Editorial
Panauti Journal, Volume 3

It is with immense pleasure that I present the third volume of *Panauti Journal*, a multidisciplinary academic publication of Indreshwor Multiple Campus, Panauti-7, Kavre, Nepal. The journal remains committed to fostering rigorous academic discourse, encouraging cross-disciplinary knowledge creation, and contributing to Nepal's development practices and policy perspectives.This issue compiles fourteen diverse and insightful articles, each undergoing a rigorous peer review process. Together, they reflect not only the vibrancy of Nepal's academic community but also the pressing social, economic, cultural, and policy debates shaping the nation.

The first article by *Dr. Rajan Binayek Pasa and Indira Thapa* explores the contextual phenomenon of gender construction in rural Nepal. Drawing on household survey data from Dailekh, the authors reveal how gender roles are shifting towards more gender-friendly norms, enhancing women's socio-economic participation and reducing gender-based violence. This study makes an important contribution to debates on women's empowerment and policy design.

The second article by *Jayaram Karmacharya, Ishwor Agri, and Dinesh Shrestha* investigates homestay tourism in Bhada Village, Kailali District, highlighting its role in preserving Tharu culture while boosting rural incomes. This case study demonstrates how community-based tourism can simultaneously strengthen livelihoods and cultural heritage.

The third article by *Hem Raj Joshi, Dhan Bahadur Chaudhary, and Manoj Basnet* examines the integration of social media in agriculture among Tharu farmers in Tikapur. Their findings reveal farmers' reliance on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube for agricultural knowledge-sharing, underscoring the need for digital literacy programs and localized content to maximize benefits for smallholders.

In the fourth article, *Beg Prasad Garbuja* assesses agricultural transformation in Nepal using econometric approaches including Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net regressions. The study identifies demographic and economic drivers of agricultural value added, pointing to the need for targeted trade and demographic policies.

The fifth article by *Alina Maharjan and Subhechhacha Shrestha* interrogates Nepal's structural inequalities through the lens of class, caste, gender, and geography. Critiquing Kathmandu-centric development, the authors highlight systemic marginalization in regions such as Karnali and Sudurpaschim, and call for a justice-oriented development model.

The sixth article by *Amita Kandel, Anju Poudel, Saraswati Aryal, Usha Subedi, and Sushmita Shrestha* evaluates agricultural extension under federal governance. Their analysis shows both opportunities and challenges in decentralization, emphasizing the importance of local capacity building and participatory planning for effective extension services.

The seventh article by *Arpan Basnet* studies the impact of imports, remittances, and migration on agriculture's share of GDP. Drawing on 25 years of data, the paper highlights how dependency on external flows weakens domestic agriculture, reinforcing rural marginalization.

The eighth article by *Birendra Prasad Parajuli and Balkrishna Deuja* revisits the 1964 Land Reform Act through a Marxian lens. The authors argue that while reforms sought to dismantle feudal landlordism, structural loopholes allowed inequalities to persist, reproducing semi-feudal conditions.

The ninth article by *Chiranjibi Dhakal, Devendra Adhikari, and Ganga Subba* offers a comprehensive review of artificial intelligence (AI) in Nepal's development and education sectors. Highlighting both opportunities and challenges, the article underscores the importance of human-centered AI policies, digital capacity building, and ethical safeguards.

The tenth article by *Dambar Bahadur Rogu* addresses the tensions between ethnic diversity and national integration. The study argues that inclusive policies, equal recognition of languages and cultures, and intercultural initiatives are key to reducing contested identities in Nepal's nation-building process.

The eleventh article by *Govinda Adhikari* critically evaluates the impact of capitalist and neoliberal policies on Nepal's peasant economy (1961–2023). The study demonstrates how declining landholdings, rising indebtedness, and remittance dependency have reshaped rural livelihoods, and advocates for equitable agrarian reforms.

The twelfth article by *Him Kumari Kapri and Arvind Shah* explores the enduring problem of landlessness and agrarian inequalities in Nepal. Their analysis shows how unequal access to land reproduces poverty and exclusion, particularly among women, Dalits, and indigenous groups.

The thirteenth article (in Nepali) by Parsuram Adhikari examines the importance of religious tourism in Kavrepalanchok, highlighting Bhaleswor and Kashyapeswor, and offers a local perspective that provides a valuable vernacular contribution to this topic.

Finally, the fourteenth article, authored by Roshan Prasad Shrestha (in Nepali), explores the historical, political, and cultural significance of the Badimalika Badi Puja festival in promoting religious tourism. The study emphasizes how cultural traditions can foster sustainable tourism and enhance community participation.

Collectively, these fourteen articles offer an impressive breadth of inquiry—ranging from gender empowerment, agrarian change, and social inequalities, to tourism, AI, and cultural heritage. What unites them is their shared relevance to Nepal's policy discourse and development challenges.

On behalf of the editorial team, I would like to congratulate all the authors for their rigorous contributions. I am equally grateful to the reviewers and editorial colleagues for their invaluable input. The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Indreshwor Multiple Campus.

With this third volume, *Panauti Journal* reaffirms its mission to provide a scholarly platform for novice and established researchers alike, contributing to Nepal's academic growth and policy innovation.

Editor-in-Chief

Shifting Gender Norms and Women's Empowerment in Rural Nepal

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Abstract
Gender construction is a contextual phenomenon that differs across cultural belief systems. This study assesses gender construction and its influence on the life prospects of women in rural Nepal. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 132 sample households residing in 12 different settlements across two wards of the Gurans Rural Municipality in Dailekh. The study found that gender construction is becoming more anti-patriarchal and gender-friendly in the study area, positively impacting the life prospects of women in rural Nepal. Gender-sensitive policies, gender-responsive budgets, quality parenting for educational access, and the effective role of the media are identified as major factors contributing to changing gender constructions. Additionally, indicators such as caste and ethnicity, family socioeconomic status, and family support systems also play vital roles in gender constructions. The evolving belief system regarding gender constructions is motivating women to assume socio-economic roles in their families and communities, leading to socio-economic and political empowerment and a reduction in gender-based violence. These improvements are possible due to the implementation of international and national policy instruments related to gender equality and women's empowerment. This study is useful for policy debates on enhancing women's empowerment and reducing gender-based inequalities in rural Nepal.

Keywords: gender construction, influencing factors, life prospect, women empowerment

Introduction

Gender encompasses culturally constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and relationships that societies attribute to men, women, boys, and girls (Deborah & Puzio, 2019). These norms govern interpersonal dynamics and dictate the expected behaviors, responsibilities, and identities associated with different genders across cultures. Importantly, gender is distinct from biological sex, as it represents a fluid spectrum that allows individuals to develop their potential free from restrictive stereotypes. Gender equality refers to the fair and equitable treatment of all genders, ensuring equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities regardless of gender identity (Camilletti, 2024). This principle recognizes both the similarities and differences between genders while working to eliminate discriminatory barriers. As a fundamental human right, gender equality serves as both a prerequisite for and a measure of sustainable, human-focused development. Within domestic spheres, achieving gender equality proves particularly vital for enhancing women's and children's well-being and economic participation (Dilli, 2018). When properly implemented, gender equality guarantees balanced access to economic resources, social services, cultural participation, and political representation across all genders (United Nations Children's Fund, 2017).

However, persistent cultural frameworks, norms, and values often perpetuate gender disparities (Kagesten, 2016), creating significant obstacles to human progress. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) represents a significant global challenge (United Nations Development Programme, 2025).Across many societies, men continue to dominate higher-ranking positions in social, economic, and political spheres. Research demonstrates that economic prosperity correlates strongly with women's decision-making autonomy (Syed, 2009), underscoring how women's empowerment serves as a fundamental requirement for national and societal progress. The concept of empowerment encompasses various dimensions, including self-determination, personal agency, autonomy, choice, rights assertion, independence, and freedom in decision-making (Mandal, 2013). Achieving gender-balanced participation in governance represents a crucial objective for strengthening democratic systems and ensuring their effective operation (United Nations, 2005).

Gender inclusion starts at home, then spreads to the community and the whole country. The household serves as the primary economic unit that provides for the subsistence and socio-economic progress of its members (Mokomane, 2012). Decision-making within households involves complex negotiations between members and requires balancing income-generating activities with domestic production for self-consumption (Omari, 1995; Wheelock & Oughton, 1996). This structure creates a supportive environment that helps women grow and live with dignity as equal citizens. Improving women's educational attainment plays a pivotal role in strengthening their decision-making capacity. Access to material resources and employment opportunities is closely linked to enhanced autonomy in household decisions. Economic independence gained through earned income enables women to reduce reliance on male family members and increases their bargaining power in domestic negotiations (Dilli, 2018). In this social and economic context, traditional constructions of gender continue to shape both social status and economic participation, making it a researchable issue.

Religion, Culture, and Gender Perspective
Gender constructs and their impact on women's opportunities remain context-dependent and complex. Religious doctrines often reinforce gender hierarchies — Christianity's depiction of God as Father implies male supremacy, while Islam traditionally restricts women's public participation by prohibiting mosque attendance for prayers, outdoor employment, and requiring face coverings with the burqa. Within Hinduism, though not doctrinally codified, prevalent Brahmanical beliefs suggest male Brahmin birth results from virtuous past lives (Channa, 2013), implicitly establishing male superiority, further evidenced by menstrual worship restrictions. Many societies typically associate femininity with caregiving roles, confining women predominantly to domestic spheres, while masculinity is equated with leadership and economic provision (Sharma et al., 2016). These gendered divisions stem not merely from behavioral expectations but are sustained through economic structures, cultural traditions, and intergenerational value transmission. Institutional frameworks, including cultural norms, social systems, and political structures, collectively shape gender formations, relationships, and associated power differentials (United Nations, 2012).

Nepal's patriarchal social structure systematically privileges men through socio-cultural norms that reinforce male dominance in economic and political spheres. Census data reveals stark gender disparities, with only 23.8 percent of Nepalese women owning land (National Statistics Office, 2022), despite constitutional guarantees of equal property rights. The labor market shows significant imbalance — while women constitute 55.5 percent of the working-age population, their employment rate stands at just 22 percent (Shrestha, 2019), indicating substantial barriers to workforce participation. Political representation remains critically low, with women comprising over half the population but occupying minimal decision-making positions. Historical patterns show persistent underrepresentation, evidenced by only 12 percent female candidacy in the 1999 elections (Pardhan, 2005). This exclusion persists despite Nepal's ratification of international gender equality commitments. The gap between legal provisions and

ground realities is particularly evident in property rights implementation and educational access, where women continue to occupy subordinate positions with limited autonomy in household decisions (Pokharel, 2008). These systemic inequalities demonstrate how deeply entrenched patriarchal structures undermine formal equality measures.

The Hindu patriarchal system also remains firmly established through socio-cultural and religious traditions. Transforming gender constructs necessitates fundamental changes to long-standing rituals and cultural practices. Both international and national policies, along with advocacy efforts, play a crucial role in redefining and reshaping traditional gender roles. Notably, men's participation and support are essential for driving societal transformation (Adhikari, 2022). Recent years have witnessed significant shifts in women's decision-making authority, particularly among older women, Buddhist women, educated women, and professional women who demonstrate greater influence in household matters (Tiwari, 2013). Younger, educated women increasingly manage household finances, enjoy greater spending autonomy, and experience enhanced social standing, though some still rely on their husbands for major decisions (Balayar, 2021). The growing trend of male migration for foreign employment has further altered gender dynamics, with women assuming household leadership roles and making economic decisions regarding daily expenditures (Rajkarnikar, 2020). Against these evolving backdrops, this study seeks to examine gender constructions and their impact on women's life opportunities in Gurans Rural Municipality of Dailekh, Karnali Province.

Policy Perspectives
Gender equality entered international human rights law through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In 1975, the UN General Assembly proclaimed International Women's Year, which was succeeded by the UN Decade for Women from 1976–1985. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was formally adopted in 1979. Multiple global observances promote gender equality: International Women's Day (March 8), International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (February 6), International Day of Women and Girls in Science (February 11), International Day for Eliminating Sexual Violence in Conflict (June 19), International Widows' Day (June 23), International Day of the Girl Child (October 11), and International Day for Rural Women (October 15).

Likewise, Nepal initiated gender equality measures through its sixth five-year plan (1981–1985). The 2015 Constitution guarantees non-discrimination and equal ancestral property rights for women, though implementation remains inconsistent. Legal frameworks like the National Civil Code (2017) and Civil Service Act (2010) establish quotas — reserving 33 percent of civil service positions for women alongside other marginalized groups. The Local Self-Governance Act (2017) mandates women's representation in local governance, while election rules require 50 percent female candidates for key positions (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, 2021). The interim plan (2008–2011) introduced 33 percent reservations across government structures and promoted gender-responsive budgeting. The 2020 Fifteenth periodic plan continues prioritizing local-level gender equality (Dulal, 2020). However, constitutional provisions in Nepal (Article 11[5], [7]) restrict women's ability to confer citizenship (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2015).

Thus, despite substantial constitutional guarantees, policy commitments, and evolving socio-cultural dynamics, a persistent gap remains between formal provisions for gender equality and the lived realities of women in Nepal. Existing studies largely focus on national-level trends or urban contexts, leaving rural areas like Gurans Rural Municipality underexplored. Limited research examines how intersecting factors such as religion, cultural traditions, migration patterns, and policy implementation gaps shape women's life opportunities in these settings, highlighting the need for localized, context-specific analysis.

Methodology: Study Area
Gurans Rural Municipality is located in the Dailekh District of Karnali Province, Nepal. Twelve settlements—six from each ward—were purposively selected from two wards (core and periphery) of Gurans Rural Municipality to constitute the study area. The municipality has a total population of 22,033 (10,675 males and 11,358 females) distributed across 4,096 households. Ward number seven has a population of 2,316 (1,168 males and 1,148 females) with 387 households, while ward number eight has a population of 2,337 (1,174 males and 1,163 females) with 383 households (Gurans Rural Municipality [GRM], 2019).

This rural municipality is characterized by low development indicators, including in gender construction and women's empowerment. However, it is located in close proximity to Surkhet, the capital city of Karnali Province. Geographically, it borders Kalikot District to the north, Birendranagar Municipality of Surkhet District to the south, Achham District of Sudur Paschim Province to the west, and Jajarkot District to the east. The study area is culturally diverse, with villagers practicing Kalikote, Surkheti, Achhami, Jajarkote, and Dailekhi cultural traditions. Many of these practices are evolving under the influence of modernization, as evidenced by increased girls' enrollment in education and higher levels of women's empowerment. Nevertheless, the persistence of *Chhaupadi pratha*—a cultural practice in which menstruating girls and women are secluded in cowsheds—remains a challenge. This study, therefore, aims to assess gender construction and its impact in this rural municipality.

Methods and Materials
The study adopts both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2013) to collect the required data and information. Quantitative data were obtained through a cross-sectional survey design from 132 sample households (67 from Ward 7 and 65 from Ward 8), selected using purposive and random sampling. Survey research was chosen for its effectiveness in collecting valid and objective data from a large audience (McCombes, 2022; Wolff, 2015). Data collection employed self-administered household survey questionnaires (Ponto, 2015).

In addition, qualitative data were gathered through nine in-depth interviews with articulate women participants, using a narrative inquiry design. An interview guideline was used to explore their stories and experiences related to the research issues (Cohen et al., 2018). Data analysis involved the use of simple Likert scale tabulation and descriptive methods. The following section presents findings on: characteristics of the respondents, attributes towards gender equality, factors for gender construction, and life prospects of women.

Results

Characteristics of the Respondents
The study's respondents comprised both male and female individuals, with 55 percent being male and 45 percent female. The largest proportion (26 percent) were aged between 20 and 40 years, while the smallest group (14 percent) were aged above 60 years. Caste-wise, 75 percent of respondents belonged to the Chhetri community, followed by Dalit (12 percent), Janajati (11 percent), and Brahmin (2 percent).

Regarding land ownership, most respondents (26 percent) possessed 6–9 *ropani* of irrigated land, while the smallest proportion (8 percent) owned ≥10 *ropani* of irrigated land. Similarly, 42 percent owned 6–9 *ropani* of rain-fed land, and 44 percent owned ≥10 *ropani* of rain-fed land. More than half of the respondents (52 percent) did not own irrigated farmland, while 6 percent did not own rain-fed land.

