



Political Upheavals in Nepal and its impact on India

Rachna Devi

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi,
221005, India

Abstract:

This article discusses the political upheavals that have occurred in Nepal over the past few decades. Nepal has experienced significant changes in its political landscape since the late 20th century, including the end of the monarchy in 2008 and the adoption of a federal democratic republic system. However, Nepal has also seen periods of political instability and uncertainty, including a decade-long Maoist insurgency and subsequent peace process. Most recently, in 2020, a series of political crises led to a change in government and heightened tensions between political parties. The article explores the causes and effects of these political upheavals and the challenges facing Nepal's democracy today. Petty personal and party interests are creating this political instability that is obstructing the process of nation-building and state-building. Political upheavals in Nepal have affected security dynamics in the region. For instance, the end of the monarchy and the subsequent political instability allowed space for various insurgent groups to emerge, posing security threats both within Nepal and potentially spilling over into India's bordering states. However, this has necessitated increased vigilance and coordination between Indian security forces and their Nepalese counterparts.

(Keywords: Political Instability, Cross-border relations, Socio-economic implication, Security concerns, Regional geopolitical dynamics.

1. Introduction

Nepal is going through a democratic transition. It is a big achievement for Nepal that it has now a constitution that declares it a federal parliamentary democratic republic. But Nepal has lots to do with its nation-building and state-building. The geostrategic significant country Nepal has been facing political upheavals in its federal republican history. Here many attempts at democratization were assaulted, firstly by the party-less Panchayat System of King Mahendra in 1960; King Gyanendra sidelined democracy again in 2001 after the royal massacre of King Birendra and now during K P Sharma Oli's prime ministership. It has had many prime ministers in its short history under the new constitution. No prime minister has been able to complete the term. This landlocked

country has been always facing the unknown fear that its sovereignty is in danger. Nepal does not have its manufacturing and is mainly based on foreign aid for the development of the country. The crisis of Nepal worries the world because it is a buffer country, not in a cold war sense but still in the current geopolitical sense. Nepal has been progressing with its new constitution to the path of democracy that came into force on 20th September 2015 and this year (2022) on 20th September it will complete 7 years of its constitutional democracy. On 20 May 2008, the monarchy was abolished and a republican form of government was installed after the decade-long guerrilla war between monarchical forces and Maoist insurgents. The constitution that has come into force for six years was not consensus-based but majority-based. Nepal was born as a federal democratic republic in 2008. The election for the constituent assembly took place and the constitution-making process began. The aspirations and desires could not be accommodated in the constitution even after five years. The election for the second constituent assembly took place in 2013. The constitution somehow came into full shape despite the woes and worries of Madhesi and Hindu pressure groups and it came into force on 20th September 2015. Only after three days after the implementation of the constitution, the Madhesi started a violent protest in the Terai region which is close to the border of Nepal. They blocked the Indo-Nepal border. These people have roti-beti relations with Indian people in UP and Bihar. India was blamed for this blockade.

Himalayan country Nepal has been facing the problem of natural disasters including the 2015 earthquake, landslide, and floods. Nepal is situated in the subduction zone of convergent boundaries of the Indian and Eurasian plates and there is always the danger of earthquakes. The houses are built of wood. Nepal has huge hydrological resources. Most of the rivers of the Ganges Plain come from Nepal's mountainous region. India has facilitated Nepal for the hydropower projects. The balance of payment is not favorable to Nepal. Nepal has to do a lot for its construction in the economic domain and socio-cultural domains.

2. Political Upheaval

The Nepali Constitution was promulgated for political stability, achieving lofty ideals and establishing Nepal as a federal, democratic republic based on parliamentary democracy, providing everyone voting rights and 1/3rd reservation for women in the Parliament. But these constitutional ideals faced fire in the last years. After the parliamentary election of 2018, the Communist parties got a majority but not an absolute majority alone. The year when the world was celebrating 200 years of birth anniversary of Karl Marx, CPI(UML) and CPI(MC) merged; established a new party, and formed the government under the leadership of K P Sharma Oli. When two years came to an end, the party discussion took place as to whether K P Sharma Oli would leave the party chairpersonship or he would give the PM post to Prachanda. But K P Sharma Oli did not leave any post despite the party's highest decision-making body standing committee taking a majority decision in favor of one man one post in July 2020. When Oli felt that the opposition was about to present a no-confidence motion, PM Oli called an emergency cabinet meeting and recommended the dissolution of the lower house of the parliament at the end of the year. President Bidya Devi Bhandari accepted the

