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Bagiswori College

Tumacho, Kamalbinayak, Taulachhen, Bhaktapur

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Editorial Note

In the ever-evolving realm of academia, research remains integral to shaping the intellectual and social dimensions of society. Through rigorous scholarly inquiry, complex challenges are addressed, prevailing assumptions are examined, and innovation is fostered across diverse disciplines. With a deep sense of purpose, we present *Bagiswori Journal*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, March 2024, as a multidisciplinary, double-blind peer-reviewed publication, encapsulating a wide range of research contributions from dedicated scholars.

This volume reaffirms the journal's commitment to promoting interdisciplinary engagement and fostering a comprehensive understanding of critical contemporary issues. The articles included herein encompass a broad array of topics—spanning management, literature, social sciences, politics, and culture—each offering perspectives that contribute to transformative academic discourse and practical application.

This issue notably emphasizes the production, documentation, and dissemination of indigenous knowledge, local wisdom, and culturally embedded practices. In an era characterized by rapid globalization, there is a pressing need to explore, preserve, and integrate traditional knowledge systems, community-based skills, and region-specific resources. These elements, often marginalized in mainstream scholarship, are essential to promoting sustainable development, cultural resilience, and innovation rooted in local identity.

By incorporating these perspectives, the journal aspires to serve as a channel through which indigenous and locally grounded knowledge reaches a wider academic and policy-making audience. The thoughtful integration of these knowledge systems with contemporary research methodologies enriches scholarly dialogue and contributes meaningfully to the understanding of nuanced, context-specific realities.

The research contributions featured in this volume exemplify academic rigor and the intellectual engagement of faculty members and aspiring young researchers. They serve not only as evidence of scholarly achievement but also as platforms for ongoing academic exchange, offering insights that address real-world challenges while drawing inspiration from local cultures and lived experiences.

For researchers, this volume provides an opportunity to share the outcomes of their academic endeavors and to foster collaboration across disciplines. For students and young scholars, it offers a valuable repository of knowledge, encouraging critical inquiry and engagement with contemporary issues, particularly those emerging from their own communities.

We extend sincere appreciation to the College Management Committee, the Board of Patrons, contributing authors, peer reviewers, and members of the editorial team, whose collective commitment and efforts have culminated in the publication of this edition. We believe that this journal will play a pivotal role in promoting indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage, thereby strengthening the shared pursuit of academic advancement and societal transformation.

We warmly welcome constructive feedback from our readers. We hope that the contents of Bagiswori Journal, Vol. 4, Issue 1, will continue to inspire scholarly engagement, foster intellectual growth, and contribute to meaningful research within and beyond academic institutions.

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WOMEN IN NEWAR CULTURAL PRACTICES OF BHAKTAPUR MUNICIPALITY: REPRESENTATION, EMPOWERMENT AND CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the representation of women in the Newar cultural practices for their socio-economic change in Bhaktapur Municipality. Gender ideology is created in a society and manifested in various ways. Among several approaches, cultural practices are crucial in establishing and expressing gendered culture in the society at large. This paper examines women's position in traditional Newar cultural practices through the perspective of gender performativity, challenging the notion that there is a single, universal experience of womanhood that applies to all women regardless of their culture, class, and race. Gender performativity refers to the concept that gender is socially constructed and continuously performed through repeated actions, behaviors, and expressions, rather than anything innate or biologically determined. Bhaktapur Municipality is widely recognized for its festivals, traditional dances, art, culture, and Newari way of life. The major deities of the two major religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, are thought to have contributed to the evolution of the enigmatic, vibrant, and thrilling ancient festivals that are still observed today. Throughout the year, numerous festivals are observed to commemorate historical and legendary events, to honor the gods, and to mark the shift of the seasons. This qualitative study analyzes how women are portrayed in cultural traditions of Bhaktapur Municipality by applying narrative research design. Primary data were collected through in-depth,

semi-structured interviews and field-based observation whereas secondary data were gathered from books, journals and online databases. The finding of the article suggests that despite all the barriers of patriarchal power, Newar women have an influential position in indigenous cultural practices. Along with the significant participation in the cultural practices, the Newar women have learnt the indigenous skills and knowledge which are applied to produce the local products. Many Newar women have turned into entrepreneurs by following the local skills in the production of the goods. The growing number of female entrepreneurs is a highly effective way of promoting women's socioeconomic development, gender equality, and women's empowerment.

Keywords: Cultural Practices, Gender Performativity, Newar Women, Socio-economic Development, Women Representation

1. INTRODUCTION

Bhaktapur, a city noted for its rich cultural legacy, celebrates a variety of festivals, rituals, and traditional arts that reflect its people's history and values. These cultural traditions are essential not only to the city's identity, but also to the lives of those who participate in them. Within this cultural milieu, women's depiction and role provide valuable insights into gender dynamics, societal conventions, and religious beliefs.

Discussions on women's status have been going on for several years in Nepal, and they will probably continue to be a dominant topic for many more decades to come. An important consideration when evaluating the success of any civilization is the status of women in society. However, a society is heavily influenced by its cultural heritage, and gender equations are frequently culturally defined. Generally speaking, Hindu thought dominates Nepalese society, and Hindu cultural traditions and equations have an equal impact on gender roles. "Women enjoyed more or less the same status as men during the early Vedic Period" (Pathak, 2019, p. 228). A man cannot perform any religious rite in Hinduism flawlessly without his wife's assistance. Pathak (2019) further writes, "In early Vedic period, the *Rig Veda*, child marriage is not mentioned. The girl was free to choose her match, and dowry was unknown...Even widow remarriage was permissible in Vedic period" (p. 229). It is undeniable that women and men have equal status according to the Vedic line. Women, however, have long been discriminated and subjugated. During the early Vedic Period, when wars and disputes were common, soldiers were essential. Women addressed such societal demand, therefore women were respected and allowed widow remarriage. All of this altered dramatically in the later Vedic

Period. “In the later Vedic Period, women had begun to lose the position acquired during early Vedic Period” (Pathak, 2019, p. 229).

Despite significant legislative and policy changes in support of women’s rights, gender-based discrimination still occurs in real-world settings. Women continue to be financially dependent on men. Work in the home is not considered valuable. Due to anti-social attitudes and actual discrimination, oppression, exploitation, injustice, and exclusion, women’s standing has not substantially improved in comparison to men's in all spheres, including the political, economic, social, cultural, and educational ones. *Jhuma*, *Deuki*, *Chhaupadi*, and dowry are examples of socially detrimental customs that have not yet been fully eradicated. As time and development progress, so do the types and manifestations of violence against women. Misuse of contemporary technologies has also resulted in violence against women. One of its manifestations is the procedure of performing an abortion following the identification of the fetus via video X-ray. Anita Gurusurthy (2004) states that existing power relations in society determine the enjoyment of benefits from Information and Communications Technology (ICT); hence these technologies are not gender neutral. The digital revolution is altering how people live, work, and communicate with one other. ICT growth and adoption may expand access to services and information and pave the way for collective action for social justice. But there's also a chance that this change may lead to inequalities in terms of who benefits and whose opinions are heard.

While much has been published about women's roles in religious rituals and cultural customs in South Asia, there has been little research on Bhaktapur particularly. Previous research on gender and cultural practices has frequently highlighted women's underrepresentation or marginalization in public cultural settings. However, there is also evidence of women actively shaping and preserving these behaviors, indicating a greater and multifaceted role. It specifically investigates whether traditional cultural practices reinforce gender stereotypes or if women have found ways to assert agency and influence within them. This article aims to examine women's representation and participation in the cultural activities of Bhaktapur Municipality, focusing on their role in important cultural ceremonies and socio-economic change. This study contributes to greater insight of gender roles in Newar cultural traditions and sheds light on the changing position of women in traditional settings. This research shows the women's agency within a patriarchal society by investigating opportunities provided by cultural traditions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

By upholding particular values and standards, cultural practices are crucial in forming and preserving a society. Since the beginning of time, people of Bhaktapur have been guided by Newar cultural norms to live in a specific manner. “Ancient Hindu scriptures like the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* show profound respect for the feminine principle” (Pathak, 2019, p. 228). A woman is a Goddess to be worshipped from who all emanate. Women in ancient times enjoyed freedom, equality, and liberty in all areas of life, and their circumstances were in accordance with religion. However, the rise of oral traditions and vernacular writings reinterpreted the ideal woman and gave rise to customs in which women were obedient to males.

The equation shifted over time as cultures became increasingly power-hungry and militaristic, and battles began to play a significant role in gaining territory. Because wars were martial in nature, they gave preference to courageous men, and women were kept in the house. Managing families and raising children became their innate responsibility. Due to the afore stated circumstances, this is an outcome of male child’s preference in the society (Acharya, 2020). Subsequently, this resulted in gendered divisions, and women ceased to have the same privileges as males. When taking account of contemporary Nepalese society, one can see the division in many areas, such as politics, economic autonomy, property rights, and health concerns. Women have not been able to enjoy even the most fundamental of rights since the establishment of such a gendered value system. They were entitled to their own protection as well. They had to be content inside the safe bounds that their man had promised. Because they believed that women were men's property, they were unable to speak up against their own men. While males were expected to obtain formal education and work in official employment to provide for their families, women were expected to do household responsibilities. Women struggled in patriarchal, oppressive societies that were afflicted with caste issues and other ills in many parts of the world. Asian Development Bank (2016), in its Gender Equality Result Case Study, makes the following claim:

Women in Nepal have long experienced high levels of poverty, social exclusion, and marginalization because of their gender. For women from ethnic minorities and groups considered low caste, these disadvantages are greatly compounded. The 2013 Gender Inequality Index, reflecting gender-based inequalities in three dimensions—reproductive health, political empowerment, and economic activity—ranked Nepal 102 out of 182 countries. (p. 2)

Various beliefs are associated with women's status. While it is generally accepted that no one's leftover food is fit for consumption by others, it is frequently the case that food left on men's plates is acceptable for their wives. Women are viewed as men's sexual object of desire and reproductive function.

In the male dominated society, women receive their identity with men's reference. In such a patriarchal society, women remain second and other. "For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute- she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 1953/1956, p. 16). Women were expected to give up their world and happiness in order to ensure the well-being of their families. They were prohibited from engaging in appropriate conversation with men other than her partner. It was considered a sin if a lady was discovered conversing with another guy. Men and women have been categorized as masculine and feminine by society's culture, which has led to gender inequality. "Gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman, the way societies distinguish between men and women and assign them social roles" (Bhasin, 2000, p. 1). In contrast, women are today more educated and skilled than in the past, enabling them to lead families and businesses of all sizes. Many of them have begun to defy the rigid, conventional roles that were assigned to them, although they were frequently compelled to follow them. Since their priorities and value systems have changed over time, the fight for women's empowerment and gender equality is the primary priority. Butler (1990) challenges the division between gender and sex made by earlier feminists and claims that a person acquires her gender by continually performing it rather than having it engraved in her body. She argues that gender is constructed through performance and an individual's gender identification is contingent on the situation and is not static (Butler, 1990).

In Nepalese society, gender discrimination has taken the place of patriarchal societal standards. Because men are viewed as superior and women as inferior, the social norm that the man is the head of the household has established a definite hierarchy. Stereotypes with sociocultural roots and male hegemony have prevented women from participating in a variety of social activities, and discriminatory gender-role norms have prevented them from performing household tasks. In addition, women are viewed as less qualified for leadership positions because of the idea of masculine leadership qualities. Their professional development and career objectives have been further hampered by the societal perception that women are exclusively in charge of taking care of the home and the family. Different socio-cultural factors, such as religion, conventions, tradition, caste, gender, and so forth,

have shaped the menstrual habits and beliefs that differ throughout the world in terms of time and location. Despite the fact that menstruation is a normal biological process that signifies the start of womanhood, the sociocultural norms and values surrounding its practice put women's and girls' lives in danger and cause a gap in human development. Due to numerous restrictions and inadequate menstrual hygiene practices, women and girls who are menstruating suffer in silence during their periods since they are viewed as impure and untouchable, particularly in Hindu communities. The women and girls are prohibited to touch some sacred things such as temple, water tap, and kitchen utensils including the male member of the families who have undergone the sacred ritual like *Bratabandha* (Amatya et al., 2018).

When women are menstruating, many traditional Nepali Hindu families place restrictions on them. One example of such limitations, albeit in a more extreme form, is *Chhaupadi*. The mid- and far-western parts of Nepal are home to the *Chhaupadi* ritual, which involves banishing women from their normal homes during their periods on the grounds that they are supposedly impure. In remote areas of far-western and Karnali Province of rural Nepal, the menstruating girls and women should make a distance from both community people and their daily normal activities (Amatya et al., 2018). It has drawn criticism for violating women's fundamental human rights as well as for the negative effects it has on their physical and mental health. It persists despite being illegal because of gender inequality, superstitious beliefs, and illiteracy. The historical patriarchal socio-cultural structure exacerbates the predicament of women in areas already beset by conflicts over caste, religion, and ethnicity. Even though the severity of the issue differs from community to community, the situation of women in these two areas reflects that of Nepali women generally, who are viewed as inferior to males and have less freedom, authority, and autonomy. It is mainly motivated by the superstitious idea that women who stay at home during their periods—which are seen as a time of impurity—would anger the gods, and as a result, the entire family will suffer. Additionally, some people believe that if a menstruation woman touches a cow, it will die; if she touches a fruit, it will fall off before it ripens; if she touches a water source, it will dry up; and so on. “Girls in Bajura and Achham were particularly afraid of taking roads where there may be a temple, or a water source, or touching someone who they weren't meant to touch and therefore angering the gods, being cursed or causing ill health to themselves or their family” (Morrison et al., 2018, p. 18). In addition to being forced to live in small huts after being exiled from their residential dwellings, women are also prohibited from touching their brothers, spouses, cattle, crops, and fruit-bearing trees. If they unintentionally touch

someone, they have to purify them, for instance, by using cow urine, which is revered. The only nourishing foods available to women are rice, salt, and certain cereals; they are not permitted to eat milk, meat, fruits, or green vegetables. The constant worry is that they might get hurt if they unintentionally touch something.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Numerous researches have been conducted on cultural practices of Bhaktapur. The previous studies have not explored the representation of Newar women in cultural practices of Bhaktapur Municipality. In spite of all the obstacles posed by patriarchal authority, the paper asserts that Newar women play a significant role in indigenous cultural practices of Bhaktapur Municipality. This study explores how Newar women perform crucial roles and are presented in the cultural practices of Bhaktapur Municipality.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the roles and representation of women in Bhaktapur's cultural practices employing a narrative research design. A deeper comprehension of how gender roles and cultural norms are portrayed is made possible by narrative research, which is especially well-suited for capturing people's lived experiences and intimate stories. The study's objective is to collect rich, in-depth accounts that shed light on the changing roles that Newar women play in these customs. Narrative research was used because it allows for a thorough analysis of individual experiences and highlights both individual and group voices within the Newar community. Researchers can gain insight into the individual's meanings attached to their experiences and how storytelling shapes these meanings by using this method (Riessman, 2008). The study followed semi-structured interviews and field-based observational methods to collect primary data, and it also used books, scholarly journals, and electronic resources to collect secondary data. Through visits to places of worship and cultural celebrations, primary data was gathered. The researcher actively engaged in some rituals in order to gain deeper insight into the community members' daily experiences.

Four Newar women particularly from *Jyapu* (peasant) community, ages 30 to 40, were chosen as a purposive sample for the study. In order to ensure inclusion of voices from experienced women, the age range was selected to encompass women who actively participate in cultural practices. The participants were chosen on the basis of their direct participation in cultural activities and ability to provide insightful remarks on the representation and role of Newar women in cultural practices of Bhaktapur Municipality. A very small sample size was selected to

enable a detailed, in-depth exploration of each woman's individual experience and her interaction with cultural traditions of Bhaktapur Municipality. Community people were interviewed in a semi-structured manner. The purpose of these interviews was to record individual accounts and subjective interpretations of religious festivals, customs, and beliefs. The results were contextualized using secondary sources, which were gathered from a range of books, scholarly publications, and online databases. Judith Butler's theoretical concept of gender performativity serves as the foundation for this study. The study investigates how religious and cultural rituals construct, represent, and depict gender roles and identities. How religious rituals and celebrations might support or contradict prevailing gender norms in the community will be examined using gender performativity.

5. REPRESENTATION OF NEWAR WOMEN IN SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES OF BHAKTAPUR MUNICIPALITY

Despite global advancements in gender equality and women's empowerment, many Nepali women continue to experience discrimination and discouragement for playing musical instruments. Interviews with a number of community members and cultural leaders of Bhaktapur Municipality revealed that musical instruments were often considered as divine manifestations, and historically, it was thought that women should not touch or play them because of the cultural connotations of menstruation and impurity. But new generation women are challenging these ideas more and more, especially in Bhaktapur Municipality, where shifts in these long-standing conventions are slowly becoming more apparent. I saw women and girls actively playing traditional instruments during my fieldwork, which was traditionally thought to be improper. These performances were remarkable because they were in the traditional Newari attire, *Haku Patasi*, which gave the scene an aura of cultural beauty. Among the many traditional and well-known garments worn by Newar women is the *Haku Patasi*, or black saree. The Newar people are native to the Kathmandu Valley and have lived here from the days when weaving was a significant industry there. It is composed of domestic cotton that is grown in various locations within the city. Handlooms and locally made clothing for both personal use and retail sales are owned by Newars of Bhaktapur Municipality. *Haku Patasi* is the typical local clothing worn by ladies, particularly those from the *Jyapu* community. The clothing nevertheless draws notice right away. The Newar women's *Haku Patasi* serves a unique function. *Haku Patasi's* hue itself has a historical and cultural connection to Newar customs. According to Newar legend, the sari's bottom red lines represent the source of power, which is thought to resemble the powerful goddess *Mahakali*. "Eight different corners which are tied in

the *Putu Laun* symbolize the *Astamatrika*, the goddesses of protection” (Shrestha, 2003, p. 101). The black color of the saree was chosen so it would keep its warmth. *Haku Patasi* is also thought to have the ability to ward against bad luck. Above the *Patasi*, a full-sleeved shirt, known as *Putu Laun* in Nepali, is worn. It is constructed of hand-woven threads and is tied at eight separate corners. Therefore, *Haku Patasi* represents the strength of women in society in addition to being a clothing.

In Taumadhi, Bhaktapur Municipality, I once sat in the temple courtyard and watched a group of women playing musical instruments. The lively sound appeared to enliven the atmosphere and uplift everyone in the vicinity, even those who were in deep sadness. The increasing acceptance of women's involvement in these performances was demonstrated by this scene. Furthermore, I found through casual conversations with members of different *Bhajan Samuha* (hymn groups) that Newar women have taken on a pivotal role in maintaining Bhaktapur's hymn-singing tradition. Particularly during festivals, when they perform in temple courtyards and offer prayers and songs day and night, these hymn groups play a crucial role in the social fabric of Bhaktapur. I had the chance to go to a hymn performance at a festival visit where women were active in organizing the music and leading the group. Many of the women I interviewed talked about how these organizations have given them a voice and a place to not only maintain their culture but also make their presence known in areas that have historically been dominated by men.

Newar women in Bhaktapur Municipality do not face the same restrictions as women in other regions of Nepal, and they are central to the sociocultural practices of the city. “Differences in comparative disabilities during their monthly menstruation is another way in which the Newar women feel themselves to have a better situation than Indo-Nepalese Chetri and Brahman women” (Levy, 1990, p. 122). In Bhaktapur Municipality, Newar women face far fewer restrictions than Chhetri and Brahman women. Menstruating Newar women are permitted to cook in the kitchen and continue to sleep in their customary locations in the majority of middle-class and lower-class *Jyapu* households in Bhaktapur Municipality. The 34-year-old woman from Bhaktapur Municipality talked about how women in her community who are menstruating are not isolated during their period and are still incorporated into family and social life. She noted, “Women who are menstruating are still viewed as integral part of family. We remain in our regular locations, carry on with our daily tasks, and are not viewed as dirty or taboo. Many women from different groups do not enjoy this independence” (R. Suwal, personal communication, December 18, 2024). Her account suggests that women in Newar households do not experience the social exclusion that is frequently observed in

other caste or cultural groups, and menstruation is not seen as a source of impurity. It seems that maintaining daily routines and removing barriers to social interaction provide a feeling of normality and individual freedom. All the aforementioned issues are echoed in Nepali's earlier report on Newar communities:

Menstrual impurity other than the first one [i.e., menarche rites] is not observed by the Newars as strictly as by the Gorkhas [the Indo-Nepalese]. During menses, a Gorkha woman lives practically in isolation. On the fourth day after her bath she is considered clean. But still she is not allowed to touch water and attend to religious duties until the fifth day. Among the Newars, on the other hand, a woman during her menses can even attend to the domestic duties including kitchen. (Nepali, 2003, p. 115)

In contrast to the non Newar community, Newar women especially from farmer community in Bhaktapur Municipality feel free in different socio-cultural activities and family functions as well.

The folktales, history, customs, way of life, religious beliefs, social harmony, craftsmanship, joys and fears, dreams and sorrows, and unity in the diversity of the people and the entire nation are all reflected in festivals and ceremonies. In particular, they have religious and cultural importance, and on certain auspicious days and times, they are celebrated with a large number of people in order to fulfill certain wishes of both individuals and communities. To make the gods and goddesses happy, they are connected to the recollections of noteworthy occasions. "Festivals were inaugurated to celebrate annually in some event in the scriptures to pacify the gods, to thank them for the harvest, to honor their birth dates or to celebrate some miraculous performance attribute to them" (Anderson, 1977, p. 27). The Newars of Bhaktapur Municipality celebrate feasts and festivals, and they enjoy and deepen their bonds by participating in at least one festivity each month.

In order to commemorate the start of the monsoon season, the Newar community cleans water sources such ponds, wells, and stone spouts during the *Sithi Nakha* celebration. Special Newari dishes like *Wo* (a lentil-based chapatti) and *Chatamari* (a rice flour-based chapatti) are prepared by the Newar women on that day. During the celebrations, six types of *Wo* and various vegetables are prepared. They honor their ancestral god by making traditional pancakes like *Wo* and *Chatamari*. "*Chatamari* and six different kinds of *Wo* are the symbols of the earth and the families inside it respectively" (Bajracharya, 2000, p. 18). Not only are the foods tasty, but they are also high in vitamins. The body needs a variety of vitamin-rich foods as the monsoon draws near in order to boost immunity. This source

demonstrates how aware Newar women are aware of the importance of consuming nutritious foods for their health. Additionally, they develop their ability to cook a variety of common foods, which can aid them in becoming entrepreneurs. Thus, *Sithi Nakha* is very special to the Newar women and it is known as “daughters’ day” (Pandey, 2018, p. 13). This might be explained by the fact that daughters are the primary householders who fetch water for residential consumption. Therefore, one way to help daughters fetch water is to clean water sources.

In Nepal and around the world, marriage is a revered custom. In contrast to other communities, the Newar community has a very distinct marriage arrangement, with a Newari girl getting married twice before she really marries a man and starts menstruating. In the Newar society, daughters are thus given preference over sons. But an amazing fact is that a girl is not married to an ordinary man but “Narayan” (Mangar, 2020, p. 926). *Ihi* (*Bel vivaha*), the sacred process of marriage at a very young age, is experienced by a Newari girl. In the traditional Hindu marriage rite known as the *Ihi* ceremony, a girl is wedded to Narayana prior to the start of her menstrual cycle. Using customary Hindu marriage rites and a procession of *Kanyadan* (the father offering a virgin daughter to the divine husband), a premenstrual virgin girl is married to Narayana during the *Ihi* ceremony. The ability of the Newar people to arrange their children’s marriages to *Bel*—a fruit from the bel plant, commonly known as the wood apple—is one of their most distinctive cultural practices. The *Bel* or the wooden apple, which is also assumed as a figure of the Lord Narayan had a peculiar quality of not getting rotten and remaining fresh forever. “Since, the ‘*bel*’ to whom she was first wedded is said to exist perpetually, a Newar lady is never a widow” (Mangar, 2020, p. 927). The girl is therefore not regarded as a widow even if her husband passes away in the future because she is also married to Narayan, who will always and forever live on. According to Hindu tradition, the *Ihi* ceremony is a pre-menarche marriage, meaning that a second marriage, the *Gufa* rite (*Surya darshan*), can come before a real marriage to a human. A female must spend twelve days in a dark room. Different families carry out this rite in different ways, and it has its own importance. In fact, this ritual is also known as *Barhang Taygu*, where it is a marriage but with the Sun, *Surya Narayan* (Mangar, 2020, p. 928). It is performed on the 12th day. Since the Sun is the source of strength and energy, it is regarded as God. Accordingly, it is said that the girl will be shielded from evil and terrible things by her marriage to the Sun. By keeping the girl in *Gumba*, a Buddhist place of prayer, for a few days but not more than twelve, the Newar community has also revived the *Gufa* tradition. This demonstrates how Buddhism and Hinduism are intertwined. Once I visited Suryamadhi, eastern part of Bhaktapur, while the ritual of *Ihi* ceremony was being held and I talked to 35-year-old college lecturer, one of the participants in the

ceremony. She argued, “*Ihi* and *Gufa* customs are powerful symbols of Bhaktapur's cultural heritage, and they have empowered Newar women while imparting useful lessons. As a woman from Bhaktapur, I feel pride in these traditions because they shape who I am and provide me with a sense of continuity, community, and connection to something more than myself” (G. Duwal, personal communication, January 30, 2025).