In terms of occupation, 32 percent of respondents' family members were engaged in agriculture, followed by business (23 percent), government jobs (20 percent), foreign employment (17 percent), and private jobs (9 percent).

In terms of income, 79 percent of respondents earned ≤ Rs. 100,000 monthly, 20 percent earned Rs. 100,000–199,000, and only 1 percent earned Rs. 200,000–299,000. Most families fell within the low-to-middle income range, with 38 percent spending Rs. 10,000–20,000 monthly, 45 percent spending Rs. 20,000–30,000, and 14 percent spending Rs. 30,000–40,000. Despite the absence of private schools, most families allocated resources for education and healthcare, relying on surplus agricultural production. Additionally, 80 percent of respondents reported that female family members participated in cooperatives and other social organizations.

Attitudes towards Gender Equality
The study developed 15 items to assess respondents' beliefs regarding gender construction. The majority expressed favorable attitudes toward gender equality (Table 1). For example, 80 percent disagreed with the statement *"Women should not engage in business or any economic activity."* Similarly, 78 percent disagreed with the statement *"Women should not engage in social and political activity"* and 70 percent disagreed with *"Women should not own any property."* However, 1 percent strongly agreed with the latter statement, which is not conducive to women's empowerment.

Traditional gender roles continue to be internalized. For instance, Solbes-Canales et al. (2020) found similar attitudes among students in public schools. Conversely, statements such as *"Women are the backbone of society"* and *"Men and women should equally engage in household chores and childcare"* received 28 percent and 20 percent "strongly agree" responses, respectively.

Previous studies support these findings. Doss (1996) and Mader (2015) found significant decision-making power for women in household expenditure and economic matters. Likewise, Luchok et al. (1987) reported variations in women's roles based on cultural background, with Hindu women primarily engaged in domestic and subsistence production, while Tibeto-Burman women were more involved in market activities.

Table 1. *Attitude towards Gender Equality* (n=132)

Items	SA (%)	Agree (%)	Nutral (%)	Disagree (%)	SD(%)
Men are superior than women	0.00	26.00	5.00	61.00	8.00
Women are kindhearted	7.00	67.00	3.00	23.00	0.00
Women maintain daily household chores	0.00	33.00	0.00	56.00	11.00
Women take care of the children	0.00	36.00	1.00	52.00	11.00
Women are power of society	28.00	64.00	4.00	4.00	0.00
Men play economic role in their family	0.00	42.00	2.00	51.00	5.00
Men are decision makers of their family	0.00	22.00	0.00	62.00	16.00
Women should not provide property right	0.00	13.00	2.00	70.00	16.00
Women should not involve in economic activities	0.00	3.00	1.00	80.00	17.00
Women should not involve in social and	1.00	2.00	4.00	78.00	16.00

political activities					
Arrange marriage has been preferred by local youths	0.00	33.00	2.00	64.00	2.00
Women cannot express their emotion due to the cultural restriction	8.00	64.00	2.00	27.00	0.00
Sexual relationship should not be established before marriage life	14.00	71.00	14.00	1.00	0.00
Men and women should equally engage in household chores and childcare	20.00	66.00	2.00	12.00	0.00
Men and women should equally engage in social, political and economic activity	21.00	63.00	5.00	11.00	0.00

The responses indicate generally positive attitudes toward gender equality among the 132 respondents. Most disagree that men are superior, women should not own property, or should be excluded from economic, social, and political activities, reflecting support for women's empowerment. A large proportion also strongly agree that women are an essential part of society and that men and women should equally share household chores, childcare, and participation in social, political, and economic activities. While traditional beliefs, such as arranged marriages and cultural restrictions on women's emotional expression, persist for some, overall, the findings demonstrate a gradual shift toward more gender-friendly attitudes and recognition of women's roles in household and community decision-making.

Factors for Gender Construction
This study developed 15 items to measure the factors influencing gender construction. Almost all the items received "agree" or "strongly agree" (SA) responses from the respondents (Table 2). Among them, the statements *"higher education levels for women"* (93%), *"death of husband"* (88%), *"social media, radio, and television"* (85%), and *"socio-economic status"* (79%) received the highest levels of agreement.

In contrast, the items *"disability"* (41%), *"caste and ethnicity"* (40%), and *"gender-responsive budget"* (30%) received the highest levels of disagreement.

Research across 82 studies spanning 29 countries—primarily in North America and Europe—identified the cultural environment, family influences, and peer groups as key determinants in gender construction (Kagesten, 2016). Another study found that in both developed and developing nations, fathers predominantly retain the final decision-making authority over critical household and family welfare matters (Engle, 1997). Similarly, Ljunge (2016) observed that masculine culture, shaped by both parents, influences gender roles among immigrant children from 70 countries. Shrestha (2015) also reported that gender disparity in Nepalese society is rooted in the patriarchal system and religious beliefs.

Table 2. *Influencing Factors for Gender Construction* (n=132)

	SA (%)	Agree (%)	Nutral (%)	Disagree (%)	SD (%)
Caste/ethnicity	2.00	56.00	2.00	38.00	2.00
Socio-economic situation	7.00	72.00	2.00	19.00	0.00
Geography and environnement	2.00	63.00	4.00	32.00	0.00
Gender identity	19.00	67.00	2.00	12.00	0.00
Heterosexual orientation	2.00	63.00	14.00	21.00	0.00
Disability	2.00	54.00	4.00	41.00	0.00
Domestic violence	5.00	73.00	2.00	20.00	0.00
Single women	17.00	71.00	5.00	7.00	1.00
Unemployment of men	8.00	70.00	3.00	18.00	1.00
Involving in foreign employment	6.00	73.00	4.00	16.00	1.00
War, conflict and political movement	2.00	77.00	5.00	15.00	1.00
Gender responsive polices	2.00	68.00	5.00	23.00	2.00
Gender responsive budget	2.00	61.00	8.00	28.00	2.00
Higher education access of women	12.00	81.00	0.00	6.00	1.00
Social media, radio and television	5.00	80.00	3.00	12.00	1.00

The findings indicate that multiple factors shape gender constructions in the study area, with respondents largely agreeing on the significance of education, media exposure, socio-economic status, and policy measures. Higher education access for women (93% agreement), social media/radio/television influence (85%), domestic violence (78%), and socio-economic situation (79%) were identified as the most influential factors. Other important determinants included gender identity, single women's status, male unemployment, involvement in foreign employment, and exposure to war, conflict, or political movements. In contrast, factors such as disability, caste/ethnicity, and gender-responsive budgets received comparatively higher disagreement, suggesting they are perceived as less directly influential. Overall, the results highlight that both structural and social factors, including education, economic conditions, media, and policy interventions, play key roles in shaping gender norms and perceptions in rural Nepal.

Life Prospects of Women
Changing gender roles have encouraged parents to adopt more gender-friendly attitudes at both household and community levels. All respondents (100%) agreed that the number of girls studying in schools, colleges, and universities has increased. Additionally, nearly 89% of respondents agreed that interactions between women and men are becoming more frequent. Around 88% acknowledged the increased involvement of women in social and cultural activities.

Similarly, most respondents agreed that women's participation has increased in economic activities, their empowerment status has improved, more families are led by women, women's decision-making roles at the household level have expanded, and women's involvement in foreign employment, government jobs, private employment, and leadership roles has grown. However, 18% of respondents noted that competition between men and women is increasing day by day. Furthermore, a majority agreed that the prevalence of forced marriage and child marriage has significantly decreased.

In summary, the study reveals that respondents, comprising 55% males and 45% females, are predominantly aged 20–40 years, with the majority belonging to the Chhetri community. Land ownership varies, with many families holding 6–9 ropani of irrigated or rain-fed land, though over half lack irrigated farmland. Family members are mainly engaged in agriculture, business, government jobs, foreign

employment, and private work, with most households earning a low-to-middle monthly income. Attitudes toward gender equality are generally positive, with most respondents supporting women's involvement in economic, social, and political activities, property ownership, and household decision-making, though traditional gender roles persist to some extent. Key factors influencing gender construction include higher education for women, social media exposure, socio-economic status, and widowhood, while disability, caste/ethnicity, and gender-responsive budgets received more disagreement. Regarding life prospects, respondents reported increased female participation in education, social and cultural activities, economic work, household decision-making, leadership, and employment, alongside a notable decline in forced and child marriages, indicating gradual shifts toward gender equality and women's empowerment in the study area. The following section discusses the findings on gender constructions and their influence on the life prospects of women.

Discussion: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
Gender equality ensures equal power and opportunity for men and women in areas such as financial independence, education, and personal development. Therefore, gender equality directly influences the socio-cultural, economic, and political empowerment of women. Socio-cultural empowerment reflects the general status of women in terms of literacy, educational attainment, age at marriage, and participation in activities outside the home (Mazhar, 2017). In many Asian countries, gender discrimination remains prevalent, with women facing control and restrictions imposed by men in their daily lives (Khan, 2010). However, the situation in Nepal appears to be improving. Most interviewees in this research shared that women from all ethnic groups, including Dalits, now actively participate in household and community-level cultural ceremonies and functions, becoming increasingly active and interactive.

Economic empowerment involves equal access to and control over economic resources, enabling women to utilize them effectively (Samman, 2016). Globally, 2.7 billion women are restricted from having the same job opportunities as men, often working in informal or unpaid household roles (UN Women, 2015). Conversely, in the study area, rural women are increasingly involved in economic activities such as commercial vegetable farming and dairy production. In recent years, they have also gained economic independence through government jobs, private employment, and foreign employment, supported by capacity-building trainings and incentives provided by local governments and development stakeholders.

Political empowerment stems from women's active participation in political decision-making processes. Worldwide, women comprise only 15% of lawmakers across 183 parliaments, with significant regional variations (Leyenaar, 2004). In the study area, most interviewees expressed concerns about women's limited access to key political positions, despite provisions for their participation in local-level committees. While these representative measures have somewhat empowered women politically, further reforms are needed to increase women's involvement in political and governance structures.

Overall, this study finds that gender equality—covering socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions—has been improving in the research area, though challenges remain. Women, including those from marginalized groups, now participate more actively in cultural and community events, reflecting progress in socio-cultural empowerment. Economic opportunities have expanded through farming, dairy production, formal jobs, and foreign employment, supported by local initiatives and training. Politically, while reserved seats and committee participation have boosted representation, women still face barriers to holding key decision-making positions, indicating the need for further reforms to achieve full empowerment.

Theoretical Reflection
Conflict theory posits that social problems arise when dominant groups exploit subordinate groups, making it difficult for women to assert their rights due to economic dependence on men (O'Neil, 2017).

However, rural women are becoming increasingly aware and skilled, challenging dominant male groups and advocating for their rights.

Social structural theory suggests that society creates gender roles and stereotypes, which shape power dynamics and gender statuses (Freedman, 1993; Risman et al., 2018). In the study area, gender constructions and roles have gradually become more women-friendly, with husbands and male counterparts encouraging women to participate in economic and political activities. Functionalist theory argues for a functional division of labor between men and women, emphasizing the importance of women's roles in socialization and childcare (Baligar, 2018). However, in the study area, both men and women are actively involved in household chores, childcare, and decision-making processes, challenging traditional gender roles. Although traditional theories highlight gendered power imbalances and roles, rural women in the study area are increasingly active and supported in economic, political, and household spheres.

Conclusion

The deeply rooted Hindu patriarchal system in Nepal is gradually changing, with gender constructions becoming more anti-patriarchal and women increasingly empowered socially, economically, and politically. Key drivers include gender-sensitive policies, gender-responsive budgets, educational access, media influence, and supportive family and community systems. These changes have improved women's participation in decision-making, reduced forced marriages, and challenged traditional gender roles. Future research can explore the long-term impacts of these shifts, regional variations, and the role of intersectional factors such as caste, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Practically, strengthening policies, promoting awareness, supporting capacity-building programs, and encouraging male engagement can further enhance gender equality. Overall, women in rural Nepal are becoming more confident and active, driving positive social change in their communities.

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Role of Homestay Tourism in Preserving Tharu Culture and Boosting Rural Economy of Nepal: Evidence from Bhada Village of Kailali District

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Abstract
Homestay tourism has emerged as a significant source of family income in Nepal's rural destinations. This study assesses the role of homestay tourism in preserving Tharu culture and boosting the rural economy in Bhada Village of Kailali District—the first community homestay initiative in Sudur Paschim Province, established in 2010. The study used a descriptive and explanatory research design under a quantitative approach and a cross-section survey strategy. Required data were collected from randomly selected 45 households (20 homestay owners and 25 local farmers and cultural performers) through self-administered household survey questionnaires. The study found the popularity of the destination due to its religious and cultural assets, particularly the Vehada Baba Temple and indigenous Tharu culture. The village is rich in forest ecosystem and traditional Tharu lifestyle. These attractions draw tourists annually, fostering cultural exchange and economic growth. The study reveals that homestays have significantly improved local livelihoods by generating employment and increasing household incomes, with many owners earning between NRs. 25,000 to 50,000 per month. Additionally, tourism has encouraged the preservation of Tharu culture, arts, and traditions, promoting them at national and international levels. In conclusion, homestay tourism in Bhada Village serves as a model for community tourism, demonstrating how rural areas can improve livelihoods through homestay tourism. Therefore, provincial and local authorities should establish clear operational guidelines and designate responsible agencies for homestay registration, monitoring, and quality assurance to strengthen community homestays in the Province.

Keywords: tourism, community homestay, Tharu culture, rural economy, Kailali

Introduction
Tourism is broadly defined as the planning, organizing, touring, and other services for tourists. Traveling overseas for the purpose of sightseeing, hiking, mountaineering, taking in the natural beauty of the surroundings, learning about cultural heritage, etc., is generally referred to as tourism. Tourism has been seen as a key mechanism for rural revitalizing that offers opportunities for sustainable economic growth, social and cultural development, and enhancing community cohesion (Dashper, 2014). The nation's economy is dominated by the tourism industry. Around 1.2 million foreign visitors came to Nepal in 2019 (Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation [MoCTCA], 2020), a 2% rise over that in 2018. This amounts to roughly 5.7% of tourists from Asia and 0.1% of tourist's worldwide (United Nations World Tourism organization, 2018). In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, international tourism experienced its 10th consecutive year of growth, with 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals, generating US$1.7 trillion in export revenues and supporting millions of jobs, of which 54% were held by women

and youth, making tourism a key and rapidly growing sector in both advanced and emerging economies (United Nations World Tourism organization, 2018).

Nepal began to develop the various facets of social, economic, and political life after gaining democracy in 1950 and with Nepal's inclusion in international platforms to welcome foreign visitors who wish to visit the country in order to grow its tourism sector. The first successful ascent of Nepal's over 8,000-meter peaks sparked a phenomenal surge in mountaineering activity. Nepal was introduced to the international scene in 1955 after being granted membership in the United Nations Organization (UNO) and the Non-Aligned Countries' Group, and since its founding, it has witnessed rapid growth in tourism. Apart from this, religious pilgrimage has been a foundational form of tourism in Nepal since ancient times, documented by Chinese travelers as early as the 4th century AD (Poudel, 2002). Owing to the country's distinct geographic location and range of elevations, Nepal is among the world's smallest yet most biodiverse nations. Thus, in terms of religious, cultural, and ecological riches, it is among the greatest destinations on Earth to explore. Nepal has the ability to draw a wide range of tourists from around the globe due to its unique combination of art, culture, and history, as well as its stunning natural surroundings. The diverse industry of tourism supports trade, other service sectors, and cottage industries. It is the second-biggest source of earnings in foreign currency.

Nepal's tourism sector accounted for 6.7% of the national GDP, generating Rs 231.0 billion (equivalent to US$ 2,051.4 million). Tourists spent around NRs. 93.9 billion (US$ 833.8 million), representing 30.8% of the country's overall export revenue.. While leisure expenditure appears to be 86% of total spending and business spending to be 14%, domestic spending accounts for 55% of total spending and foreign spending for 45%. In Nepal, tourism has generated 1,034,000 jobs overall, or 6.9% of all jobs (Ministry of Finance, 2020). Tourism fundamentally revolves around the visitor experience, making destination authenticity and comprehensive resource audits critical for sustainable development (Sharpley, 2020).

The national economy as well as beneficiary groups can benefit from the study of homestay tourism. The tourist industry has been the subject of extensive investigation, particularly community-based tourism (Witchayakawin et al., 2020). Besides, community-based homestay tourism has a lot of potential in Nepal (Yanes et al., 2019) and has the power to drastically alter the way of life for anyone living there. The users' group can immediately profit from this concept. In this background, this study aims to assess the role of homestay tourism in preserving Nepal's Tharu culture and boosting the rural economy in Bhada Village.

