Opportunities and Threats of Borderless Cultural Nationalism in National Security and Development of Nepal

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Abstract

Globalization, technological advancement, and mass migration change the concept of nationalism. Cultural nationalism creates both opportunities and threats in national security and development. Cultural nationalism, characterized by the sharing of cultural and religious values, is often depicted as surpassing national boundaries. In this light, relationships of Nepal, India and Bhutan can be related to cultural nationalism because the people of these nations share similar culture and religion; however, they live in different nations. On the other hand, sharing common cultural and religious values helps these south asian nations establish mutual understanding among nations at both the official and public levels. However, criminal activities also happened in the veil of culture, creating challenges on development and national security that Nepal has been facing for a long time. In this context, the study focused on the threat of borderless cultural nationalism. The main objective of this study is to analyze how borderless cultural nationalism affected maintaining national security and terrestrial unity in small nations like Nepal. The study followed a qualitative research design and used document analysis and in-depth interviews as data collection tools. The documents related to cultural nationalism were used as a source of secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews. It is found that cultural nationalism creates both opportunities and threats to nation-building side by side, so strong and well-equipped security management and expertise-based diplomacy are needed to minimize the threats of cultural nationalism and develop its role in nation-building.

Keywords: *Culture, development, nationalism, national security*

Introduction

Cultural nationalism refers to the shared cultural identity among individuals residing in various regions across the globe. Cultural nationalism emerges as a manifestation of a global society characterized by a shared religious ideology, cultural practices, political perspectives, economic systems, and technological advancements. Smith (2022) analyzed the term cultural nationalism

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as, "Cultural nationalism is the concept related to myths, symbols, and ideology that applies to the first appearance of the core doctrine" (p. 23). Smith talks about nationalism in terms of culture, religion, language, myth, and common ancestry. In the same lines, Maajid (2022) defined the term in relation to common belief and notes, "Common belief of nation building" (p. 3). Both Smith and Maajid articulated the term from a positive standpoint, asserting its significance in the process of nation building. In ancient civilizations, tyrannical emperors and rulers utilized religion as a tool to instill fear and exert control over extensive regions within their realms; that is also a form of cultural nationalism. In modern times, the Islamic revolution of 1989 brought the issue of cultural nationalism in terms of religion. Religion based cultural nationalism by some extreme groups created a threat in the world during the last decade of the 20th century. Cultural nationalism is not only practice for nation building but also creates the threat of development and national security.

In the context of Nepal, cultural nationalism appeared as the main political agenda during the period of the Maoist insurgency. The issue of cultural aspects was also addressed by the constitution of Nepal (2015) and defined as a nation with multi-culture, multi-ethnic, and multilingual. Article 3 of the constitution notes:

> Having multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural characteristics with common aspirations of people living in diverse geographical regions, and being committed to and united by a bond of allegiance to national independence, territorial integrity, national interest, and prosperity of Nepal, all the Nepali people collectively constitute the nation. (The Constitution of Nepal, article-3)

The above-mentioned article of the constitution defines Nepal as a multicultural nation; that is the concept of cultural nationalism. The concept of cultural nationalism is not new for Nepal. During the time of unification, King Prithvi Narayan Shah noted, "Nepal is a garden of four tribes and thirty-six sub-tribes" (*Char Barna Chhattis Jaatko Phulbari*) (Goldman, 1984, p.65). In Nepal, political cultural nationalism is taken as one of the major threat to border security and development. It is taken as the main challenge of border security because transborder criminal activities have occurred in the veil of culture and religion. Cultural nationalism has also encountered challenges related to internal peace, harmony, and tolerance. In the milieu focusing on cultural nationalism, the study seeks the answers to the questions of how borderless cultural nationalism, like the activities of religious and cultural groups, creates opportunities for the development of nations and why it creates threats for border security and nation development in Nepal. This study primarily aims at unfolding ways for managing borderless cultural nationalism that is creating problems in the development of the nation and its border security.

Review of Literature

Cultural nationalism refers to the nationalism related to religion, culture, and languages. Leerssen (2006) highlighted the history of cultural nationalism in the context of the 18th century and explained, "Cultural nationalism criticized European nationalism and focused on linguistic and social context (p. 11). Like Leerssen, Woods (2014) focuses on cultural nationalism in the context of globalization and migration. Leerssen (2014) further notes cultural nationalism in terms of religious and linguistic notions that raised the issue of regionalism and globalization.