Worshipping *Kumari*, the living goddess, is another instance of the Newar community's tolerance for various religions. In Nepali, the word *Kumari* literally means virgin girl. For generations, people have worshipped the *Kumari*-living goddess, who is thought to be the spirit of the *Taleju* goddess and is represented by a line of Nepali females. In order to fulfill their wishes, believers of Buddhism and Hinduism bow their foreheads on the toes of the living goddesses, the *Kumari*, with utmost respect. “The *Kumari* is a prepubescent girl who is hailed as manifestations of divine and spiritual energy, the living incarnation of the Hindu goddess of power Durga who is also named as *Talejū (Tulaja) Bhawani, Bhagawati, Kālī, Pārvatī, Tripurasundarī, Ambikā* etc” (Ghimire, 2018, p. 24). It is interesting to note that the Newar Shakya clan is always the source of the Royal *Kumari*. The *Taleju* is an important Hindu goddess, yet the *Kumari* is a Buddhist by birth. This distinctive custom exemplifies the harmonious coexistence and blending of religions that Nepal has long been recognized for. *Kumari* culture belongs to a unique holy ritual in which young girls are worshipped as living goddess with profound faith. “People worship and present her offerings to wish for jobs, visa, prosperity and success” (Maharjan, 2024, p. 74). In *Kumari* cult as well, *Ekanta kumari* of Bhaktapur enjoys freedom than other *Kumaris* found in other cities in Kathmandu Valley. As 40-year-old caretaker of *Kumari* stated, “*Ekanta Kumari* of Bhaktapur always exercises more freedom and choices while most *Kumaris* are completely dedicated to the temple and its ceremonies. Most *Kumaris* carefully follow the regulations established by their family and the temple, but *Ekanta Kumari* has been free to pursue education, play with friends, and live with parents which is unusual” (R. Shakya, personal communication, November 20, 2024).

Indigenous knowledge and women's empowerment are interconnected and both should be fostered simultaneously for a better future. “Indigenous knowledge reflects the dynamics way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organize that folk knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history to enhance their lives” (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p.3). Through the year-round cultural rituals, the Newar women have acquired numerous indigenous skills. They have started small to large-scale businesses in Bhaktapur with the aid of these local

talents and knowledge. Entrepreneurship focused on tourism in particular is being encouraged, which helps the nation become more well-known worldwide. Women contribute significantly to the growth of the tourism industry and the country, and in turn, tourism enables women to improve their socioeconomic standing. The general concept of women as housewives is gradually changing in Bhaktapur Municipality to artists, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs and at present, women serve as decision-makers in farm management, domestic expenditure (food items, clothes and other expenses), the children's education, religious and social travel, household maintenance and also capital transactions (Shivakoti, 2022). "In spite of being in a large joint family, Newari women enjoy higher social status than non-Newari women...Newari system allows equal and active participation from both sexes which shows liberal outlook of the Newars regarding women" (Shivakoti, 2022, p. 82). According to the comparative study of the socioeconomic status of women in the *Jyapu* community of the Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts, more *Jyapu* women in Bhaktapur are involved in income generating activities and entrepreneurship than women in Lalitpur (Shrestha et al., 2015). The study further depicts:

More women from Bhaktapur district are involved in cultural activities than women in Lalitpur. The same is true for involvement in saving schemes and cooperatives, and community based social service. Women in Bhaktapur are not only economically active, but they are also more active in work related to their local communities. (Shrestha et al., 2015, p. 58).

It is important to think about empowerment holistically, not just in terms of goods and financial decisions. The first step in improving the outcomes of empowerment initiatives worldwide is self-examination. Empowerment includes the ability to choose and address something that deviates from norms and values, in addition to the right to choose or possess something of need or preference.

Indigenous knowledge remains essential to women's empowerment in Bhaktapur Municipality, particularly in the fields of community leadership, agriculture, crafts, and health. Women improve their social and financial status by embracing and valuing this knowledge. Numerous women in Bhaktapur Municipality are knowledgeable about traditional treatment methods that employ local herbs and natural cures. In addition to improving the health of the society, this information enhances the social status of women who preserve this priceless indigenous knowledge. Traditional healers, often women, play a significant role in community health and are valued for their knowledge. Women in Bhaktapur Municipality actively engage in, and occasionally lead, traditional festivals, rituals, and celebrations. This commitment elevates their position and influence in their

communities. A woman of 30-year-old from Pottery Square in Bhaktapur Municipality has embraced the traditional skill of clay pot making and converted it into a successful entrepreneurial venture. She responded:

I realized that the distinctive craftsmanship of our clay pots may be more than just a tradition; it could serve as a bridge for us to convey our culture with the world. With the growth of tourism in Bhaktapur, I saw a chance to not only preserve the art alive, but also to make it into an economically sustainable business. I began conducting classes for tourists, teaching them how to make clay pots and discussing the story behind each one. Tourists are fascinated by the hands-on experience and it's been very satisfying to see them carry home a piece of Bhaktapur's heritage. By combining my passion for pottery with our city's expanding tourism, I've been able to establish a business that supports my family while also employing others in our community. (L. Prajapati, personal communication, December 10, 2024)

This response demonstrates how the woman has applied her traditional clay pot manufacturing skills to start an entrepreneurial journey that benefits both her personal progress and the local economy, while also promoting and protecting Bhaktapur's heritage.

With the aforementioned evidences of cultural practices, Newar community of Bhaktapur Municipality confirms that it has provided influential space for the Newar women. In addition, Newar women have been engaged in different income generating occupation utilizing their indigenous knowledge as the men. The idea of gender performativity, which holds that gender is not only a biological truth or a fixed identity but rather a performance or a set of activities that people perform through. "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1990, p.140). This notion challenges the conventional classification of gender as a stable identity revolutionizing the discourse on feminism and gender identity. Gender is a performative constructed identity, a rehearsed act, akin to a character in a play, supported by social scripts that have been passed down and modified over time. The recurrence of these performances gives an illusion of a fixed gender identity.

One of the best examples of gender performativity in action is the participation of Newar women in traditional cultural activities of Bhaktapur Municipality, such as

leading hymn groups and playing musical instruments during festivals. Women are now questioning and redefining these performances, which were once thought of male domains as they not only participate in but often lead these rituals. By doing this, they are changing how society views gender and proving that femininity may encompass creativity, and power in both public and sacred spaces. Historically, societal taboos surrounding menstruation and perceived impurity made it inappropriate for women in Bhaktapur Municipality to play musical instruments and join in cultural and religious rituals. It was socially discouraged for women to use these places and instruments of worship. These notions are being challenged by the women at present. By actively participating in festivals, playing musical instruments and wearing *Haku Patasi*, they are redefining femininity. The portrayal of women playing musical instruments fights back against the traditional stereotype of women as being quiet, subservient, and constrained in their positions. Applying Butler's idea of performativity in this context, Newar women embody a new form of femininity that is active, strong, and defiant at places of cultural and religious significance through embracing these stereotypically male responsibilities. The act of leading hymn groups and playing musical instruments might be interpreted as a performative revolt against the gender conventions that have historically repressed women's voices.

The idea that gender is a fixed identity is being challenged by the growing involvement of Newar women in both public and private domains, such as social ceremonies, economic activity, and cultural practices. For example, women from other Nepali communities (such Brahman and Chhetri women) have historically experienced more restrictions than Newar women. At *Sithi Nakha*, their participation and acknowledgment in defending domestic and communal traditions demonstrates how Newar women constantly re-perform and re-negotiate their gender identity within the family and community. Gender and spirituality are uniquely intersected in the *Ihi* ceremony, where young girls are married to the god Narayan before they start menstruation. These customs provide women a great deal of social and cultural authority and are often connected to religious devotion and feminine purity. Newar women are exercising cultural and gender authority in ways that go beyond traditional gender roles through these ceremonies. Furthermore, a young prepubescent girl known as *Kumari* is worshipped as a living goddess, representing the confluence of social identity, gender, and spirituality. This devotion, which combines Buddhist and Hindu aspects, emphasizes the importance of Newar women in maintaining a spiritual tradition that transcends gender and divine identity.

The findings of this study reveal that Newar women in Bhaktapur Municipality are defying traditional gender stereotypes and claiming their places in social, religious, and cultural traditions. The concept of gender performativity, which challenges the notion of gender as a fixed identity by interpreting it as something constituted via repeated actions, behaviors, and rituals, can be used to clarify this shift in active participation.

6. CONCLUSION

To sum up, human beings are intimately linked to events. Every event has an immediate impact on society. These do not happen in a vacuum. Consequently, they have an impact on nearly every element of daily existence, including the religious, sociocultural, political, economic, and ecological. Women are the focus of almost all socio-religious ceremonies and traditions. The Newar community in Bhaktapur Municipality values and prioritizes women, as seen by these women-centric traditional rituals. Some of the distinctive customs and celebrations, such as *Ihi*, *Gufa*, *Sithi Nakha*, *Haku Patasi*, and *Kumari* are focused on women and require their effort in order to improve their socioeconomic status. Indigenous knowledge is used to produce local, typical Newari goods and to boost the travel and tourism sector. In actuality, these rituals and traditions show how Newar women are valued in Newar community in Bhaktapur Municipality. Compared to previous decades, a healthy balance between religious and economic responsibilities has become increasingly apparent. This might be because of the shifting social perception of women's roles, abilities, and significance in the Newar community of Bhaktapur Municipality.

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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON THE OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SIKAMĪ (WOODCARVERS) OF BHAKTAPUR MUNICIPALITY IN WOODCARVING

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the opportunities and challenges faced by *Sikamī* (Shilpakars) of Bhaktapur Municipality, the woodcarving artisans and entrepreneurs, with a focus on preserving and promoting this heritage craft over the past four decades. It is qualitative research with ethnographic method applying interpretive paradigm. Field observations, document analysis and interviews were employed in the research. The findings of the research reinforce that the revival of traditional architectural designs and the restoration of ancient monuments have significantly boosted the demand for traditional woodcarvings. Initiatives of the local government, including training programs for individuals from diverse caste groups, have broadened participation in this craft, fostering its independent practice. The expansion of the tourism industry has further widened the market, enhancing production to meet growing demand. Notably, the inclusion of women in woodcarving indicates a progressive shift, contributing to the industry's sustainability. However, challenges such as the disinterest of younger generations, particularly among traditional *Sikamī* families, and the impact of modern technology on traditional skills threaten the craft's continuity. The study emphasizes the need to honor and support traditional artisans as

custodians of cultural heritage, ensuring the preservation and evolution of this vital art form. The study provides insights into how globalization and technological changes impact local crafts. It can help *Sikamī* adapt to changing market demands along with preservation of traditional skills, heritage conservation, develop tourism industry.

Keywords: Woodcarvings, Newar, Bhaktapur, *Sikamī*, Shilpakar, Carpenter

1. INTRODUCTION

Bhaktapur is a city of immense cultural heritage and UNESCO has included Durbar Square of Bhaktapur in their list of World Heritage Sites. Seven historical and cultural sites of universal importance in Nepal were enlisted as World Heritage Sites in 1979, and Bhaktapur Durbar Square is one of them. (Amatya, 1999). Bhaktapur is taken as the abode of ancient Nepali culture, custom, and art of excellent craftsmanship. Bhaktapur, largely dominated by the Newars, is a hub of traditional knowledge and skills. The age-old cultural heritages, both tangible and intangible, are painstakingly preserved by the working-class people of Bhaktapur.

Newars are language groups with mixed blood; an ethnic group that shares the Mongolian blood; and different occupational group within the Newar socio-cultural structure (Gosai, 2022). The Shilpakār is one of the caste group of the Newars of Kathmandu valley. Deo (1969) refers to Regmi (n.d.) that they are not a single ethnic group but a mixture of different ethnic elements. But the caste analysis of the Newar community shows that they belong to the Newars who have special *Silpa* (skill) and hence are called Shilpakār. The Shilpakār Newars are the carpenters or the woodcarvers. These Shilpakārs have sculpted the idols, houses, temples, and palaces for centuries. Almost all the historical woodcarvings, the beautifully shaped, formed, and carved in an intricate pattern and design extensively used in door frames, window cornices, brackets, lintel, struts, posts, etc. are made by the Shilpakārs.

In Nepal Bhasa (Newari) *sī* means wood and *kamī* means worker or woodcrafter. The artists (*Kaligadh*) who work related to wood are called *Karmī* or *Sikamī* (Baidya, 2004, p. 33). Shilpakār means the person who can make a design with craftsmanship. The earliest stone tablet that mentions the name of a Shilpakār dates back to 793 N.S.(1673AD) and it records the creation of four stone idols at Jagatpal Mahabihar in Kirtipur (Sandhya Times, 2068, Asoj 4 (2011 Sept. 21), as cited in Shilpakār, 2012). Levy (1992) stated that *Kamī* is one of the occupational groups

and were traditionally wood carvers, one of the Newar high arts and now make furniture and do woodwork in the construction and repair of houses. All the wooden structures used in *Mathas*, temples, Buddhist monasteries, and taverns are dedicated to Gods and Goddesses as sacred offerings (Sharma, 2012).

There are about 350 households and a population of 5,000 belonging to the Shilpakār community in Bhaktapur Municipality. Shilpakārs are centered at *Tekhāpukhu*, *Ghugacho*, *Ichādo*, *Mulākhu*, *Itāchhen*, *Khaumā*, *Gomārhi*, *Yāchhen*, *Bholāchhen*, *Jenlā*, *Tahamalā (Thane)*, etc. (ibid). The original place of this caste group stays nearby the monasteries and palace area. Sharma adds that the windows, doors and the frames, posts, stairs, etc. of the palace and the monuments of those days were made by them and they are assigned to repair the wooden parts. According to Sharma, they were learned people of Tantrism. The mother tongue of Shilpakār is *Nepal Bhasa*. They follow the Hindu religion and *Viswokarma*, the legendary architect mentioned in Vedas is their *Kulguru* (Family Teacher).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Woodcarving is a significant source of livelihood of *Sikamī* of Bhaktapur Municipality, a hub of woodcarving traditions. The increasing interest of heritage conservation, cultural tourism, and international markets provides avenues for sustaining and revitalizing the art form. But, it has faced numerous challenges that threaten its sustainability. The rising cost of materials, declining interest among younger generations, urbanization and competition from mass-produced alternatives have put the traditional profession under pressure.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the current state of woodcarving profession of *Sikamī* of Bhaktapur Municipality, focusing on opportunities available and challenges faced by them.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employed an ethnographic approach to explore the transformation of the woodcarving industry in Bhaktapur Municipality over the past four decades. Ethnography was chosen as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, cultural significance, and evolving practices of *Sikamī* artisans. Through field observations, interviews, and document analysis, the study examined the opportunities and challenges faced by traditional woodcarvers in a rapidly changing economic and social landscape.

The research was conducted in Bhaktapur Municipality, Nepal, a historic city renowned for its woodcarving heritage. Key locations included traditional woodcarving workshops, restoration sites, and artisan communities, where participants were actively engaged in various stages of woodcarving, from design to production.

Data Collection Methods

The researcher conducted extensive field observations in woodcarving workshops, restoration projects, and training programs. By spending time with artisans in their natural work environments, the study documented daily routines, work techniques, and use of traditional tools. Interactions between master artisans and apprentices on adaptation of traditional skills in response to modern influences, the inclusion of women and younger generations in the craft was done. Informal conversations during the observations provided additional context for understanding the perspectives of artisans.

A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of participants, among them were Senior *Sikamī* artisans - Krishna Gopal Shilpakar (90), young entrepreneur - Ram Sundar Bhele (50), Historian and Writer - Purusottam Lochan Shrestha (70), woodcarver and designer – Bishnu Gopal Shilpakar (60), tourism industry stakeholders - Jeevan Shilpakar (60) and Ramsundar Bhele (48).

Each interview lasted between hours and was conducted in Nepali/Nepal Bhasa as per the participant's preference. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

The study also analyzed historical records, government policies, training program reports, and previous research on Bhaktapur's woodcarving industry. These documents helped contextualize the transformation of the craft over time and the impact of economic and cultural policies.

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns related to economic opportunities and market expansion, cultural sustainability and traditional knowledge transmission, the impact of modern technology on traditional craftsmanship, gender participation in woodcarving, generational interest and skill continuity.

Themes were derived through a systematic coding process, ensuring that findings were rooted in participant experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting interviews and observations. Participants were given the option to remain anonymous. Ethical approval was sought from relevant local authorities before initiating the study. The researcher remained sensitive to cultural and social norms during fieldwork.

Research Limitations

Despite efforts to ensure a comprehensive study, certain limitations were encountered. Limited Access to Some Participants: Some older artisans were hesitant to share details, fearing misrepresentation. Observer Effect: The presence of the researcher might have influenced participants' behavior. Time Constraints: Ethnographic research ideally requires prolonged engagement, but the study was conducted within a fixed timeframe, which limited deeper immersion. Generational Differences: Older and younger artisans held different perspectives on the sustainability of the craft, making interpretation of results complex.

Reflexivity

As a researcher, my position, background, and biases influenced the study process. To address this, I maintained a field journal to reflect on observations and potential biases. I ensured multiple perspectives were included to present a balanced narrative. Continuous self-evaluation helped reduce subjectivity in data interpretation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Renovation and Conservation Work as an Opportunity

In the past, efforts to build such artworks used to be initiated by the state itself as during the Malla period but the indifference of the state affected the scene in the ensuing period. Common people were poor in the Shaha Regime and people could not make artistic buildings with fine carvings. So, it would be hard to continue the woodcarving as in the past. It was due to poverty that the artwork could not be preserved. By the year 2032 BS (1975 AD), the profession of skilled wood artists must have significantly declined. German government-supported Bhaktapur Development Project to restore the old town and its glorious architectural heritage in 1974. Many historic temples were renovated.

Woodcarving and woodcraft making has increased since the last four decades in Bhaktapur with the start of renovations of the ancient monuments and buildings in Bhaktapur in the 1970s and the number of tourists coming in the city is increasing year by year. Guru Lal adds:

"In the context before 2032 BS (1975 AD), it was collapsing due to a lack of opportunity to carry out the woodcraft. However, in the early 30s of the Bikram Era, the German Project created an opportunity to work".

The Bhaktapur Development Project was the milestone in the development of woodcarving as it started, conservation and renovation sped up. People started sharpening their chisel, saw, *Basilā* and so on that was rusted for decades. There were very few *Sikamī* left who had the knowledge and skill of their tradition. Many *Sikamī* people joined the project making much woodwork to renovate the temples and monuments in hundreds of years. It was a good opportunity for the people to get work and earn money. It was similar to working from home because the *Sikamī* either had to travel far in search of work or stay away from home for months to complete houses. Some *Sikamīs* had reached to Dhulekhel, Panauti, Kathmandu to make public houses and temples.

Guru Lal further reflects:

"I do not think there were more than 10-12 people who had expertise in woodcarvings in Bhaktapur in those days. Those people led about 50 to 60 artisans who worked here at Dattātraya while the German Project was going on. It was going to work rather than a matter of learning. You get money. The workers were mostly Shilpakārs. Some others joined only after the German Project was launched."

The *Sikamī* got employment in the Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP) and the community people were encouraged to continue their family tradition of woodcarvings. The workplace made by the German Project was like the vocational training institute where the newcomers learn from the elders. However, teaching and learning practices were limited to their own lineage. Others did not intervene, as everyone had their own tasks to fulfill according to family tradition.

Jouvan adds:

"There was a lack of woodworks. The workers were not good enough either. Some were very bad. After the German project came, it gave high

importance to it. Many people learned the skill in the period. The enthusiastic youth learned it and the German project encouraged them.”

The challenge faced by the ancestors of the *Sikamī* was converted into an opportunity because the harsh condition makes the people labor harder. It was like the survival of the fittest and the survived people gave birth to the new artists in a favorable time.

Knowledge of *Sikamī* is related to earnings too. Learned people got job or employment in woodcarving workshops and that encouraged to learn more. The German project used to pay more money than the local people while making a home. The payment was on the basis of the level of the skill of the people too. It motivated the artisans to learn harder. It paved the path of opportunity further.

The preservation of the ancient monuments and buildings with elaborate wood carvings is labor intensive and expensive. Bhaktapur Municipality has renovated almost all the monuments and buildings in the past three decades. In the meantime, Ngyātāpola Temple and Bhairav Temple at Taumadhi square have been renovated two times. Following the 1988 earthquake, the conservation of the 55-Window Palace became a significant concern, sparking extensive debates over the use of traditional techniques and materials versus modern industrial construction methods. Numerous experts were involved in the restoration process, each presenting their own proposals and innovative approaches to conservation. Khan (2016) says that the palace was preserved using traditional methods and structural systems, ensuring both load-bearing capacity and earthquake resistance were maintained.

Bhaktapur Municipality has encouraged to local people to learn and earn the skill too. Kanhaiya has an almost the same line to say:

“There was no practice of teaching wood carving like today. Only the people who knew woodcarving would be involved in it and they were very few. Whenever I see broken windows while going out, I used to worry about who would renovate them. My core concern was always this. There have been so many windows with a lot of wood carvings and I was not sure who would repair them if gets broken. And all the works are done were only Kora.”

The recent trend of making houses and buildings of the traditional style of architectural design has boosted the woodcarving industry as well. Traditional

woodcarvings are being incorporated in the buildings made these days. Bhaktapur municipality provides 35 percent of wood required to make the front part and the roof of a house in the core area of the city. This has encouraged the local people to make houses in the traditional Newar style. Such a provision can create opportunities for those engaged in the woodcarving profession.

Bhaktapur Municipality has prepared detailed guidelines for the preservation of existing buildings and for new development in the core zone of the World Heritage Site, based on UNESCO guidelines (UNESCO Kathmandu Office, 2007). Within the core zone, buildings must be constructed out of traditional materials and details, such as decorative wooden frames for fenestration, and traditional veneer bricks for walls. The Municipality reimburses 70 percent of the cost of wood used and 100 percent of the cost of bricks used, to encourage the public to follow these architectural regulations (Silva, 2017).

COVID-19 has some slackness on the woodcarving industry. But most of the workshops were run during the pandemic because one can work in his own home or workshop in his own locality maintaining social distance and using some other safety measures. I went to one of the workshops in Bhaktapur where a dozen of carvers was working during the pandemic. Bishnu, the proprietor of the workshop said that we had already enough orders to make the wood carvings on the struts, doors, windows, etc. He said that the transaction of wood carvings reduced by a quarter in comparison to the normal period.

5. OPPORTUNITY TO OTHER CASTE GROUPS

In 2052 BS (1995 AD), the Bhaktapur Municipality authority took an initiative to rebuild and renovate the age-old temples like Ngyātāpola temple, Bhairabnath temple, etc, and there was a demand of the carvers a lot. The local government organized some training of woodcarvings to the other caste group people to fulfill the demand of the workers. Thus, the other caste group people too started the profession independently. The *Sikamī* helped to train the other caste group. Kanhaiya, one of the tutors who trained the other caste group people of Bhaktapur Municipality remembers:

Luckily, I heard that the municipality is planning to teach wood carving. I was also informed by a person working in the municipality. He even asked me if I was interested in teaching. I was to be accompanied by Tulshikumar of Golmadhi. So we both started teaching everything we knew. It is very

difficult to start wood carving to the other caste groups. So, I had to teach step by step.