Study Area and Methods
This study is based on Bhadgaon (Bhada Village), Kailali District, Nepal, which is well-known for its historical sites (Nepal Tourism Board, 2018). There are a total of 93 households in Bhada Village that are directly and indirectly associated with homestay tourism. The key stakeholders of this study include tourist guides, homestay committee members, homestay owners, and local people who are directly or indirectly involved in homestay tourism. A total of 45 households (48.38%) were selected using a random sampling technique. We found that 20 households were directly involved in operating homestay tourism and the remaining 25 households were indirectly benefited (e.g., through employment, cultural performances, supply of goods, or related services) from Bhada Village Homestay of Dhanghadi Sub-Metropolitan City, Kailali.

This study used a quantitative research method (Creswell, 2018) and a cross-sectional survey design (Gupta & Gupta, 2015). Under this method, this study used a descriptive and explanatory research design. Likewise, the explanatory research design helped to explain why homestay tourism is becoming a major

source of family income and an effective source of local livelihoods. The numerical description of the sample population was collected using a structured questionnaire, and the findings/conclusions derived from the study helped to generalize the results to the entire population. The following section presents the findings of this research under the following headings: demographic details, tourism in Badhgaon, tourism marketing and tourist information, occupation and income, and annual income and expenditure.

Demographic Details
Kailali, historically known as Bhaktagram, derives its name from the 10th-century *Kiran Tantra* manuscript. The district's name exists in three linguistic forms: Kailali (Sanskrit), Khwopai (Tharu dialect), and Khopring (Kirat). Established with Dhangadhi as its headquarters, Kailali was reclaimed from British control in 1860 AD. The district spans 2,742 sq. km, with elevations ranging from 179 m to 1,957 m. Predominantly inhabited by Tharu, Rana Tharu, Chhetri, Brahmin, and other ethnic groups, Kailali's economy relies on agriculture, supported by rivers like Karnali, Mohana, and Khutiya. The region features diverse climates—subtropical to temperate—with temperatures ranging from 17°C to over 40°C and annual rainfall up to 1,577 mm. The disaggregated data of the study area are presented in Table 1.

The study area, Bhadgaon, is rich in traditional dances and vibrant festivals, which are abundant throughout the village. The villagers celebrate a number of unique festivals and fairs, including *Sakhiya Nach*, Gurahi Festival, Maghi, Dashain, and Gaura. The green forest and the various customs of the Rana Tharus are embodied in products and memorable imagery. Religious and historical sites, festivals, and events are the main tourist draws in this destination.

Table 1. *Profile of the Study Area*

Physiography	
Total area	3235 Km^2 (323500 Hectare)
Elevation range	(1109 m to 1950 m)
Mean annual rainfall	1840 mm
Mean annual temperature	Autumn max 43˚C to Min 24˚C, winter max 19 degrees C to Min 5˚C
Climatic condition	Ranges from tropical to sub-tropical
Major rivers	Karnali, Mohana, Khutiya, Patharaiya, Kandra, Manahara, Godavari, Gulara, Likma, Rora Donda
Important lakes	Ghodaghodi, Jokhar, Tilko, Behadababa,Liki, Laukabhauka

Likewise, the findings, as shown in Table 2, **depict** a predominance of nuclear family structures in the surveyed households, with 71.11% (32 households) having 1–6 members, which typically represents nuclear families. The remaining 28.89% (13 households) with 6+ members likely represent joint/extended family systems, particularly the 6.67% (3 households) with 8–11 members and the single household with 11+ members, which clearly indicates a traditional joint family structure. The distribution shows that while nuclear families (smaller households) constitute the majority (51.11% alone in the 4–6 member category), joint family systems still persist significantly in the community, accounting for nearly one-third of respondents. This pattern suggests a transitional phase where nuclear family structures are becoming more common, yet traditional joint family systems remain an important social arrangement for a substantial minority of households.

Table 2 *Family Size of the Respondents*

Family member	HHs	Percent
1 to 3	8	17.78
3 to 6	23	51.11
6 to 8	10	22.22
8 to 11	3	6.67
11 above	1	2.22
Total	45	100.00

Thus, Bhadgaon in Kailali is a culturally rich village with diverse ethnic groups, traditional festivals, and natural attractions that support local tourism. Traditional joint family systems remain an important social arrangement for a substantial minority of households in the study area, helping to preserve local culture in a collaborative way.

Tourism in Badhgaon
Badhgaon holds considerable potential for tourism development due to its rich natural, cultural, and historical assets. In Nepal, the tourism business is the biggest industry. Being one of the virgin travel destinations, the far western area is still largely undiscovered. With regular flights connecting Dhangadhi to Kathmandu and a bordering access point with well-maintained road networks, it is able to enhance its organizational capabilities and service quality. The district contains a wide range of historical, cultural, mythological, and religious sites. Visitors come to Kailali for multiple reasons, which can be grouped into leisure and relaxation in natural surroundings, sightseeing and boating, rafting, attending seminars or conferences, experiencing cultural attractions and homestays, pursuing academic study or research, and other miscellaneous purposes. To explore these motivations, a set of questions was administered to 45 individuals who had previously traveled to Badhgaon, Kailali, in order to determine the main reasons behind their visit.

Table 3 *Tourist Arrivals by Purposes in the Study Area*

Propose of Visit	Number	Percentage
Conference and Seminars	10	22
Rafting/ Dolphin view	8	18
Business	6	13
Cultural attraction and Home-stay	6	13
Study and research	3	7
Natural beauty	12	27
Total	45	100

Table 3 shows that most tourists come to this district to enjoy its natural beauty. The next most common reasons are attending conferences and seminars, followed by rafting, cultural programs, and homestays. Some visitors also come to Kailali for study and research.The villagers are getting opportunities to share their cultural norms and values with visitors. Cross-cultural exchanges through tourism foster global awareness and positive mindset changes, as communities learn to appreciate both differences and universal human commonalities (Acharya, 2010).

Tourism Marketing and Tourist Information
Tourism marketing can be defined as the coordinated set of activities undertaken by national tourism organizations (NTOs) and tourism businesses at various levels to promote destinations, meet visitor

needs, and ensure sustainable tourism growth (Middleton & Clarke, 2001). Kailali offers a wide range of natural and cultural attractions to satisfy travelers. It is the focal point of the Far West region. Regarding marketing, the majority of respondents gave favorable answers in both the questionnaire and the interview. However, the marketing of tourism is still focused on exporting its goods. Even with today's advanced capabilities, the management sector lacks practical application; primarily, marketing is not greatly impacted by a dearth of knowledge, poverty, illiteracy, or inadequate infrastructure.

The study reveals that most tourists fall within the 31–45 age group, making up 31% of the total visitors. Similarly, 24% are between 46–60 years, 22% are aged 16–30, while 7% are 61 years or older, and 16% are children under 14. The data also indicate that male tourists outnumber female tourists. In terms of duration of stay, the majority (40%) spend two days in Kailali. Additionally, 9% remain for more than four days, 31% stay only one day, and 20% spend three days and two nights.

The study area attracts tourists with its natural and cultural attractions, though marketing efforts could be further improved. Most visitors are adults, with more males than females, and typically stay for one to two days. This signifies the region's high potential for tourism business growth.

Occupation, Annual Income, and Types of Houses
Most of the households are engaged in the hospitality (homestay) sector. During the field visit, we found that a few locals raise hens to sell in the Kailali market and other nearby markets. Small enterprises such as everyday stores, beauty salons, meat and vegetable shops, and small veterinary clinics are owned by several people in the research region. We also found that daily labor and agriculture are the main sources of income for some people in the study area. Table 4 presents the main occupations of the respondents.

Table 4 *Main Occupation of the Respondents*

Occupation	HHs	Percent
Hospitality (home-stay)	33	73.33
Labor	4	8.89
Mechanics	1	2.22
Service sector	1	2.22
Sale/business	1	2.22
Carpenter	2	4.45
Farmer	2	4.45
Driving	1	2.22
Public Servant	-	-
Total	45	100.00

Occupational Status
As shown in Table 4, among 45 households, 73.33% of members are engaged in hospitality, particularly homestay-based tourism. About 8.89% rely on labor work, while 2.22% are employed as mechanics, 2.22% in the service sector, 2.22% in trade or business, 4.45% in carpentry, 4.45% in farming, and 2.22% as drivers. None of the households reported employment in government service. This suggests that the majority are primarily involved in homestay tourism, while agriculture and other traditional occupations are practiced as supplementary activities.

Housing Structure
Field observations indicate that most houses in the study area are constructed with mud and wood, with a smaller number built using bricks. Roofing materials vary: 46.67% of households have zinc roofs,

13.33% have tiled roofs, 35.56% have concrete roofs, and 4.44% use locally made tiles. The dominance of zinc-roofed houses is linked to the growth of homestay services in the area.

Income and Expenditure
Homestays and agriculture represent the major sources of household income. According to Table 5, 42.22% of households earn an annual income ranging from NRs. 1,000 to 10,000, while 24.44% fall within the range of NRs. 10,001 to 20,000, and 22.22% report earnings between NRs. 20,001 and 50,000. Only 6.68% of households make between NRs. 50,001 and 100,000 annually, and 4.44% earn more than NRs. 100,000. These figures indicate that the majority of households have relatively low income. Regarding annual spending, 26.67% of households spend NRs. 1,000–10,000, whereas 40% spend between NRs. 10,001 and 20,000.

Table 5 *Estimated Annual Income of the Respondents*

Income			Expenditure		
Income (in Rs.)	HHs	Percent	Expenditure (in Rs)	HHs	Percent
<1000	-	-	<1000	-	-
1000-10000	19	42.22	1000 – 10000	12	26.67
10000-20000	11	24.44	10000 – 20000	18	40.00
20000-50000	10	22.22	20000 – 50000	13	28.89
50000-100000	3	6.68	50000-100000	2	4.44
>100000	2	4.44	>100000	-	-
Total	45	100.00	Total	45	100.00

Homestay tourism and agriculture are key sources of income for households in the study area, although most earn relatively low incomes. Consistent with the findings of Pasa (2020), homestay tourism is contributing to improved livelihoods and expanded economic opportunities for local communities. This indicates that further efforts are needed to strengthen and diversify income sources to enhance the economic security of households in Bhadgaon.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that homestay tourism has emerged as the predominant livelihood source for households in Bhada Village, with more than 70% of respondents directly engaged in hospitality services. This aligns with Witchayakawin et al. (2020) and Yanes et al. (2019), who argue that community-based tourism, particularly homestays, provides rural communities with immediate economic benefits and opportunities to showcase their cultural heritage. In Bhada, the predominance of nuclear families coexisting alongside traditional joint family systems further suggests that homestay tourism is reshaping household structures, where smaller family units can independently manage homestays while extended families preserve traditional cultural practices. The relatively higher concentration of zinc-roofed houses in homestay-operating households indicates a direct link between tourism engagement and modest improvements in housing quality, reinforcing Sharpley's (2020) view that tourism not only stimulates income but also indirectly supports infrastructure development and social transformation.

Despite the economic opportunities, the income distribution pattern highlights significant limitations. Most households earn less than NRs. 50,000 annually, suggesting that while homestay tourism supplements livelihoods, it is not yet sufficient to provide sustained financial security. This mirrors Pasa's (2020) observation that homestay initiatives in Nepal contribute to livelihood diversification but often

remain constrained by low tourist inflows, inadequate marketing, and infrastructural bottlenecks. Furthermore, the concentration of visitors in short stays (1–2 days) limits the potential for higher earnings and suggests the need for better promotional strategies and diversified tourism packages, as emphasized by Middleton and Clarke (2001). Culturally, the findings affirm Acharya's (2010) argument that tourism fosters cross-cultural exchanges, as Bhada's Tharu festivals, dances, and rituals are becoming an important attraction. However, to ensure long-term sustainability, income diversification, improved marketing, and stronger institutional support are essential to transform homestay tourism from a supplementary to a primary livelihood strategy in the region.

Thus, the study highlights that homestay tourism in Bhada Village plays a significant role in sustaining livelihoods, preserving Tharu culture, and creating local employment opportunities, though most households still earn relatively modest incomes. While the sector has improved housing conditions and fostered cultural exchange, challenges such as short tourist stays, limited marketing, and infrastructural constraints continue to restrict its full potential. Strengthening promotional strategies, diversifying income sources, and ensuring community participation are therefore crucial to making homestay tourism a sustainable driver of rural economic growth and cultural preservation in Kailali.

Conclusion

Homestay tourism in Bhada Village demonstrates how community-led initiatives can promote sustainable development for indigenous communities in Nepal. By integrating income generation with cultural preservation and environmental stewardship, such models reveal the potential of tourism to address social, economic, and ecological challenges simultaneously. The Bhada experience underscores the importance of culturally sensitive approaches that empower local residents and protect their unique identity. Looking ahead, targeted investments in infrastructure and marketing will be essential to expand benefits while safeguarding the community's authenticity. These lessons provide valuable guidance for policymakers and development practitioners working with marginalized populations.

Policy Recommendations

To strengthen Bhada's homestay tourism, several policy actions are recommended. Provincial authorities should establish clear operational guidelines and designate agencies responsible for registration and oversight, while government support should focus on improving infrastructure and building local capacity. Local governments need to enhance marketing strategies, and communities should actively promote their unique cultural assets. Key measures include digital promotion, equitable guest allocation, staff training for tourism agencies, and the adoption of inclusive policies that support both community and private homestays. Additionally, regular management committee meetings should be held to address operational challenges, ensuring sustainable development and long-term growth.

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Role of Social Media in Agricultural Knowledge Dissemination: Perspectives from Tharu Farmers Residing in Tikapur Kailai, Nepal

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Abstract

Social media integration into agricultural operations has emerged as a transformative force in agricultural development, with Nepalese farmers increasingly adopting these platforms. This study assesses the role of social media in agricultural knowledge dissemination among Tharu farmers in Tikapur (Block 32), Kailali District, Sudurpashchim Province, Nepal, using a descriptive and explanatory research design with cross-sectional survey methods. Data were collected from 50 participating farmers via self-administered semi-structured questionnaires to evaluate adoption rates, platform preferences, and perceived utility. Analysis through MS Excel revealed varied digital engagement: while most respondents regularly use social media, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp dominate the digital landscape, with Twitter and LinkedIn showing minimal uptake. Farmers expressed mixed perceptions, ranging from optimism to skepticism, about social media's impact on agricultural practices. Findings indicate that farmers primarily use these platforms for information sharing and problem-solving rather than commercial applications, highlighting untapped economic potential. To maximize benefits, the study recommends that local governments implement digital literacy programs, develop localized agricultural content in native languages, improve rural digital infrastructure, and foster public-private partnerships to create farmer-friendly marketplaces—all while integrating these initiatives with traditional knowledge systems to empower smallholder farmers. The study implies that policies enhancing digital literacy, localized content, and infrastructure are key to leveraging social media for Tharu farmers' agricultural development.

Keywords: Tharu farmers, communication, digital extension, social media

Introduction

In recent years, the swift proliferation of social media has transformed global communication, networking, and information-sharing dynamics. Initially regarded as an urban-centric phenomenon, its infiltration into rural regions—especially within agricultural communities—has gained notable significance (Barber et al., 2019). This transition offers a distinct opportunity to analyze the impact of digital platforms on conventional agricultural methods and rural economies. Farmers globally are utilizing

social media to share knowledge, deliberate on best practices (Gupta & Jain, 2018), and obtain real-time market information as digital connectivity expands (Khan et al., 2019).

Social media comprises various interactive online platforms that enable the creation, sharing, and curation of user-generated content (Davis, 2016). Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram function as essential mediums for communication, collaboration, and commerce. In 2023, roughly 4.7 billion individuals—almost 60% of the worldwide population—engage with social media, predominantly utilizing messaging and social networking platforms (Dollarhide, 2024). These platforms differ in structure, user demographics, and functionality, yet they all aim to promote digital interaction (Bite et al., 2017).