recommendation without taking into stock all relevant constitutional provisions. The President dissolved the house and issued the dates for the general election next year in April and May months of the year 2021. Against this decision, the ministers resigned and people protests took place. A petition was filed in the Supreme Court by the opposition parties. The court found a contradiction in the decision and the constitutional provisions and the court reinstated the parliament for the remaining period. Again, the leader of the largest party showed his inability to form the government as the vote of confidence Oli decisively lost on 10 May 2021. President Bhandari made him the caretaker prime minister and sought another vote of confidence in the next 30 days. Oli again showed his inability to form the government and recommended the dissolution of the parliament having a significant number of MPs backing his recommendation. President Bhandari dissolved the parliament without giving the chance to another party and talking with another party. The order of President Bhandari was challenged in court. The court again repeated its decision and going ahead from its previous decision appointed Sher Bahadur Deuba as the prime minister and ordered the parliament to be reconvened within the next seven days. Sher Bahadur Deuba, a senior politician and four-time prime minister of Nepal garnered the support. He earned the number with the help of other parties. He currently heads the government. There is political stability in the country.

3. Causes of Political Upheavals

I. **Centralization of Power by Oli-** K P Sharma Oli was charged that he was not consulting the senior party members in key policy decisions. PM Oli created fear among his party members and opposition when he brought National and revenue intelligence agencies and an anti-money laundering department under the prime minister's office. They feared that PM Oli could use these agencies to crush any dissent in the party. The laws related to infringing privacy and the professional rights of media and social activists were enacted to silence the opposition in the country. The key constitutional posts were given to his close and loyal people. Bidya Devi Bhandari was re-elected for the second term of the Presidency. This fomented dissent among the leaders against K P Sharma Oli in the newly merged party Nepali Communist Party.

Oli government failed to check the corruption and to contain the spread of COVID-19 cases. And so, it lost the tacit support of the common people. When COVID-19 cases were spreading very rapidly, the election could not be conducted as the order was passed by President Bidya Devi Bhandari on the recommendation of the then PM Oli. The Communist Party was struggling internally. Otherwise, the Communist Party of Nepal would have run the government for the full five years. Oli had to have harmonious relations among the leaders in his party and earn the goodwill of the people. When the motion of vote of confidence was voted upon after the Supreme Court verdict, a faction of the Communist Party supported Sher Bahadur Deuba.

II. Electoral System

The Nepali constitution has adopted a mixed electoral system for the House of Representatives. The 165 members of the total 275 seats are directly elected in single-seat constituencies by simple majority vote and 110 members are directly elected in a single nationwide constituency by closed-

list proportional representation vote with a threshold of 3% overall valid vote to be allocated a seat. The proportional system most probably created the hung parliament. No single party has been able to form government in its short constitutional history, because no party has been able to get the required number. Germany, Israel like many countries in which a proportional electoral system is found, political instabilities exist. In Israel, there is the fifth election in the last four years.

III. Internal Party Struggle

The first general election after the promulgation of the Nepali Constitution led to the majority of communist parties. In the 2nd centenary year of Karl Marx, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) and CPI (Maoist Center) merged and formed the communist party of Nepal. The post of prime minister went to CPI(UML) leader K P Sharma Oli who joined the chairpersonship of the Party PM Oli with Prachanda. The deal was to rotate the office after two years and a half years tacitly. But K P Sharma Oli changed his mood. He neither left the party chief post nor the post of Prime Minister. When he was asked to leave the post, he recommended the dissolution of the lower house. This internal power struggle led to a split in the Nepali Communist Party and came into pre-merger form.

IV. Lack of consensus

Two times the elections took place for the constituent assembly. The constitution-making started in 2008 and came to an end only in 2015 after failing to make it in 2012. Even though the parties were not fully satisfied. The constitutional laws were passed with majority voting, not consensus-based. The parties were divided on many issues. Ideological orientations and personality fault lines are already existing. In India, the Nehruvian consensus helped post-colonial India establish the new system. In Nepal, there is the absence of it and also the absence of any leader who can play that role.

