly drawn attention, triggering ‘patriotic’ sentiments. Media, particularly, has been instrumental in terms of being the ‘agent’ and even sometimes an ‘actor’ in carrying forward the discourse.

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The role of media has increasingly been prominent how a national security matter is perceived. Syed Nasser Qadri (2019) views that media can be an active participant in the social (de)construction of security threats and the (de)legitimization of exceptional measures. He adds that since the primary form of exposure for general citizens to foreign policy issues is through the media (as public cannot experience security/foreign policy/diplomacy matters first-hand), they are susceptible to framing effects in the news.

Michael C. Williams (2003) talks about the relationship of security and the speech act, as a form of communication where he says that security is not just any kind of speech-act, not just any form of social construction but rather, through the process of securitization, an issue can be labeled as an “existential threat”, thereby requiring extraordinary measures to address it. Elaborating on securitization, Balzacq (2005) talks about three assumptions for effective securitization viz. audience centered, context-dependent and power-laden. Particularly on media’s role in securitization, Cristina Archetti (2010) talks about three different ways media is used as a tool for foreign policy and international exchange: public diplomacy (using media to influence public opinion), media diplomacy (for communicating with disputing parties and promoting conflict resolution) and media-broker diplomacy (journalists serving as temporary mediators in international negotiations).

Specific to Nepal, Deepak Adhikari, in his paper, *The Role of Media in Shaping Foreign Policy Discourse in Nepal* talks about the how the specialized reporting of foreign policy and national security issues in Nepal began as late as the 2000s through *Kantipur* and *The Kathmandu Post* dailies. Prior to that, the foreign policy reporting was limited to covering bilateral visits, parliamentary hearing of the ambassadors—designate and activities of the foreign missions. *The Kathmandu Post* also started set up a bureau in New Delhi in 2005 and continues to hold an office there. The other media houses also followed suit, but they have not been able to have a permanent presence (Adhikari, 2016).

The story of the latest border dispute between Nepal and India inaugurated construction of ‘Link Road’, passing through Lipulekh in 2020. The Lipulekh Pass is a disputed territory and claimed by both Nepal and India. India had released a revised political map in November 2019 which included the disputed territories of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura. This act was condemned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Nepal through its Press Release, which called upon the Government of India to “refrain from carrying out any activity inside the territory of Nepal” (MoFA, 2020). Following this incident, the Nepali parliament was also quick to act on, with the amendment of the constitution to endorse the updated map with the disputed areas included (Ghimire, 2020).

This paper, thus concentrates on the media portrayal of Lipulekh border dispute issue and discusses the nature and extent of securitization in the Nepali and Indian mainstream and online media space, including social media.

METHODS

A qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) framework was adopted for this study. Conceptualized by Norman Fairclough, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) consists of three dimensions: the object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts); the processes by means of which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects; and the socio-historical conditions which govern these processes.

Content analysis of media coverage during 2020 and 2021 by Nepali and Indian media and online media was conducted. To understand the nature and type of discourses happening in social media, two

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