In agriculture, social media functions as a potent instrument for networking, marketing, and the dissemination of knowledge. Agricultural producers can engage with colleagues, extension services, and purchasers, transcending geographical limitations and improving market accessibility (Varner, 2018). Research underscores its significance in enhancing brand awareness, customer engagement, and revenue generation within the agribusiness sector (Uitz, 2012). Nonetheless, obstacles including restricted internet access, deficiencies in digital literacy, and apprehensions regarding information reliability impede extensive adoption (Acheampong & Kofi, 2019; Al-Shaikh, 2023).

In Nepal, social media usage has seen substantial growth. There were approximately 13.5 million active social media users, accounting for about 43.5% of the total population. This significant penetration underscores the increasing relevance of digital platforms in various sectors, including agriculture (Gyawali, 2022). Despite its global reach, the impact of social media on marginalized farming communities, such as the Tharu people of Block 32, Tikapur, Nepal, remains understudied. While digital platforms offer potential benefits—such as improved agricultural techniques and market linkages—their actual utilization and perceived value among Tharu farmers are unclear. Socioeconomic factors, technological barriers, and cultural preferences may influence adoption rates, necessitating further research.

This study aims to assess the role of social media in shaping agricultural knowledge dissemination within the Tharu community of Tikapur, Kailali. By analyzing usage patterns, perceived benefits, and adoption challenges, the research aims to bridge existing knowledge gaps and inform policy interventions. The findings could guide agricultural extension programs, digital literacy initiatives, and rural development strategies tailored to the needs of Tharu farmers. Ultimately, this study seeks to empower the community by exploring how social media can enhance productivity, sustainability, and market integration in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Methodology

The research was carried out in Samitipur, Block 32 of Tikapur, situated in the Kailali district of Nepal's Far Western Province. Block 32 is situated at 28.5368° North latitude and 81.1181° East longitude, with an elevation of 156.04 meters above mean sea level, and is defined by a tropical climate. A descriptive and explanatory research design was utilized, accompanied by a cross-sectional survey strategy. The study's target population comprised the Tharu farming community in Samitipur. A total of 50 farmers were chosen through simple random sampling to examine their perceptions of the influence of social media on agriculture.

Data were gathered utilizing semi-structured questionnaires. A Likert scale was utilized to assess variables including the frequency of social media usage and its perceived influence on agricultural

practices. This scale is extensively utilized for assessing attitudes, perceptions, and opinions on particular subjects. The gathered data were encoded, inputted, and analyzed utilizing Microsoft Excel. Excel was selected for its user-friendliness and capacity to conduct fundamental data analysis, encompassing chart generation, data input, and shape modification. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and visual representations (charts and diagrams), were employed to analyze the socio-demographic and agricultural characteristics of the respondents, encompassing age, gender, educational attainment, land holdings, and additional factors.

To analyze and prioritize the purposes for which farmers use social media, the study further applied a forced ranking scale. This method enabled the quantification of farmers' preferences by calculating an index value of importance using the following formula.

$$Iimp= \sum si*fi / N$$

Iimp = Index value of importance
$\sum$= Summation
S i = Scale value of i th intensity
f i = Frequency of i th response
N = Total number of respondents

The following section presents findings under the headings: *Tharu Community and the Use of Social Media*, *Characteristics of the Farmers*, *Social Media Profile and Frequency of Social Media App Used*, *Perception of Farmers Regarding the Effectiveness of Social Media in Agriculture Use*, *Uses of Social Media*, and *Social Media Use on Information Accessibility and Knowledge Acquisition*.

Findings

Tharu Community and the Use of Social Media

The word *shavir*, meaning a Theravada Buddhist, is most likely the source of the word थारु (*thāru*). Located in central Nepal's Terai region, the Tharu people believe they are native to the land and descended from Gautama Buddha. In western Nepal, the Rana Tharu people identify with the Thar Desert and believe they are descended from the Rajputs who moved into the forests in the sixteenth century (Chaudhary, 2024).

According to Nepal Tourism Board (2025), the Tharu are the majority ethnic group of the Terai. They extend westward into the foothills of Kumaon and throughout the plains of Nepal. Most likely, the Tharu were the first people to inhabit the Terai. The Rana Tharu people of western Terai claim Rajput origin, despite generally having Mongoloid features and a dark-brown complexion. The 2023 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) reports that there are 1,807,124 people belonging to the Tharu community, making up 6.2% of the total population of Nepal. Among them, 31,821 Tharu people live in Tikapur Municipality, accounting for roughly 41.82% of its population (National Statistics Office, 2023). The Tharu community, mainly residing in Tikapur Municipality No. 1, Samitipur, in rural landscapes, represents an important population structure in the country's agricultural sector.

Known for their rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted connection with the land, Tharu farmers play a vital role in maintaining agricultural production and food security in the region. Amid the evolving digital landscape, Tharu farmers are increasingly using social media platforms to obtain agricultural information, share knowledge, and communicate with peers.

Characteristics of the Farmers

The demographic attributes of the surveyed farmers, encompassing age categories, gender distribution, religious affiliation, and educational attainment, are summarized in Table 1. This demographic profile provides critical contextual insights regarding the study population, emphasizing significant social and cultural factors that could influence technology adoption trends in agricultural communities. These variables function as essential baseline indicators for evaluating farmers' perceptions of and utilization patterns regarding social media platforms in their agricultural practices.

Table1: Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-30	10	20.00
	30-40	16	32.00
	40-50	13	26.00
	>50	11	22.00
Gender	Male	22	44.00
	Female	28	56.00
Religion	Hinduism	44	88.00
	Christianity	6	12.00
Education attainment	Illiterate	8	16.00
	Primary	9	18.00
	Secondary	13	26.00
	Intermediate	15	30.00
	Bachelors	4	8.00
	Masters	1	2.00
Total		50	100.00

Table 1 depicts the demographic distribution of the respondents. The data indicate that middle-aged individuals (30–50 years) represent the largest segment of the sample, signifying their preeminent presence in the study. Younger respondents (ages 20–30) constitute a smaller proportion. The percentage of respondents aged over 50 is almost equivalent to that of the 20–30 age group, indicating a relatively balanced distribution between these two age categories.

Women comprise 56% of the sample, indicating a majority, whereas men account for 44%, reflecting slightly lower male participation. A significant majority—88% of participants—identified as Hindu, while merely 12% identified as Christian, indicating limited religious diversity within the sample. The educational attainment of respondents exhibited variability. A majority, 56%, attained a secondary to intermediate level of education. A minority—34%—were either illiterate or possessed only rudimentary literacy skills. Significantly, only 10% of respondents possessed a bachelor's or master's degree, reflecting a relatively low level of higher education within the community.

Thus, surveyed farmers were predominantly middle-aged, female, and Hindu, with most having attained secondary to intermediate education. Higher education levels were rare, and a notable proportion of

respondents had low or no formal education, which may pose challenges for the adoption of technological developments in the community.

Social Media Profile and Frequency of Social Media App Used

The respondents' presence on social media platforms and the frequency of app usage provide insights into their digital engagement patterns and potential for adopting technology-based practices. Table 2 illustrates distinct preferences in social media platform usage among the farmers.

Facebook (Rank I) was identified as the most utilized platform, followed by YouTube (Rank II), TikTok (Rank III), WhatsApp (Rank IV), Twitter (Rank V), and LinkedIn (Rank VI). This ranking reflects a pronounced inclination towards visual and interactive platforms like Facebook and YouTube, which are presumably valued for their accessibility, content diversity, and user-friendliness. Conversely, professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn exhibited negligible engagement among respondents, indicating a lack of relevance or awareness in rural agricultural settings. These usage patterns offer valuable insights for formulating agricultural extension strategies that correspond with the digital behaviors and preferences of farmers—particularly by leveraging popular platforms for efficient content distribution and interaction.

Table 2 Frequency of Social Media App Used

Social Media App	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Rank
Facebook	25	4	2	1	0	0	32	I
YouTube	3	13	12	3	1	0	32	II
TikTok	2	10	9	7	3	1	32	III
WhatsApp	1	3	4	13	10	1	32	IV
Twitter	1	1	2	5	15	8	32	V
LinkedIn	0	1	3	3	3	22	32	VI

Table 2 indicates that 32 respondents (64%) reported possessing a social media profile. A notable minority—36% of the sample—reported that they did not utilize any social media platform. Among social media users, Facebook was the predominant platform, followed by YouTube. TikTok was ranked third, and WhatsApp was designated as the fourth most utilized application. Conversely, Twitter and LinkedIn were the least employed platforms, with only a handful of respondents indicating any usage. Most farmers maintain social media profiles, predominantly using Facebook and YouTube, which is encouraging for leveraging these platforms in agricultural outreach and technology adoption.

Perception of Farmers Regarding the Effectiveness of Social Media in Agriculture Use

The farmers' perceptions of social media effectiveness in agriculture have been categorized across five levels: Highly Effective, Effective, Moderately Effective, Ineffective, and Unknown (Table 3). The distribution reveals divergent views, with some farmers recognizing the agricultural value of social media, while others remain skeptical or uncertain about its utility. These varying perspectives underscore the complex adoption dynamics of digital tools in farming communities, where perceived effectiveness significantly influences technology uptake.

Table 3 Perception of farmers regarding the effectiveness of Social Media in Agriculture Use

Indices	Highly Effective	Effective	Moderately Effective	Ineffective	Unknown
Response Frequency	5	10	10	7	18

Table 3 illustrates a varied spectrum of perceptions among respondents concerning the efficacy of social media in agricultural practices. Twenty-five respondents, categorized as Highly Effective, Effective, and Moderately Effective, conveyed a favorable perception, asserting that they believe social media contributes positively to agriculture. Conversely, seven respondents deemed social media ineffective, indicating that they perceive minimal or no influence of digital platforms on their agricultural practices.

A significant segment of the sample—18 respondents—was classified as Unknown, signifying insufficient experience or uncertainty regarding the role of social media in agriculture. The findings indicate a diverse perspective within the agricultural community: while many acknowledge the potential of social media in farming, others are either skeptical or lack awareness.

Uses of Social Media

The farmers' primary uses of social media in agriculture include information seeking (I) and sharing (II), which dominate, while commercial uses such as buying/selling (IV) and branding (VI) are less common. The results highlight social media's stronger role in knowledge exchange than in agricultural marketing (Table 4).

Regarding farmers' goals and preferences for using digital platforms in agricultural activities, the ranking of characteristics pertaining to social media use in agriculture provides valuable insights into their priorities and engagement patterns.

Table 4 Ranking on Use of Social Media

Categories	Rank
Information Seeking	I
Sharing Information	II
Solution Seeking	III
Selling/buying Agri-commodity	IV
Knowing Market Rates	V
Branding of Agri-commodity	VI

Table 4 shows that at the top of the list, "Information Seeking" reflects the importance farmers place on using social media to find pertinent agricultural information. "Sharing Information," which comes next, emphasizes the value of knowledge sharing and peer learning within the agricultural community. The fact that "Solution Seeking" ranks third indicates farmers' reliance on social media to solve problems and address issues related to agriculture.

"Buying/Selling Agri-commodities" recognizes the potential of social media for transactions, but it lags behind the functions outlined above, highlighting the predominance of problem-solving and information exchange. "Branding of Agri-commodities" and "Market Rates" are ranked lower.

Social Media Use on Information Accessibility and Knowledge Acquisition

The prevalent use of social media, especially platforms like Facebook and YouTube, is encouraging for enhancing information accessibility and knowledge acquisition among farmers in the community. The divergent perspectives among farmers regarding social media's role in agricultural information dissemination are analyzed below in Figure 1.
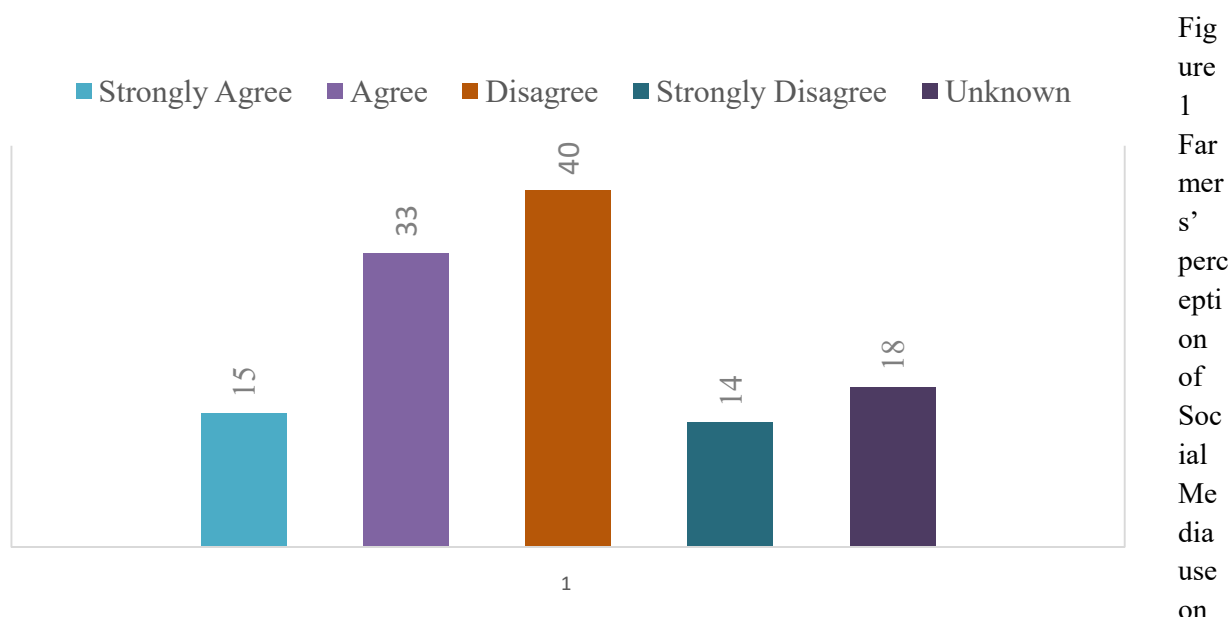
Figure 1 Farmers' perception of Social Media use on Information Accessibility

Figure 1 reveals that most respondents disagreed with the assertion that social media facilitates information accessibility and knowledge acquisition in agriculture. This indicates a degree of skepticism or discontent regarding the efficacy of digital platforms in providing pertinent agricultural information. A significant number of respondents concurred, indicating an acknowledgment of the potential advantages of social media in improving access to agricultural knowledge and best practices.

A notable proportion of participants categorized themselves as "Strongly Disagree," indicating a distinctly unfavorable view of social media's influence in this area. This group may be affected by factors such as digital illiteracy, concerns regarding misinformation, or a deficiency of pertinent content in local languages. A segment of respondents selected the "Unknown" category, signifying ambiguity, indecision, or inadequate familiarity with social media as an agricultural instrument.

Discussions of Findings

The function of social media in the dissemination of agricultural information is characterized by both potential and ongoing challenges. This research emphasizes that although "information seeking" was

identified as the primary use of social media by respondents, numerous farmers continue to doubt its overall effectiveness. This disparity between potential and perceived value reflects larger systemic obstacles. A significant portion of participants opposed or strongly opposed the idea that social media facilitates agricultural knowledge acquisition, reflecting apprehensions regarding digital illiteracy, skepticism toward online content, and the lack of information in local languages. The findings align with Kumara & Jahanara (2024), who indicated that although the utility of social media is acknowledged theoretically, practical constraints—particularly concerning trustworthiness and usability—impede its effectiveness.

Notwithstanding these reservations, a portion of respondents indicated moderate to high satisfaction levels with social media platforms, consistent with the findings of Sandeep et al. (2022). Their research highlighted that platforms with visually appealing and user-friendly interfaces are more likely to cultivate favorable attitudes among farmers. This underscores the essential importance of design and accessibility in influencing users' perceptions of value.

The functional hierarchy of social media platforms offers insights into user behavior and preferences. Facebook and YouTube lead the rankings due to their multimedia functionalities and extensive reach in rural areas. These platforms allow farmers to access a variety of content—videos, live demonstrations, and vernacular discussions—that facilitate decision-making. Conversely, WhatsApp, despite its lower ranking for formal information retrieval, is essential for community-level peer exchanges, especially via trust-based group interactions. Research in India and Nepal confirms WhatsApp's effectiveness in facilitating informal, yet pertinent, knowledge transfer at the grassroots level (Balaji & Kavaskar, 2024; Bohara & Gurung, 2025).