V. Lack of statesmanship

The role of leaders is significant in the well-ordered functioning of the Constitution. Ambedkar, the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution and renowned scholar, emphasized in his last address to the Constituent Assembly that

“How much the constitution I feel, however good a constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot”.

When PM K P Sharma Oli was not able to muster support in the lower house, it called a meeting of the Cabinet and recommended the dissolution of the house before its full term. President Bidya Devi Bhandari accepted the recommendation without verifying the veracity of this claim. The Constitution of Nepal gives responsibility to the President that he/she will ensure compliance and protection of the Constitution. But President Bhandari remained unsuccessful, that was the situation the Court intervened and preserved the constitution.

VI. External Influence

In 2018, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist–Leninist) and CPI(MC) merged. China was directly involved in the political patchwork of the Communist Party rule in Nepal. Chinese ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi September and December 2020 held a series of meetings with National Communist Party leaders to resolve the internal differences ignoring the diplomatic protocol. When she failed to bring unity among the Communist parties, the senior Chinese Communist Party leader Guo Yeshua came to Nepal to bring unity among Communist Parties. In 2016 the same claim was made in newspapers for the continuity of the Oli government. These external influences undermine the democratic process in the country. Also, the trust of citizens decreases in the system. The parliament is thought to be supreme but the kingmakers are someone far away. This is not a good sign for the sustainability of the system.

4. Impact

The nation-building and state-building cannot be realized in these crises. The state apparatus has to penetrate the rural areas for the development of these areas. The frequent crises are not letting the constitution inculcate among the people of Nepal. The values of the constitution would remain only the words. These must become the spirit. Its responsibility lies on the people in power primarily. The leaders should not let go of the hope in the system. And it is more detrimental to the system that has been going under the state building. India also faced the brunt of this crisis. Because whenever this crisis exists, the Chinese try to influence the political system. The political leaders use nationalism to draw the attention of the people away from the real issues of political stability and petty personal interest because nationalism is also not less than opium.

- The 21st century belongs to Asia and when two Asian tigers have core national interest issues to be resolved, there is always worry. There are two big boulders India and China and between them, Nepal is like a small stone. But when the great game of geopolitics is taking place, even a small country is significant. Under the larger geo-political game, Nepal is a significant element. The key actors want Nepal on its side. During the Cold War, Nepal kept its equidistance and still tried to maintain it. Nepal got assistance from all sides. The Chinese built cement factories, the Indians constructed roads, and the Americans helped with healthcare (The Economist, 12th March 2022). The allegiance to a superpower has become a matter of serious concern for a country. Ukraine is facing a military attack from Russia because it wanted to become part of NATO and Russia did not tolerate the interference from its neighbor. Mackinder's theory is still relevant. Land power is still significant despite the development of technological warfare and cyber warfare. Nepal is a member of the United Nations. The voting of every single country is important, that is the reason the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken felt the importance of Nepal and talked with the Nepali Prime Minister just before voting in the UNGA over the act of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Nepal voted against Russia. Underlying the importance of Nepal, China has been taking a keen interest in Nepal. China has projects through which it is working on it. Belt and Road Initiative and under BRI Trans Himalayan multi-dimensional connectivity network are significant projects. India wants not to let

Nepal slip under Chinese influence. Indian neighborhood's first policy is for South Asian countries. When the world was reeling under the COVID-19 pandemic, PM Modi took the initiative and called the meeting of SAARC countries. India proposed the COVID-19 emergency fund. In 2015 when Nepal faced a catastrophic earthquake, India took the lead in assisting Nepal through Operation Maitri.

Relation between India and Nepal

India has an open-door policy with Nepal. Indian and Nepali citizens can visit each other countries without any visa. The Indian rupee is accepted in Nepal. Nepali families have inter-marrying and inter-dining cultures. Many Nepalese livelihoods are based in India. India and Nepal signed the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship Agreement in 1950, which established the reciprocal treatment of Indian and Nepali treatment of Indian and Nepali citizens in the two countries, in residence, property, business, and movement. There are debates over its revision but yet to see something concrete. The open border is misused. The left leaders allege that the treaty undermines the federal democratic republic of Nepal because the treaty was signed when there was a monarchy. Nepali leaders allege that Nepal requires Indian permission to purchase weapons from other countries.