Hutchinson & Smith (1994) defined cultural nationalism as new types of nationalism based on accepting a single common culture, whether they live in different parts of nations. They elaborate on cultural nationalism as:

> The people must be liberated–that is, free from any external constraint; they must determine their own destiny and be masters in their own house; they must control their own resources; they must obey only their own 'inner' voice. But entailed fraternity. All internal divisions they must be gathered together in a single historic territory, a homeland, and they must have legal equality and share a single public culture (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p. 4).

Hutching and Smith talked about the destiny of the people that separate them geographically; however, they want to share their own culture and desire to establish common interest based on culture and religion. In the context of Nepal, the effect of borderless cultural nationalism can be seen in the Terai region because there is an affinity of language, culture, and religion among people living in geographical regions of India and Nepal. Extreme cultural nationalism creates the new threat of terrestrial integrity, national security, and development. In the same line, Hutchison (1987) noted that cultural nationalism focused on national identities rather than the terrestrial block of people. Hutchison (1987) further noted about cultural nationalism in his book, The Dynamic of Cultural Nationalism, as conflating nationalism and state-seeking movements (p.34). Movement from new nations in Asia, Africa, and Europe are based on culture, religion, and language. The nations of South Asia focus on the cultural factors in defining the identities of the nation and believe in maintaining its' cohesion. Ohmae (1990) talked about borderless nationalism in his book, The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy. In his book, he brought various examples of borderless power that play a role in holding the global politics rather than the terrestrial integration. The education system, technology, and financial factors play important roles in global society and enrage the blood spot of the terrestrial boundaries of the nation. Cultural nationalism is soft power that enhances the borderless nationalism on the basis of humanity and heed of the human being. Ohmae (1990) further notes, "The world enabled them to fool, mislead, or control the people because only the governments possessed real facts in anything like real time. When information flows with relative freedom, the old geographic barriers become irrelevant" (p.18). Ohmae noted that geographical boundaries cannot fulfill the desire and need of the people in modern times, so that borderless nationalism is necessary for the peace and harmony of the world. Like Miller (1995), who also focused on the positive aspects of cultural nationalism and national identities, which are more spiritual and less physical. In this regard he notes, "National identities are not cast in stone....they are above all 'imagined' identities, where the content of the imagining changes with time" (p. 27). Membership in a certain nation cannot hold the identities of the people because they have multiple needs that are only fulfilled through the sharing of culture, religion, and knowledge. These factors are against the traditional concept of a terrestrial nation; however, most of the nations of the world address the issue of borderless cultural nationalism.

Extreme cultural nationalism, is considered as one of the major threat to national security and development, because nations that followed federalism based on cultural nationalism cannot maintain peace, national security, and development. Agnew (1994) talked about the

terrestrial boundaries of the nation and its value in maintaining national security, which is a precondition of development. In this regard, Bulley (2017) quoted him as saying, "The sovereign state is perpetually among the key pillars of exclusion; it is necessary to look beyond the statist imaginary and think about the politics and possibilities of international ethics (p.2-3). He criticized the modern concept of exclusion and inclusion, which is directly related to the existence of a nation. The main blame of the modern critics is that traditional territorial states play a role in excluding people from the nation, and they propose cultural nationalism as an alternative; however, inclusive democracy in the name of extreme cultural nationalism create a threat to the national security of the small nations rather than uplift the situation of people. Graziano (2018) defines it as a new way of manipulating power through culture and religion. He further notes, "Their political, legal, social, moral, and psychological footprint fluctuates in both time and space, reflecting ideologies and power (p. 3). The traditional concept of nationalism is associated with geographical boundaries and certain territories. The concept of geographical nationalism is shifting, and new thoughts of nations emerged with the web of globalization and technological enhancement that establishes multidimensional social practice based on culture. Abizadeh (2012) notes descriptive claims about nationalism. He further elaborates, "The descriptive approach asks, "What is a nation? What is the nature of belonging to a nation?" while the normative approach asks, "Does national membership have moral worth? How much should one value national belonging relative to other identities?" (p.866). Abizadeh raised many questions about cultural nationalism in terms of national identities and membership of the nation. Similarly, Appiah (2018) talks about the tension between terrestrial nationalism and the cosmopolitan nature of the society in the context of American and European nations. He further notes, "Cosmopolitanism and nationalism are fundamentally intertwined, suggesting that there is no structural tension between these two, much in the way that there is not necessarily a contradiction between feeling attached to New York City and feeling attached to the United States (p.35). The value of membership in the nation is important even in a cosmopolitan society because people from poor and underdeveloped nations go to America and work for membership. The debate of borderless nationalism and membership of a particular nation creates controversy in global democracy, peace, and development because transnational terrorism is one of the major threats to human existence in the world. In the context of Nepal, transborder criminal activities frequently happened in the veil of cultural nationalism.