Socio-economic and demographic factors additionally influence the efficacy of social media in agriculture. Madhushekar et al. (2024) identified strong positive correlations between social media usage and variables including educational attainment, scientific orientation, income, and prior exposure to digital platforms. Comparable patterns manifest in Nepal: younger, technologically adept farmers possessing at least a secondary education are more inclined to employ mobile applications and social media for agricultural guidance and market insights (Tiwari et al., 2024). In contrast, older farmers and those with limited education exhibit reduced adoption rates, as demonstrated in a study in Rishing Rural Municipality, where many farmers possessed mobile phones but used them solely for basic communication rather than accessing agro-advisory content (Bohara & Gurung, 2025).

Thus, the findings indicate that while social media holds significant potential for agricultural information dissemination, its effectiveness within the Tharu community is constrained by factors such as digital illiteracy, language barriers, and trust issues. Platforms like Facebook and YouTube are preferred among Tharu farmers for formal knowledge acquisition, whereas WhatsApp remains vital for informal peer-to-peer exchanges. Overall, socio-economic and demographic factors, particularly age and education, strongly influence farmers' adoption and use of social media for agricultural purposes.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study concludes that farmers primarily engage with social media platforms for basic agricultural purposes, such as information sharing and problem-solving, rather than for commercial applications, indicating untapped potential for economic empowerment through digital tools. The preference for certain platforms reflects farmers' value for user-friendly interfaces and practical, multimedia content that aligns with their daily agricultural needs. However, varying perceptions about social media's effectiveness highlight challenges in ensuring reliable information flow and building trust in digital solutions. The

continued digital exclusion of some community members underscores persistent barriers that must be addressed.

To maximize the benefits of social media in agricultural practices, local government authorities must enhance digital literacy, develop locally relevant agricultural content, improve digital infrastructure, and create pathways for farmers to transition from information consumers to active participants in digital marketplaces. Extension services and policymakers should focus on integrating these digital tools with traditional farming knowledge systems to create sustainable, farmer-centric solutions.

Overall, the study highlights the transformative potential of social media in agriculture when implemented through culturally appropriate, needs-based strategies. Future efforts should focus on developing inclusive digital ecosystems that support both the technological and socio-economic needs of smallholder farmers, ultimately contributing to more resilient and connected agricultural communities.

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Agricultural Transformation in Nepal: An Econometric Analysis

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Abstract

Agricultural transformation in Nepal, reflecting changes in productivity, structure, and economic contribution, is influenced by various socioeconomic and demographic factors. This study examines how these factors influence agricultural value added (% of GDP) in the country. For this purpose, data from two sources—the World Bank and the World Population Prospects 2024—were used, in which an econometric analysis approach was applied to assess the level of agricultural transformation in Nepal. While the overall relationship was statistically significant, the individual effects of the independent variables were too trivial to establish meaningful interactions. To address this issue, econometrics of three additional regression techniques—Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net—were employed to better identify the true contributions of the independent variables to the dependent variable. Key variables such as sex ratio, population growth rate, agriculture-related imports and exports, urban population, remittances, and per capita gross national income emerged as the most relevant factors in explaining variations in agriculture value added. The findings imply that targeted policies addressing demographic, economic, and trade-related factors are essential to effectively enhance agricultural value added and support Nepal's agricultural transformation.

Keywords: agricultural transformation, Pooled OLS, Ridge, Lasso, Elastic Net Regressions

Introduction

Agricultural transformation represents the shift from traditional, subsistence-oriented farming methods to contemporary, commercially-oriented agricultural systems characterized by increased productivity (Pasa et al., 2024). This fundamental transition involves significant changes in food production systems, which are shaped by multiple interrelated factors. While technological progress, efficient resource allocation, and improved management techniques play crucial roles, demographic characteristics and social dynamics equally influence agricultural outcomes (Pasa, 2017). Population trends, labor availability, and societal structures interact with production systems, creating complex relationships that determine the pace and nature of agricultural development. The modernization process consequently reflects not just economic and technological changes, but also broader societal transformations that affect how food is produced and distributed. Variations in population size, structure, and behavior exert pressure on agricultural production through shifts in demand and labor supply. Conversely, changes within the agricultural sector can impact rural livelihoods and demographic trends.

In general, Malthus (1978) posited that population growth would inevitably outstrip food production, leading to resource scarcity, famine, and misery. Initially, Nepal seemed to fit the Malthusian narrative. Rapid population growth, coupled with limited technological advancements, strained food production capacity, particularly in the hills and mountains. Malthus underestimated technological progress (Boserup, 1965). The introduction of Green Revolution technologies (HYVs, fertilizers) temporarily boosted food production, challenging the Malthusian prediction in the short term (Wrigley, 2004). Nepalese agriculture's persistent reliance on conventional farming techniques, combined with the growing effects of climate change, continues to threaten future food security (Shrestha & Gurung, 2018), indicating that Malthusian warnings still hold some validity. The catastrophic 2015 earthquake exposed the fragility of Nepal's agricultural networks when supply chains collapsed (Gauchan et al., 2017),

momentarily supporting Malthus' predictions about resource shortages during emergencies. Nevertheless, the nation's ability to avert a full-blown famine through prompt grain imports after the disaster revealed shortcomings in Malthus' original propositions, demonstrating how modern trade mechanisms can overcome temporary production deficits.

Marx (1867) focused on the social relations of production, arguing that unequal access to land, resources, and power creates exploitation and hinders agricultural development. Nepal's history of feudal land ownership patterns, caste-based inequalities, and limited access to credit and technology for smallholder farmers align with the Marxist critique. Landlessness and marginalization of certain ethnic groups exacerbate food insecurity. Land reform efforts in Nepal have been largely unsuccessful due to political resistance and implementation challenges (Bhandari & Linghorn, 2011). This has perpetuated unequal access to land, hindering agricultural productivity and reinforcing the Marxist critique of class-based exploitation in agriculture. The dominance of large landowners in certain regions contributes to the marginalization of small farmers and limits their access to markets and resources. The inequitable distribution of land and resources limits the productivity of smallholder farmers, constricting overall national food production capacity (Blaikie et al., 2002).

Boserup (1965) argued that population pressure stimulates agricultural innovation and intensification. Necessity is the mother of invention. Boserup's theory has some relevance in Nepal. Population growth in certain areas has driven farmers to adopt more intensive farming practices, such as terracing, intercropping, and the use of organic fertilizers. However, Boserup's model assumes access to resources and technology, which is not always the case in Nepal. Environmental degradation, climate change, and limited access to credit and extension services can constrain the ability of farmers to intensify production (Raji et al., 2024). In the Terai region, population density has encouraged the adoption of HYVs and irrigation, leading to increased rice production. However, this intensification has also led to environmental problems such as soil degradation and water scarcity, highlighting the limitations of Boserup's theory when resource management is inadequate. While population pressure has encouraged intensification, the absence of sustainable management practices and resource limitations constrain further increases in food production (Hossain & Debnath, 2019).

Schultz (1964) argued that traditional agriculture is not inherently inefficient but operates efficiently within its constraints. He emphasized the importance of investing in human capital, technology, and infrastructure to increase productivity and transition to modern agriculture. In the context of Nepal, Schultz's concepts can be used to tackle issues like low agricultural productivity, restricted access to contemporary technology, and dependence on subsistence-level farming. By focusing on education, training, and the adoption of innovative agricultural practices, Nepal could enhance its agricultural output and support rural development.

Chayanov (1966) focused on the unique characteristics of peasant economies, where household labor and consumption needs drive agricultural production decisions. Chayanov's theory is highly relevant in Nepal, where a significant proportion of farmers are smallholders engaged in subsistence or semi-subsistence agriculture (Macfarlane, 1976). Household labor availability, family size, and consumption requirements heavily influence cropping patterns and production levels. Remittances have altered household labor dynamics, leading to a decline in agricultural labor and a shift towards less labor-intensive crops or even land abandonment in some areas. This supports Chayanov's emphasis on household-level decision-making in agricultural production (Fricke, 1986). The decline in agricultural labor due to remittances can lead to decreased production of traditional crops, shifting towards more market-oriented but less labor-intensive alternatives, potentially compromising food diversity and nutritional security.

Research Gap

Despite extensive theoretical and empirical insights from Malthus, Marx, Boserup, Schultz, and Chayanov, existing studies on Nepalese agriculture often examine population dynamics, land distribution, or technological adoption in isolation, without systematically integrating demographic, socioeconomic, and agricultural factors to explain national agricultural productivity. Moreover, prior research frequently relies on fragmented datasets, short time spans, or qualitative observations, limiting the ability to quantify the combined effects of these variables on agricultural value added (% of GDP). This study addresses this gap by employing a comprehensive, longitudinal dataset spanning 1960–2023, incorporating demographic indicators (population density, growth, fertility), economic variables (GNI, remittances, urbanization), and agricultural measures (crop, livestock, and food production indices, fertilizer use, land allocation). Using robust econometric techniques, including pooled OLS and regularized regression models (Ridge, Lasso, Elastic Net), the research systematically evaluates the relative importance and interplay of these factors, providing a more holistic and quantifiable understanding of the determinants of agricultural productivity in Nepal. In this background, the study aims to assess agricultural value added (% of GDP) in Nepal, which has been influenced by various socioeconomic, agricultural, and demographic variables.

Methodology

Data
This study used secondary sources of data on Nepal, generated from published reports and indexes (Martins et al., 2018). Specifically, data were collected from the World Bank and World Population Prospects websites, including population density, population growth rate, agriculture, forestry, and fishery value added, livestock production index, crop, food, and cereal production indexes, agricultural land, rural population, fertilizer consumption (kilograms per hectare of arable land), per capita PCA, and gross national income (see Annex).

Approach
This study adopted a hypothetico-deductive approach (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008), a fundamental framework in scientific research that integrates both inductive and deductive reasoning to evaluate theories and expand understanding. The research process involves seven key steps: identifying the problem, developing a hypothesis, designing the study, defining measurements, collecting data, analyzing the data, and drawing general conclusions. Each step is influenced by theory and, in turn, influences theoretical understanding. A defining characteristic of the research process is its cyclical nature, usually beginning with a problem and culminating in provisional empirical generalizations.

The process starts with observations that lead to the development of a hypothesis (inductive reasoning). From this hypothesis, specific and testable predictions are generated (deductive reasoning). These predictions are then rigorously tested or further observed. If the results contradict the predictions, the hypothesis is modified or rejected. If the results support the predictions, the hypothesis is strengthened, although it remains subject to ongoing evaluation and is not considered definitively proven.

Hypothesis
Food production in Nepal is significantly influenced by population dynamics, agricultural sector performance, livestock and cereal production, rural population characteristics, economic indicators, and agricultural input usage.

Econometric Analysis

This hypothesis is designed to be tested using pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. The study regresses the food production index on the listed independent variables. If pooled OLS fails to adequately examine the interrelationship between variables, three additional regression analyses (Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net) will be used to assess the extent to which independent variables contribute to the dependent variable. The mathematical formulas for Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net regressions all build upon the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression formula but add penalty terms to address multicollinearity and improve model generalization (Hastie et al., 2009). The goal of OLS is to reduce the total of the squared differences (residuals) between the actual observed values and the values predicted by the model.

The formula for the estimated coefficients (β) is:

$\hat{\beta} = (X^TX)^{-1}X^Ty$

Where:

$\hat{\beta}$ is the vector of estimated coefficients.

X is the design matrix (predictor variables).

y is the response vector (dependent variable).

X^T is the transpose of X.

$(X^TX)^{-1}$ is the inverse of the matrix product of X^T and X.

Ridge Regression. Ridge regression adds an L2 penalty term to the OLS objective function. This penalty is proportional to the sum of the squared coefficients.

*Minimize: $\|y - X\beta\|^2 + \lambda\|\beta\|^2$

Where:

$\|y - X\beta\|^2$ is the sum of squared residuals (same as in OLS).

λ (lambda) is the regularization parameter (a non-negative constant). It controls the strength of the penalty. Larger λ leads to more shrinkage.

$\|\beta\|^2$ is the L2 norm (sum of squared coefficients).

The solution for the estimated coefficients in Ridge regression doesn't have a closed-form solution like OLS, but it can be efficiently computed using numerical methods.

Lasso Regression. Lasso regression incorporates an L1 penalty into the OLS objective function, where the penalty is based on the sum of the absolute values of the model's coefficients.

*Minimize: $\|y - X\beta\|^2 + \lambda\|\beta\|_1$

Where:

$\|y - X\beta\|^2$ is the sum of squared residuals (same as in OLS).

λ (lambda) is the regularization parameter (a non-negative constant).

$\|\beta\|_1$ is the L1 norm (sum of absolute values of coefficients).

Like Ridge regression, Lasso doesn't have a closed-form solution and requires numerical methods for computation.

Elastic Net Regression. Elastic Net regression combines both the L1 and L2 penalty terms. The objective function is:

Minimize: $\|y - X\beta\|^2 + \lambda[\alpha\|\beta\|_1 + (1-\alpha)\|\beta\|^2]$

Where:

$\|y - X\beta\|^2$ is the sum of squared residuals (same as in OLS).

λ (lambda) is the regularization parameter (a non-negative constant).

α (alpha) is the mixing parameter ($0 \leq \alpha \leq 1$).

$\alpha = 0$: Pure Ridge regression.

α = 1: Pure Lasso regression.

0 < α < 1: Elastic Net regression (a blend of Ridge and Lasso).

$\|\beta\|_1$ is the L1 norm (sum of absolute values of coefficients).

$\|\beta\|^2$ is the L2 norm (sum of squared coefficients).

Again, Elastic Net requires numerical methods for solving the optimization problem.

All three methods build upon OLS regression by adding penalty terms to the objective function. The choice of method and the tuning parameters (λ and α) depend on the specific characteristics of the data and the goals of the analysis. Ridge regression is effective for handling multicollinearity, Lasso performs variable selection, and Elastic Net combines the benefits of both. The regularization parameters (λ) are typically chosen using cross-validation to optimize predictive performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results of the analysis aimed at testing the hypothesis that food production in Nepal is influenced by a range of demographic, economic, and agricultural factors. The discussion integrates descriptive statistics, pooled OLS regression, and advanced regularized regression methods (Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net) to evaluate the contributions of population dynamics, agricultural sector performance, livestock and crop production, rural population characteristics, economic indicators, and input usage to agricultural productivity.

Prior to regression analysis, missing values in the dataset were addressed using a combination of imputation methods, including backfilling, linear interpolation, time series decomposition, and regression-based prediction, to ensure a complete and reliable dataset. The results highlight key patterns, identify robust predictors, and examine the relative importance of each factor, providing a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of food production in the Nepali context.

Methods of Imputation

Backfilling (Next Observation Carried Backward – NOCB) Since the missing values in Nepal's agricultural data occur at the start of the series, the earliest available value, for example from 1965, can be used to fill in the preceding gaps. This approach is reasonable if we assume that the values in the early 1960s were similar to those in 1965. However, it should be used with caution, as it assumes no significant changes occurred during that period.

Linear Interpolation (Extrapolation)
The trend from the available data can be extrapolated to estimate the missing values for Nepal. Since data for several years after the missing period are available, a linear model can be fitted to the existing data and projected backward. This assumes a relatively constant linear trend. While simple to implement and understand, this method may be inaccurate if the variable does not follow a linear trend.

Time Series Decomposition and Extrapolation
A more sophisticated approach involves decomposing the time series for Nepal's agricultural indicators into trend, seasonal, and random components. The trend component can then be extrapolated backward, and the seasonal and random components added back (if applicable). This method is suitable if the data exhibit seasonality or a clear trend.

Regression with External Predictors
If other variables correlated with Nepal's agriculture value added (% of GDP) (AGR_GDP) are available—such as rural population percentage, fertilizer use, or agricultural land area—a regression

model can be built to predict AGR_GDP based on these predictors. The model can then be used to impute missing values for 1960–1964.

The study combined all four approaches. For example, linear extrapolation was applied first and then refined using a regression model with external predictors. The following table summarizes the socioeconomic and agricultural variables for Nepal (Table 1).