Some of the people of the *Sikamī* caste group were not happy in teaching wood carving to the other caste group because they had the tradition of transferring the skill to their clan only. Their culture and belief system had forbidden them to teach the skill to another caste group. However, it was the demand of time and space. Krisna Gopal remembers those hustle-bustle days:

Many told me not to go. They even called me in clan meetings but I did not go. If I had gone, I would have to leave teaching wood carving. I was even threatened to be outcasted by my own people. Since I was backed by the municipality, I had the courage to take the challenge. Also, we did not go in haste; we were called for it. They might be afraid that more people will learn the art. But they do not realize that if people do not learn then there would not be any to continue the work. After we started teaching there has been immense growth in the work. People who used to stay idle before are also getting jobs today. They used to sit idly and gamble around the whole day. Now they are all busy in the work.

Some of the *Sikamī* people doubted that they would be out of work if others learned their craft. However, due to continuous renovations, ongoing projects, and the growing demand for wood crafts in both the tourism and international markets, they became even busier than before.

The furniture industry is flourishing in Bhaktapur Municipality. There is high demand for different furniture. But most of the workshops are run by people other than the Shilpakār caste group. Ram Sundar Bhele says:

There are about 7-8 thousand workers in 25 hundred workshops working as a carpenter making different furniture like kitchen racks, bed, table, chair, etc. in Bhaktapur Municipality and most of them are other than the Shilpakār community. It is because of the high demand in the valley and other cities of the country.

The population of Kathmandu valley is increasing day by day because of the increase of migratory people and there is a high demand for furniture for the people. A good number of youths is involved in fulfilling the demand of the market. These youths have noted the fact that most of the furniture found in the market is not so much durable and are very cheap. They say them '*bajāriya sāmān*'

that means use and throw type of furniture. This gave them the new opportunity to work for durable traditional artwork.

Opportunity Created by Tourism

Nepal was open for foreign tourists after the end of the Rana autocratic regime and the tourism industry started to flourish. Designing and producing woodcrafts in Bhaktapur Municipality started to cater to the needs of tourists and export overseas in the past some decades ago. There has been the relation between the tourism industry and the woodcraft industry too. The market of Nepali woodcraft is widening in the past decades because of the development of the tourism industry in the past decades and it is encouraging to produce the woodcraft to meet the demand.

Tourism has suffered an unprecedented setback and its effect can be seen on the global economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has rendered thousands of people unemployed so the woodcraft industry has also been affected seriously. All the handicraft shops were closed for months because of the lockdown ordered by the government to control the pandemic. However, people continue to make woodcrafts in their workshops, though in smaller quantities, hoping the situation will return to normal. They were puzzled when the lockdown was announced by the government to control the COVID-19 pandemic and could not decide what to do in the initial days. Indrakaji says that they accepted the situation and started making sculptures.

In recent years Chinese tourists are added to the Nepali tourism industry and they prefer to buy Nepali woodcraft. Unskilled and semi-skilled people got scope to widen their works because of the growing demand for a variety of woodcrafts in the past. If we evaluate the time before the COVID-19 pandemic, the scene was different. Jouvan explains:

The wood carving business is getting better as the Chinese are coming. So, it's a good opportunity to produce real workers/artisans. Yes, if the condition goes on getting better, the living standard of the workers will develop to a great extent, they have gained financial development to some extent in the last 4 -5 years. Those who work and produce themselves paying attention can earn about 50,000 rupees easily. And if they can carve images of gods and goddesses, they can earn up to 100,000 and 150,000 rupees.

About 15 years ago the workers Shilpakar got that money only after delivery of their products, now they get money in advance. This scene changed only after the Chinese came.

Some tourists looked for very good crafts, that encouraged people to make good products that gave them good earning. Today's crafts are no less in value than those which are exposed in the temples. Ram Sundar informs:

There are 30 workshops of woodcarvings registered in the government office and 5 of them have a license of exporting woodcrafts. Each gets enough income. I think more than 2 crores of net profit. One had the sale about 15-16 crore in the expo held in China some years ago. They sale statue of Budha, Tara, windows, etc. mostly. Sometimes they get 1000 percent of profit.

Most of the workers in the woodcarving workshops face language problems while selling the crafts to tourists from different countries and they are dependent on the tourist guides for it. The workers cannot explain the quality of the wood, history, and cultural value of the image or the craft they make. The workers have to give commission to the tourist guide for it.

Opportunity to the Female Workers

Once there was a taboo that other caste groups of people did not bother to do the woodwork. Time has come that women are attracted to this profession. There are many females at present doing this occupation. The then women of the Shilpakār did not show interest in such works. That might be because that there were not enough works either. But now things are changed: women are there in this occupation.

Srasta Gopal says:

It might be a kind of awkwardness working together with males and females in this sector. Women needed to stay separate. Some of the males did not like allowing females in this occupation. They get angry. We needed to leave the family for days. Leaving the family in this way was unusual for the women.

Family size is smaller today and one gives birth to not more than two children. The women are free. There is less land to do farming too. The income of only one (male) is not enough to feed the family nowadays. So, women have come out of the house to support the family.

In the past one had a number of children and the women had to take care of the children. Srasta Gopal adds:

If children come there, they may get injured. Again, if the children are kept in the upper floor without being watched, they may fall down. This is also another reason why females are not encouraged. It is not that they are not allowed to touch this or that but necessity of looking after the children is the main cause.

The future of the woodcarving looks bright as the women are introduced in the artworks. Women's economic empowerment helps in closing gender gaps. Economies grow when more women work. It boosts the productivity of the society too. The occupation of wood carving can be a base of social transformation.

Hence, I have concluded the opportunities of woodcarvings. I have discussed on the challenges of woodcarvings in the following paragraphs.

Introduction of Western-Style Architecture: Fall of Traditional Knowledge

Woodcarving and wooden architecture grew in prominence during the Licchavi period (from 400 to 750 CE) and the Malla period (10th–18th centuries). Unfortunately, during the period of the Shaha dynasty (1768 – 2008) and Rana Administration (1846–1951), this tradition was greatly discouraged (Uttam Lochan, conversation).

In the 1850s, British historian Ambrose Oldfield visited Nepal. A description of Oldfield of Kathmandu streets in the 1800s reads (cited in Poudel, 2010):

The houses are of brick and tile, wit-pitched or pen-roof; towards the street, they have frequently enclosed wooden balconies of open carved work, and of a singular fashion, the front piece instead of rising perpendicularly, projecting in a sloping direction towards the eaves of the roof. They are of two, three, and four stories, and almost without a single exception, of a mean appearance; even the Raja's house is but a story building and claiming no particular notice. The streets are excessively narrow and nearly as filthy as those of Benaras.

In Newar architecture, the buildings are not more than four stories, the face of the buildings clearly shows the bricks, the windows often have carvings, and the roofs are supported by the struts. Jung Bahādur Rana, the first Prime minister of Rana regime, established the Rana oligarchy in Nepal. During his regime, he discouraged traditional architecture by introducing and promoting western-style

architecture after his return from Europe visit in 1850 AD. His successors also continued the same policy, as they imported the European design and/or appreciated British India's nobility design (Bernier, 1979).

In this connection, Uttam Lochan says:

The Ranas were inspired by the British culture and the new palaces and buildings made by them were more inclined towards European designs and elements. Perish of the Nepali art started. The artists were diverted and discouraged. They changed their occupations. The traditional art and techniques were just simply forgotten.

Uttam's arguments can be taken as a proof in Rana palaces like Simha Darwar, Thapathali Darbar, Babar Mahal, and Keshar Mahal. All of these palaces were made in neoclassical architectural style. The Ranas also changed the conventional Newari pattern of building palaces inside the city. Erection of white plastered palaces and absence of traditional style artistic wooden window, struts, and roofs are some of the examples.

One can see such example in Bhaktapur Darbar Square as well, there is an 'odd one out' building called Lal Baithak. This Baithak was built by the Rana regime after the massive earthquake in 1890 BS (1833 AD). Before its demolition in the earthquake, there stood the Simha Dwaka Darbar (Lion Gate Darbar), also known as Nhekan Jhyā Darbar (Mirror Window Darbar), with the mirror addition dating back to the Malla Period. The Rana rule lasted for 104 years and during that time a number of grand royal residences were built in Kathmandu but only a few are in Bhaktapur. Among them is the building of Shree Padma Secondary School, established in 1980 B.S. (1923 AD) in the Darbar Area of Bhaktapur. This building was also built in a western model. Even the residential building at Thalechhe in made in western style. This building was also collapsed in the 2015 earthquake.

Modern technology of reinforce cement concrete (RCC) was adopted during reconstruction of residential building after Nepal earthquake 2015 instead of adopting traditional materials and technology of brick mortar load bearing wall system (Pahiju & Bajracharya, 2021).

Attraction towards White-Color Job as a Challenge

White color is meant to go to the office wearing a neat and clean dress and respected everywhere whereas the working people are not respected. People give respect to those who tend to work in an office, but ignore those who work

physically hard, dirty and heavy. The children of Shilapakārs do not seem to be interested in this occupation nowadays. The first thing is that they've developed their economic status higher in the last few decades. In the past, Shilpakārs focused on their children's (sons) education rather than on woodcarving. Now they are training their women and daughters to carve wood. But the women and daughters are not being able to give enough time for the work because they have their own family responsibilities. Jouvan tries to supplement:

In the past, they (Sikamī) did not value school education. The reason was that Shilpakārs did not have enough land for farming. They had to survive on their labor. So, they focused on work than study and they trained their children from the age of 8-11 years, the school age.

Now the situation has been changed. The children do not pay attention as it is physical work. Besides, it's believed that they should be educated first, some of the children study in boarding school, that makes them too busy after passing SEE (grade ten), they need to go to college, after that they make their own destinations as they are learned.

In terms of earning, a wood carving artist can earn a good sum of money. But, the children prefer to have a white-color job. Jouvan's statement clarifies it this way:

I've told you. Today an engineer or a doctor hardly earns 20-25 thousand rupees being employed as government works (officials). Maximum they earn up to 40,000 rupees. No more than that. On the other hand, the good wood carving man earns 40-50 thousand rupees easily in a month. You do not need a big investment whereas you need 30/40 lakhs to pass MBBS and some 15 lakhs to pass engineering.

While visiting the people for data generation, I have heard about an incident regarding the interest of people in this work. There was a father who earned about 50/60 thousand rupees a month doing this carving job. He did not let his son do this job. He made the son an engineer. Now the son's income is only 20/30 thousand rupees whereas his own income is 50 thousand rupees a month. However, the father encouraged the son to be in the academic field itself. Jouvan adds:

People do not see/ think that this is a well-paid job. They think there's no future scope of this job. It is believed that there is no future in this kind of job, as people think you can only earn as long as you are physically able to work. They work for jobs that pay them life long, who knows what will happen tomorrow?

Shilpakārs' common understanding is that there's no security in this occupation from the side of the nation. They claim that the nation is not responsible for its citizens, the industry owners themselves should manage for the security of the workers. The workers feel they are not secured. They do feel a lack of respect and honor by the authorities and the officers of the in comparison to an engineer, doctor, and lawyer or like that. Kali Bahādur opines: "This is not a reliable job. When people get older, they cannot earn well so there is a tendency that they let their children see other jobs and study well."

Some people are forcefully engaged in this job. Normally we do say that different people have different skills, interests, and abilities. But, when a father asks all four of his sons to engage in the same work, that does not bring a good result. There is a great difference between working with interest and working under someone's pressure. When a father sees some potential in his son, he forcefully tries to make his son work for him. He thinks he gets some support in his work but the result becomes negative in many of the cases. Jouvan adds:

In our society, working-class people are a bit neglected. People think that they cannot even survive as they do not work. On the other hand, a shopkeeper thinks he's an investor and that he's superior to the worker. He thinks that the worker cannot get anything to eat if he's not there. In this way, the worker is oppressed and that's why they get depressed.

As a researcher, my argument is that we can respect them as an artist with educational degrees like a bachelor, master, and Ph.D. They deserve it. They are greater architects than engineers; researchers have also shown that they (Shilpakārs) are real architects.

Kali Bahādur has a different observation in this issue. He says that the changing family structure and the job relations have caused the gap between the parents and the children. He says:

I have got a son, but he does not show interest in carpentry. It might be so because the workplace and he stay apart. I go to work outside. It's not like the furniture in one's own home. It would be good if there is a small workplace within one's home. But people have to shift to another place for work now as big places is necessary. Nowadays people get irritated because of sound pollution!

In those days, people did not have many options in an occupation like today. Today, people can select their own occupations according to their interests and

scope. The parent cannot compel their children to do the family works too. They like to enjoy their personal or private life. They have become more individualistic. It is because individualism has become predominant. There is a lack of collective feelings.

Guru Lal says, "In the past, most of the people were very poor and were compelled to do the physical works. In the past, we had to look forward to Dashain or Bisket to enjoy the taste of some beaten rice."

It seems that the tradition of transferring the knowledge that one has inherited from his ancestors to the younger generation, from one generation to the next, might be broken or discontinued.

Escalating Cost: Another Challenge

The main hindrance to the use of wood on the wide-ranging scale for the building is its escalating cost. In earlier days, there was enough timber from the Kathmandu valley itself or in the surrounding hills. The growth of population and the following demand for timber resulted in the shortage of timber. Now Kathmandu valley is mostly dependent on Terai Jungle or the woods from abroad.

People have begun to put doors and windows on aluminum just because of their cost-effectiveness. Many Shilpakārs are also invested in aluminum works. Some of them have left the woodworks on changing course of time and demand. They say that in terms of building the demand for aluminum or steel structures is greater so they cannot be confined to the wooden window and door.

Many private owners interviewed reported preserving the ancient buildings was very costly and they could not afford to reconstruct or build the house in traditional styles. Price of bricks and wood had increased, and also skilled human resources for maintenance were scarce and costly. Traditional knowledge on such craftsmanship had also declined over the past decade. In many cases these have actually led to demolition, and reconstruction of heritage buildings with design adapted to the by-laws that are officially valid for newly constructed buildings (Maharjan, 2012).

Almost all buildings are concrete nowadays because wood is costlier. Even quality wood is not easily available in Nepal. Those who make the traditional style of houses in the core area make all the structures concrete except the doors and windows. Some make roofs with struts and tiles. Woodworks are slower because wooden structures are made manually. Kali Bahādur elaborates:

In the past, Shilpakārs are kept for three-four months to build a home. Nowadays, Shilpakārs are called just to make windows and doors and some furniture pieces. If the house is constructed traditionally, carpenters come first. They get paid from the very beginning. If a policy to make a traditional style of load-bearing masonry houses is made compulsory at least in the core area of the city, woodcarving occupation would be better.

Newar style of architecture is unique and can be developed supporting the people in making traditional style of houses. The knowledge may be lost when such structures are destroyed completely.

In the past, the carpenter was considered to be a higher-level engineer because he is given an important place before the start of construction and the end of it. Now everyone looks for the money. The carpenters have become a contractor. With the introduction of modern technology, people with traditional skills have to live in crisis.

Wooden structure buildings are nature friendly and are reusable. Nepali geography is suitable to produce enough wood for Nepali people. The cost of timber can be reduced by planting extensive trees in the barren land of the country. This is how the challenge of *the Sikamī* converts into opportunity.

Value Becomes a Challenge

Without hard work and time, no woodcraft can be made. Some customers do not understand the labor of the workers and might underestimate the time and again that makes the artists disheartened. Raj Kaji says that some people understand the time-consuming hard work to make artistic crafts but most think that they are overcharging them. It is good that people have started showing more interest in wood carving these days. There is the demand for new designs or replicas of temples and palaces to decorate their living rooms, balconies, courtyards, and walls.

6. CONCLUSION

The German-supported Bhaktapur Development Project revitalized Bhaktapur's woodcarving tradition, providing employment and training opportunities. The municipality's preservation efforts and incentives have further boosted the industry. Despite COVID-19 challenges, woodcarving workshops continued operating. Traditional architectural styles are being revived, ensuring economic opportunities and the survival of this historic

craft. Bhaktapur Municipality initiated woodcarving training for other caste groups in 2052 BS (?) to meet labor demands. Despite resistance from traditional *Sikamī* artisans, teaching expanded opportunities. Continuous renovations and tourism boosted the industry, with many non-Sikamī workers excelling. Today, Bhaktapur's furniture industry thrives, meeting rising market demands with durable traditional craftsmanship. The tourism industry has boosted Bhaktapur's woodcraft sector, with demand rising, especially from Chinese tourists. COVID-19 caused setbacks, but artisans adapted. Earnings have improved, with some making up to 150,000 rupees monthly. Export profits have soared, though language barriers challenge sales. Despite difficulties, woodcraft remains a thriving business. Women are now increasingly joining the woodcarving profession, overcoming past taboos and societal restrictions. Economic necessity, smaller families, and changing social norms have enabled their participation. Their involvement boosts economic growth and gender equality. With women entering the sector, woodcarving holds potential for social transformation and sustainable economic development. The Lal Baithak in Bhaktapur reflects historical transitions, including the shift from traditional to western-style architecture. Despite good earnings in wood carving, younger generations prefer white-collar jobs for security and social respect. Lack of government support and societal perceptions discourage continuity in the craft, posing challenges to its future. The rising cost of timber has shifted construction trends toward aluminum and concrete, reducing demand for traditional woodwork. Preservation of heritage buildings is costly, and skilled artisans are scarce. Policy support for traditional architecture and reforestation efforts could revive wood-based construction, turning this challenge into an opportunity for sustainability.

7. IMPLICATIONS

The research contributes to the study of role of indigenous knowledge system in economic development. It helps understand Newar arts and crafts in a rapidly changing society and how globalization impacts local knowledge and skills. It highlights the importance of preserving traditional skills and ways to enhance market access. Bhaktapur Municipality, organizations that promote local knowledge and skills, Government bodies can make policy accordingly. The research can be a model for studying other socio-cultural and economic dynamics of Nepal.

The study opens doors for further research on how can the country promote traditional knowledge and skills with the help of modern technology and develop the economy of the country. It suggests comparative studies on woodcarving industries in other heritage cities like Patan and Kathmandu. It calls for further investigation into the role of local government, central government and other institutions in preservation of the glorified heritage of knowledge and skills of *Sikamī* of Bhaktapur Municipality.

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EVOLUTIONARY TRAJECTORY OF HINDUTVA IN NEPAL AND INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Hindutva, as a Hindu nationalist political theory has major impact on the South Asian polity. History of Hindutva traces back to the Indian struggle of independence. Nevertheless, recently Hindutva became much impactful, particularly since 2014 after BJP, one of the major Hindutva political parties re-emerged into Indian central political power. Nepal has obvious impact of this political change in India, not only because Nepal is one of the neighboring countries of India, also because Nepal is a Hindu-majority country and once a Hindu nation. Hindutva ideologues have always described Nepal as a model Hindu nation also to consolidate their objective to establish India as a Hindu nation. Interestingly, when Hindutva ideology is at the central stage of Indian politics, Nepal no longer is a Hindu nation. Evolution of Hindutva politics has different trajectory in Nepali context. This paper studies how Hindutva politics historically evolved in Nepal and shows how it differs from Indian context notwithstanding fundamental similarities. Indian ideologues had developed Hindutva as a political theory but it was already in practice in Nepal in different ways long before it took a shape of a political theory. This research makes academic enquiry of historical documents and research papers as data sources to analyze the evolutionary trajectory of the Hindutva in Nepal against the backdrop of Hindutva theory evolved in India.

Keyword: Hindutva in Nepal, History of Hindu Nationalism

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding of Hindutva political theory is crucially important to understand contemporary South Asian politics. Particularly after Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Narendra Modi came to the Indian central political power since 2014 and implemented policies based on Hindutva political theory, its implication has widened, not necessarily constrained within Indian border, rather neighboring countries like Nepal as well.

Hindutva, as a nationalist political theory defines Hindu civilization originated on the bank of Sindhu River that subsequently extended throughout the Indian Sub-continent, as a Nation with its organic race, culture, geography language and jurisprudence based on blood relation.

Hindutva literally means Hindu-ness (Bownas, 2024) and alternatively in use for Hindu Nationalism (Banik, 2022) took a shape of political ideology after VD Savarkar defined Hindus as a nation in his seminal work 'Essentials of Hindutva' in 1924 (Graham, 1990, p. 44). He coined the term 'Hindutva' and analyzed it as a nationalist theory that 'does not coincide with Hinduism, a religion' (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 15). He defines Hindu nation as an organic nation based on race, blood relation, culture and nationality, reside from *Sindhu* (*Sindhu* River) to *Sindhu* (Indian Ocean) with Sanskrit language as the root and who consider Hindustan not only as fatherland but a holy land.

Savarkar glorifies 'Hindu blood' that,

'...come down from the altitudes of the sublime *Vedic* heights to the plains of our modern history fertilizing much, incorporating many a noble stream and purifying many a lost soul, increasing in volume and richness...' (Savarkar, 2021, p. 30)

Major departure of Savarkar from his predecessors (such as Dayananda Saraswati and Vivekananda who advocated reform in Hindu religion) is he clearly demarked Hindu nationalism as a nationalist political ideology wider than Hinduism, a religion. He says, 'it must not be forgotten that we have all along referred to the progress of the Hindu movement as a whole and not to that of any particular creed or religious section thereof Hindutva and not Hinduism only (Savarkar, 2021, p. 20).

In quest of glorifying Hindu as the superior nation and defining Hindustan as geographically defined Hindu national territory, Savarkar and his followers drew

line between 'others' and Hindus creating binary opposition particularly with Muslims and Christians. They believe those are the foes of Hindutva who can pollute 'pure blood' of Hindus. Against the backdrop of British appeasing Muslims with an idea of separate electorates for Muslims and official secular policy of Indian Congress (Graham, 1990, p. 3), Hindutva forces formed Hindutva organizations to vanguard the Hindu nationality and establish Hindustan (from Sindhu River to Indian ocean) as a Hindu nation. Beside foundation of Arya Samaj in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati, a political party Hindu Mahasabha was formed under the presidency of Savarkar in 1937 with an objective to challenge the secularism of the Congress and Muslim theocracy of Muslim League, politically.

Prior to that, in 1925 another Hindu fundamentalist organization '*Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangathan*' (RSS) was formed led by KB Hedgewar, follower of Savarkar's idea. Within Congress Party, impact of traditionalist Hindu nationalists was prominent under the leadership of Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel who simultaneously oppose Nehruvian Secularism and Fundamentalist Hindu nationalism led by RSS.

After Indian independence (1947) as the *Hindu Mahasabha* could not take height of a full-fledge political party and it mostly focused on cultural movement, a vacuum for liberal Hindu nationalist was fulfilled by the foundation of the *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (BJS) under the leadership of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee on October 1951. But as the organizational base of the BJS was based on the RSS, very soon it became a political apparatus of the fundamentalist Hindutva organization.

Mookerjee tried to sustain the BJS as a liberal Hindu party but his unexpected demise in 1953, eased RSS to integrate it as per its objectives. Emergence of MS Golwalkar as the new leader of BJS directed it into political apparatus of RSS. Golwalkar argued that the servitude of the Hindus is because of the weakness of national consciousness of Hindus and so regeneration of Hindu nation is imperative (Graham, 1990, p. 46). His idea of racial purity directed him to appraise the Fascism then thriving in Germany and Italy. (Banik, 2022)

Golwalkar (1939) in his seminal book 'We; or, our Nationhood defined' writes,

'...the non-Hindu peoples in *Hindusthan* must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion must entertain no idea but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture...they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country

wholly subordinated to the Hindu nations claiming nothing deserving no privileges far less any preferential treatment-not even citizen's rights.' (Golwalkar, 1939, pp. 55-56)

Nonetheless, Hindu nationalist forces were divided and was not represented by a single political party. Hindu traditionalists inside the Congress didn't support the BJS, pointing its affiliation with the RSS, a fundamentalist faction of Hindu nationalism. After the State of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975, political scenario changed leading BJS merging into the coalition of anti-Congress forces that came together in the Janata Party. But due to 'hardly compatible with the constitutional framework' (Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 19) ex-Jana Sanghis were sidelined within *Janata Party* that finally led to the foundation of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), the currently ruling political party of India.