The reviews mentioned above show the different dimensions of cultural nationalism in national and international contexts. These reviews show that cultural nationalism is not an alternative to geographical nationalism because membership in a nation is the first and foremost identity of a person that is only possible in a territorial state. In the context of the debate, it goes on to valorize either the cultural nationalism or geographical state boundary. There are cultural commonality between people of India and Nepal. Also there are border disputes which needs to be resolved. In this socio-political context, the study examines the opportunities and threats of borderless cultural nationalism in Nepal.

Methodology

The study followed the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research design. The study used both primary and secondary sources of the data. Library and internet research followed and

collected the secondary data. Books, articles, journals, and research reports were the major secondary sources of data. Primary data were gathered from in-depth interviews and critically examined the cultural nationalism in terms of national security and development in the context of Nepal. A purposive sampling method was followed to select the participants. Reviewing the availability of sources and research period, two experts who are working in the diplomacy and national security sector were interviewed. Their identity is not disclosed for privacy. Three questions have been given to the experts related to opportunities of cultural nationalism, the threat of borderless nationalism, and its effect on national security and development. Before finalizing the data, researcher discussed the issue in an informal setting that helped to capture the data in a natural setting. In addition consent with the participants has been taken and assured that the information will not be misused.

Opportunities and Threats of Borderless Cultural Nationalism in Nepal

Cultural nationalism addresses the demand of inclusive democracy that focuses on the national identities based on religions, languages, and cultural practices. After promulgating the Constitution of Nepal in 2015, the issue of cultural nationalism has established itself as one of the prominent agenda for the identity and rights of the people living in different parts. There are 142 ethnic/caste groups, 124 languages, and 10 religions that were reported in the 2021 census (CBS, 2023). It shows the multiple identities of the nation that are mentioned in the Constitution in detail; however, still the nation respects territorial integrity and unified sovereignty. In this regard, P1 notes:

> There are provisions of the citizenship for non-resident Nepali who live with the membership except South Asian nations like India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Because of this provision, there is possiblility of increase in population which can brings certain opportunities in economic sectors; however, it may create challenges in national security and development. In Afghanistan, half of the populations have foreign citizenship, and the Afghani government provides facilities to the Afghani people who have already got membership of other nations, but there is no good sign of the investment and development so that cultural nationalism could not be properly and positively implemented in Afghanistan. Nepal also provides special citizenship privilege to NRN and currently NRN are investing in various sectors. Threats may increase in Nepal due to cultural nationalism, and there may occur any incidents at any time in any place due to religion, language, and caste disputes. In some part of Nepal, there is also voice for autonomous state with right of self decision. (Personal interview, 2081).

P1 notes that cultural nationalism could not properly function in Nepal in its implementation phase because it is neither used to save the multiple identities of the people nor uplift the people of respected communities. A kind of dilemma occurs among people, and people are more involved in setting the agenda rather than utilizing the agenda in real life. Cultural nationalism helps to establish fraternity among the people living in different nations with one culture, language, and religion. In some cases, common cultural belief between Nepal and India establish strong bond and relationships at people's levels.

At present, Nepal is actively working to tackle national security issues by evaluating a variety of factors, such as economic, socio-cultural, environmental, human, and cyber

security, among others. The latest effort, the National Security Policy of 2016, has successfully incorporated these diverse aspects into a cohesive framework for the country's security. p2 notes the certain opportunities of cultural nationalism that can be used for the development of the nation; however, the constitution of Nepal 2015 about national unity and security in article 51 (3) states, "to maintain law and order by developing a national security system" (p.31). The constitution also makes the provision of national security in Part 28, Article 266, as, "There shall be a National Security Council for making recommendations to the Government of Nepal, Council of Ministers for the formulation of a policy on overall national interest, security, and defense of Nepal (p.185). National security focuses on the national interest of Nepal that is mentioned in Article 5 of the constitution as:

> The safeguarding of the freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, nationality, independence, and dignity of Nepal, the rights of the Nepali people, border security, economic well-being and prosperity shall be the basic elements of the national interest of Nepal. Any conduct and act contrary to the national interest shall be punishable by the Federal law. (pp. 8-9)

Constitutionally, Nepal focuses on national security and development in the framework of national interest. The national interest of Nepal is closely tied to territorial integrity.