In 1951, a year marked the end of the 104-year-old autocratic Rana oligarchy. King Tribhuvan Shah, the Nepali Congress, and Rana Rulers arrived at a compromise in Delhi, mediated by Jawaharlal Nehru, and agreed to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly. There were close relations with India during this time. In 1955, King Mahendra replaced King Tribhuvan. He shifted the foreign policy away from India and closer to China. In 1956, diplomatic relation with China was established. But at the time of the India-China war of 1962, Nepal maintained an equidistance policy, and the same policy was followed later. During Rajiv Gandhi, the pro-China policy of Nepal led to the containment of the Indo-Nepal border in 1987. This made India's image a big brother in South Asia. In the 1990s and 2000s India- Nepal relations also bittered because the Nepali government did not help India in the fight against Moist. Later when Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachand' became a significant politician of Nepal and former prime minister of Nepal, Nepal did not help India as he was from a Moist background and wanted the change the power of guns. During the Nepali Congress rule, India enjoyed good relations with Nepal. The noted hiccup in the relationship between India and Nepal appeared during the protest against the adopted new Constitution by the Madhesi people who were unsatisfied with the citizenship laws of the constitution. In 2020, when K P Sharma Oli faced political challenges in domestic politics, he started to criticize India on many counts. Firstly, on the border issue; then Ram was born in Ayodhya, and Yoga originated in Nepal. He even claimed that India is spreading COVID-19 in Nepal. India officially showed its maturity and did not take these claims seriously. Next PM Sher Bahadur Deuba visited India and brought cordial relations back on the side of Nepal. In a recent visit to Nepal, Indian PM Modi visited Lumbini on the occasion of Budhha Purnima, where Gautam Buddha was born, to counter Chinese influence. This Buddhist diplomacy was praised by scholars because China has been very active in spreading its influence in Nepal in

recent decades through developing Buddhist tourist infrastructure sites including the international airport at Lumbini. PM Modi did not use this airport and used the chopper to reach the destination from Kushinagar Airport in Indian territory.

5. Nepal – China Relations

Nepal established its relations with China in 1955. Nepal always played the Chinese card when it felt India was dominating its policies. China also wanted its neighbor should be in good relations with it as Tibet is politically very sensitive. China does not want any anti-Chinese activities in its neighbor fueling the Tibetan claim. China has kept its closeness with Nepal. China dispatched arms and ammunition to Nepal during the insurgency from 1996 to 2005 to help Maoist insurgents. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China is present in Nepal. China has opened the Confucius Institute to spread its culture and language in Nepal. Nepal attracted attention when learning the Chinese language was made mandatory by private schools in Nepal in 2019. China has been keeping its distance from the internal domestic politics of a country, particularly in its neighbor. China showed firstly that it can go ahead to patch up the internal party struggle to bring back the communist party in power. So, the relationship between both governments of the countries when the left was ruling was very good.

6. Nepal – the USA Relations

The United Nations recognized Nepal in 1947 and the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1948. This year they are celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations. Recently in February, the Nepali Parliament ratified USA aid Millennium Challenge Corporation. There was strong protest among the parties that this would be compromising the interest of the nation. That assistance is ever largest assistance of \$ 500 million from the USA to Nepal. This assistance is to be governed by this agreement. Through this project, the east-west road link and electric transmission infrastructure would be built. A decade ago, Nepal joined the American Global War on Terror, when President Bush called for support. Nepal got the support in return as it was also facing the moist insurgency. The USA takes its help to contain red influence.