Discussion of trajectory of evolution of Hindutva ideology in India laid base for academic enquiry of evolution of Hindutva political practices in Nepal. Major argument of this paper is Hindutva political theory was already in practice as a ruling political ideology in Nepal when Indian Hindu nationalists were developing the Hindutva as a nationalist political theory in Indian context. By examining Hindutva political ideology in function at different period of Nepali history, this academic enquiry analyzes how it was functioning distinctly but inter-relating with Indian context. This paper will trace out the historical evolution of Hindutva ideology in Nepal and India and points out the differences of two historical evolutionary trajectories so that reliable background for further study of contemporary Hindutva could be done.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative, explorative and analytical research based on the secondary data, employing Historical Comparative Methodology. With objective to trace out the evolutionary trajectory of Hindutva ideology in Nepal and India, books, academic papers, news articles, opinion articles, published interviews, digital documentary and relevant feature films are used as the sources of data. Data are analyzed to figure out the similar and dissimilar characteristics of Hindutva ideology in both countries, simultaneously based on the timeline of Nepali history.

Since it is mostly focused on the historical comparison of trajectory of evolution of Hindutva ideology in Nepal and India, recent emergence of Hindutva politics and activities, particularly after 2008 when Nepal was declared a republic state, has been limitedly discussed just for directional indication. Nonetheless the analysis

and conclusion of this paper can help for the further academic research and analyze contemporary development of Hindutva movement in both countries, as a historical background.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While studying Hindu Nationalism or Hindutva ideology and its implication, adequate numbers of literature could be found on Hindu Nationalism in Indian context. But not much has been studied on Hindu nationalism in Nepali context. Nevertheless, available literatures about practices of Hindutva politics in Nepal is reviewed here.

Nepal has been included in many crucial Hindutva literatures from the beginning. Savarkar, a pioneer ideologue of Hindutva ideology, in his seminal work 'Essentials of Hindutva' has mentioned Nepal, that 'Hindu and *Hindusthan* owns a loving allegiance of millions of our people from the throne of Nepal to the begging bowl of the street' (Savarkar, 2021, p. 28). While showing the wide range of Hindus throughout *Hindusthan*, he glorifies Nepal as a country where Hindu king rules. Hindutva forces in India since then has been regarding Hindu monarchy in Nepal as a glory of entire Hindu nation and an integral part of Hindutva in Nepal.

Arguing the tolerance and inclusive nature of Hindu nation, he presented Nepal as an example where a Hindu of the highest caste is allowed to marry a woman of those who are supposed to be the alien tribes... who incorporated with and bound with Hindus the ties of common blood (Savarkar, 2021, p. 31). But Nepali society strongly based on Hindu caste system is still not flexible and tolerant for marrying a woman from alien tribes by the highest Hindu. Therefore, Savarkar's understanding about marriage between high caste Hindu and other alien caste in Nepal is not exactly true.

According to Wolf (2014), Savarkar had emphasized the importance of the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal as a model of governance and fabric of society. To Savarkar the calling of the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal as a foreign country was intolerable (Kuruvachira, 2006, p. 125). He held that the brave and warlike Gurkhas were part and parcel of Hinduism and any more to keep them segregated from India was strongly and relentlessly opposed to him.

This argument indicates that Hindu Nationalism about which Savarkar build an ideological frame was already in practice in Nepal before Indian Hindu nationalists were brain-working on it. Hindu nationalism in Nepali context though has certain

cultural and historical ties with Indian Hindu Nationalism but there are certain fundamental differences as well. It also shows Hindu nationalism in Nepal has different origin and background of evolution, differing Indian context.

Hindu nationalism in Indian context evolved as a part of anti-colonial struggle and independence of India from British colonialism. Hindu nationalists justify their ethno-nationalist identity as an obvious reaction of victimization of Indian Hindus by the Mughal conquerors and the British Colonialism and thus they wanted to established 'Hindu Nation' idolizing their 'golden past'(Leidig, 2020).

On the other-side, Hindutva in Nepal evolved as a cultural and political binding among different ethnic groups to build a state with homogenous nationality. One of the major differences of Hindutva in Nepal and Indian context is the existence of Hindu monarch in Nepal. While Indian Hindutva defines Hindu nation in term of geography, blood and language, in Nepali context Hindu monarchy is an essentially binding component for Hindu nation. Bownas (2024) states in Nepal, unlike India, political religion has been intimately bound up with monarchical power, and theologically, with syncretic practice.

According to Sharma (1997) in Nepal Hinduism provided the King (state) not only with its rational basis but also its popular legitimacy... based on the motivation for combining all the hill states into a single, powerful entity was not merely personal ambition but the wish to build a sacred Hindu land, distinct from and secure against the non-believing *Muglan* (Moghul Emperor) and the English '*Phiringis*' poised on the coast (Gellner et al., 1997, pp. 76-78).

Shastri (2002) argues that designation of Nepal as 'a real Hindustan' enabled the pursuance of a policy of isolation-political as well as cultural form the 'polluted' center while simultaneously following an aggressive Hinduisation of local communities within (Dixit et al., 2010, p. 35).

Review of literatures about evolution of Hindutva ideology in India and Nepal shows different trajectories in function. In India, Hindutva has been developed as a political theory to resist 'the others' and consolidate the purity of Hindu blood and culture in *Hindusthan* whereas in Nepal Hindutva has been practiced by the state to consolidate its power among the people by Hinduisation process. Hindutva forces in India are clearly drawing line of division with others such as Muslims, Christians and Communists where as in Nepal, Monarchy as the core of Hindutva force is using Hindutva as to fade out the differences between different

communities and ethnicities within Nepal to build whole country as a nation based on Hindutva.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Nepal took shape of a single unified country during the period of Gorkhali king Prithvi Narayan Shah (1742-75). He extended the boundary of his tiny hilly state of Gorkha to all four directions and corner-stoned the state, later known as Nepal. Since then, till 2008, Nepal was ruled by the Shah kings until it was declared a republic state. During Rana regime (1846-1951), Kings were practically deprived of any executive rights and Ranas were the actual rulers. In 1951, Rana regime ended and multi-party democratic system started with the King as the sovereign power. In 1960, King Mahendra took executive power on himself and introduced the political party-less Panchayat system that declared Nepal a Hindu state formally. People's Movement in 1990 ended the Panchayat system but the new constitution promulgated in 1991 continued Nepal as a Hindu nation. Maoist rebellion started in 1996 led the country for a decade long civil war. Royal Massacre in 2001 shook the political base of Hindu kingdom. Gyanendra Shah became the new King who practiced active executive rights, contrary to the constitutional provisions, leading to the People's movement of 2007. In 2008, ending the two-century long monarchical system, Nepal was declared republican and secular state.

Based on the study of evolution of Hindutva politics in Nepal, history of Nepal from the unification of Nepal to the declaration of republic, it can be divided into the three major periods- King Prithivi Narayan Shah's period, Rana period and Panchayat period. Hindutva politics in Nepali context is essentially based on these three distinctive periods with distinct and complimentary characteristics that is discussed below.

A. Prithivi Narayan's "*Asil Hindustan*"

Malla King Jayasthiti Malla (1382-95 AD) introduced the caste system based on Hindu scripture *Manu Smriti* in Nepal. He invited five Indian Brahmans namely Kritinath Upadhyaya Kanyakubja, Raghunath Jha Maithili, Srinath Bhatta and Rannath Jha for that task (Sapcotta, 2022). They helped to lay Hindu-based social structure in Malla kingdom in Kathmandu valley where before that majorly Buddhism was in practice.

Another Malla King Yakshya Malla also invited Hindu Brahman from the southern India to serve as the priest of Pashupatinath Temple located at Kathmandu. During the initial phase of Malla reign, Newar and other residence of Kathmandu valley were divided into four varnas and sixty-four castes (Sapcotta, 2022). As Malla kings came from Indian territory in Kathmandu valley, those social reforms were attempts for the readjustment of the local communities as per their compatibility to consolidate their regime. Due to numbers of ethnic culture already existed in Nepal during those days, introduction of Hindu value-based system forms a base for 'a syncretic form of Hinduism encompassing much that is Buddhist and animist' (Rose, 1971, p. 8).

Gorkhali King Prithivi Narayan Shah started expansion of his kingdom in 1744 and invaded Malla kingdoms of Kathmandu Valley in 1760-70s. Though reasons behind the expansion of Gorkha kingdom had other political and economic causes as well, later Shah defined the Gorkhali expansion as a quest for Hindu kingdom. Shah said he wanted to make Nepal a true Hindu state (*Asil Hindustan*) (Sherpa, 2021). He refers his hard-won kingdom as the '*asal*' (true) Hindustan, a 'garden' of four *varnas* and the thirty-six *jats* (Dixit et al., 2010, p. 25). Therefore, during his border expansion and conquest of the small states and principalities, he along with territorial conquest, established Hindu polity as the state system.

Hindu Nationalism as a modern principle was not developed or at least not known to Nepali elites till then. But, King Shah's desire to build '*Asil Hindustan*' was impregnated with desire to establish Hindu nation. India, also popularly known as *Hindustan*, was then ruled by the British empire which for the Hindus was alien civilization. Britisher were regarded as 'impurity' within Hindu beliefs. Against such backdrop, it could be Shah's political rhetoric to win support of surrounding Hindu kingdoms and principalities for his expansionist campaign. Nevertheless, his desire to establish '*Asil Hindustan*' consequently became viable reason to either suppress or hinduize the 'other' principalities ruled by different rulers. Here 'the others' basically means probable hurdles of expansionist campaign and the enemies of Gorkha Raja.

The *Parbatiya* or 'hilly people' were the social backbone of the new state and their Khas language became the cultural foundation (Gellner, 2005).

Besides invading land and property, Gorkhalis exterminated the cultural identities and significance of local ethnic population. Sanskritization and Hinduization were the two powerful tools used to meet this objective.

Hilly Brahman family helped the king to expand the Sanskritization and Hinduization of the 'other' ethnic groups in Nepal. The defeated ethnic minorities had no other option than to abide the rules imposed by the Raja. Certain ethnic groups were deprived from joining and serving in state army. Newar, Tamang and some other ethnic people were not allowed to join national army, which was a political oppression of the ethnic minorities.

Since *Khas* language became the language that elites and government officials use, other ethnic languages were shadowed. As language is one of the major features of ethnic minorities, suppression of languages had vehement effect on identity of ethnic minorities.

Nevertheless, nationalism as a modern concept was not consciously implemented then, rather it was solely based on the expansionist policy of the Shah Durbar.

Hindu King, Hindu Kingdom, Hindu Norms and values have been a focal point for unity or unilateral or centralist policy and a discourse is created that they are strengthening the country and society (Swobhasa, Swojati, Sworastrako Bhasya, n.d.). In fact, the main core of the argument lies '*Asil Hindustan*' whereas casteism is in the core of politico-cultural-economic practices which is still popular in one way or the other.

Shah's popular quotation 'Nepal is a land of four *varnas* and thirty-six castes' was a vindication of Hindu-polity based system in Nepali society. Four *Varnas* is based on Hindu religious mythology and it is divisive and hierarchical. It enhanced horizontal division of Nepali society creating higher and lower categories within society. Similarly, presence of 36 castes in 'garden' does not necessarily means all have equal rights of exposure and approach for state power. Among the *varnas* and castes in existence, certain ruling elite *varnas* and castes ever remained at the center of political, economic, social and cultural power and other castes and *varnas* are degraded as the ruled categories.

Different than Indian Hindu nationalist idea, Prithivi Narayan Shah was not much adverse to 'Mohamadens' (Bhandari and Dennis, 2019). Mainali (2025) argues during Shah's period, Nepal's attitude was not revengeful towards Muslims as in India because except Bengal ruler Samsuddhin's attack on Kathmandu valley during Malla period, there was no possibility of Muslim invasion in Nepal as in India. Instead, Shah invited Muslims traders and artisans to live in Kathmandu and expelled Christians from Kathmandu which Mainali says was not because any religious cause but for political cause (Mainali, 2025).

Nevertheless, the fundamental foundation of Shah's kingdom was 'pure Hindu nation building' which was continuum of previous Malla, Sen and other principalities' legacy as well and building of 'pure Hindu nation' was continued by Shah's inheritors.

In India, Hindu Nationalism runs parallel to the dominant Indian political tradition of the Congress Party (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 3). Idea of India as a Hindu nation came later only during the independence struggle against the British colonialism.

When Shah was building 'a pure Hindu nation' invading small principalities around the Gorkha kingdom, India was almost in verge of colonial rule of British empire. Hindus had not presented themselves as nation and political idea rather than a religion and tradition. King Shah had already worked on making Nepal as a Hindu nation, long before the idea of Hindu Nationalism took shape in India. This is one of the major differences in evolutionary trajectories between Nepal and India.

B. Jung Bahadur's Hinduization and *Muluki Ain*

In Nepal, Rana regime started in 1846 and in 1856 Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana decreed *Muluki Ain* (Legal Code). Gellner defines *Muluki Ain* as '...use of Hindu ritual and the codification of castes and ethnic groups' (Gellner, 2005, p. 5). *Muluki Ain* which has imbedded impacts still in Nepali laws consolidated Hinduization of whole Nepali society legally. Actually, the *Muluki Ain* completed the incomplete Hinduization of Nepali society, started by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

Ancient Hindu scripts (*Dharmashastra* and *Nitishastra*) were the bases of the *Muluki Ain*. "... (Rana) introduced a written law based on Hinduism, which divided Nepal into several hierarchical levels and subordinated all other ethnic communities to the *Bahun* and *Chhetri* (*Khas*) ruling castes of Nepal (Shrestha, 2007). Pokharel (2020) sees *Muluki Ain* to have aggregated the pre-existing ideas in the Hindu scriptures and turned them into laws. It has strengthened the caste system in Nepal creating obligatory parameters for purity, impurity, inter-caste relations, commensality rules, sexual relations, divorce, incest and rape.

All these legal provisions are based on Hindu philosophy which helped the elite class to build Nepal as a Hindu Nation and on that base whole Nepali society was Hinduized. The authoritarian Rana government was committed to punish the trespassers of the *Muluki Ain*. No matter how different citizens' cultural background and religious values differ, they were obliging to abide it.

Celebration of cow as a holy animal could be an appropriate example here. As Hindu considers celebrating Cow as the ‘insignia and a symbol’ of Hindu-ness, (Gellner et al., 2012) *Muluki Ain* decreed killing of cow a punishable crime. It is stated that ‘in the Kaliyuga this kingdom is the only kingdom in the world where cows, women and Brahmans may not be killed’ (Gellner et al., p. 80). But certain numbers of ethnic groups of Nepal have cultural practice of killing cows for meat consumption. Due to the introduction of such legal provision based on Hindu polity, ethnic groups either have to Hinduized or be punished. King of Nepal was presented as ‘*Gaurakshyak*’ means protector of cow. In India, Hindu belief on cow as a holy animal, became a condition for the conflict with Muslims whereas in Nepal, it posed threat to local ethnicities for legal punishment and suppression.

Certainly, the implementation of *Muluki Ain* had strengthened the stronghold of the Rana rule and it started the rule of law in Nepal that hitherto was not in practice.

Imposition of Hindu legal system as a national law was an initiative to build a modern nation rooted on Hindu polity and morality. It was a process of homogenization of heterogenized Nepali society with Hinduism as a core. Through *Muluki Ain*, Nepali society was further horizontally divided and the cultural differences between Nepali ethnicities were minimized, framing the whole society into a single monolithic frame.

Jung Bahadur Rana was clear about the kind of ‘*rajya*’ he was building. He said,

‘We have our own country, a ‘*Hindu Rajya*’, where laws prescribe the cows shall not be slaughtered and women and Brahmans not be sentenced to capital punishment ...’ (Dixit et al., 2002, p. 25)

More than a century long Rana regime had consolidated the Hindu nationalism and deepened the Hindu religious belief, enhanced Hindu nation building and celebrated Sanskrit language. Introduction and implementation of *Muluki Ain* based on Hindu values and establish it as a foundation of Hindu nation in Nepal is another distinct feature of Hindu nationalism in Nepal, different than India. In India, Hindu nationalists though do practices based on Hindu religious scripts, do not have any such legal tool based on Hindu polity as a state law.

During Rana regime in Nepal, independence movement was taking shape and myriads of thoughts were in debate in India interacting ideas on what sort of country India should to be. One of the influential schools of thought in interaction was the Hindu Nationalist thought. This school was even impactful inside the

Indian Congress who formally comply secularism. According to Graham (1990) Indian Hindu nationalists then were divided into three major types- a) Hindu Traditionalists who were the members of Congress and believed that liberal Hindu nation building is possible through the mechanism of the Congress party. b) Hindu Nationalists who also believe on need of building liberal Hindu nation but didn't believe that it is possible through the Congress who is staunch advocate of secularism. c) Hindu Fundamentalist who wanted to build pure Hindu nation and for that, wanted to build militant organization.

Different Hindu nationalist political and cultural organizations were founded in India during the latter half of Rana regime in Nepal. As Rana rulers also were building Hindu nation in Nepal to consolidate their regime, Indian Hindu nationalists had deep faith upon Nepali elites. They believed Nepal as the cradle of Hindu nationalism that support their effort in building Hindustan as the Hindu nation. But their belief failed to understand the differences between the motive of Hindu nation building in India and Nepal. Motive of Hindu nation building of Nepali elites was to retain it as an outer cover to vanguard from outer invasion and strengthen cultural homogeneity inside but they never were ready to weaken the British empire in India as it was the political support of their regime in Nepal.

An event popularly known as the 'Nepal plot' happened during the first decade of 20th century is an example of the difference of expectation of Nepali and Indian Hindu nationalists then. According to Kuruvachira (2006), Hindu nationalist such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak planned to convince the king of Nepal to invade India, after which they think in India there would be an uprising in support of Nepali King because 'if the independent king of the only independent Hindu Kingdom conquered India, there would be one sovereign Hindu nation' (Kuruvachira, 2006, p. 84).

As per the plan, Tilak and his business associate Ganesh Joshi visited Patna on early 1902 and from there they had plan to enter Nepal on February when Nepali border opens for pilgrims who visit *Pashupati* temple to mark the Shiva Ratri festival. As per their plan, once they arrive Kathmandu, they were to visit the King and convince him on their plan. But their plan failed as Nepali border didn't open that year because of plague. Their meeting with King was planned by a Maharashtrian school mistress known as *Mataji* who lived in Calcutta and Nepal for many years. (Kuruvachira, 2006) Later Tilak deputed Joshi and KP Khadilkar to Nepal to establish arms and ammunition factory, which produce arms to supply the Nepalese army whom were supposed to invade India.

During this time, Chandra Shumsher was the Prime minister of Nepal and Rana regime from the beginning had mutual beneficial relation with the British rulers. Since the British rule in India could not be overthrown and the Peking was weakened one after another war with foreign invading forces, Rana started appeasing the British rulers in India for their existence. Therefore, it was not objective to expect support from Rana or the King of Nepal who practically was prisoned by Ranas, for the Indian Hindutva forces to liberate India through Nepali king from the British colonialism and establish Hindu nation there.

Nevertheless, as Hindutva and Hindu religion were working as the cultural tool of ruling in Nepal, Ranas also wanted to show the Indian Hindutva forces support and rectify their reign in Nepal. That's why Chandra Shumsher was proposed to be the chief of Vishwa Hindu Mahasabha. Indian religious gurus and Hindu nationalists had good rapport with Ranas. But their relation with Hindutva forces in India can be extended unless it effects relation with the British rulers and disturb their autocratic reign.

Arya Samajist in Nepal

History of Hindutva in India traces back to the Nineteenth Century when Swami Dayananda Saraswati formed the Arya Society in 1875, intended to reform Hinduism. Swami Dayananda was proud of spiritual glory imbued with cultural and social greatness of Indian (meaning Hindus) antiquity (Jaffrelot, 2009). He argues that the Vedic epoch is not limited within the spirituality rather but also in a people-in its culture and its land. This idea of cultural and territorial supremacy was later developed as the Hindutva by forthcoming Hindu nationalists.

Ideas of *Arya Samaj* was extended to Nepal through intellectuals who studied in Indian academics. Madhavraj Joshi was one of the followers of Dayananda Saraswati in Kathmandu who believed on the reforms needed in traditional Hinduism during Rana regime. He established *Arya Samaj* in Kathmandu and actively involved in reformist activities (Malla, 2020). On 1905 July 26, Joshi was invited at Singh Durbar for intellectual debate with royal gurus for whom Joshi's reformist ideas were intolerable and finally he was punished.

Legacy of Joshi's reformist ideas was shouldered by his son Sukraraj Shastri, who was among four youths who were capitally punished on 1941 January by Rana regime. Shastri was educated in Vidhyabrat Graduation College in Sikandarabad of India and was largely influenced by Indian reformist idea and independence movement. He served as the Principal of Arya Samaj School at Allahabad. As

Indian Hindu nationalist, he on one hand seeks reforms in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religions and on the other hand attacked on Islam and Christian religions (Annapurna Post, 2022). His book “*Swarga ko Durbar*” (Palace of Heaven) published in 1930 February from Calcutta elaborates the needs of reform and vanguard Hindutva.

In the book, he states the need to end girls’ marriage and polygamy and supports widow marriage as essential factors to reform Hinduism, that Dayananda Saraswati in India had been advocating for. He warned that malpractices of Hindu community are harming Hindu-ness and subsequently that poses threat of Muslims and Christians taking advantages of. (Annapurna Post, 2022)

Rana regime though based on Hindu polity, was intolerant towards reformist idea of Hindutva forces in India. Basically, it was because evolution of Hindutva ideas in India was deep-rooted on the anti-British Independence movement with whom Rana elites had dependent political relation. Additionally, any voice that advocate changes was intolerable for stubborn traditional Rana regime. Therefore, Rana used Hindutva as the shield to save their face from ‘impurity’ and prove own self ‘pure’ but they were not ready to change the concept of purity and impurity as the Indian Hindu nationalist did, regarding the British empire politically.

C. King Mahendra and Panchayat Period

King Mahendra during his tenure (1955-1972) consciously and prudently implemented Hindu nationalist policies in Nepal. Definitely his acts were the continuation of the evolution of Hindu Nationalism in Nepal started during Prithivi Narayan Shah’s time. But Mahendra implemented it consciously, categorically and in a planned way. Till then Hindutva political ideology was also much developed, institutionalized and organizationally wider in India. Beside impactful presence of Hindu nationalist like Sardar Ballav Bhai Pattel in the Congress, challenging the Nehruvian secularism, Hindutva outfits such as *Vishwo Hindu Mahasangha*, *Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh* (RSS) and *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* were active.

In 1960 King Mahendra declared the Panchayat system and that system was based on Hindi Nationalist polity. He promoted the three pillars of Nepalese identity, which were Hinduism as religion, Nepali as a language, and monarchy as political institution. (Pulami, 2023, p. 38). He declared Nepal the only ‘Hindu Kingdom’ of the world (Shrestha, 2007) and glorified Shah kings and kingdom. His slogan

'*Aneka ma Ekta*' literal means 'Unity among Diversity' and '*Ek Bhasa, Ek Desh, Ek Jati, Ek Bhes*' literally means 'One Language, One Country, One Ethnicity, One Culture' that helped transforming Nepali society into a homogenous society from heterogeneity, into a national whole.

Kharel (2021) opines that the Panchayat period shaped a particular 'national identity' that remains contested today... and a lot of grievances against Nepali state- especially from a marginalized groups such as Janajatis, Madhesis and Dalits- have their roots in this period. Nepali language, *Daura Surwal* and Hindu religion were the foremost features of Panchayat system which according to Kharel was an aggressive campaign to mould a Nepali identity.

Nepali language, Hindu religion and the superiority of the upper caste Hindu *Parbatiya* group were the common grounds identified for the unification of this heterogeneous group (Sharma, 2023). Promotion of religious identity helped legitimize the institution of monarchy and promote 'Hindu Nationalism.'

With an intention of promoting *Khas* (Nepali) language as national language, development and promotion of other languages were undermined. No space was given to other languages of ethnic groups in state-owned media. Neither their use in official functions is authenticated. Publication of books, articles and newspapers in languages other than Nepali languages were suppressed by the state and even made subject of state-repression.