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis	SE	VIF
Population Density	137.64	44.26	68.78	201.90	-0.08	-1.54	5.53	1.34
Sex Ratio	100.00	3.85	91.53	103.62	-1.00	-0.52	0.48	1.53
Population Growth Rate	1.70	0.80	-0.14	3.00	-0.88	-0.58	0.10	1.36
Total Fertility	4.43	1.49	1.98	6.09	-0.48	-1.46	0.19	1.33
Life expectancy	55.62	10.51	38.70	70.40	-0.13	-1.52	1.31	1.41
Agriculture Added Value (% of GDP)	44.28	15.11	20.91	69.01	0.20	-1.23	1.89	1.67
Livestock Production Index	62.38	31.96	25.51	144.45	1.06	0.38	3.99	1.54
Crop Production Index	53.50	31.83	20.08	116.66	0.63	-1.00	3.98	1.44
Food Production Index	55.35	31.83	21.05	123.18	0.71	-0.78	3.98	1.48
Agriculture related Import	1.75	0.98	0.00	5.32	1.35	2.93	0.12	1.46
Agriculture Related Export	12.92	11.84	0.45	48.02	1.42	1.35	1.48	1.46
Urban (% of Total Population)	10.69	5.94	3.48	21.90	0.34	-1.34	0.74	1.84
Remittances (% of GDP)	7.67	10.28	0.03	27.63	0.85	-1.11	1.29	1.51
Dependency on 15-65	75.08	8.16	54.02	82.41	-1.31	0.40	1.02	1.52
Informal Economy (DGE method)	44.06	9.36	30.04	61.80	0.25	-1.20	1.17	1.37
Fertilizer Consumption	27.58	29.61	0.08	115.33	1.28	0.87	3.70	1.61
Gross National Income Per Capita	346.41	377.76	50.00	1430.00	1.52	1.05	47.22	1.59
Mean Years of Schooling	2.55	0.95	1.26	4.49	0.49	-0.88	0.12	1.21

Population density shows a relatively low skew (-0.08), suggesting a fairly symmetrical distribution. The sex ratio (100.00) indicates a near-equal balance between males and females. Population growth rate (1.70) is moderate, with a negative skew (-0.88), indicating a concentration of values below the mean. Total fertility (4.43) is relatively high, with a slightly negative skew (-0.48). Life expectancy (55.62) is moderate, with a near-symmetrical distribution.

Agricultural value added as a percentage of GDP (44.28) is substantial, with a slight positive skew (0.20). Livestock, crop, and food production indices exhibit positive skews, indicating a concentration of values below the mean, possibly suggesting a significant portion of the population engaged in low-productivity agriculture. Agriculture-related imports (1.75) and exports (12.92) show high positive skews, suggesting a concentration of values below the mean for imports and a more dispersed distribution for exports.

Urbanization (10.69% of the total population) is relatively low, with a positive skew (0.34). Remittances as a percentage of GDP (7.67%) are moderate, with a positive skew (0.85). The dependency ratio (75.08) is high, with a negative skew (-1.31), indicating a relatively large proportion of dependents. The informal economy (44.06%) is substantial, with a slight positive skew (0.25). Fertilizer consumption (27.58) shows a high positive skew (1.28), suggesting that a small proportion of farmers use a large amount of fertilizer. Gross national income per capita (346.41) is low, with a high positive skew (1.52), indicating a large disparity in income distribution. Mean years of schooling (2.55) is low, with a positive skew (0.49).

In this dataset, VIF values remain relatively low, suggesting minimal multicollinearity concerns. However, higher VIF values in certain variables, such as agriculture-related indicators, suggest potential redundancy or correlation among predictors. Addressing high VIF can improve model reliability by ensuring independent variables provide distinct contributions.

The study used multiple imputation methods to address missing values in Nepal's agricultural and socioeconomic data. Descriptive statistics show moderate population density, high fertility, and moderate life expectancy. Agriculture contributes substantially to GDP, with livestock, crop, and food production skewed toward lower productivity. Urbanization and schooling are low, while income and fertilizer use show high variability. VIF values indicate minimal multicollinearity, providing a reliable basis for regression analysis.

Outputs of Pooled OLS Regression
"Outputs of Pooled OLS Regression" present the estimated results, showing how the independent variables collectively and individually affect the dependent variable, providing a baseline analysis of their relationships.

Table 1 evaluates the pooling model that examines the relationship between various socio-economic and demographic factors and agricultural GDP (AGR_GDP). The model is based on an unbalanced panel dataset comprising 64 observations across a defined time span, allowing for the assessment of different predictors and their impact on agricultural GDP.

The use of an unbalanced panel ($n = 64$, $T = 1–1$) indicates variability in the time dimension across entities, which can affect estimation reliability. The residuals range from -26.60 to 30.27, suggesting some predictions deviate significantly from observed values, indicating potential issues such as heteroscedasticity or model misspecification. The model's R-squared value of 0.40865 indicates that approximately 41 percent of the variance in AGR_GDP is explained by the included variables, which is relatively low and suggests that important predictors may be missing. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.1901 highlights that further variable addition yields diminishing returns, raising concerns about model efficiency. The F-statistic of 1.87 with a p-value of 0.047126 indicates that the model as a whole is statistically significant at the 5 percent level, suggesting that the predictors collectively provide a better fit than a null model.

The coefficient estimates show mixed signs, and many lack statistical significance. For example, the coefficient for population density (POP_DENS) is negative but not significant, suggesting negligible declines in agricultural GDP as population density increases. The sex ratio (SEX_RATIO) coefficient is positive (1.1280) and approaches significance ($p = 0.0563$), hinting that a balanced sex ratio may enhance agricultural productivity.

The total fertility rate (TOT_FER) shows a negative relationship with AGR_GDP that is not significant, challenging expected theories regarding high fertility rates and productivity. Variables related to agricultural indices (LIVE_IND, CROP_IND, FOOD_IND), agricultural trade (AGR_IMP, AGR_EXP), and economic dependency show coefficients that, while informative, largely lack statistical significance. The coefficient of agricultural exports is notably negative (-0.2525), contrary to expectations that greater exports would boost GDP. The mean years of schooling (MEAN_SCH) has a positive but insignificant effect (2.0027, $p = 0.2405$) on agricultural productivity, suggesting that educational attainment may not directly impact agricultural GDP in this context.

Overall, the pooling model reveals some insights but also significant limitations. With low explanatory power and many non-significant predictors, the model suggests several areas for improvement. Future

analyses could benefit from refining the variable selection process to include potentially impactful factors such as technological adoption, market access, and environmental variables. Attention should also be given to data quality to ensure a balanced panel approach or the application of imputation methods to address data sparsity. Finally, exploring the broader socio-economic context beyond the current variables may enrich our understanding of the dynamics affecting agricultural GDP. This model serves as a preliminary exploration that underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to effectively capture the complexities of agricultural productivity.

The summary statistics alone do not provide a complete picture of the data. Further analysis, including correlation analysis, regression modeling, and visualization techniques, is needed to fully understand the relationships between these variables and their implications for agricultural transformation. The high positive skewness in several variables suggests the presence of outliers, which should be investigated further. In this context, the study further analyzes panel data (1960–2023) using three regressions (Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net), employing methods designed for panel data that account for the correlation structure and time dependence (Table 2).

Table 2 compares the outputs of three regularized regression methods—Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net—applied to Nepal's agricultural and socioeconomic dataset. The table highlights differences in variable selection, coefficient shrinkage, intercept values, and key predictors across the models. Ridge regression retains all variables with smaller coefficients due to shrinkage, while Lasso and Elastic Net perform variable selection by setting many coefficients to zero, simplifying the model. The table also identifies variables consistently important across all models, as well as those with less reliable or inconsistent effects.

Table 2 Comparison of the Regression Outputs

Feature	Ridge Regression	Lasso Regression	Elastic Net Regression	Analysis
Variable Selection	No variables are excluded. All variables have non-zero coefficients (though some are very small).	Many variables have coefficients set to zero (indicated by "." in the output), indicating variable selection.	Similar to Lasso, many variables have coefficients set to zero, suggesting variable selection.	Lasso and Elastic Net are explicitly performing variable selection, simplifying the model. Ridge retains all variables, which may be useful if all variables have some predictive power, or the goal is only to improve prediction, not interpretation.
Coefficient Size/Shrinkage	Coefficients are generally smaller in magnitude compared to a standard linear regression, due to the shrinkage effect of Ridge.	Coefficients of the remaining variables (those not set to zero) tend to be larger in magnitude than in Ridge, as they compensate for the excluded variables.	Coefficients of the remaining variables tend to be between those of Ridge and Lasso.	The shrinkage effect is evident across all three methods, but most pronounced in Lasso. Larger coefficients in Lasso and Elastic Net indicate that the selected variables have a stronger individual impact.
Intercept	Relatively large positive intercept (14.62).	Negative intercept (-0.64).	Larger negative intercept (-3.05) than lasso.	The intercepts differ significantly, reflecting the different variable selection and coefficient shrinkage effects.
Key Predictors (Consistent Across Models)	SEX_RATIO, POPA_GRAT, AGR_IMO, AGR_EXP, URB_PER, REM_GDP, GNI_PCA	SEX_RATIO, POPA_GRAT, AGR_IMO, AGR_EXP, URB_PER, REM_GDP, GNI_PCA.	SEX_RATIO, POPA_GRAT, AGR_IMO, AGR_EXP, URB_PER, REM_GDP, GNI_PCA.	These variables consistently appear as important predictors across all three models, suggesting that they are robust and reliable predictors of the outcome variable. These have the largest coefficients in Ridge.
Inconsistent Predictors	POP_DENS, TOT_FER, LIFE_EXPT,	POP_DENS, TOT_FER, LIFE_EXPT,	POP_DENS, TOT_FER, LIFE_EXPT,	These are variables that are deemed less important by Lasso and Elastic Net, and have small coefficients in Ridge. These

Feature	Ridge Regression	Lasso Regression	Elastic Net Regression	Analysis
	LIVE_IND, CROP_IND, FOOD_IND, DEP_ECO, ING_DGE, FERT_CON, MEAN_SCH	LIVE_IND, FOOD_IND, DEP_ECO, ING_DGE, FERT_CON, MEAN_SCH	LIVE_IND, FOOD_IND, DEP_ECO, ING_DGE, FERT_CON, MEAN_SCH, CROP_IND	predictors might be less reliable, or their effects may be captured by the other variables.
CROP_IND	Very small negative coefficient.	CROP_IND still appears with a (small) coefficient, but is mostly discarded	Lasso regression removes it entirely.	The differences in CROP_IND behavior illustrates how model selection choices affect the interpretation. Elastic Net is more conservative than Lasso, retaining slightly more variables.
General Model Complexity	Most complex (all variables included).	Least complex (most variables excluded).	Intermediate complexity.	The models have different levels of complexity, with Ridge being the most complex and Lasso being the simplest. The choice of complexity depends on the goals of the analysis.

The comparison shows that Lasso and Elastic Net provide simpler, more interpretable models by excluding less important predictors, whereas Ridge retains all variables, which may improve predictive performance but complicates interpretation. Key predictors such as sex ratio, population growth, agricultural imports and exports, urban population, remittances, and per capita GNI consistently emerge across all models, indicating their robust influence on the outcome. The choice of model should balance predictive accuracy and interpretability based on the study's goals.

The study effectively addresses the hypothesis that food production in Nepal is influenced by population dynamics, agricultural sector performance, livestock and crop production, rural population characteristics, economic indicators, and input usage. Using a combination of descriptive statistics, pooled OLS regression, and regularized regression methods (Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net), the analysis evaluated the impact of these variables on agricultural GDP and the food production index. Results indicate that factors such as population growth, sex ratio, agricultural trade (imports and exports), urban population, remittances, and per capita GNI consistently emerge as significant predictors across multiple models, highlighting their robust influence on agricultural outcomes. Conversely, variables like population density, total fertility, crop and livestock production indices, fertilizer consumption, and mean years of schooling show limited or inconsistent effects, suggesting that their influence on food production may be indirect or context-dependent. Overall, the findings demonstrate that while many hypothesized factors are relevant, their significance varies, providing a nuanced understanding of the determinants of agricultural productivity in Nepal.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study confirms and partially refines the hypothesis that Nepal's food production is influenced by demographic, economic, and agricultural factors. Using multiple imputation, descriptive statistics, pooled OLS regression, and regularized regressions (Ridge, Lasso, and Elastic Net), the analysis identifies key determinants—such as sex ratio, population growth, agricultural trade, urban population, remittances, and per capita GNI—that consistently influence agricultural GDP, supporting the hypothesized relationships. Other factors included in the hypothesis, such as population density, total fertility, crop and livestock production indices, fertilizer consumption, and mean years of schooling, showed limited or inconsistent effects, suggesting their impact may be indirect or context-dependent.

Overall, the findings highlight the complex interplay of socio-economic and agricultural variables in shaping food production, underscoring the need for targeted policies that address demographic pressures, strengthen economic conditions, and promote efficient agricultural practices. Future research should consider additional variables, such as technological adoption, market access, and environmental factors, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of agricultural productivity in Nepal.

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Annex: Data Sources

1. Agriculture Land (%of Land Areas). https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.AGRI.ZS
2. Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery Value Added (%of GDP). https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS
3. Cereal Production. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.PRD.CREL.MT
4. Fertilizer Consumption: Kilograms per Hector of Arable Land https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.CON.FERT.ZS
5. Food Production Index. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.PRD.FOOD.XD
6. GDP percent of per Capita PCA. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD
7. Gross National Income (GNI) per Capita Income. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.ATLS.CD
8. Livestock Production Index. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.PRD.LVSK.XD Crop Production Index. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.PRD.CROP.XD

9. Population Density, Population Growth Rate (Annual), and Life Expectancy at Birth; https://population.un.org/wpp/downloads?folder=Standard%20Projections&group=Most%20used

10. Rural Population (%of Total Population https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS

Structures of Marginalization: Examining Nepal's Class, Caste, Gender, and Regional Inequalities

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Abstract
Nepal's development trajectory remains deeply uneven, shaped by enduring structural inequalities and the persistent marginalization of peripheral regions and vulnerable social groups. This article examines Nepal's persistent underdevelopment by analyzing the intersecting dynamics of class, caste, gender, and geography. It critiques the Kathmandu-centric model of development, arguing that it has deepened regional disparities, particularly in marginalized areas such as Karnali and Sudurpaschim. Drawing on world-systems theory, internal colonialism, and feminist standpoint theory, the study reveals how entrenched structural inequalities manifest in unequal infrastructure, inadequate service delivery, labor exploitation, and political exclusion. Dalits, women, and other marginalized groups continue to face intersecting barriers, including systemic discrimination and limited access to education, healthcare, land, and financial services. Despite the introduction of decentralization and inclusive policies, elite dominance and bureaucratic resistance hinder the realization of equitable development. Using secondary sources and thematic analysis, the article highlights that reliance on remittances, tokenistic political inclusion, and uneven access to services reflect deeper systemic failures. It calls for a transformative, justice-oriented development approach that amplifies marginalized voices and ensures the redistribution of power, resources, and representation to address Nepal's socio-spatial inequalities.

Keywords: underdevelopment, class, caste, gender equality, center-periphery dynamics

Introduction
Nepal's development trajectory is profoundly shaped by entrenched spatial and social hierarchies. The long-standing Kathmandu-centric model has systematically marginalized peripheral regions such as Karnali, the Far West, and the rural Terai, creating stark inequalities in infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities. These geographic disparities are compounded by structural inequalities rooted in class, caste, and gender, as the concentration of resources and state capacity in select urban centers reinforces the privileges of the center while limiting development in the periphery (Lord et al., 2016).

The contrast between urban Kathmandu and Nepal's marginalized regions is evident across multiple dimensions, including education, healthcare, livelihoods, public and private services, infrastructure, and political representation. These disparities are not merely spatial; they are underpinned by systems of class exploitation, caste-based exclusion, and gendered marginalization.

From the perspective of internal colonialism theory, the central elite extracts labor, resources, and political legitimacy from peripheral regions without extending equitable access or rights, thereby entrenching structural inequalities. This perspective aligns with world-systems theory, as articulated by Wallerstein and Gunder Frank, and extended to the South Asian context by Bahl (2023), emphasizing that development and underdevelopment are interdependent processes operating both within and across national borders. Feminist standpoint theory further emphasizes the need to center the lived experiences of Dalits, Janajatis, and poor women, whose everyday struggles illuminate the deep-rooted injustices and

structural violence embedded in Nepal's socio-political fabric (Chatterjee, 2024). By combining these theoretical perspectives, a more nuanced understanding emerges of how structural hierarchies perpetuate underdevelopment across Nepal's center-periphery divide.