Effect of Cultural Nationalism on National Security and Development in Nepal

Cultural nationalism is one of the burning issues in underdeveloped and developing nations because sometimes it is taken as a main tool to manage the conflict. In the context of Nepal, cultural nationalism was in a dormant phase and flared up during the Maoist insurgency. The Maoist armed conflict had emerged taking cultural nationalism as one of main agenda. The then Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 also acknowledged diversity within unity. In this regards; P1 notes; historical juncture of the national security and cultural nationalism of Nepal, needs to be implemented based on legal and constitutional provision. He also focuses on the situation of development and shows the relation with national security. In this context, P2 highlights:

> Managing the diversities inside the nation, creates social harmony and ultimately promotes strong territorial integrity and cultural nationalism. National security and development are always interconnected with cultural nationalism. (Personal Interview, 2024)

P2 emphasizes the proper practice of cultural nationalism for the progress of national security and development. The traditional concept of nationalism could not effectively motivate the people, so rapid political change occurred in Nepal, establishing the new landmark of cultural nationalism and national interest. In this regard, Kymlicka (1995) notes:

> Civic and ethnic nationalism in Nepal, a nation celebrated for its profound cultural diversity and complex identity, exhibit both commonalities and distinctions. Both types of nationalism seek to cultivate loyalty and a sense of belonging among their members. Civic nationalism focuses on common values and dedication to collective institutions, whereas ethnic nationalism is based on unique linguistic and historical identities. (p.45)

Kymlicka (1995) focuses on the belongings of nationalism that are still practiced in Nepal. Leaders of political parties have different understandings about national interest, national security, peace, and development. Political parties needs to have clear vision or attitude toward

national security and cultural nationalism in Nepal. Cultural nationalism, national security, national interest, and development become the main political agenda of different political parties during their election campaigns. P2 views on that: "Political parties needs to have coherent vision regarding national security and cultural nationalism, resulting in the issue neither presenting opportunities nor posing threats to national security and development" (Personal Interview, 2024). Cultural nationalism is used in Nepal to manage the diversities related to language, religions, and castes; however, there persists the fear factor of agitation that occurred during the time of the promulgation of the constitution. The practice of the government is set back into the previous position, and terrestrial integrity is interlinked with national security rather than cultural nationalism. In this context, P1 notes:

> There is need to harness cultural nationalism in Nepal to promote nation building and development. Politically it is taken as a dry agenda, and administratively extreme cultural nationalism is considered one of the threats to national integrity, national security, and development. It is not only being problematic in Nepal; the provision also created problems in African nations where cultural nationalism is used to solve the riot and civil war. (Personal Interview, 2024)

P1 unfolds the negative effect of cultural nationalism that created problems in the overall development and national security of the nation. Cultural nationalism is problematic in the implementation process; however, political parties frequently raise this issue as a political agenda. It is developed as an unfinished political agenda in Nepal and is also taken as a main threat to national security and terrestrial integrity.

Conclusion

Opportunities and threats coexist within the framework of cultural nationalism in Nepal, as the enduring legacy of a unitary government has significantly influenced the overall political landscape of the country. The national identities of Nepal have recently evolved under the principles of cultural nationalism; however, territorial integrity is crucial for sustaining peace and security within the nation, which is a prerequisite for development.

The current conception of national security arises from the ongoing interactions between terrestrial integrity and cultural nationalism. The political history of Nepal indicates the evolution of nationalism based on territorial integrity and national security. The coexistence of cultural nationalism and national securities significantly affects the sociopolitical environment of the global society and the demand of the people. While analyzing the perceptions of participants and the legal documents of Nepal, it is found that Nepal needs to have clear vision on the unimplemention of the agenda related to cultural nationalism and national security. To get benefits from the cultural nationalism, it is necessary to research the positive aspects of cultural nationalism, such as enhancing the tourism sector and utilizing the skills and financial resources of non-resident Nepali people. There is a high possibility of economic progress in Nepal through the proper use of cultural nationalism.

This research paper contributes to the field of nationalism studies by providing a comprehensive examination of cultural nationalism in Nepal. It highlights the importance of ideologies in fostering social cohesion, driving state progress, improving governance, and influencing public policy. The study provides significant understanding of the manifestations of

cultural nationalism in a multicultural nation such as Nepal and its implications for both internal and external dynamics. The study ultimately highlighted the necessity for the formulation of inclusive policies that acknowledge and honor ethnic diversity.

Extreme Cultural nationalism creates problems in the peace and stability of Nepal; however, cultural nationalism tries to address the diversities of Nepali society in the contemporary socio-cultural landscape of Nepal. The negative effect of borderless cultural nationalism is reflected in transborder criminal activities and transnational terrorism. This is one of the prominent issues that creates a threat to national security and development. To understand the complexities of nationalism, especially its capacity to both unify and challenge the nation-building process, is crucial for the strong development of any nation characterized by diverse and interconnected elements.

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