Similarly, *Daura Surwal* with *Dhaka Topi* was made national dress undermining other dresses of ethnic groups. Wearing of *Daura, Surwal and Dhaka topi* was made compulsory for any official functions and all male government officials and staffs must wear *Dhaka topi* mandatorily (Gupta, 2021). On a citizenship card, for men it was compulsory to stick a photo with *Topi* on head. Hindu religion was regarded as the official state religion and there were holidays during Hindu festivals such as *Dashain, Tihar, Shivaratri, Krishna Janma Asthami, Ram Navami* etc. This undermined the diverse ethnicities and their culture, enforcing them either to follow the Hindu polity or remained marginalized.

Literatures published in Nepali language were only considered as national and the authors who write in 'other' languages were hardly regarded as national luminaries. Essentially the period was domination of the 'One Nation, One Language and One Religion policy of government' (Shrestha, 2007). As Panchayat system was a party-less political system so it was easy for the state to suppress dissents against State policy of Hindu Nation building. Many books published in ethnic languages

were banned under various pretexts. Literary programs of ethnic languages were banned. *Khas* Nepali language was regarded as national language and other languages were segregated.

The 30 years of Panchayat politics gave immense support to Hindu religious organizations such as the World Hindu Council (*Vishwa Hindu Parishad*). With active initiation of King Birendra and Yogi Narahari Nath, the World Hindu Confederation (*Vishwa Hindu MahaSangh*) was established in 1981 (Bownas, 2024) amid the global meeting of *Sanatan Dharma Omkar* followers at Birgunj. Such initiatives were focused on at one side appeasing Indian Hindutva forces to continue their support towards monarchy and Panchayat politics of Nepal and on the other side to consolidate the Hindu nation building inside Nepal.

On the other-side, Nepali elites were equally cautious of being engulfed into the Indian Hindutva movement. As a separate country, they wanted to draw clear difference line between Indian and Nepali Hindu nation building. Foundation of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in an initiation of the King when the branches of other India-based Hindutva organizations were active in Nepal indicates this aspect. Therefore, Nepali elites then were cautious to Nepali national identity while promoting Hindutva in Nepal.

Post-1990 political change

Nepal went through a range of political ups and down after the political change of 1990. Panchayat system was overturned and the constitutional monarchy was practiced under the constitution of 1990. The King was defined as the symbol of National Unity and was celebrated as the incarnation of Vishnu, the Hindu God and the King of 'the last Hindu Kingdom of the world' (Gellner et al., 2016, p. 79). Royal family was above the laws. Constitutionally Nepal had status of the Hindu Nation. Privileges for Hindu tradition and practices were not changed at all. Political leaders representing various parties essentially were not free from the psychological habits and constitutional provisions based on Hindu nationalism. Multi-party democratic system was in practice. Against such backdrop, pro-monarchists were united into a political party-Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) which fundamentally was Liberal Hindu nationalist party. As a part of constitutional provision, political parties were essentially agreed upon the prevalence of Hindu nationalist practices. Therefore, the period 1990 to 2008 could be regarded as the continuation of Hindu nation building through democratic political parties.

Maoist rebellion started in 1996 February and for a decade Nepal went through the civil war. With the joint pressure of the Maoist rebellion and the People's movement of 2006 April, the monarchy was abolished in 2008 May 28. Nepal was declared a secular state constitutionally which means the state does not have any specific religion. Religious freedom is guaranteed for all citizens in the new constitution 2015.

As Nepal is declared a secular country, proselytization process increased. Number of churches throughout the country increased in substantial number, that aroused the resentment of Hindu nationalists in both Nepal and India. According to an article published in 15 February 2021, Christian community in Nepal is increasing remarkably (*Nepal: One of the Fastest-Growing Christian Populations in the World*, 2021). Hearth (2023) reported that in Nepal number of Christian grows more than 40 percent in less than a decade duration. This condition makes the Hindutva forces in Nepal cautious and resentful (Siyech, 2024), thus encouraging Hindutva movement in much fundamentalist ways.

In India, a Hindu nationalist government led by Narendra Modi came in power in 2014. Hindu nationalist forces in Nepal are encouraged and strengthened as a pro-Hindu nationalist political party came to the power-center in India (Siyech, 2024; Bownas, 2024). Anderson and Longkumar (2018) states that Hindutva since 2014 appears to be more confident, proud, brazen, and belligerent than ever before. Mehta (2022) argues that today Hindu nationalist in India is displaying the core ambition of Hindu nationalism to collect complex cultural threads and weave them into a political unity and display in full might.

Politically though Hindu Nationalist forces in Nepal apparently seem weaker but they are encouraged with the political development in India with the hope of their heyday back again. Additionally, since majority of Nepali people are Hindu, glorifying Hindu culture and tradition is making easy impact on them. Recently pro-monarch and pro-Hindu nation political forces in Nepal are regaining momentum. Reason behind is internally because 'failure' of ruling mainstream political parties to meet the people's expectations and externally because of strengthening Hindu Nationalist forces in India (Manish Jung Pulami, 2023, p. 41). Certain influential leaders of major political parties are also supporting the agenda of restoration of a Hindu nation in Nepal (Narayan, 2022), adding fuel to Hindu nationalists.

Initiative for the restoration of Hindu nation along with Hindu monarchy in Nepal has been supported by the Indian religious Hindutva nationalists who have deeper

political and cultural influence in Nepal. (NepalLive , 2025; Nepali Times, 2024). Indian religious gurus, saints, pujaris and Hindu nationalist political leaders insisting for restoration of Hindu nation because they believe making Nepal a Hindu nation is also a part of Hindu nationalist movement.

On the other side, as proselytization is widening and number of Church and Christians are increasing, Nepal can be a venerable country for communal and religious conflict. Anti-Muslims activities in India help surging such activities in Nepal, particularly in Terai districts. Social media are used by Hindu Fundamentalists to widespread hatred speech against Muslims and Christians, kindling communal clashes and insecurity among local communities. Number of tensions increasing in recent years among Hindu and Muslims and Christian minorities (Bownas, 2024; AP News, 2023; Volz, 2018; Dev, 2025; HimalKhabar, 2025) shows the Hindu nationalist activities in Nepal is gradually moving towards fundamentalist direction.

5. CONCLUSION

Historical Comparative study of evolutionary trajectory of Hindu nationalism in Nepal and India show two different but interrelated trajectories of Hindutva ideological development and implementation in two countries. Hindu Nationalism is top-to-down approach in Nepali context that always played role to consolidate the political power of the ruling elites. Defining Nepal as a Hindu nation has always been a process of Hinduization of diverse Nepali society. Ruling class uses Hindu nation building as a cultural initiative to validate their regime.

In Nepal, Hindutva has been the ruling political ideology that was in practice since Malla period. Extension of Gorkha state led by King Prithivi Narayan Shah simultaneously extended Hindu nationalism as a process of nation building. Rana regime consolidated Hindu nationalism and Panchayat System formalized Nepal as a Hindu nation in much deeper ways.

Whereas evolutionary path of Hindutva in Indian context is different. Indian Hindutva ideologues developed Hindu nationalist theory as political and cultural counteract against British Christianization, Muslims prevalence and Secularism of Indian Congress. Hindu Nationalism in India started as a resistance of the external invasion upon Hindu-ness of Indian civilization and developed as a rightist political theory that intend to build Indian sub-continent as the *Akhanda Bharat* with supremacy of Hindu nation based on purity of blood, historical glorification and cultural supremacy. For Indian Hindu Fundamentalists, Nepal has always been

an ideal Hindu land where Hindu King used to reign and wanted India to be a similar sort of Hindu nation.

Hindu nation and Hindu monarch are different from each other and not necessarily complimentary. Indian Hindu nationalists have never talked about making India a country ruled by Hindu monarch. But in Nepali context, Hindu monarch had been a major part of Hindu nation. Hindu monarch is thought complimentary of Hindu nation. This is the distinct feature of Nepali Hindu nationalism with distinctive historical background, different from India.

Hindu nationalism in India context is divisive in nature which creates binary opposition between Hindus and others. But in Nepali context, implementation of Hindu nationalism has been a process of blurring the differentiation between different ethnic and religious groups through Hinduization process to make a single whole.

Recent restrengthening of Hindu nationalist forces in India has deeper impact in Nepal. Increment of communal clashes, acts of hatred and misinformation campaign and strengthening of Hindutva fundamentalism in Nepal are the direct impacts of revitalization of Hindutva politics in India. Expanding proselytization in Nepal is working as a pretext for the expansion of Hindu fundamentalism in Nepal. In fact, this condition could lead to further communal tensions in local community level.

In national level, declaration of Nepal as a secular state has been a subject of resentment for the Hindu nationalists in India. Number of religious and political leaders of India have been resenting on this issue and in fact they are supporting the restoration of Hindu nation in Nepal. This has encouraged pro-Hindutva and pro-monarch forces in Nepal to challenge the constitution of Nepal that states Nepal as a Secular Republic.

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SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CAUSES OF CORRUPTION AND CHALLENGES IN ITS CONTROL IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on descriptive research methodology and employed structured questionnaire tools to obtain data and information. A survey sample was confirmed through purposive sampling and sample unit was 100 respondents. Who were officers and staff currently working in the offices of the CIAA, NVC, CIB, and DAO, all of them were primarily responsible for investigative research and action to combat with corruption in Nepal. The quantitative data were analyzed using simple statistical tools and MS excel particularly. Qualitative data were analyzed constructing theme and using Word Cloud to visualize subjective information. Based on the objective, data revealed that corruption is significantly increasing in current time though Nepal government structured so many mechanisms to control corruption. Similarly, the most common forms of corruption identified were bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism correspondingly. The most common cause of corruption is political in Nepal. In the same way significant number of respondents opined that Money is everything type of belief system, erosion on moral ethics and values and no social boycott of corrupt people are three socio-economic cause of corruption. Likewise Political interference, Lack of

enforcement, institutional corruption are the big challenges to control corruption in Nepal. The study highlights strategic focus on to control political corruption; strengthen public policy and anti-corruption strategies to foster the transparency. This study also paved the way to the research hers to conduct further study relating to anti-corruption and good governance initiatives in Nepal.

Keywords: Corruption, Anti-corruption Law, Bribery, Political Interference, Socio-economic Factors

1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a general term that encompasses a wide range of abuse or misuse of entrusted funds and power for personal or private gains (Graycar & Sidebottom, 2012). It is considered a wrongdoing, a behavioral challenge, and an ethical dilemma that calls for personal transformation. Transparency International (2024) defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." Here, "abuse" refers to misuse or mistreatment, and "entrusted power" refers to authority granted to duty bearers and decision makers on the premise that they act with integrity to advance the public good (TI, 2024), and "private gain" refers to the self-serving benefits (financial, material, political or social) that accrue to individual or specific interest groups at the expense of society at large. The legal definition of corruption in broad scene is as an act of bribery involving a public servant and a transfer of tangible resources (Mathew & Barnabas, 1996).

The corruption can happen in several forms. The main forms of corruption are bribery, embezzlement, fraud, and extortion (Khan, 2006). Even when these concepts are partly overlapping and at times interchangeable with other concepts, some of the basic characteristics of corruption can be identified through these concepts (Svensson, 2005). The Prevention of Corruption Act 2002 AD is the primary legal document that described different types of corruption. The act describes various types of corruption in existence and their identification as a criminal offense. The act identifies bribery, money laundering, abuse of office and facilitation payments in the public and private sectors (TI, 2017).

There are several causes of corruption. The root causes of corruption are bad systems of governance (Klitgaard, 1988). There is little chance of getting caught. This comes primarily from a lack of transparency. Lack of accountability is also the cause of rampant corruption (Lambsdorff, 2007). Another equally important cause of corruption is bad incentive. Although public employs take oath before joining the duty they do not get adequate level of anti-corruption related specific

education and training that is another cause of corruption. In the context of political economy of Nepal, though Nepal is considered as Federal Democratic Republican country and power and resources decentralized in to different constituent bodies, corruption is localized and connected to different bodies rather than control (Ghimire, 2018). Corruption is also taken as a social phenomenon where the events are exposed in several ways such as; social, political, psychological, cultural, and religious and other subjective factors. However, most of the researches are focused on administrative and economic aspect of corruption.

The Prevention of Corruption Act, 2002, in its Chapter-2, provisioned several offences of corruption and punishment. This Act has established a comprehensive legal framework to combat corruption, including the Anti-Corruption Act and the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Act. The CIAA is the apex constitutional body that plays a crucial role in investigating corruption cases, files corruption cases in Special Court for appropriate punitive actions and promoting integrity within government institutions (Karki, 2018& Shrestha, 2019). Similarly, despite the existence of anti-corruption, official policy of zero tolerance towards corruption, political party leaders and government authorities routinely speak out against corruption and vibrant communication Medias enforcement remains weak due to limited resources, inadequate training, and a lack of political will (WB, 2020& Shrestha 2019).

According to Transparency International the global coalition against corruption Nepal received 35 score ranks 107 out of 180 countries (TI, 2023). This shows that corruption is widespread, massive and reflected in multiple forms in Nepal. In this background, this study aims to identify the causes and challenges to control corruption in the context of Nepal and attempt to answer following research questions:

- a. What are the socio-economic causes of corruption in Nepal?
- b. What are the major challenges to control corruption in Nepal?

Based on the research question the specific objectives are designed as such;

- a. To determine the socio-Cultural and economic causes of corruption in Nepal
- b. To analyze challenges to control corruption in Nepal

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Corruption is complex and multifaceted phenomenon, has been conceptualized and defined in various ways in the sociological literature. Understanding these diverse perspectives is crucial for framing the sociological analysis of anti-corruption efforts in Nepal. The manifestation of corruption in developing countries, including Nepal, is often shaped by unique contextual factors. Pokharel (2019) explores how historical legacies, weak institutions, and economic disparities contribute to the persistence of corruption in Nepal. Understanding these contextual factors is essential for a nuanced sociological analysis.

As the similar kind different scholars have defined different forms of corruption such as:

- a. **Petty Corruption:** This type of corruption is about only a small amount of benefit exchanged between the taker and the giver. According to Schwenke (2005), such corruption involves the use of small managerial functions for corruption and outside work rather than the use of authority.
- b. **Grant Corruption:** Grand corruption is a transition of large amount and benefit between the receiver and giver. Skilled people who are at the top level policy making are complicit in such corruption. Both the giver and receiver benefit from this (TI, 2023)
- c. **Systematic Corruption:** In systemic corruption, any institution or organization is completely involved in corrupt activities. Bogovicet. Al. (2010), the structure of any organization is designed to be conducive to corruption and the organization itself in encouraging corruption in a planned manner.
- d. **Administrative Corruption:** Administrative corruption refers to corruption committed by employees working in public administration. Bureaucracy does things like extorting money from private sector businesses and firms, not doing any work without a bribe or some money (Coats, 2005).

As we know, corruption is as a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by cultural, political, historical and power dynamic factors. Social constructionist theories emphasize how corruption is defined, perceived, and reacted to within society. Scott (1978), Hacking (1999), and Schmidt (2013) provide insights into the

social construction of deviance, including corruption. As well there are multiple factors and causes that lead to corruption include weak institutional frameworks (Bjornskov, 2011), inadequate anti-corruption measures and enforcement (Cao and Shi 2021), a lack of transparency and accountability (Jain, 2001), low wages and high-income inequality among public officials (Doh, Rodriguez, Uhlenbruck, Collins, and Eden, 2003), and cultural and social norms that tolerate, encourage and challenge to control corruption (Mungiu, 2015).

According to the study, as the types and causes of corruption have increased, the challenges of controlling corruption are also increasing. Moreover, Tan-Mullins & Hofman (2014) identified lack of political will and enforcement capacity as key challenges in anti-corruption efforts. Even In the south Asian context since 1980s, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani presidents and prime ministers have been charged in court with corruption. Additionally, the media and political opponents of Sri Lanka's and Nepal's prime ministers frequently accused them of corruption (Thapa, 2023)

The challenges of anti-corruption can be broadly explained in terms of legal and operational challenges. Operational challenges cover operational parameters, coordination, and harmonization challenges facing the investigation initiatives, lack of anti-corruption programs where legal challenges include definition of corruption in Act, a poor conception of the meaning of corruption, limited mandate to the law enforcement agencies (Amukowa, 2013). In Nepal, Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is considered as a powerful institution enabled by the constitution as a constitutional body that can investigate and prosecute the authorities of public sector involved in the alleged corruption.

As the similar vein, different theoretical perspectives differently define and analyze the corruption. According to Institutional Theory, corruption is influenced by the institutional context, including the effectiveness of anti-corruption laws, the strength of regulatory bodies, and the presence of accountability mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Applying institutional theory to the study of corruption in Nepal allows for an exploration of how existing institutions contribute to the perpetuation or prevention of corrupt practices. Political Economy Theory emphasis is that Corruption is often analyzed in the context of power structures and economic inequalities, with a focus on how elites use their positions for personal gain. Marx (1867) provided foundational insights into the political economy, and Nye (1967) discussed corruption as a result of power imbalances.

According to Social Capital Theory social capital influences corruption through

informal networks that facilitate collusion and corrupt practices. Putnam (1993) and Coleman (1988) contributed to the understanding of social capital and its implications. Cultural Theory views that Cultural factors influence societal attitude toward corruption, determining whether certain behaviors are tolerated or condemned. Huntington (1968) and Banfield (1958) discussed political culture and amoral feminism in relation to corruption. Similarly, rational choice theory posits that individuals make decisions based on a rational assessment of costs and benefits. Examining corruption through the lens of rational choice theory provides insights into the motivations and decision-making processes of corrupt actors in the Nepalese context (Becker, 1968).

These theories establish a foundation for understanding corruption as a social phenomenon and establishes the conceptual framework for examining corruption in Nepal, drawing on theories that emphasize societal structures, interactions, influences, and diverse theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of corruption in this study.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research methodology, which involves specifying the research issue, understanding its real-world context. Self-administered survey questionnaire were the major tools of primary data collection in this research study. The questionnaires were distributed among the staffs and officers working in the agencies like Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), National Vigilance Center (NVC), Central Investigation Bureau (CIB), and District Administration Office (DAO), working as investigative research, action and play the direct role in anti-corruption efforts. The questionnaires were distributed offline in printed form as well as online through email in Google forms. With acknowledging the limitation, a total of 100 Samples were collected purposively as per the nature and orientation of the study. Among them 65 were collected offline and 35 online. Out of 100 samples 51 samples were collected from CIAA, 10 from CIB, 12 from DAO, 16 from PMO and 11 from others. The questionnaire implies primarily close ended questions and few open-ended questions to obtain the free opinion. MS excel and word cloud (www.worditout.com) was used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative forms of data respectively. Word cloud is often used in qualitative research to visualize subjective form of information to identify recurring themes and key words.

4. RESULTS

A total of 100 samples were collected during the study. The data were exported to suitable platform like MS Excel for graphical presentation and suitably analyzed keeping the research objectives in center.

Background Information of Respondents

As per the objective and nature of the study the respondents were selected purposively according to their active age group, position, focus work areas and work experience accordingly. Having a position of an officer or above have a role as well as authority to investigate the corruption case as well as file a corruption case in the court whereas the person in Assistant can assist investigation officer has a clerical role in such cases. The detailed demographic distribution of the respondents has been reported in the Table 1.

Table 1. *Background of Respondents*

S.N	Description	Frequency	Total	Percentage
1	Age			
	20-30 Years	7	100	7%
	31-40 Years	59	100	59%
	41-50 years	19	100	19%
	Above 50 years	15	100	15%
2	Position of the Respondents			
	Assistant	14	100	14%
	Officer	50	100	50%
	Under Secretary	28	100	28%
	Joint Secretary	8	100	8%
3	Work focus of the Respondents			
	Investigation	83	100	83%
	Prosecution	4	100	4%

Vigilance	2	100	2%
Monitoring	10	100	10%
Other	1	100	1%
4 Work Experience			
< 5 years	25	100	25%
5-10 years	37	100	37%
10-15 years	18	100	18%
>15 years	20	100	20%

Source: Survey, 2024

Respondent as per age group, position of employment, area of work focus, and years of professional experience are categorized and presented in the table. The distributions of respondents as per their age-group were: 7% 20-30 years, 59% 31-40 years, 19% 41-50 years, and 15% above 50 years of age. As per the civil service act, every civil servant has to retire after completion of 58 years. Similarly, collected data shows that the respondents as per their employment level 14% belonged to Assistant, 50% Section Officers, 28% Under Secretaries, and 8% Joint Secretaries. Out of total respondents' majority 83% were involved in investigation of corruption related activities, 10% in monitoring of corruption related events, 4% in prosecution related activities of corruption cases and 3% were at vigilance work.

Regarding the years of experience in civil service, majority of the respondents belong to 5-10 years of experience, 25% respondents were of less than 5 years of civil service experience, 18% belonged to 10 to 15 years of experience, and 20% above had more than 15 years of experience in civil service. Such a category and features of respondents were selected purposefully to achieve the objective reflexively.

Current Status of Corruption in Nepal

Table 2. Status of Corruption

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Decreasing	12	100.0	12%

Same as in the past years	29	100.0	29%
Increasing	59	100.0	59%

Source: *Survey, 2024*

Regarding the trend of corruption in Nepal, 59% of respondents perceive that corruption is increasing, 29% perceive it as remaining the same as in previous years, and 12% perceive it as decreasing. This table reflects that corruption is increasing significantly whether it is material or no-material.

Most Prevalent Types of Corruption in Nepal

Table 3. *Types of Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Bribery	92	100	92%
Embezzlement	84	100	84%
Nepotism	66	100	66%
Fraud	37	100	37%
Extortion	21	100	21%

Source: *Survey, 2042*

Among the 100 respondents, 92 percent respondents perceive that Bribery is the most Prevalent type of corruption in Nepal followed by Embezzlement, Nepotism, Fraud and Extortion orderly. This data reflects that material and economy or monetary related corruption is most prevalent in Nepal.

Corruption Prone Areas in Nepal

Table 4. *Prone Areas of Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Public Procurement	60	100.0	60%
Land Administration	15	100.0	15%

Judiciary & Law enforcement	25	100.0	25%
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Source: Survey, 2024

In the survey question about areas or sectors prone to corruption in Nepal, 60% of respondents identified public procurement as the most susceptible to corruption, 25% pointed to the judiciary and law enforcement, and 15% identified land administration as the sector most prone to corruption. This data figure shows that public procurement sector particularly budget related and tender related areas are most corrupted. This is because there is a tendency of bribery to government official to reward certain percent of the total project amount and the tendency has been developed as a customary. In absence of this reward the contractor has to suffer delays in approvals and payment releases.

Broad Common Causes of Corruption

Regarding the causes of corruption 40% is attributed to politics, followed by social factors 36%, economic factors 16% and cultural factors 8%. According to data reflects in table number five; political sector and social sector comprised nearly same percentage of cause of corruption. This similarity is due to the interrelation between the social and political activities. Normally the people involved in social activities bear mass appeal and broad public network. Later such persons are framed by political parties so that they can get more votes. This chain has resulted in political corruption that emerged from the social relation and networks.

Table 5. *Common Cause of Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Social	36	100.0	36%
Political	40	100.0	40%
Economical	16	100.0	16%
Cultural	8	100.0	8%

Source: Survey, 2024

Most Prevalent Socio-economic Causing Factors of Corruption

Table 6. *Socio-economic Causes of Corruption*

S.N	Response	No. of Respondents	Total	Percentage
1	Money is everything type of belief	94	100	94%
2	Erosion on moral/ethical values	91	100	91%
3	No social boycott of corrupt people	74	100	74%
4	Male have more corrupt behavior	23	100	23%
5	Ignorance of religious faith by civics	18	100	18%

Source: Survey, 2024

The most prevalent socio-cultural factors causing corruption are ‘money is everything type of belief’ system in the society which consists 94 percent responses followed by ‘Erosion on moral/ethical values’, and ‘no social boycott of corrupt people’. The data depicts that not only economic but also social factor are responsible in corruption. Similarly, male civil servants having more corrupt behavior may be due to the lesser women share in civil services as well as the culture. This issue needs more exploration. Regarding the ignorance of religious teachings for civics may have caused the corruption because religious teaching is taught and learned by everyone during early age of socialization where basic ethical behavior about good and bad / right and wrong are in common. Secondly, moral education is guided by religious teachings which prioritize to conduct good deed. This requires religious teaching separately for civic like training/workshop to combat corruption. Below figure number one also outline the socio-economic causes of corruption in Nepal.