Despite existing studies on Nepal's center-periphery disparities, there is limited research examining how class, caste, and gender intersect to drive persistent underdevelopment across multiple regions. This study addresses the gap by combining qualitative insights and quantitative data to provide an integrated understanding of the structural mechanisms sustaining marginalization.

Objective and Methodology
This article aims to examine the patterns of underdevelopment in Nepal by exploring the intersecting dimensions of class, caste, gender, and geography. It focuses on addressing three core questions:

1. In what ways does the center-periphery dynamic in Nepal shape disparities in infrastructure, access to services, and political representation?
2. How do class, caste, and gender intersect to sustain and deepen structural inequalities?
3. What are the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate these inequalities, and what potential pathways exist for transformative change?

This study used secondary data sources (Perez-Sindin, 2017), applying the library method, in which all the data and information were sourced from related academic articles, NGO reports, ethnographic accounts, and policy papers. The reviewed articles were analyzed thematically on the basis of three core theoretical frameworks: world-systems theory to understand global and internal hierarchies (Bahl, 2023); internal colonialism theory to trace the state's role in extracting from the periphery (Baruah, 2020); and feminist standpoint theory to prioritize the voices and experiences of the most marginalized (Chatterjee, 2024; KC, 2022).

The next section presents the findings under headings: **Center-Periphery Relations, Class Structure, Caste Hierarchies, and Gender Inequality**.

Findings

Center-Periphery Manifestation: Geography of Disparity
Development of infrastructure, market access, and service delivery in Nepal's peripheral areas is very poor in comparison to the central areas. Roads, electricity, healthcare, and schools are mostly concentrated in the center, mainly Kathmandu Valley. Historical negligence and lack of political influence have resulted in an immense gap in the development of mid-hills, far-western hills, and the Terai region of the country (Lord et al., 2016).

Markets in these areas are poorly connected with internal market actors and with larger national and international markets. As a result, producers in these areas are compelled to sell their produce at low prices. These regions also have weak value chains, which limits the producers from getting full benefit from their work. This has ended up restricting economic opportunities to informal labor or subsistence farming. In addition, these regions lack representation in key decision-making bodies, further reinforcing exclusion (Silva-Tapia, 2016). Table 1 shows the center-periphery disparity in Nepal.

Table 1: Center-periphery disparity in Nepal

Indicator	National Average	Center (eg. Bagmati)	Periphery (eg. Karnali, Sudurpaschim)	Class/Caste/Gender Implication
GDP Contribution by Province	–	Bagmati: 36.4%	Karnali: 4.3%, Sudurpaschim: 7.1%	Inequality in economic output reinforcing periphery underdevelopment.
Poverty Rate	20.3%	Bagmati: 12.6%	Karnali: 26.7%, Sudurpaschim: 34.2%	Poverty excessively affects Dalits, women-headed households, and rural caste minorities.
Remittance Inflow	NPR 1,445.3 billion	N/A (Not disaggregated)	High dependence in peripheral regions	Migration reflects lack of local employment; women face additional vulnerabilities in foreign labor markets.
Federal Expenditure Allocation (2022/23)	NPR 1,421.3 billion	Higher infrastructure spending in center	Lower and slower implementation in periphery	Budget inequity affects service access; periphery lacks bargaining power in planning.
Agricultural Share of GDP	24.09%	Bagmati: 17.1%	Karnali: 5.2%, Sudurpaschim: 9.7%	Agriculture-dependent populations are poorer, less diversified, and often lower caste or indigenous.
No. of School	35,876	Bagmati: 6,837	Karnali: 3,233 Sudurpaschim: 4,194	Higher quality and density in center Sparse in remote areas like Karnali, Far West Women, Dalits, and Madhesi groups face systemic exclusion from quality services.
Literacy Rate	76.2%	Bagmati: 82.1%	Karnali: 76.1% Sudurpaschim: 76.2%	
No. of Public Hospitals	234	Bagmati: 56	Karnali: 33 Sudurpaschim: 19	
No. of Non-Public Hospitals	2,178	Bagmati: 1,426	Karnali: 55 Sudurpaschim: 65	
Basic Health Centers within 30 Minutes	70.6%	Bagmati: 78%	Karnali: 43.1% Sudurpaschim: %	
Access to Electricity	94%	Bagmati: 98.1%	Karnali: 58% Sudurpaschim: 85%	
Capital Formation (as % of GDP)	Dropped to 24.5% (2023/24)	N/A	N/A	Lower public and private investment in backward regions limits class mobility.

(Source: Center for Education and Human Resource Development, MoEST, 2024; Economic Survey, 2023/24; Ministry of Health and Population, 2024; Nepal Living Standard Survey, 2023; Statistics, Policy and Research Division, MoEST, 2024)

Table 1 reveals a scrutinized comparative overview of socio-economic indicators in Nepal, reflecting disparities among the national average, core provinces like Bagmati, and peripheral provinces, i.e., Karnali and Sudurpaschim. Bagmati province, as a central area, aggregates a large number of schools

(6,837), public hospitals (56), and non-public hospitals (1,426), with a remarkable contribution to GDP of 36.4%. Conversely, peripheral regions like Karnali and Sudurpaschim lag in such amenities, with GDP contributions of 4.3% and 7.1%, respectively. As a result of low economic output in these peripheral regions, the poverty rates of Karnali and Sudurpaschim are markedly higher than the national average (20.3%), which explicitly affects marginalized groups, including women-headed households, Dalits, and caste minorities in these regions.

Despite substantial national remittance inflows, it is evident that peripheral regions' human resources tend to rely heavily on external labor markets due to limited local economic opportunities. The low number of schools in peripheral regions compared to core regions clearly indicates educational disparities, thereby contributing to systemic exclusion, particularly among women, Dalits, and caste minorities. With capital formation falling to 24.5% of GDP and investment skewed toward urban hubs, spatial and structural inequalities are exacerbated, resulting in low capital formation and agricultural dependence in peripheral regions. This limits economic diversification and further exaggerates deeper class-, caste-, and gender-based exclusion.

Class Structure: Labor and Capital Accumulation in the Center
Land ownership, labor relations, and capital flow are areas where class disparities are reflected, particularly in peripheral areas. Impoverished groups in rural areas frequently work as seasonal laborers or tenant farmers under abusive circumstances. Landowners, who are often urban upper-caste elites, extract surplus while providing little in return, resulting in a highly skewed agricultural economy (Dalzell, 2015).

For many people, remittances are now their main source of income, but they also conceal the lack of structural economic reform (KC, 2022). The high rate of labor migration from peripheral areas is driven by uneven development, lack of opportunities, and discrimination in those areas. This results in households being left without sufficient resources or assistance. According to the Nepal Living Standard Survey, 2023, internal migration of males has decreased, while that of females has increased. This change reflects a significant transformation in the demographic profile of migrants, with women making up an increasing proportion of the internal migrant population by 2022/23.In 2023/24, Nepal received NPR 1,445 billion in remittances, which amounts to 25 percent of GDP (Ghimire, 2024). Table 2 shows the class structure disparity in Nepal.

Table 2: Class structure disparity in Nepal

Indicator	National Average	Center (eg. Bagmati)	Periphery (eg. Karnali, Sudurpaschim)	Class/Caste/Gender Implication
Land ownership of agricultural land	63.6%	Bagmati: 52.0% Kathmandu valley urban: 32.1%	Karnali: 84.5% Sudurpaschim: 84.3% Karnali (rural): 94.5% Sudurpaschim (rural): 91.7%	Land ownership is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas. Land ownership is concentrated among higher castes while women and Dalits have limited access to land, reinforcing socio-economic disparities.
Renting out of land	17.9%	Bagmati: 23.3% Kathmandu valley urban: 38.8%	Karnali: 8.8% Sudurpaschim: 14.2% Karnali (rural): 7.9% Sudurpaschim (rural): 6.8%	
Labor force	37.1%	Bagmati:	Karnali: 28.9%	Emphasizes the unequal

Indicator	National Average	Center (eg. Bagmati)	Periphery (eg. Karnali, Sudurpaschim)	Class/Caste/Gender Implication
participation rate (15 years and above)		45.1%	Sudurpaschim: 27.9%	opportunities in the labor market and the close link between poverty levels and labor market outcomes.
Unemployment rate	12.6% Poor: 17.3% Non-poor: 11.7%	Bagmati: 9.4%	Karnali: 23.8% Sudurpaschim: 12.5% Karnali (poor): 41.5% Karnali (non-poor): 19.8%	
% of population Employed	32.4%	Bagmati: 40.9% Kathmandu Valley: 48.3%	Karnali: 25.6% Sudurpaschim: 24.4%	It is observed, as expected, that urban areas have higher employment rates and greater labor force participation across all provinces. In contrast, rural areas generally show lower employment levels and higher rates of unemployment compared to urban regions.
Employment in Agriculture Sector	13.3%	Bagmati: 8.2%	Karnali: 11.1% Sudurpaschim: 8.3%	
Labor migration	Internal migration: 38.1% Male: 25% Female: 49.6%	Bagmati: 49.8%	Karnali (rural): 16.8% Sudurpaschim: 32.4%	Migration driven by lack of local employment; higher rates among Dalits and marginalized communities
Share of remittance in total income	33.7%	Bagmati: 32.1%	Karnali: 31% Sudurpaschim: 38.2%	Remittances are crucial for peripheral regions but often used for consumption rather than investment, limiting long-term economic growth.
% of HH received remittance	76.8%	Bagmati: 69.8%	Karnali: 83.9% Sudurpaschim: 69.8%	
Average amount of remittance among recipient HHs	NPR. 145,093	Bagmati: NPR. 138,927	Karnali: NPR. 95,062 Sudurpaschim: 108,698	
Access to Cooperatives	83.3%	Bagmati: 89.1%	Karnali: 56.1%	Women and disadvantaged groups in the peripheral areas have less access to finance.
Access to Banks	74.2%	Bagmati: 79.8%	Karnali: 39.3%	

(Source: Nepal Living Standard Survey, 2023)

Table 2 clearly illustrates regional, class, caste, and gender inequalities between central (e.g., Bagmati) and peripheral (e.g., Karnali, Sudurpaschim) provinces of Nepal. Ownership of agricultural land is higher in rural peripheries such as Karnali (84.5%) and Sudurpaschim (84.3%) compared to Bagmati (52%) and urban Kathmandu Valley (32.1%), yet ownership remains concentrated among higher castes, with Dalits and women having limited access. In contrast, renting out land is more common in urban centers

(Bagmati: 23.3%, Kathmandu: 38.8%) than in Karnali (8.8%) or Sudurpaschim (14.2%), as most of the land in peripheral areas is used by the landowners themselves, especially for agricultural purposes.

Labor market indicators such as participation, employment, and unemployment clearly depict center-periphery divides, with peripheral regions experiencing lower participation and employment but higher unemployment, especially among the poor. Urban areas like Kathmandu Valley have higher employment rates (48.3%) than Karnali (25.6%) and Sudurpaschim (24.4%) due to abundant economic activities. Agriculture offers employment to 13.3% nationally, indicating a declining but still crucial sector in poorer regions. Labor migration is driven by the lack of local employment opportunities, with peripheral regions highly dependent on remittances (Sudurpaschim: 38.2%). However, remittance usage is mostly for consumption rather than investment.

Access to financial institutions reflects inequality as well. Only 56.1% of households in Karnali have access to cooperatives and 39.3% to banks, compared to 89.1% and 79.8% in Bagmati, respectively, further marginalizing women and lower-caste groups in the periphery. These intersecting disparities emphasize persistent structural inequalities across class, caste, gender, and geography.

Caste Hierarchies: Access, Dignity, and Opportunity
Caste is a systemic mechanism that controls access to resources, social mobility, political representation, public dignity, and recognition. As it is deeply rooted in societal structures, it influences access to education, healthcare, and employment. Dalit communities are still excluded from land ownership, face segregation in public spaces, and are overrepresented in menial, stigmatized work (Baruah, 2020). Despite constitutional protections and progressive laws, caste-based discrimination continues to be evident.

Dalits and other marginalized communities often face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities and undermine their dignity. Government policies promoting inclusion often fail at implementation due to bureaucratic resistance and elite capture (Bloch, 2021). State bureaucracies are often staffed and dominated by upper-caste and elite groups, and selective enforcement of inclusion mandates leads to delays in quota enforcement and discriminatory behavior by officials. In Nepal, reserved seats in government or local bodies usually go to relatively privileged Dalit or Janajati individuals, excluding those most in need. Social stigma and institutional discrimination combine to produce a system in which Dalits are citizens in name but marginalized in practice (Silva-Tapia, 2016).

Nepal's Constitution (2015) formally outlaws caste-based discrimination and guarantees affirmative action for Dalits. However, untouchability practices persist in over 30 districts. Dalit representation in high-level politics and bureaucracy is negligible, and the implementation of inclusive policies remains weak due to elite capture and bureaucratic apathy. Table 3 shows the effects of caste hierarchies on access, dignity, and opportunities in Nepal.

Table 3: Effect of caste hierarchies in access, dignity and opportunities in Nepal

Indicator	Dalit Population	National Average / Other Groups	Class/Caste/Gender Implications
Poverty Rate	41%	25% *	Structural caste discrimination limits economic mobility; Dalits remain economically marginalized.
Per Capita Income	US$ 977	US$ 1,597	Reflects both caste-based exclusion from high-paying jobs and systemic underemployment.
Land Ownership	90% landless	Much lower landlessness in upper castes	Historical land alienation; economic class tied to caste status—key factor in rural Dalit poverty.
Literacy Rate	33%	65.9% *	Educational deprivation due to caste-based neglect and gendered barriers for Dalit girls.
Education above SLC	3.8%	Much higher for upper castes	Caste hierarchy restricts access; early dropout linked to poverty.
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	0.4%	N/A	Elite education remains inaccessible due to class and caste gatekeeping.
Life Expectancy	61 years	68.7 years	Poor healthcare access rooted in caste status and class location; worse for Dalit women.
Under-5 Mortality Rate	90 per 1,000 live births	68 per 1,000	Reflects intergenerational neglect and malnutrition.
Political Representation	~1% of mayoral positions	Dalits are 13% of the population	Political underrepresentation due to caste power structure.
Representation in Parliament (Dalit Quota)	8% (reserved)	N/A	Reservation addresses structural caste exclusion but lacks real empowerment mechanisms.
Local Election Outcomes	1 mayor, 2 deputy mayors in Madhes (2022)	1,271 wards in total	Symbolic wins; real political power remains caste-concentrated and male-dominated.
Bonded Labor (Haruwa–Charuwa)	66% of bonded laborers are Dalits	N/A	Modern slavery rooted in caste-class intersection; Dalit women face highest risk.
Caste-Based Killings (2015–2020)	52 reported cases	N/A	Extreme violence as caste control mechanism; (e.g., inter-caste marriage punishments).
Discrimination Cases (COVID-19 Lockdown)	753 cases, incl. 34 murders	N/A	Crises amplify caste-based violence; women often face compounded threats (e.g., abuse in quarantine).
Illiteracy (Dalit Women – Terai)	90%	Lower in men and non-Dalits	Dalit girls face multiple barriers: poverty, early marriage, caste bias.
Exploitation (Dalit Women)	High risk of trafficking and sexual abuse	N/A	Dalit women highly vulnerable to trafficking, sexual violence, and servitude.
Reported Cases	300+	N/A	Reflects deep-rooted caste ideology; Dalit

Indicator	Dalit Population	National Average / Other Groups	Class/Caste/Gender Implications
of Untouchability (2023)			women often subjected to public humiliation or violence.
Access to Clean Water	~60%	~85%	Discriminatory access to infrastructure; caste dictates spatial exclusion (e.g., taps for Dalits).

(Source: DWO, 2023; ResearchGate, 2023; Record Nepal, 2022; Constitution of Nepal, 2015; Annapurna Express, 2022; UN Digital Library Nepal, 2024; UNDP, 2022a, 2022b; Academia.edu, 2020; IDSN, 2023; NHRC Nepal, 2024)
(the data varies as no new report after 2023 has been published by DWO)

Table 3 highlights the persistent and structural underdevelopment of Dalit communities in Nepal, revealing stark disparities in poverty, education, health, political representation, and exposure to violence. It reveals the widespread economic disadvantages due to caste hierarchies, as Dalits have a poverty rate of 41%, substantially higher than the national average, indicating deep-rooted economic exclusion. The average Dalit income is US$ 977, compared to the national average of US$ 1,597, demonstrating clear income disparity. A staggering 90% of Dalits are landless, reflecting their historical exclusion from land ownership and agrarian reforms. This severely limits their economic mobility.