7. Conclusion and Way Ahead

The Constitution was adopted in 2015 with great enthusiasm and expectations, but the frequent political instabilities are making the Constitution fail. The Nepali leaders should ponder over the actual workings of the system. They should not change their mind from the primary duty of nation-building to power-grabbing for self-interest. In the last crisis, The Supreme Court of Nepal reinstated the parliament for the remaining term. Sher Bahadur Deuba was appointed as the prime minister by the court. He won the Vote of confidence with the support of the CPI(MC), the People’s Socialist Party, and the CPI(UML) faction. The Court protected and preserved the constitutional laws. Political leaders have to put their petty interests below the national interest. Party politics is the lifeblood of democracy only when the parties pursue the national interest and work for the development of the common people. India can not equate with China in economic strength, but India can earn its goodwill through its commitment and diplomatic tie-up with like-minded partners.

Political stability in Nepal is significant for not only India but also for the peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. The great geopolitical game should not make any country vulnerable and subservient like in Cold War times. In the time of the non-zero-sum world, Nepal has to have a balanced relationship with the interested countries.

References

Kothari, R. (1972). State Building in the Third World: Alternative Strategies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7(5/7), 233–244. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4361001>

<https://www.epw.in/journal/2021/25/commentary/constitutional-and-political-predicament-nepal.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal>. Accessed 19 August 2022.

<https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/02/19/nepal-s-democracy-challenges>

<https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/03/20/china-and-india-take-opposite-approaches-to-a-crisis-in-nepal>

Adhikari, D. R. (2013). *Historical Dictionary of Nepal*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Agrawal, T. (2016). Constitutional Amendments and Federal Restructuring in Nepal. In N. G. Shastri & A. Acharya (Eds.), *Federalism: Conceptual Challenges and Relevance in the Nepali Context* (pp. 85-121). Springer.

Arpi, C. (2016). *Indo-Nepal Relations: Historical, Cultural and Political Perspectives*. Vij Books India Pvt Ltd.

Basnet, D.B. (2015). *Nepal: Nation-State in the Wilderness: Managing State, Democracy and Geopolitics*. Routledge.

Blanchard, L., & Dunne, M. (2018). Nepal in crisis: India's strategic options. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(1-2), 250-266.

Adhikari, J. (2014). *The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution*. Verso Books.

Adhikari, J. (2017). *The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*. Cambridge University Press.

Adhikari, J. (2019). *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*. Routledge.

Adhikari, J., & Seddon, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Political Transition in Nepal: Conflict, Peace and Constitution Making*. Routledge.

Adhikari, J., & Whelpton, J. (Eds.). (2015). *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge University Press.

Bista, D. B. (1991). *Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle for Modernization*. Orient Longman.

. Bista, D. B. (1994). *People of Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

Bista, D. B. (1996). *A People War: Images of the Nepal Conflict 1996-2006*. Nepal Picture Library.

Bista, D. B. (1998). *The Problem of Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

. Bista, D. B. (2007). *The Voice of the Hills: An Autobiography*. Himal Books.

Burghart, R. (1984). *The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal*. *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 11(1), 1-27.

Burghart, R. (1996). The Conditions of Listening: Essays on Religion, History, and Politics in South Asia. Oxford University Press.

Burghart, R. (2003). Hinduism in Nepal: The Ritual Dimension. Oxford University Press.

Gellner, D. N. (1994). Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual. Cambridge University Press.

Gellner, D. N. (2001). The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian Themes. Oxford University Press.

Gellner, D. N. (2005). The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian Themes. Routledge.

Gellner, D. N. (2011). The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian Themes. Routledge.

Gellner, D. N. (2016). The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian Themes. Routledge.

Hutt, M. (1994). Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion. Indiana University Press.

. Hutt, M. (2003). Nepal: A Guide to the Art and Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley. Shambhala Publications.

Hutt, M. (2014). Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan. Oxford University Press.

Hutt, M. (2016). Nepal: A Guide to the Art and Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley. Shambhala Publications.

Hutt, M. (2018). Nepal: A Guide to the Art and Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley. Shambhala Publications.

Hutt, M., & Subedi, A. (Eds.). (2016). Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace. Cambridge University Press.

Karki, A. (2014). Nepal: A Historical Study. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

Karki, A. (2016). Nepal: A Historical Study. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

Karki, A., & Whelpton, J. (Eds.). (2017). Nepal: Navigating the Politics of Identity and Belonging. Cambridge University Press.

Seddon, D. (2010). A Political and Economic Dictionary of South Asia. Routledge.