Figure 1: *Causes of Corruption in Nepal*



Source: Survey, 2024

An open-ended question “In your opinion, what are the socio-economic causes of corruption in Nepal?” was asked to write their opinion. The response of the participants was analyzed using the ‘data visualization’ technique to produce the word cloud as shown in the figure number one.

The word ‘Social’ had the frequency of 26, followed by ‘Money’ and ‘Society’ and the word ‘moral’ repeated 7 times in the text. The senses of the majority of respondents in relation to the most visible and greater word represents the higher its frequency or importance in the text.

The majority of respondents expressed that the diminishing social and moral values contribute to a culture of corruption. They highlighted the growing influence of the "money is everything" narrative, which fosters materialistic temptations and weakens ethics and morals. Furthermore, respondents pointed to undue political interference in administration and the political protection of individuals involved in major corruption scandals as significant barriers to accountability. These factors collectively create an environment of corruption in Nepal.

Challenges to Control Corruption in Nepal

The respondents perceived that the top three challenges that are hindering the anti-corruption efforts in Nepal are political interference, lack of law enforcement, and institutional Corruption. Another prominent factor is Weak Legal institutional framework. According to the data structural challenge are most common to combat corruption in Nepal.

Table 7. *Main Challenges to Control Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Political interference	87	100	87%
Lack of enforcement	76	100	76%
Institutional Corruption	65	100	65%
Weak legal framework	58	100	58%
Societal attitudes	16	100	16%

Source: Survey, 2024

Political Challenge to Control Corruption in Nepal

The table below shows the results of the survey on political challenge to combating corruption the most frequently cited challenge is the lack of political supports with 85 percent of respondents identifying it as a major obstacle. It followed closely by the accountability crisis among political representatives (77%) and weaknesses in the electoral system (76%). A significant minority (49%) also believe that public support for dishonest leaders is a challenge. Other challenges were mentioned by only 7 percent of respondents.

Table 8. *Political Challenges to Combat with Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Political Support	85	100	85%
Accountability crisis among political representatives	77	100	77%
Electoral system	76	100	76%
Public support to dishonest leader	49	100	49%
Others	7	100	7%

Source: Survey, 2024

Economic Challenges to control Corruption in Nepal

Table 9. *Economic Challenges to Control Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Low income of public servant	76	100	76%
Less transparent economic system	36	100	36%

Source: Survey, 2024

The table shows that low income of public servants and less transparent economic system are the major significant economic challenges to controlling corruption in

Nepal. According to the results 76 percent of respondents 'report low income of public servants and 36% respondents reported less transparent economic system as major economic challenges to control corruption in Nepal. These findings suggest that addressing these structural issues is crucial for curbing corruption in the country.

Socio-Cultural Challenges to Control Corruption in Nepal. The table presents socio-cultural challenges to control corruption in Nepal. The most significant challenge are "Public appreciation of corrupt person" with 76% of respondents", "Family Support/orientation," with 66 percent of respondents citing it. This is followed "culture of impunity" (65%) and "culture of social acceptance" (62%). These findings suggest that societal values, family support to corrupt member and cultural believe system play the crucial role in enabling and perpetuating corruption.

Table 10. *Socio-cultural Challenges to Control Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Public appreciation of corrupt person	76	100	76%
Family Support/orientation	66	100	66%
Culture of impunity to the culprits	65	100	65%
Culture of social acceptance	62	100	62%
Weak monitoring system	57	100	57%
Poor legal setup	55	100	55%
Corruption is the easy way of getting rich	46	100	46%
Increasing materialist culture	30	100	30%
Culture of forgiveness	23	100	23%

Source: Survey, 2024

Strategies Needed to Be Adopted to Control Corruption in Nepal.

This research collected information through an open-ended questionnaire to understand opinion regarding the strategies to be adopted to control corruption in

Nepal. The open-ended question was: “In your opinion, what strategies Nepal should adopt to control corruption in the country?” The response was captured in text form and analyzed using word visualization technique.

The response of the entire participant was analyzed using the ‘Data visualization’ technique to produce the word cloud result which is shown in figure number two. In the result, the word ‘Corruption’ had the frequency of 25, followed by ‘Public’, ‘education’, ‘awareness’, ‘strong’ and the word ‘legal’ repeated 7 times in the text.

Figure 2: *Response Towards Strategies to Be Adopted to Control Corruption in Nepal.*



Source: Survey, 2024

The majority of respondents expressed a strong consensus on the need to control political corruption through various measures. As outlined in the earlier section political corruption and its linkages with socio-economic causes of corruption. They also emphasized that strengthening public policies aimed at curbing corruption is essential, along with the establishment of a robust institutional framework to ensure accountability. Additionally, respondents highlighted the importance of public education and awareness in fostering transparency, as an informed society can actively participate in holding institutions accountable. Furthermore, they stressed the necessity of implementing effective measures supported by strong legal and institutional mechanisms to combat corruption comprehensively.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the previous literatures the common types of corruption are grand corruption, systematic corruption and administrative corruption in the Nepal. According to the TI 2023 assessment, countries with peace, freedom, and robust democratic institutions likely to score well and Nepal have already made significant progress towards implementing federalism as per the 2015 Constitution. Nevertheless, there is still more work to be done to restructure and strengthen existing institutions and promote service-oriented public administration across all three levels of government.

Likewise, as theoretical literature suggest that political economy Theory and Social Capital Theory are most applicable to analyze the context cause and challenges to control corruption in Nepal. Similarly, literature on corruption and institutional theory highlights both the complexity and the challenges of combating corruption in Nepal. Despite significant strides in adopting formal anti-corruption measures, the effectiveness of these reforms has been undermined by weak institutional capacity, political interference, and entrenched cultural and political practices.

This study builds on existing literature by applying institutional theory to understand the interplay between formal and informal institutions in the Nepali context and by proposing ways to strengthen anti-corruption efforts through more aligned institutional frameworks. Interestingly, rational choice theory is not perfectly match with this finding because based on the obtained data and information corruption is not solely driven by individual behavior but also institutional and socially constructed. By addressing these gaps, this research provides a nuanced understanding of corruption control in Nepal and offers actionable insights for reform.

As Thapa (2023) says, "...a substantial portion of the political corruption in these countries is rooted, and acknowledging that it is 'society driven' makes it difficult for the Anti-Corruption Commission to advocate for its impartiality successfully." Which is also supported by institutional theory and reflects that Nepal's efforts to control corruption reveals the challenge is not just one of individual behavior but of a deeply embedded institutional system where formal anti-corruption efforts are often undermined by social networks and political resistance. While formal institutions such as laws and anti-corruption agencies exist, their effectiveness is severely hampered by political influence, weak enforcement, and social acceptance of corruption. So, it can be argued that Systemic Corruption happening in Nepal

embedded with political and economic systems.

6. CONCLUSION

By and large, the participants in this research perceived the status of corruption as increasing. The main causes of prevalence of corruption are political, social, economic, and cultural in nature. Challenges to controlling corruption in public agencies/organizations in Nepal are political interference in the decision-making process, lack of enforcement of legal and regulatory provisions, and institutional corruption. And the obstacles to mitigating these challenges in the present context of Nepal are political back support for corrupt persons, lack of accountability of political appointees, and the present electoral system. The most challenging factors to control corruption in Nepal are to establish independent oversight bodies, enhance evidence collection mechanisms, and engage civil society in anti-corruption efforts.

From the socio-economic perspectives, the most challenging factors include low income of public servants vis-à-vis socio-cultural acceptance towards 'money is everything' phenomena, public appreciation to corrupt persons in the society, and culture of impunity to the corrupt people by the society.

To addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, integrating political reform, stricter enforcement, and societal attitude shifts. Effective anti-corruption measures require independent oversight, stronger evidence collection, and active civil society engagement.

This study also prospects to establish an independent anti-corruption court as well.

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FACTORS AFFECTING BUYING BEHAVIOR OF ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the variables influencing Nepalese consumers' purchasing decisions for eco-friendly goods. Using judgmental sampling, 384 consumers of green products provided the key data. The data analysis was carried out utilizing software such as SPSS and SMART PLS 4. Model fit was attained by the use of confirmatory factor analysis. The parameters were estimated and research hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. This study discovered that Nepalese consumers' purchasing decisions for eco-friendly products were significantly influenced by a number of criteria, including product availability, price, quality, features, and environmental consciousness. The study's conclusions will assist green marketers in creating creative approaches to draw clients and boost revenue.

Keywords: Environmental Awareness, Green Product, Product Availability, Product Features, Product Price, Product Quality

1. INTRODUCTION

A green product is one that is non-toxic, recyclable, and composed of organic materials and components that have a good effect on both the environment and

human health. According to Boztepe (2012), green consumers are those who value environmental welfare, adopt eco-friendly practices, and favor buying eco-friendly goods. Consumers are increasingly inclined to obtain and use such products (Chen, 2009), as they are considered safer for human health, the atmosphere, and the environment (Horbach et al., 2012). Environmentally conscious consumers assess the impact of product use on environmental degradation and take measures to minimize it (Tiwari et al., 2011). Green product purchases are also more common among those who care more about the environment (Kim & Choi, 2005).

Numerous research have looked into how consumers feel and act when it comes to green products. Unnamalai (2016) found a strong correlation between consumer attitudes and buying habits, emphasizing that favorable views toward eco-friendly fast-moving consumer goods are associated with buying habits. Prabusankar (2016) revealed that factors such as safety, health benefits, quality, and worthiness positively influence consumers' purchase intentions for eco-friendly products. These consumers prefer purchasing green products when companies offer them at reasonable prices and maintain high-quality standards. Furthermore, they tend to buy green products from well-known and trusted brands (Suki, 2013). According to Elkington (1994), green customers steer clear of goods that might pose a health risk or seriously harm the environment during production. Green consumption has emerged as a result of the prudent use and conservation of natural resources (Solomon et al., 2010).

As consumer attitudes and preferences become more environmentally sensitive (Sarigöllü, 2009), green products must maintain the same quality and performance as conventional products to reinforce green values and drive sales. The perceived value of green products can be of core importance in fostering purchase intention and building long-term customer relationships (Zhunang et al., 2010). This observation serves to improve repurchase intentions since customers heighten their product sustainability concern (Steenkamp & Geyskens, 2006). Wong et al. (2020) discovered that social values, environmental concerns, and health awareness substantially impact consumers' green purchase intention. Being environmentally friendly products become more popular, businesses are incorporating environmental concerns into their marketing strategies (Gam, 2011).

Though the research on green consumption has increased globally, the specific situation of developing nations such as Nepal introduces new opportunities and challenges that have been extensively researched. Though there has been increased global interest in green products, there is little research on consumer attitudes and

buying behavior in Nepal, especially in light of the nation's distinctive economic, social, and cultural circumstances the shape consumer choice. There are several reasons in Nepal why these products are still hampered by factors such as low consumer awareness, high price of environmentally friendly products, and the limited availability of these products.

Mukendi et al. (2020) emphasized the necessity of examining actual consumers of sustainable products instead of general consumers to gain a better understanding of their buying intentions. Sobuj et al. (2021) stated that green consumers take ecological aspects into account when making consumption choices, where consumptions is deemed to be green when consumers select eco-friendly and recyclable products (Choi & Johnson, 2019).

As studies demonstrate that individuals who possess knowledge about environmental problems and the advantages associated with environmental sustainability products are more likely to engage in eco-friendly purchasing (Kim & Choi, 2005; Moser, 2015), additional research is necessary to determine how other factors, such as product quality, price, product features, availability, and environmental awareness purchasing decisions for green products within the context of Nepal product quality, price, product features, availability, and environmental awareness, influence buying decisions for eco-friendly products in the context of Nepal. The discussion above depicts that research concerning consumer perception and buying behavior toward eco-friendly products are of great significance.

The present study aims to study the determinants of consumers' purchasing behavior towards green products in Nepal. Particularly, it aims to study the effects of product quality, price, availability, product feature and eco-awareness on consumers' buying behavior. The literature indicates that Nepalese consumers are ready to spend extra financial resources on green products (Aryal, 2008). In spite of this, the organic product development in Nepal is still at the introductory phase of the product life cycle (Bhatta et al., 2008). Due to the absence of sufficient research on this subject in Nepal, the present study attempts to bridge this research gap by examining consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior towards green products in the Nepalese market.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Consumer Buying Behavior and Environmental Awareness

Consumer purchasing behavior is affected by a multitude of factors, such as product quality, environmental issues, prices, availability, and particular product features. As the level of consumer environmental knowledge rises, so does the inclination to buy environmentally friendly commodities (Agyeman, 2014). Consumer behavior entails intellectual, emotive, and physical activities like selecting, buying, using, and disposing of products that meet their requirements (Kotler, 1999). Green consumers prioritize products that do not harm personal or public health, the environment, or natural resources (Elkington, 1994). Consumers with higher environmental consciousness are more likely to engage in green consumption and prefer sustainable products (Ottman, 1993; Soonthonsmai, 2007). Green purchase decisions are also influenced by consumers' willingness to balance sustainability with product quality and price (Bhatia & Jain, 2013).

2.2 Theoretical Foundation: Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a strong framework for understanding eco-friendly consumer behavior. According to TPB, consumer purchasing decisions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Bansal, 2002). This theory has been widely applied in behavioral research to analyze green purchasing patterns (King, 2003). Studies suggest that consumers with positive environmental attitudes are more likely to develop green purchase intentions and engage in sustainable consumption (Chekima et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2017). However, the attitude-behavior gap remains a challenge, as many consumers express environmental concerns but fail to translate them into actual purchasing behavior (Moser, 2015). Understanding the factors that bridge this gap is crucial for promoting sustainable consumption in Nepal.

2.3 Factors Influencing Eco-Friendly Product Purchases

Product attributes such as quality, price, and availability play a critical role in consumers' purchasing decisions. There is a strong positive relationship between eco-friendly product quality and consumer purchasing behavior (Pinto, 2017). Similarly, price sensitivity affects green purchasing decisions, as consumers are more likely to buy eco-friendly products if they perceive them to be affordable and cost-effective (Agyeman, 2014). Consumer demographics such as age, income, and

education level significantly impact eco-friendly purchase behavior (Sachdev et al., 2014). Also, perceived brand trust, environmental concern, and corporate green image positively influence green product adoption (Ali & Ahmad, 2016). Green purchase intention (GPI) is strongly linked to consumer attitudes and environmental knowledge (Ghouse et al., 2024). Perceived behavioral control, such as ease of access to green products, also plays a significant role in determining actual purchasing behavior (Kim & Lee, 2023).

2.3 Research Model and Research Hypothesis

Green purchasing behavior of consumers on environmental products is determined by numerous factors. Perceived price, quality of the product, and product features (D'Souza et al., 2007), levels of environmental awareness (Phau and Ong, 2007), and green marketing credibility (Thøgersen, 2000) are only a few of the factors that various researchers have found to affect consumers' buying behavior. A discussion was held on the different types of literature and how one construct relates to another. Based on this, the below research model is created.

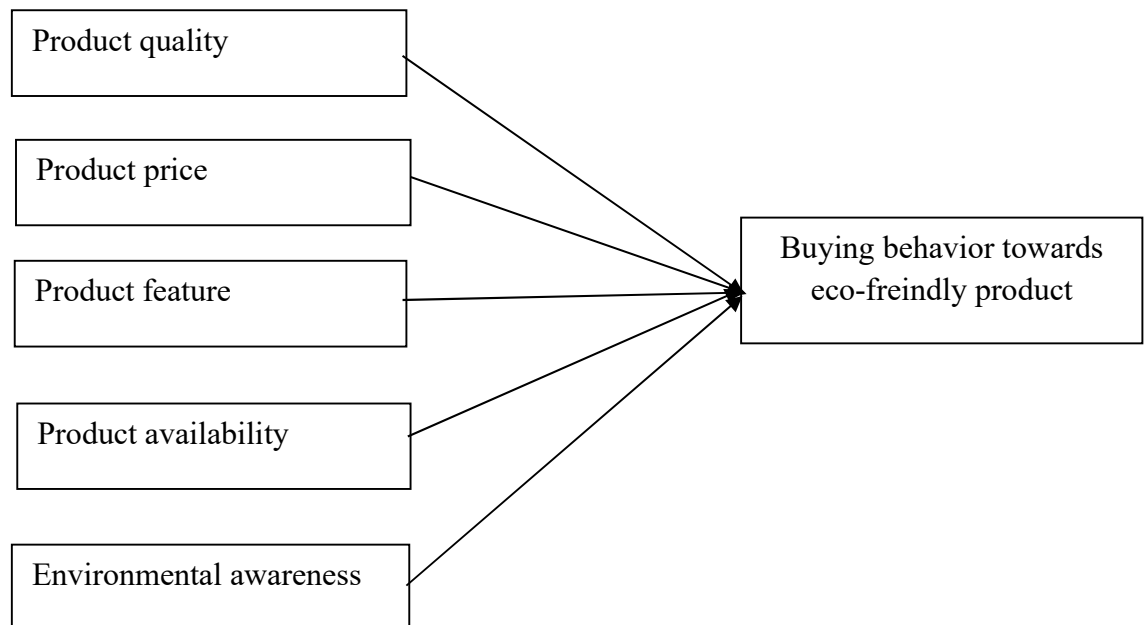


Fig. 1: *Research Model*

Source: D'Souza et al., (2007); Phau & Ong, (2007)

Product quality and consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly products

The quality of eco-friendly products is impacted by consumer knowledge and trust in the quality of the products they intend to purchase (Soegoto, 2018). The green image, safety, and quality of the product should also be prioritized (Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2016). D'Souza & Taghian (2005) noted that the enhancement of service, product quality, menu, and facilities has a positive impact on the perceived value and satisfaction of consumers, thereby influencing positive consumption. Gadenne et al. (2011) categorized green products into the following categories: general green products, recycled paper products, products that are not tested on animals, environmentally friendly detergents, organically grown fruits and vegetables, ozone-friendly aerosols, and energy-efficient products. Customers' green buying intention and behavior are strongly and favorably influenced by product quality (Mondelaers et al., 2009; Smith & Paladino, 2010). Junior et al. (2019) showed that consumers hold positive attitudes and strong faith in green products, significantly affecting their purchasing intention. Product quality significantly impacts consumers' purchase intention (Mirabi et al., 2015). The perceived high quality of green products positively influences consumer green purchase behavior (Aertsens et al., 2011; Mondelaers et al., 2009). Based on the above review, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₁: There is a significant effect of product quality on consumer buying behavior.

Product price and consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly products

The product price has a significant effect on consumer buying behavior toward eco-friendly products (Jin & Keum, 2011). Consumers with strong environmental concerns are inclined to purchase green products, even when their prices exceed those of less eco-friendly alternatives (Bang et al., 2000). Lower pricing for green products incentivizes consumers' purchases (Boztepe, 2012). Consumers' price knowledge considerably impacts their purchasing decisions (Suki, 2013). Product pricing significantly influences customers' buying behavior (Mirabi et al., 2015). Product prices significantly impact the likelihood of consumers acquiring green items (Gan et al., 2008). Consumers exhibited a reduced propensity to acquire eco-friendly products when these items were priced higher. Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₂: There is a significant effect of product price on consumer buying behavior.

Product feature and consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly products

The effectiveness of various product feature tactics significantly influences consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly products (Batra & Sinha, 2000). The features of a product can significantly influence consumers' decisions regarding green products. Product features have a limited amount of time to influence the consumer's decision-making process (Dantas et al., 2004). Product features capture the consumer's attention and persuade the purchaser that they are the most suitable option on the shelf (Rowan, 2000). Consumers employ multiple evaluative criteria when choosing suitable products to fulfill their consumption requirements (Chung et al., 2006). The purchasing decision or selection among items mostly relies on a combination of these features (Silayoi & Speece, 2004). Product features that consumers value include convenience, variety, choice, price, year-round availability, packaging, cleanliness, and freshness. Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₃: There is a significant effect of product features on consumer buying behavior.

Product availability and consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly products

Availability refers to the ease or difficulty of obtaining or consuming a specific product (Aertsens et al., 2009). One of the criteria that can play a significant role in influencing consumers' decisions to purchase green products is the availability of eco-friendly products (Renko et al., 2011). The limited availability of a product adversely affects consumer intentions and behaviors regarding green purchases (Padeland Foster, 2005; Young et al., 2010). The accessibility of green products favorably affects green purchasing behavior (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). Product availability positively correlates with green purchasing intentions and behaviors (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005). The availability of green products has a significant effect on the buying behavior of green products (Sharaf & Perumal, 2018). Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₄: There is a significant effect of product availability on consumer buying behavior.

Environmental awareness and consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly products

Green product awareness is the critical factor that influences consumers' green purchasing decisions (Siddique et al., 2018). Environmental knowledge has significant effects on consumer purchasing behavior (Sharma & Trivedi, 2016). Eco-friendly products and environmental awareness have a significant and positive correlation (Ishaswini & Datta, 2011). Environmental awareness positively influences consumer purchase behavior (Roberts, 1996). Environmental awareness and purchasing behavior have a positive and significant relationship (Crosby et al., 1981). Environmental awareness has significant effects on customers' green shopping habits (Kaufmann et al., 2012). Environmentally conscious behavior and environmental awareness have a significant effect on buying behaviors (Mkik et al., 2017). Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₅: There is a significant effect of environmental awareness on consumer buying behavior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a positivist research philosophy and employs a quantitative approach to examine the factors influencing consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly products. Descriptive and casual comparative research design were used. A cross-sectional research design was used to collect primary data through a structured questionnaire survey.

3.1 Population and Sample Selection

The study focuses on verified consumers of eco-friendly products in Kathmandu Valley. The target population consists of customers who have purchased and used eco-friendly products such as organic food, biodegradable packaging, reusable household items, and eco-friendly cosmetics. Respondents were selected from Udhami Ghar, major E-commerce platforms (Daraz and Hamrobazar), and leading supermarkets (Bhatbhateni Supermarket and Big Mart), all of which actively sell eco-friendly products. A sample size of 384 was determined using the Cochran (1977) formula, ensuring statistical adequacy. A pre-screening question was included in the survey to confirm respondents had purchased an eco-friendly product in the past six months. Judgmental sampling was used due to the lack of a comprehensive consumer database for eco-friendly product buyers in Nepal. This method ensured the inclusion of only relevant respondents, reducing the risk of obtaining data from individuals unfamiliar with green products.

3.2 Measurement of Variables

To operationalize consumer buying behavior, the dependent variable was measured using purchase frequency, brand-switching behavior towards green products, and likelihood of future eco-friendly purchases. Independent variables (product quality, product price, product features, product availability, and environmental awareness) were measured using Likert-scale items adapted from D'Souza et al. (2007) and Phau & Ong (2007), with modifications for the Nepalese market context.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process involved anonymous online and in-person surveys to reduce social desirability bias, ensuring respondents provided honest opinions about their buying behavior. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 25 and SMART PLS 4. Outlier responses were removed, and missing or unengaged data were handled before analysis. To ensure construct validity and reliability, Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted. The goodness-of-fit index was computed to confirm model adequacy (Awang, 2015). The study employed Structural Equation Modeling to test the research framework and hypotheses, evaluating the relationships between independent variables and consumer buying behavior. The internal consistency of measurement items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs exceeding the 0.7 threshold for reliability. Since the study relies on self-reported data, potential social desirability bias was mitigated by ensuring respondent anonymity and using neutral wording in questionnaire items.

3.4 Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the factors affecting (i.e., product quality, product price, product features, product availability, environmental awareness) and consumer buying behavior toward eco-friendly products in Nepal. SMART PLS 4 was used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis and determine model fit. First, all 40 measuring items were loaded for the respective 6 latent constructs. Out of 40 items, 11 items were removed one by one from the measurement model as they were loading less than 0.60 in their respective latent construct (Awang, 2015). The removed measuring items included four items from the latent construct product price. Similarly, the latent construct product price had three measuring items removed. Similarly, the latent constructs product feature and product availability each had one item removed. Likewise, two items from consumer

buying behavior were removed as measuring items. Moreover, 16 responses were removed due to high outliers. As a result, a good model fit index was achieved.

3. RESULTS

Table 1. *Results of Factors Analysis, Construct Validity and Reliability*

Construct	Items	Factors Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Consumer Buying Behavior	CBB1	0.763	0.875	0.868	0.569
	CBB2	0.771			
	CBB3	0.759			
	CBB5	0.747			
	CBB7	0.732			
Product Quality	PQ3	0.754	0.749	0.753	0.505
	PQ4	0.753			
	PQ7	0.616			
Product Price	PP1	0.832	0.866	0.865	0.619
	PP2	0.860			
	PP5	0.707			
	PP6	0.737			
Product Feature	PF1	0.803	0.909	0.909	0.626
	PF2	0.822			
	PF3	0.745			
	PF4	0.843			

	PF5	0.732			
	PF6	0.797			
Product Availability	PA2	0.74	0.896	0.896	0.589
	PA3	0.777			
	PA4	0.817			
	PA5	0.758			
	PA7	0.745			
Environment Awareness	EA1	0.801	0.923	0.924	0.71
	EA2	0.729			
	EA3	0.894			
	EA4	0.910			
	EA5	0.868			
	PA1	0.766			

Table 2. Model Fit Summary

Model	Fit indices						
	CMNI/d f	GFI	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA A	Sig.
Final measurement model	3 to 5	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.8	<0.8	<0.05
	3.324	0.90	0.910	0.987	0.72	0.066	0.042

The model-fit indicators of structure model are P value = 0.042, CMNI/df = 3.324, GFI=0.902, CFI=0.910, TLI=0.987, SRMR=0.72, RMSEA=0.066, indicating that the model has acceptable model fitness. The model has R

square is 0.624, which means that, 62.40 explain the consumer buying behaviors by the independent variables. Table 1 shows that the Cronbach Alpha values are between 0.749 and 0.923, greater than 0.70 for every construct. The standardized factor loading ranged from 0.616 to 0.910, which greater than 0.50 for each item. The composite reliability of constructs exceeded the greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Similarly, the convergent validity of the constructs was estimated using the Average Variance Extracted, ranges from 0.505 to 0.710, above threshold value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, the scales used for this research have a required constrict reliability, convergent validity, composite reliability and convergent validity.

Table 2. *Results of Correlation*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consumer buying						
1) behavior	-					
2) Product quality	.281**	-				
3) Product price	.351**	.476**	-			
4) Product feature	.398**	.416**	.379**	-		
5) Product availability	.686**	.352**	.342**	.361**	-	
6) Environment awareness	.346**	.374**	.152**	.487**	.353**	-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 found that the relationship between consumer buying behaviors and product quality, product price, product feature, product availability and environment awareness are positive and significant.

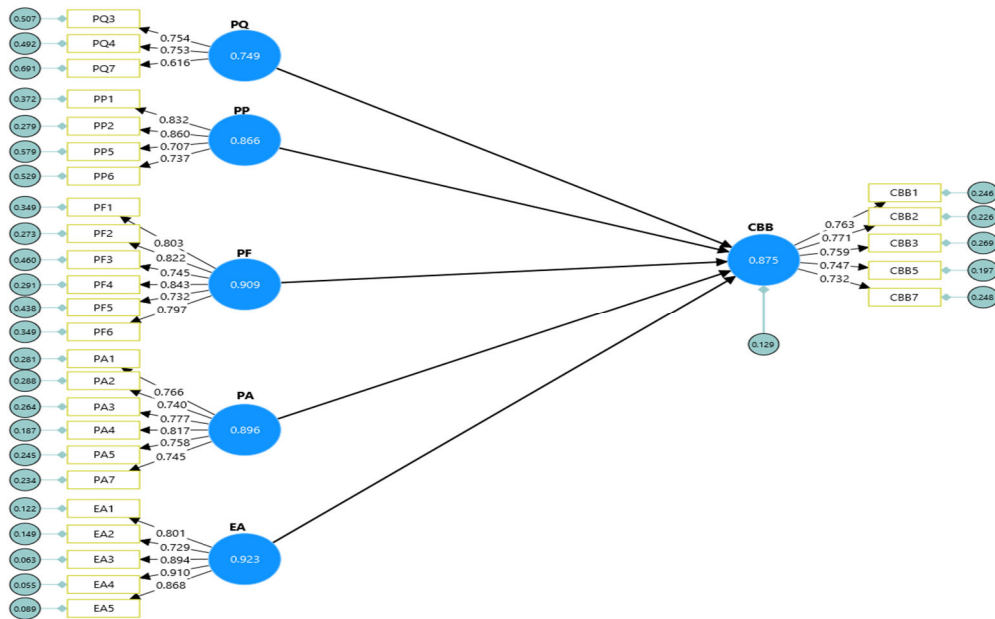


Fig. 2. Structural Model

Table 3. Factors Effects on Buying Behaviour of Eco-Friendly Products and Hypothesis Results

		Beta	Standard errors	T values	P values	Results
H1	PQ -> CBB	0.282	0.045	4.82	0.020	Accepted
H2	PF -> CBB	0.148	0.051	2.893	0.004	Accepted
H3	PP -> CBB	0.336	0.048	3.755	0.031	Accepted
H4	PA -> CBB	0.696	0.062	11.317	0.000	Accepted
H5	EA -> CBB	0.465	0.052	11.264	0.040	Accepted

Table 3 shows that the factors such as product quality, product price, product features, product availability and environment awareness have significant effects of consumer buying behavior towards eco-friendly product, which accepted hypothesis H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the factors influencing consumer buying behavior toward eco-friendly products provides valuable insights into how specific factors directly impact consumer purchasing decisions regarding green products. The study's results underline the significant positive effects of product quality, product price, product features, product availability, and environmental awareness on consumer buying behavior toward eco-friendly products in Nepal.

The results of this study align with prior research on the relationship between these factors and consumer buying behavior toward eco-friendly products in Nepal. As indicated in the literature, product quality, product price, product availability, product features, and environmental awareness significantly affect purchasing decisions (Agyeman, 2014; Mirabi et al., 2015; Suki, 2013). This study corroborates those findings in the context of Nepal, where these factors were positively correlated with consumer behavior toward eco-friendly products. For example, product availability emerged as the most influential factor, consistent with the findings of Kumar and Anand (2014), who emphasized the role of availability and accessibility in driving eco-friendly product purchases.

The importance of product availability in influencing consumer buying behavior was supported by the data, with the highest standardized factor loading observed for this variable. This finding is consistent with Mondelaers et al. (2009), who highlighted that access to green products significantly boosts consumer confidence and adoption. In Nepal, consumers appear to prioritize product availability over product price, supporting the notion that increasing distribution channels for eco-friendly products could enhance sales and market penetration (Florenthal & Arling, 2011).

The study revealed a statistically significant but comparatively lower impact of product price on consumer behavior, which aligns with earlier studies (Bang et al., 2000). While consumers express a willingness to pay a higher price for eco-friendly products, the price remains a critical consideration, echoing the work of Patel et al. (2017). Environmental awareness was another significant factor, with many respondents indicating that they were motivated by a desire to reduce environmental harm. This result supports the conclusions of Sharma and Trivedi (2016), who found that environmental awareness plays a crucial role in promoting green consumption.

Product features had a significant impact on consumer buying behavior, as suggested by prior research (Mahajan, 2016; Zubair, 2014). The study's findings

suggest that highlighting the functional benefits of eco-friendly products in promotional campaigns can influence consumer choices in Nepal.

Product availability emerged as the strongest predictor of eco-friendly product purchases, resonating with the findings of Renko et al. (2011) and Vermeir and Verbeke (2008). Limited accessibility to eco-friendly products remains a key challenge in Nepal, particularly in Kathmandu Valley, potentially hindering adoption. As Sharaf and Perumal (2018) noted, increasing product availability could stimulate demand for green products. While this study provides valuable insights into the factors affecting the buying behavior of eco-friendly products in Nepal, it is not without limitations. The study's reliance on cross-sectional data from 384 respondents and its geographical focus on Nepal limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore consumer behavior in other regions of Nepal to determine whether the same factors apply. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into shifting consumer preferences over time.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The positive and statistically significant correlation between these factors and eco-friendly behaviors emphasizes their collective influence on consumer choices. Businesses and policymakers should leverage these insights to enhance strategies that promote sustainable consumption and encourage the widespread adoption of environmentally friendly products. This study concluded that product availability, environmental awareness, product quality, product features, and product price significantly influence consumer buying behavior toward eco-friendly products in Nepal. The findings of this study offer practical implications for businesses and policymakers. Companies should focus on enhancing the availability and accessibility of eco-friendly products while also investing in targeted advertising that highlights both product functionality and environmental benefits. Policymakers could support the green transition by implementing policies that encourage market expansion, better distribution networks, and awareness campaigns.

The practical implications of this study are far-reaching for stakeholders involved in promoting eco-friendly products. Businesses should consider strategic pricing models to make eco-friendly products more competitive. Retailers could prioritize stocking green products more visibly to boost consumer engagement and accessibility. The theoretical implications of this study extend our understanding of consumer behavior in the context of eco-friendly products. The findings offer valuable insights for refining existing theoretical models and frameworks related to consumer behavior, particularly in the domain of sustainable and eco-friendly

products. They encourage researchers to further investigate how these factors interact and influence consumer decision-making processes in various contexts.

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CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL CONFORMITY: FALL OF THE FEUDAL ORDER IN B. P. KOIRALA'S SELECT SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRACT

B. P. Koirala (1914-1982) examines the limits of social conformity in Nepal in the long 1930s and projects the fall of the feudal order, devoid of the issues of justice and social welfare. This paper reads "Doshi Chasma" [The Faulty Glasses], "Karnelko Ghoda" [The Colonel's Horse], and "Madheshtira" [To the Madhesh] from the collection, *Doshi Chasma* [Faulty Glasses] (1949) in the historical context and examines the political purpose and goal for each of the major characters in the short fiction by applying the critical insights from Cultural Studies as furthered by During (2005), Storey (1997), and Hall (1997). Koirala develops tension from the interaction between the conformists and the nonconformists and aligns himself with the people from the bottom to defend them and critique the limits of the feudal order. The author looks into the spiritual emptiness of the Rana order, which torments and insults the people from the bottom to maintain the authority from the top. "Doshi Chasma" depicts an ordinary man, Keshav Raj, psychologically torturing himself after missing to greet the Rana General. Koirala critiques the impacts of the political order through the psychological upheavals in the protagonist. "Karnelko Ghoda" builds tension from the interaction between the conformist Colonel and the nonconformist bride. The author pictures the inner, empty self of the Colonel, who defeats himself by killing the horse. Finally, "Madheshtira" intertwines the conformist and the nonconformist self in the young

widow who wants to live a settled life by finding a husband. She follows the codes of society as she believes in marriage as a way to a settled life. On the other hand, the widow also challenges the mores of society by deciding to marry again. This paper contextually reads Koirala's selected stories to examine the limits of social conformity in the feudal order and explore its impact in shaping the course of each narrative.

Keywords: Agency, Social Conformity, Nonconformity, Rebel, Feudal Order

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern Nepali litterateur B. P. Koirala (1914-1982) depicts both the conformist and the nonconformist persons in Nepali society in the long 1930s to examine the social and historical forces that have blocked progress. His collection of sixteen short stories, *Doshi Chasma* [The Faulty Glasses] (1949), showcases each of such characters in the title story "Doshi Chasma" [The Faulty Glasses], "Karnelko Ghoda" [The Colonel's Horse], and "Madheshtira" [To the Madhesh]. The conformist persona suffers at all rungs of society: Keshav Raj is stationed in the lower middle class in "Doshi Chasma, while the Colonel is a member of the ruling elite in "Karnelko Ghoda." Both characters attempt their best to comply with the prevailing rules; however, they are forced to endure the torture embedded in the feudal order.

The prevailing political order fails to safeguard their interest. "Karnelko Ghoda" and "Madheshtira" depict nonconformist persons like the bride and the young widow, respectively. Though they challenge the social/political order, they fail to enjoy the bliss of life. In the selected short fiction, Koirala weaves a complex narrative about the young widow who serves as both a conformist and a nonconformist self. This paper contextually reads the select fiction to explore the limits of the feudal order and identify the political goal of the author behind writing the texts. Koirala has depicted the tension resulting from the interaction between the conformist persona and the nonconformist actors in Nepal in the 1930s. This paper has analyzed the stories published in 2009 from Sajha. The stories have been read in their source language and the data extracted is the researcher's own translation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different critics have approached B. P. Koirala's short stories from multiple standpoints to interpret the issues, structures, and mode of narration. For instance,

Khanal's (2014) analysis has compared Anton Chekhov's Russian society of the 1860s and the 1870s to Nepali society from the 1920s onwards. Khanal compares Chekhov's "The Death of a Clerk" (1883) to Koirala's "Doshi Chasma" [The Faulty Glasses] to comment on the ways the function of the feudal system in Russia and Nepal as the system treats the people at the bottom alike (p.101). Similarly, Gyawali (2014) has examined the cultural impact of Koirala's stories in the Nepali context. He has asserted that his craftsmanship in writing fiction has significantly contributed to modern Nepali short fiction by employing the cultural resources in writing about the people and society (p. 124). He has further discussed the psychological reality found in Koirala's collection of *Doshi Chasma* in order to explore the psychological implications in the persona and the text.

In the same line of argument, Bhattarai (2021) has argued that Koirala's stories use critical insights from Freudian psychoanalysis. Interpreting the stories from *Doshi Chasma*, Bhattarai states that the author delves deep into the psyche of the people of his society and examines the inner soul comprising of the primitive drives that regulate human behavior (p.116). The above-mentioned critics have discussed the outer social reality in which Koirala makes a political statement about society while critically engaging himself in the psychological domains of his characters. However, the existing literature does not state anything about Koirala's critique of the limitations of feudal order in Nepali society from the 1920s onwards. This paper contextually reads the stories to explore the role of emerging socio-historical forces in shaping the course of the stories.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study interprets the selected fiction from Koirala's collection of sixteen short fiction works, *Doshi Chasma*, to explore the ways of functioning of power through the analysis of literary writings. I have taken the critical frame of reference from cultural studies, which provides the theoretical lens to examine the power relations in a society's historical development by reading creative and literary texts. Since the texts that I have used for the analysis were originally written in Nepali, I have read the source texts and translated them as/when required to support my claim with a direct quotation. I have attempted my best to remain loyal to the meaning of the source text in English.

In contemporary times, the theoretical design is informed by the power relations in cultural studies. Such readings focus on the relationship between the dominant and the dominated in the historical context. As Storey (1997) has argued, "Cultural studies would also insist that making popular culture ('production in use') can be

empowering to subordinate and resistant to dominant understandings of the world. But this is not to say that popular culture is always empowering and resistant” (p. 9). The dominant groups generally aspire to maintain the prevailing order in that they primarily benefit from it; on the other hand, the dominated groups are denied the possibility of locating themselves in the political order. For instance, During (2005) has stated:

For cultural studies today, cultural objects are simultaneously ‘texts’ (that is, they have meaning) and events and experiences, produced out of, and thrown back into, a social force field constituted unevenly by power flows, status hierarchies and opportunities for many kinds of transportation, identification and pleasure. They are also social institutions, some based in the state, others in the market or in so-called civil society. (pp. 6-7)

The elite potentially threaten the people at the top of power, paving the road for resistance. Since cultural studies attempts to look at the social and political context from the margin, it intellectually aligns itself with the dominated. It sees resistance as challenging the prevailing power structure to establish justice and redesign the social setup.

At present, contextual reading has gained prominence for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, it helps understand a society's historical development by examining the memory through nonlinear sources like creative texts, folklore, music, and the like. As During (2005) has noted,

Every action carries a trace of the past and unconscious memory of it even. A great deal of contemporary theory analyses the way that the past is carried forward unknowingly into the present. With individuals, one word we use to talk about the unreflective determination of the present by the past is ‘habit,’ and there exist embedded social habits as well. (p. 52)

Literary and cultural analysis helps reflect on the past and its social practices. Such analyses explore the possibility of uncovering the damages imposed upon the dominated groups from the dominant ones. As Hall (1997) has argued,

...to think about or to analyse the complexity of the real, the act of the practice of thinking is required; and this necessitates the use of the power of abstraction and analysis, the formation of concepts with which to cut into the complexity of the real, in order precisely to reveal and bring to light relationships and structures which cannot be visible to the naive

naked eye, and which can neither present nor authenticate themselves. (p. 43)

Cultural analyses are founded on the nonlinear, creative data that store the collective memory in which careful readings explore the scars of the past, the weakness of the social institutions, and the narratives of injustices. This paper interprets the selected texts through the critical insights of During (2005), Storey (1997), and Hall (1997) to explore the political goal of Koirala's selected fiction.

Koirala's Critique of Social Conformity

B. P. Koirala (1914-1982) has contemplated on the historical course of Nepali society through his short fiction. His popular collection of sixteen short fiction, *Doshi Chasma* [The Faulty Glasses] (1949), depicts the context of the historical transition of Nepal in the long 1930s. As an interventionist agency, Koirala explores the limits of social structures in the historical context and shows the fall of the people who attempt to conform to the prevailing mores. In other words, the author challenges the feudal order of Nepali society by depicting the inner soul of the people who lose dignity and respect in their best attempts to conform to the norms of the society. In this section, I have analyzed three selected stories from the anthology published from Sajha in 2009 in Nepali: the title story "Doshi Chasma" [The Faulty Glasses], "Karnelko Ghoda" [The Colonel's Horse], and "Madheshtira" [To the Madhesh].

The stories critically view Nepali society in the long 1930s by considering the historical and social forces and examining the quest of the general public. Koirala purposefully designs his characters as a microcosm to explore the limits of the politics of culture in the historical context. For instance, Keshav Raj, the Colonel, and the young widow search for happiness in life by conforming to the social rules in their own ways in "Doshi Chasma," "Karnelko Ghoda," and "Madheshtira," respectively. Since the characters do not see the traps embedded in the structural codes of living in this historical and social context, they are bound to suffer and fail in their quest for a settled state. Koirala critiques the limits of feudal order by depicting the suffering and fall of the people who attempt to conform to their society's codes.

Koirala portrays the spiritually hollowed-out subjects as the key representatives of the Rana Oligarchy by presenting the suffering of the rulers and the ruled alike. "Karnelko Ghoda" builds on the tension between a forty-five-year-old colonel and his nineteen-year-old wife, who fail to satisfy each other's needs. The spiritually

empty Colonel refers to the state of society and the ability of the rulers. The author critically examines the physical and spiritual strength of the ruler by working on the interaction of the newlywed couple. The Colonel says to his bride, "Why are you so worried all the time? It's your time to enjoy. If you have any problem, do tell me" (p. 30). Ironically, the young bride stands so fragile to question his virility. The incompatible couple is further depicted thus in the story:

The Colonel's wife thought it was unnecessary to answer this question. The Colonel would never understand her trouble. A forty-five-year-old bridegroom cannot comprehend the mental state of a nineteen-year-old girl. The Colonel lovingly picked her silent bride: she did not forget her tormenting emotions in her mind just now. Without minding about her bridegroom's age, she let the weight of her body rest on him. The Colonel could not hold her and he fell onto the ground. The string of the bride's dream suddenly broke off. The bride hatefully looked at her groom, who had fallen down. He was sort of breath, panting due to the pressure to help his bride stand up. From the day, the bride had the greatest feeling for disrespect towards her groom in her heart. (Koirala, 2009, p. 30)

Koirala's critique of the aristocracy manifests in the story through the Colonel. The Colonel attempts to conform to the social mores by showing love, acting romantic with her, and proving his masculinity. On the contrary, he ends up convincing the young bride that he possesses none of these qualities.

Koirala shows the decay of the Rana Oligarchy through the eyes of the common people in "Doshi Chasma" by depicting the suffering of a clerk. The protagonist, Keshav Raj, wears a pair of spectacles that blurs his vision, and one day, he fails to greet the Rana General. Koirala describes the scene in the following words:

The evening was approaching soon. Since the hills in the West had blocked the way of the sun, the earth was already getting dark; still, the long beams of the sun were seen extended from the sky. A couple of pieces of cloud, separated from their company and lost on the way, were moving wayward in the sky. Keshav Raj was fascinated by the scene. He thought that the General wouldn't appear today for sure and went out. On other days, he would be very sad at not getting to see the General, but today, he had high vigor. (Koirala, 2009, p. 1)

Social conformity implies that such behavior benefits the person complying with it. People like Keshav Raj believe they greatly benefit by following the prevailing

mores of society. He hopes to get appreciated, implying political and economic gain. As Merton (1959) has argued,

What is more, the latter distinction has the double merit of being a piece with one made by other sociologists and of countering the stereotyped connotation, held by many, of social conformity as necessarily confined to routine, unimaginative, and unthinking assent to institutionalized expectation. (1959, p. 180)

Koirala portrays a fascinating scene in the evening to juxtapose with the shattered mental landscape of Keshav Raj, who fails to comply with the rules.

The oppressive rule tortures the ruler and the ruled alike. Koirala presents the Colonel and the clerk going through a similar mental state. Keshav Raj knows that the Rana General means everything in life: he is well aware of the loss of the General's favor. The clerk would lose all meaning of life by being discarded from the grace of the General. After missing the opportunity to greet his lord, he reaches home and becomes angry with his glasses first. He would not have disregarded his lord only if he had seen him on time. He thinks about the episode when he gets irritated at his tight trousers as well. He bursts in anger when he hears that the evening meal is a little delayed (Koirala, 2009, p. 2). Keshav Raj cannot sleep the whole night. He accepts that he has committed a crime. He says to his wife, "I have committed a crime. It appears as though I didn't take notice of a big person. Now, what can I do? It will cause great harm if he gets angry" (Koirala, 2009, p. 3). The fear of punishment and loss of reward torture him throughout the night. People comply with the rules of society because social conformity implies reward and punishment. In the self-regulatory practice, society inspires people to behave in a specific way because they can benefit from observing the rules and bringing disaster upon themselves by discarding such rules. As Coleman analyzes,

People conform with a social norm because it gains them with an advantage, makes them feel good, helps them achieve a goal, or avoid a punishment; that is, if people do it, it must be because it is something they choose to do with intent and understanding the alternatives. Presumably, people weigh the pluses against the minuses of conforming in a situation, along with other expected costs and benefits, and take the logical path of their best interest. (p. 9)

Keshav Raj knows the possible threats of not complying with the rulers. In other words, he conforms to social norms because he knows the consequences: reward

and punishment. On the other hand, the Colonel wishes to act as if he is living a normal life: he has developed an obsession with living a normal life. The subject and the ruler have been spiritually hollowed out in the Rana Oligarchy.

Like Keshav Raj and the Colonel, Koirala narrates the events surrounding the life of a young widow in "Madheshtira." Setting the location at the confluence of the Sunkoshi and the Tamakoshi at Benighat of Sinduli, the author portrays the interaction of people in a group. They are all heading towards the Terai as they have heard that a good life is comfortably achieved there. The four men respect the widow because she serves them all like a mother in the group. As the story unfolds,

Suddenly, there was light in their eyes, and there was a huge respect for the widow in their heart. Giving some beaten rice from her portion, she said to Gore, "You are young. You may go hungry more quickly than others." She looked at all of them and said, "I am off to the Mahesh. I don't have a husband. My in-laws couldn't bear to see me there. My brother-in-law was rude, but he loved me. As I didn't have a husband, I couldn't stay in the house." (Koirala, 2009, p. 92)

The young widow wants to bring her life to the normal track by finding a second husband she believes will care for her. She sees happiness in family life where husband and wife understand each other. On the other hand, Koirala portrays the tension rising from the unfulfilled desires between husband and wife in "Karnelko Ghoda," where the young bride does not speak out about what she expects from the relationship. The Colonel says:

"What troubles do you have to tell me such things? What troubles your heart that you get peace by serving the horse? You do have a certain duty towards me, too. Have you ever thought of me as much as you have thought of the horse? To tell you the truth, I envy the horse when I see you so intimate with it," the Colonel was almost in tears as he completed it. (Koirala, 2009, p. 32)

As a rebel, the bride silently revolts against social conformity when she chooses to spend a large part of her time in the stable with his horse. As Coleman (1959) has argued,

If someone is prompted about a social norm, not only are they more likely to conform to that one, but also they will be more likely to conform to other norms at the same time. The more similar norms are, the stronger is

the transfer effect or spillover from the first norm to others. (p. 16)

The young widow and the bride experience society from opposite ends, while Keshav Raj understands that this disobedience means a rebellion against the authority of the General. On the contrary, rejecting social conformity implies that the bride has chosen to discard the promise of a happy conjugal life. Koirala examines the limitations of Nepali society in the long 1930s through these people who attempt to conform to the social norms of a happy life.

Koirala narrates the tale of conformist and non-conformist characters in his stories, for he sees the errors rooted in the social structure. The young widow wants to resettle herself in the Terai by finding a suitable husband. Though she appears to be a rebel who thinks of remarriage in Nepal in the 1930s, she still conforms to the norms of happiness by settling into a family. In the group, she sees a potential husband for herself in Bhote. Bhote, Dhane, Gore, and the old man were also going to the lowlands in search of a better future. As the young widow chooses a young man of twenty-five, Bhote, she convinces him to begin a new life together. She reveals that she has some money and jewelry to support them in the Terai. In the evening, they eat the beaten rice the widow had with her. They fall asleep at the roadside. The next morning, Gore disappears with the widow's jewelry (Koirala, 2009, p. 95). The widow's dream of a settled life gets shattered by Bhote's disappearance from the scene. Keshav Raj is yet another conformist who shows how one submits to authority's dictations. The General had not even noticed Keshav Raj. As Koirala has narrated,

“Keshav Raj moves towards the door to beg for pardon. The General enters on the horseback. Keshav Raj was trembling with fear. As he got to talk to the General in private, he stammered, "My lord! That's the fault of spectacles....I beg for pardon.”

The General halted his horse. He couldn't understand it and inquired, “What did you say? Why do you seek pardon?” (Koirala, 2009, p. 5)

Unlike the young widow, Keshav Raj psychologically tortures himself for no reason at all. He imagines the possible outcome of his disobedience and the impending punishment from the authority. The young widow and Keshav Raj conform to the normalcy of social life and fall prey to the embedded traps.

Koirala weaves complex narratives of conformists and nonconformists meeting and challenging each other. The young widow challenges the mores of a society that

does not allow widow remarriage; however, she desires to live like any other settled woman. In "Karnelko Ghoda," the Colonel conforms to the rule of social life that promises bliss from conjugal life. The Colonel marries a young girl of nineteen at the age of forty-five because he has subscribed to the prevailing norm of a settled man in society. On the contrary, the young bride emerges as a rebel in the family, for she prefers a horse to her husband. Koirala says that the sexually recharged hand of the wife of the Colonel would pass its electric energy onto the horse, and the horse would feel it at her touch. As he further states,

The Colonel's wife placed her hand on the horse's body as it was munching grains. The body of the horse would shiver at her touch. The horse would take its muzzle, eat grains out, and neigh for a while. Then, it would keep itself busy at munching the grains again. (Koirala, 2009, pp. 31-32)

To maintain order in the family, the Colonel has to compete with an animal from his stable. He wants the horse to follow his orders. The bride's alter ego, the horse, retaliates as it throws the Colonel off its body (Koirala, 2009, p. 33). The nonconformist horse and the bride meet in common ground when the horse accepts her on its back and allows the groom to experience orgasmic bliss. The spiritually empty representative of the Rana order, the Colonel feels so helpless that he shoots the horse (Koirala, 2009, p. 34). Koirala depicts the fall of the Colonel, for the author has historically analyzed the complexities of the regime that requires an end to the progress of Nepali society. On the contrary, Keshav Raj feels relief after he realizes that the General had not even noticed him. The conformist servant has lost self-respect and honor in his life.

Koirala aligns himself with the people from the bottom. He does not portray the dismal future for them. For instance, the young widow had ambitiously dreamt of having a young husband, Bhote. The following day, he disappears, taking away her money and jewelry. Nonetheless, Koirala does not end the story without any hope for the woman. The old man from the group consoles her and says that she will surely get a husband (Koirala, 2009, p. 96). Her rebellion and conformity are balanced when she hears the old man's words. As During analyzes,

Gramsci argued that the poor partly consented to their oppression because they shared certain cultural dispositions with the rich. Cross-class alliances or 'blocs' could form around interests in particular circumstances or 'conjunctures', the most important such hegemonic 'cultural front' being popular nationalism. (2005, p. 21)

Koirala does not hold Keshav Raj responsible for the disobedience; instead, the glasses are faulty as they blur the vision. By shifting the focus from the person to his spectacles, the author shows the complexities underlying the historical and social system. Keshav Raj does not identify the person he eagerly wishes to serve at every sight. He cannot read the number on the plate of the motor. He fails to promptly greet the Rana General (Koirala, 2009, p. 2) as he does not identify who the person is. He runs from one place to another to explain his act. In "Karnelko Ghoda," the bride was never happy about the Colonel's love or gifts. She stays in her room and sheds tears in silence. She misses the youth from her neighborhood who had proposed to her before her marriage (Koirala, 2009, p. 29). Koirala presents the bride as the prisoner who fights against the forces that enchain her. The author states the fall of the feudal order that cannot help itself and the other. By punishing the nonconformists of the order, it imposes catastrophe upon itself and kills the horse in the end.

4. CONCLUSION

Koirala's fiction gradually builds the tension from the conflict between the conformist and the nonconformist persons and helps the readers identify a window to the crumbling political order. Since the author believes that the Rana regime hindered progress in Nepal as early as the 1930s, he reads the cracks and fissures through the conformist and the nonconformist characters. Keshav Raj from "Doshi Chasma" and the Colonel from "Karnelko Ghoda" conform with the social mores: still, they cannot find any solace. Why do the conformist people undergo the torture? Koirala's answer is as plain as the daylight: he views the historical and social forces as responsible for the plight of the people. The feudal order harbors the errors that blockade social progress. Koirala aligns himself with the people from the bottom: he shifts the people's focus from the person to the object by titling Keshav Raj's story "The Faulty Glasses." Thus, he redeems Keshav Raj from the guilt of committing errors by missing the chance to greet the Rana General. Similarly, Koirala intertwines the conformist and the nonconformist self in the young widow in "Madheshtira," where she accepts the popular mode of life by deciding to go to the Terai and marry a man. Simultaneously, she challenges the popular belief of the people through the widow marriage. Koirala shows the limits of the feudal order by writing the story of the fall of the Colonel and the psychological torment of Keshav Raj because he analyzes that the Rana Oligarchy had hindered progress in Nepal in the long 1930s.

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BEYOND BOUNDARIES: COUNTERCULTURE IN HARPER LEE'S TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

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ABSTRACT

This research article examines the birth of new cultural practices owing to individual and group inclinations in a literary text *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by an American writer Harper Lee. This text offers a textual situation that contains a debate around the appropriate and inappropriate attires from the cultural viewpoints. Employing the transcultural theory propounded by Wolfgang Welsch, particularly, the concept of untenable cultural delimitation, the researcher has selected the narrative pieces of the novel in which the clothing behavior of a group or individuals is significantly discussed. Afterwards, the codes, categories and themes are developed for the generation of the analytical framework. Certain individuals and groups who went against the dominant culture were brought together for drawing the conclusion. Two themed analytical framework consisting of individual characters and group scenario is analyzed dominantly through the within case analysis method. Each case is analyzed without much comparison to another case because the case is rich and detailed in itself. This yields the result that a culture cannot accommodate all the interests, inclinations and preferences of an individual or group. The characters go beyond boundaries forming the counterculture. Hence, the study brings the conception to the light that a fictional text includes characters who contribute to the formation of a counterculture. The novelty of the research can be claimed that no research hitherto has studied the attires in the novel to prove the challenge to the cultural delimitation.

Keywords: Clothing Behaviors, Cultural Delimitation, Cultural Imperatives, Individual Inclinations, Within Case Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

The characters clad in certain attires cannot be ignored as their attires have significant effects on the formation of new values. This study takes the cases from the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and categorizes them into two groups: individuals who challenge the dominant mode of culture and groups who go against the dominant culture.

To Kill a Mockingbird is chosen in that the dominant character Scout Finch and her father Atticus Finch have unique clothing behavior. Scout Finch, a girl character, does not prefer to wear the clothes that a girl would have worn while her father does not abide by the attire conventions in the premises of a court.

Concerning the structure of the article, it subsumes the method of study: within case analysis, generation of codes and themes, employment of Welsch's theory of cultural delimitation and its limits and the analytical framework involving the study of clothing behavior of individuals and groups. The literature around the corpus follows the methods section and highlights the major areas of attention that the corpus has principally drawn. The frame for analysis of the study is twofold. The ultimate section involves conclusion that highlights the finding of the study: one's own culture has limits because it cannot accommodate the inclinations and preferences of individuals and groups. The implication is that cultures are always in the making and they cannot be taken as the closed spheres.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This American classic has drawn much attention of critics and scholars alike because it is considered the text that is most read by Americans after Bible. Such a text has been, oftentimes, researched around some major themes. The representative themes have been discussed in this review. Critics such as James B. Kelley, Ted Gournelos, Stephen Henighan, R.A. Dave and Grace Ann Hovet have rendered the sustained attention to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel predominantly raises three issues – moral issues, the lessons for life and context (Kelley, 2010, p. 8). Moral nature is discussed taking Atticus Finch's sound moral stance and Bob Ewell's evil nature as the reference points. On occasions, the novel turns out to be a case for teaching readers that one needs to support the people who

are not supported. Hence, it stands for the call for a justice. The context, obviously, is the racial discrimination and its scenarios.

Further, “racial discrimination and oppression” (Gournelos, 2009, p. 191) is discussed in the novel. In fact, a white member standing for the black member in the society would be a new case at the time when the novel was written. When whole the society was against the black people, a white male advocating for the rights of the black individual would have been a novel case. Same issue as “white liberals who try to help oppressed African- Americans in the Pre-Civil Rights era” (Henighan, 2008, p. 40) has been studied and duly focused.

Another important study carried around the novel is the dichotomy of the two worlds- children’s and that of grown-ups (Dave, 2007, p. 41). How do the children conduct in times of the difficulties and how do the grown-ups do? “Scout’s angry response to wearing a pink dress” (Hovet, 2009, p. 28) initiates a new response on why certain characters do not like certain clothes while the other characters impose such dress on them.

Reviewing literature surrounding this novel demonstrates that the study concerning untenability of the delimitation is unexamined yet. Consulting the literature available leads the readers to the foregoing major research themes. With this attempt, a research gap is paved. The gap can be articulated as the need to investigate the variation of perspectives in the people of a same culture in regards to the attires.

3. METHODS

This study employs the theoretical concepts by Wolfgang Welsch. His concept of untenable cultural delimitation has become the central conceptual tool for the analysis. By untenable cultural delimitation, Welsch means to problematize the separation of intercultural interaction and confirms that “the basic flaw” of monocultural vision of culture is “to envisage cultures as closed spheres” (2009, p. 6). By this, he intends to establish a reasoning that a culture is not same to all of its members and not all the members can be accommodated by its boundary. The selection rationale of this theoretical concept includes Welsch’s efforts to discuss the variation of a given culture. His analysis of cultures and their internal differences led the researcher to choose the given conception.

Within case analysis has been the mode of analysis. This mode of analysis refers to the avoidance of the comparison of cases by focusing on the particular in order for

the searching analysis. Surfing through the sections of the novel and selecting the cases that contain the discussion of attires, the researcher has further sampled the cases where the delimitation is challenged and questioned; “Within-case analysis typically involves detailed case study” and the cases are analyzed without the attempt to see the patterns (Huberman & Miles, 2012. p. 17). The rationale for employing the within-case analysis includes the strong sense purpose. Eschewing the cross-case analysis, the within-case analysis drives the research to the intense analysis of the available cases.

Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* is chosen as the corpus because the central characters such as Scout Finch and Atticus Finch have unique clothing behaviors. Both of them are unconventional in this regard. This study has exploited this source for that reason.

The analytical framework for the study contains the twofold frame: the clothing behavior of groups in a culture and the individuals. The purpose of this comparison is to show that it is not merely the individual impulses that are against the dominant cultural modes but even the groups demonstrate such practices.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the novel has offered two thematic discussions: the examination of individual’s clothing behavior and that of the groups. The behaviors are similar and contribute to the argument of the article that the cultures cannot accommodate the adherents’ inclinations: there is the birth of new values in terms of attires.

Challenging Cultural Delimitation: Formation of New Values

A Halloween Time becomes an occasion for breaking the attire traditions when human beings are turned into animals such as cow with the help of attires. A Christian group called Menonnites does not even wear buttons in their shirts. A group of people acts strangely; they are wearing overalls and denim shirts and buttoned up to collars even in summer time. Atticus Finch challenges the attire tradition by unbuttoning and loosening his attires in the court premises. Mr. Tate has worn normal clothes instead of his luxurious clothes when attending the court session of Tom Robinson. This section represents how the group related behaviors are challenging the cultural traditions.

During a Halloween pageant, Cecil Jacobs is asked to wear like a cow. This pageant becomes a scene that sets a time for Bob Ewell’s attack on Scout and Jem. As Scout’s costume is a ham, Cecil’s is a cow. This act of creating fun, terror and

humor displays a scenario that Halloween pageant acts as the representative scenario for the cultural customs particularly the costumes. Why would one wear like a ham and the other as the cow? The rationale behind this is that they are representing the agricultural themes of the region. Nonetheless, turning humans to animals is an act of transcending the usual customs, as Cecil Jacobs is asked to wear like a cow and Agnes Boone would be turned to butter-bean and yet another a peanut” (Lee, 1960, p. 278).

There are people attending the trial of Tom Robinson. Scout Finch and her brother too are attending this. This is so because Atticus Finch is defending Tom Robinson. Among the people attending such a trial are Mennonites. Mennonites historically are the groups of Christian followership. Harper Lee mentions the Mennonites here to show that the trial has become so famous that even the Mennonites are attending the trial of Tom Robinson being defended by Atticus Finch. Mennonites men are shown unusual. They do not use buttons on their attires. Lee shows that Mennonites avoid even the colorful dresses. They criticize Miss Maudie for her colorful attires and flowers as they take them to be the sinful objects. Not only that, they also do not shave their beards because their spouses wish to tickle the beards after the marriage (p. 174).

This shows that Mennonites places emphasis on the clothes as the sign of commitment to the God. Wearing very simple connotes the higher commitment while wearing colorful dresses is the sinful act as these Protestants believe. They believe that bright colors are boastful and the signs of pride which in turn is sinful.

In the Maycomb County, there take place many occasions in which other members to go against the cultural prescriptions regarding the attires. In an occasion, Scout has an understanding: although she was growing a little weary of it, she believed Jem had good reason to act the way he did given his chances of succeeding after Atticus returned home. She scanned the throng. Even though it was a summer night, the men were mostly wearing denim shirts with the collars buttoned up and overalls. Since their sleeves were unrolled and buttoned at the cuffs, she assumed they must be cold-natured. A few had hats that were securely pulled down over their ears. They were drowsy-eyed, grumpy males who didn't appear to be used to the late hours. (p. 168)

This instance shows that the people were not following the mood of summer. Even in the summer mood wearing fully is, in a way against the cycle of the nature.

Next time, as Atticus Finch was defending Tom Robinson, he was not quiet internally. His internal disturbance could be seen through his clothing styles. More particularly, he would wear differently, or, he would style the clothes differently:

Atticus paused, and then he did something he didn't ordinarily do. He unhitched his watch and chain and placed them on the table, saying, 'With the court's permission- 'Judge Taylor nodded, and then Atticus did something I never saw him do before or since, in public or private: he unbuttoned his vest, unbuttoned his collar, loosened his tie, and took of his coat. He never loosened a scrap of his clothing until he undresses at bedtime, and to Jem and me, this was the equivalent of him standing before us stark naked. We exchanged horrified glances. Atticus put his hands in his pockets, and as he returned to the jury, I saw his gold collar button and the tips of his pen and pencil winking in the light. (p. 223)

Scout Finch expresses her view regarding the movement of Atticus Finch's clothing. She is demonstrative of his behavior. Whether Atticus was conventional or unconventional could be determined through his fidgeting of the clothes. If he was well, he would wear the way the society expected him to wear. When he felt that something went wrong, his clothes would express this. In this connection, Atticus's clothing choices were the indicators of his mindset. If he was to follow the customs, he wore in a way. If not, he wore in radical way. In another instance, unlike Mennonites, Mr. Heck Tate had worn very formally while attending the trial. He gave recognition to the judicial system; he abandoned his usual informal dress and wore very formally: Mr. Tate was well attired for the event. His timber jacket, high boots, and bullet-studded belt were gone, and he was dressed in a standard business suit that made him appear somewhat like every other man. After that, he stopped frightening me. He was listening intently to the circuit attorney while seated forward in the witness chair with his hands clenched between his knees (p. 183). Mr. Tate was to answer questions by Gilmer. Before this, he was well-attired. He seems to have given value to his profession.

Connecting these evidences around the theme of untenability is an effort of this study. Humans are turned to animals through costumes. Aunt Alexandra wears corset underneath the dressing-gown. Mr. Tate changes his usual high boots, lumber jacket and bullet-studded belt to ordinary on the day of Trial. Mennonites do not wear buttons. In the summer's night men in the overalls and denim shirts are buttoned up to the collars. The children's dresses are applied starch and turned like the tent. Scout wears overalls rather than the dress and camisoles. Alexandra asks Scout to wear dress rather than the pants. Atticus Finch unbuttons his vest, his

collar, loosening his tie, and takes off his coat on the day of trial. Atticus pushes his hat to the back of his head and puts hands on his hips when he is enraged. As the groups have multitudes of wishes and expectations, the culture that contains the values that might look fixed can never accommodate the wishes and expectations of its followers.

Cultural Imperatives and Individual Inclinations

The followers of any culture are expected to remain under its control in the absolute sense. The cultural imperatives involve “the requirements for maintain the cultural apparatus, regulation of human behavior, socialization and the exercise of authority” (Fernandez, 2012, p. 102). Unlike the preceding section, the cases in this section have taken the individuals for the consideration. Earlier, it was the groups that went against the dominant cultural modes. Concerning the dominant culture, Furnish E. (1999) offers support for identifying the dominant culture as:

There are two ways in which dominant culture might be identified: first, through the ubiquity of particular ideas, meanings, discourses, and practices in everyday life and, second, through case studies of particular instances in which aspects of a dominant culture are challenged and how these challenges are deflected or absorbed by the hegemonic culture” (p. 20)

In the ensuing section, the individuals are challenging the dominant mode of the culture. Atticus Finch pushing his hat back to his head, Scout Finch wanting to wear overalls and pants instead of the dress, and the camisole, Calpurnia using a lot of starch in the ironing of clothes, and Aunt Alexandra wearing corset under dress cannot be taken as one time behavior. Their tendency can look peculiar to the culture. Nonetheless, their efforts to form new cultural modes can be the initiative by an individual.

Atticus does not have any disagreement on the unconventional clothing of his daughter Scout Finch as Aunt Alexandra. It is because he seems to have an inclination that protest for an act can be carried out through the activities of clothing. Rather than having a reservation to Scout's clothing, he shows his disagreement to Dill's and time and again to Jem's clothing behavior. Atticus commanded, “Stop ringing that bell.” Dill grabbed the clapper; in the silence that followed I wished he ‘d start ringing it again. Atticus pushed his hat to the back of his head and put hands on his hips. Jem,’ said, ‘what were you doing?’ ‘Nothin’, sir’ (p. 54). When Atticus is angry or indignant, he displays it through his clothing

behavior. His hat, tie, vest, among others, are the semiotic demonstration of his indignation. Although Atticus seems excellently balanced, his clothing behaviors show his internal working. Thus, Atticus's clothing behavior demonstrates the internal working and the psychological make-up of his inner self.

Scout's clothing choices are not containable by the customs of the society. She does not follow the dictation of the cultures. She flouted the imperatives of the cultural norms:

Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches: when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I was not supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born. (p. 90)

Not surprisingly, Atticus invites his sister to take care of his children in the absence of his wife. His wife is dead owing to the heart attack. Nonetheless, Aunt Alexandra, Atticus's sister is peculiar in terms of clothing preference. She would not allow Scout to wear the clothes that the boys would wear whilst Scout loves the clothes of the boys. This unconventional preference of Scout shows that her choice is not containable by her culture. Not only that, it is not only her aunt who opposes her preference that goes against the cultural prescriptions, it is a neighbor of Finches who orders Scout to follow the cultural customs or Scout would be doomed to the shame:

Don't you contradict me!' Mrs. Dubose bawled. 'And *you*- 'she pointed an arthritic finger at me- 'what are you doing in those overalls? You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady! You'll grow up waiting on tables if somebody doesn't change your ways-a Finch waiting tables at the O.K. Café-hah!'. I was terrified. The O.K. Café was a dim organization on the north side of the square. I grabbed Jem's hand but he shook me loose. (p. 112)

Similar to Aunt Alexandra's orders Mrs. Dubose questions the attire preferences of Scout. As her aunt warns her that she cannot be the ray of sunshine to her widower father in the pants and she should not do anything that she cannot do in the dress, here is the neighbor Mrs. Dubose who warns her that wearing the overalls by the girl would embarrass the name and fame of the Finch family. Scout is afraid of

such warning. She is imposed the cultural prescriptions by her aunt and the neighbor. In yet another instance, Scout is asked to wear unusual dress:

Next morning she began earlier than usual, to 'go over our clothes'. When Calpurnia stayed overnight with us, she slept on a folding cot in the kitchen; that morning it was covered with our Sunday habiliments. She had put so much starch in my dress it came up like a tent when I sat down. She made me wear a petticoat and she wrapped a pink sash tightly around my waist. (p. 130)

Calpurnia asks Scout to wear unusually. Whilst she wants to wear her own preferences, Calpurnia irons her clothes in such a way that it is not easy enough to her. These cases of Scout Finch in which she is punctuated in terms of attires stand for the analysis that she is not let free for the attire choices. If we take that other member such as Aunt Alexandra, Mrs. Dubose and Calpurnia as the voices of the cultural institutions, obviously, Scout is the individual who is entrapped by the societal and the cultural imperatives. The tug of war between the cultural imperatives and the individual choices shows that a culture cannot contain the preferences of an individual and the sense of the cultural delimitation is all but insufficient in the lives of the adherents of the cultures. Flouting the cultural conventions is not conducted by Scout alone.

Scout compares Aunt Alexandra with Mount Everest. She is so cold. Her wearing behaviours are also unique. Scout often swears that Aunt Alexandra wears corset beneath the gown. Alexandra disapproves of Scout's tomboyism and Scout's swearing comes significant when Aunt attempts wearing corset even under the bathrobe:

Aunt Alexandra was waiting up. She was in her dressing gown, and I could have sworn she had on her corset underneath it. 'I'm sorry, brother,' she murmured. Having never heard her call Atticus 'brother' before, I stole a glance at Jem, but he was not listening. He would look up at Atticus, then down at the floor, and I wondered if he thought Atticus somehow responsible for Tom Robinson's conviction. (p. 234)

These cases, when analyzed with the within-case method demonstrate that Alexandra wearing corset even under the dress, Calpurnia using starch while ironing and turning the clothes like tent, Aunt Alexandra and Mrs. Duboise warning Scout to wear the attires of a lady and not that of the boys and Atticus breaking the norms of the court formality unbuttoning his vest in the court show

that, on occasions, the individuals go against the mainstream culture because of its inability to accommodate their interests, needs, preferences and wishes.

5. CONCLUSION

This vestimentary study is an attempt to show that one's own culture cannot contain all the tastes of an individual. The objective of the study is to examine the attire behaviours of groups and individuals in the novel. Using Wolfgang's theory of untenable cultural delimitation, the evidence selected have been analyzed in the mode of within-case analysis. It has been found that the individuals and groups are not willing to follow the cultural dictation. Oftentimes, the cultural cruelty and its edge troubles an individual/group. Hinting at the representative cases, Scout Finch, a case in hand, is asked to wear dress and not pants and overalls while she simply does not want to wear the dress and the camisoles. Aunt Alexandra and Mrs. Duboise force her to wear camisole and dress or she would have regret. As she is expected to be the sunbeam in the family, her father's life who is a widower, she does not seem to follow the warning of Alexandra and Duboise. Atticus's unconventional wearing such as unbuttoning the collar and loosening tie in the formal context could be taken as the breach of the legal convention. In the legal context, on the trial day, the barristers are expected to wear appropriately. Contrarily, he goes against the conventions of the attire codes. These representative cases stand for the problems of the cultural delimitations. A culture, thus, cannot be said to have a clearly defined boundary. The individuals adhering to a given culture should not be considered that they follow the culture in its entirety. The research claims the originality as it is the only research in this text through the perspective of attires. In other words, this article claims that it is the only research that has carried out the vestimentary analysis.

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