Similarly, caste hierarchies cause severe educational disparities. Only 33% of Dalits are literate, compared to the national rate of 65.9%, showing a large education gap. Just 3.8% of Dalits have passed above the School Leaving Certificate (SLC), and a mere 0.4% have a degree above bachelor's level—indicating near-complete exclusion from tertiary education. These educational disparities hinder long-term development and employment opportunities.

Table 3 also reveals comparative life expectancy, as Dalits live, on average, 7.7 years less than the national population (61 vs. 68.7 years). Similarly, under-5 mortality among Dalit children is 90 per 1,000, significantly above the national average of 68, revealing a lack of access to healthcare and nutrition. Although Dalits make up 13% of the population, they hold only ~1% of mayoral positions. In the 2022 local elections in Madhes Province, only one Dalit mayor and two deputy mayors were elected out of 1,271 wards—highlighting extreme political underrepresentation.

The Haruwa–Charuwa system, a form of bonded labor, continues to affect Dalits disproportionately, with two-thirds of these laborers being Dalits. This reflects the persistence of feudal, caste-based labor practices and economic dependency. Violence and discrimination also persist, with 52 caste-based killings documented from 2015–2020. During the COVID-19 lockdown, 753 discrimination cases, including 34 murders, were reported—illustrating systemic caste-based violence and lack of legal protection. In the Terai region, 90% of Dalit women are illiterate—far worse than Dalit men or women from other castes. Dalit women face double discrimination (gender + caste), and some communities (e.g., the Badi) experience high rates of sexual exploitation and trafficking. Collectively, these patterns demonstrate a chain of underdevelopment sustained by entrenched caste hierarchies.

Gender Inequality: Education, Health, and Migration Impacts
Gender inequality is acutely felt in peripheral regions, especially among lower-caste and poor women. Education levels remain low, and early marriage and domestic responsibilities reduce school attendance for girls (Jaffrey & Slater, 2017). Healthcare access is limited, with reproductive services particularly

inadequate. Male out-migration burdens women with additional labor while leaving them vulnerable to violence and financial insecurity. As KC (2022) notes, female labor migrants often face abuse abroad and stigma at home. Violence against women, including domestic violence, remains prevalent but underreported due to cultural taboos and weak enforcement mechanisms. Table 4 shows the impact of gender inequalities on education, health, and migration.

Table 4: Impact of gender inequalities in education, health and migration

Category	Indicator	Women	Men / General	Key Findings
Education	National Literacy Rate (2021)	69.4%	83.6%	Persistent gender gap in literacy
	Lumbini Province Literacy Rate	71.7%	85.2%	Regional gender disparities
Health	Maternal Mortality Ratio	151 per 100,000 live births	N/A	Improved from 281; still high
	Neonatal Mortality Rate	16.6 per 1,000 live births	N/A	Significant reduction; still concerning
Migration	Female Labor Migrants (since 2008)	176,000+	N/A (men majority)	Mostly in informal/domestic sectors
	Risks Abroad	High	N/A	Legal protection and healthcare access limited

Economic Survey, 2023/24

Table 4 presents key findings from Nepal's Economic Survey 2023/24, highlighting persistent gender inequality across education, health, and migration. In education, female literacy remains significantly lower (69.4%) than male literacy (83.6%), with similar disparities seen regionally—such as in Lumbini Province, where female literacy is 71.7% compared to 85.2% for males—indicating enduring gender gaps in access to education. In health, although the maternal mortality ratio has declined to 151 per 100,000 live births and neonatal mortality to 16.6 per 1,000 live births, these figures still reflect ongoing challenges in maternal and child health services for women. In migration, over 176,000 women have migrated for labor since 2008, predominantly into informal domestic sectors, where they face heightened vulnerability due to limited legal protection and healthcare access abroad. Overall, the data illustrate a chain of underdevelopment where gendered disadvantages in one domain compound vulnerabilities in others, reinforcing structural inequality for women in Nepal.

In summary, the findings demonstrate how Nepal's center-periphery dynamic shapes persistent disparities in infrastructure, access to services, and political representation, with Bagmati Province concentrating schools, hospitals, financial institutions, and GDP contributions, while peripheral regions such as Karnali and Sudurpaschim lag markedly, reinforcing spatial inequalities. It further reveals how class, caste, and gender intersect to sustain structural disadvantages: land ownership and economic opportunities favor higher castes and urban elites, Dalits face systemic exclusion from education, land, and political participation, and women—especially in marginalized communities—experience compounded burdens from limited literacy, health access, and migration pressures. The underlying mechanisms perpetuating these inequalities include elite capture, bureaucratic resistance, historical neglect of peripheral regions, reliance on remittances, and social norms that reinforce discrimination. Potential pathways for transformative change emerge from participatory, equity-driven approaches that center marginalized voices, strengthen inclusive governance, support grassroots organizations such as Dalit-led NGOs and women's cooperatives, and prioritize redistribution of resources and political power to historically

excluded groups, highlighting actionable strategies to address entrenched socio-spatial inequities in Nepal.

Discussions of Findings

The study reveals a deeply entrenched center–periphery divide in Nepal, where economic output, infrastructure, and federal investment remain concentrated in Bagmati Province, reflecting the persistence of centralized capital accumulation. As Lord et al. (2016) argue, such decentralization without substantive redistribution of fiscal and political power reproduces historical inequalities under a new administrative guise. Through the lens of World-Systems Theory, we observe how Nepal's internal regions replicate global core-periphery dynamics. Bagmati Province, representing the "core," concentrates capital, infrastructure, and institutional power (36.4% of GDP share), while peripheral regions like Karnali and Sudurpaschim (4.3% and 7.1%) resemble "semi-peripheral" or "peripheral zones" within the national system. These internal hierarchies mirror global economic divisions, wherein the periphery supplies labor, natural resources, and remittance inflows while receiving less in terms of investment, infrastructure, and institutional presence.

As Bahl (2023) argues, internal stratification within developing countries is increasingly shaped by unequal incorporation into the global capitalist economy—a dynamic that is clearly visible in Nepal's dependency on labor out-migration and remittances (NPR 1,445.3 billion), especially from rural and marginalized castes. The heavy dependence on remittances in peripheral regions underscores this dynamic; while they provide short-term relief, they fail to transform local economies or address class immobility, echoing Silva-Tapia's (2016) critique of remittance-led development as a mechanism for reproducing marginality. From the perspective of Internal Colonialism Theory (Baruah, 2020), the state emerges not as a neutral arbiter of development but as an active agent in the extraction and marginalization of its own periphery. This is evident in the federal expenditure patterns—while NPR 1,421.3 billion was allocated in 2022/23, implementation remains skewed toward central regions where elite bureaucratic and political institutions are concentrated. Peripheral zones remain underdeveloped not due to lack of resources, but because development itself is wielded as a political instrument—used to consolidate the dominance of dominant caste and class groups. Agricultural regions with high caste and ethnic diversity remain locked in low-return subsistence economies (~24% share of GDP), with minimal capital formation and poor service delivery. This extractive logic is further reinforced ideologically—through official discourse that frames rural, indigenous, and Dalit communities as "backward" or "unproductive," echoing colonial justifications for neglect (Bloch, 2021).

The findings further reinforce the entrenched center–periphery divide in Nepal's socio-economic structure, revealing how class, caste, gender, and geography intersect to perpetuate inequality. Labor force participation and employment rates are significantly lower in peripheral regions, with Karnali exhibiting particularly high unemployment (23.8%), especially among the poor (41.5%), illustrating the spatial manifestation of class exclusion. As Dalzel (2015) argues, such labor migration reflects a form of "managed displacement," where the state's failure to invest in productive sectors in the periphery pushes workers toward mobility, primarily to support urban and global centers of accumulation. Limited access to cooperatives and banks in regions like Karnali further compounds exclusion, restricting financial participation for disadvantaged groups.

Empirical evidence shows that Dalit and Janajati women face the greatest disadvantages in education, health, and migration—exemplifying what Baruah (2020) calls "layered marginality," where gender oppression is magnified by caste and ethnicity. Crucially, Feminist Standpoint Theory (Chatterjee, 2024; KC, 2022) urges us to recenter the voices and experiences of women, Dalits, and other systematically excluded groups. The data on education, health, and remittances highlight how gender intersects with geography and caste to deepen marginalization. Women in peripheral areas bear the brunt of male

migration—not just in terms of emotional and economic strain, but also through increased unpaid labor and social vulnerability. The migration patterns further affirm these dynamics: lower-caste women often migrate under informal, exploitative conditions with little state protection, reflecting Silva-Tapia's (2016) critique of "intersecting vulnerabilities" shaped by class, caste, and gender. Health and education services remain sparse in regions like Karnali and Far West, where women, Dalits, and Madhesis face systemic neglect. Feminist standpoint epistemologies suggest that true development cannot be top-down. It must be reimagined from the margins—drawing on the lived knowledge and resistance strategies of the most affected. Encouragingly, the post-2015 federal restructuring has opened fragmented but meaningful spaces for this reimagination: Dalit-led NGOs, women's cooperatives, and youth collectives are emerging as alternative development actors, working against institutional odds to build just and inclusive futures.

Together, these frameworks help us understand that Nepal's underdevelopment is not just economic, but also deeply social, spatial, and epistemological. These analyses show that caste and gender are not merely additive, but co-constitutive systems that together restrict access to opportunity, voice, and dignity. It is held in place by chains of exclusion—material and discursive—that bind the periphery in dependence. Breaking these chains requires not just redistribution of resources, but a restructuring of power, representation, and knowledge production. Addressing these structural inequalities demands an intersectional, equity-driven approach in policy design that prioritizes historically excluded communities. Development must no longer be what is done to the margins—it must emerge from them.

Conclusion

Nepal's persistent underdevelopment is rooted in systemic neglect and the interplay of center-periphery dynamics, class, caste, and gender hierarchies, which trap peripheral regions like Karnali and Sudurpaschim in cycles of poverty, limited employment, weak infrastructure, and heavy reliance on remittances. While Bagmati Province concentrates capital, investment, and services, peripheral populations—particularly Dalits, women, and indigenous groups—face structural exclusion from economic, political, and social opportunities. True transformation requires more than expanding infrastructure; it demands redistributing power, resources, and agency through inclusive local governance, grassroots mobilization, and alternative livelihoods. Policies must address the co-constitutive nature of caste, class, gender, and geography, prioritizing intersectional justice and decentralizing development decision-making. Future research should focus on participatory development strategies, the long-term impacts of remittance dependency, and effective interventions to enhance education, health, financial inclusion, and empowerment in marginalized communities, ensuring development emerges from, rather than imposes upon, the periphery.

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Institutional Reforms for Strengthening Agricultural Extension under Federal Governance in Nepal

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Abstract

Agricultural extension plays a crucial role in enhancing productivity and livelihoods, and its effectiveness in Nepal is increasingly shaped by the country's transition to a federal governance system. This paper assesses institutional reforms for strengthening agricultural extension under federal governance in Nepal. This study used a library method for exploring decentralized policies and programs as well as devolved power/jurisdictions to the local government. The study found that the timeline of extension development shows a gradual change in historical context following the adoption of the federal system. Key features of federalization include expanded farmer engagement, improved access to resources, and the capacity to customize policies to local requirements. Federalization has provided the opportunity for farmers' participation and a bottom-up approach for planning agricultural extension programs. However, obstacles exist, such as institutional inefficiencies, unclear power structures, and scarcity of human resources at the local level. This paper highlights the importance of increased institutional capacity of the local government. Therefore, the government must strengthen local capacity through training and technology, foster multi-stakeholder coordination, and implement participatory, evidence-based planning to ensure effective, inclusive, and sustainable agricultural extension services in a federal context.

Keywords: agricultural extension, federal governance, institutional reform, local government capacity

Introduction

Extension has supported communities in maintaining their quality of life by addressing their problems and challenges (Nederlof et al., 2011). Extension or advisory services provide need- and demand-based knowledge and skills to farmers to improve their livelihoods and standard of living (Qamar, 2007). The growing significance of standards, certification, and food security, along with the expansion of nonfarm employment in rural areas and agricultural enterprises, are addressed with the assistance of extension services (Khanal et al., 2023). Since the 1950s, the Nepalese government has implemented a variety of agricultural extension models and strategies, with or without donor support (Uprety & Shivakoti, 2019).

Nepal has experimented with several extension methods, with mixed results, including Projectization, Farmer Field Schools, Block Production Programs, Tuki System, Training & Visit system, Integrated Rural Development Projects, Public-Private Partnerships, and group approaches (Ghimire, 2021). Every federal nation has its own levels of administration; Nepal became a federal nation in 2015 with the adoption of a democratic, republican, and inclusive constitution. Three tiers of government—federal, provincial, and local—were established under the constitution, each with divided and independent authority (Timsina et al., 2018). The Nepalese constitution assigns research and development powers to the federal and provincial levels and delegates agricultural extension services to the local level.

Nepal adopted federalism with the establishment of a three-level government, each with distinct concurrent and exclusive powers for the distribution of authority at the local level (Burlakoti & Nettle, 2024). This three-tiered system has created new opportunities for forming agricultural policies,

particularly at the provincial and village levels, supporting a bottom-up strategy for the delivery of agrarian extension services within Nepal's restructured governance framework (Tamang et al., 2020). The establishment of a federal government grounded on principles of law, governance, and equitable power distribution encourages demand-driven, participatory agricultural planning. However, due to a lack of coordination between different governmental levels, insufficient long-term planning, and limited financial resources, Nepalese extension service delivery continues to face challenges in adapting to the changing context.

Despite Nepal's long history of agricultural extension, little is known about how federal governance affects service delivery, coordination, and local participation. This study addresses these gaps by assessing institutional reforms and their impact on effective, demand-driven extension services. The purpose of this study is to examine institutional reforms and challenges in strengthening agricultural extension under Nepal's federal governance system.

Method

This study employed a library-based research method (George, 2008) to explore decentralized policies and programs, as well as devolved powers and jurisdictions granted to local governments. The review primarily includes: the Constitution of Nepal (2015); Nepal Agriculture Policy (2004); Nepal Agriculture Extension Strategy (2007); Agriculture Development Strategy (2015–2035); the Civil Service Act; Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development documents; Provincial and Local Government Agricultural Guidelines; and reports from local governments. These government documents are considered authentic and reliable sources because they are officially published and provide verified information on policies, strategies, and institutional frameworks. The following sections present findings on **Extension and Federalization**.

Extension and Federalization

Political and institutional reforms played a crucial role in the commercial transformation of the agriculture sector. Since the 1990s, agriculture extension has been looked at by the government as a mainstream program to help the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the fundamental reform of the political and institutional framework in 2017 was brought about by the ratification of a new constitution in 2015. The establishment of several institutions under different governments has resulted in issues with redundant operations, inadequate delivery methods, and effective local agriculture extension system implementation. Before federalism, selected local government representatives who were aware of the needs and demands at the grassroots level still faced a gap between government bodies and citizens. Table 1 shows the extension's shift after federalization.

Table 1:Extension's Shift afterwards Federalization

Characteristics	Prior to Federalism	Changes after Federalism	Impacts
Administration	5-Development Region , 75-districts, 3915- VDCs and 58- municipalities	Central Government, State Administration (7), Districts (77), Local Government (753)	The local authority struggled to manage financial and human resources.
Implementation of Local bodies	Controlled through administrators to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Local Development	Elected people from elections	Organize the needs of the local farmers with the national agriculture priority

| Agriculture program policy | Nationally established overall policies and plans, with Agriculture Extension reaching district-level DDCs, DADOs, and DLSOs | Different exclusive and concurrent rights are granted to local, state, and federal governments. Specifically, the local government has acquired administration and operation authority over agriculture extension | The capacity to prepare the plan, policy and program at local government is comparatively weak. |

Source: Kyle and Resnick (2019)

After federalization, Nepal's agricultural extension system shifted from a centralized structure of five development regions and 75 districts to a three-tier system comprising federal, state, and 753 local governments. Local bodies, now elected, gained the authority to organize farmers' needs and manage extension programs, replacing the previous administrator-led system. While this devolution increased local participation and responsiveness, many local authorities continue to face challenges in planning, resource management, and effective implementation of extension policies. Similarly, in Nepal's federalized agricultural system, institutions are organized across three levels as presented in Table 2.
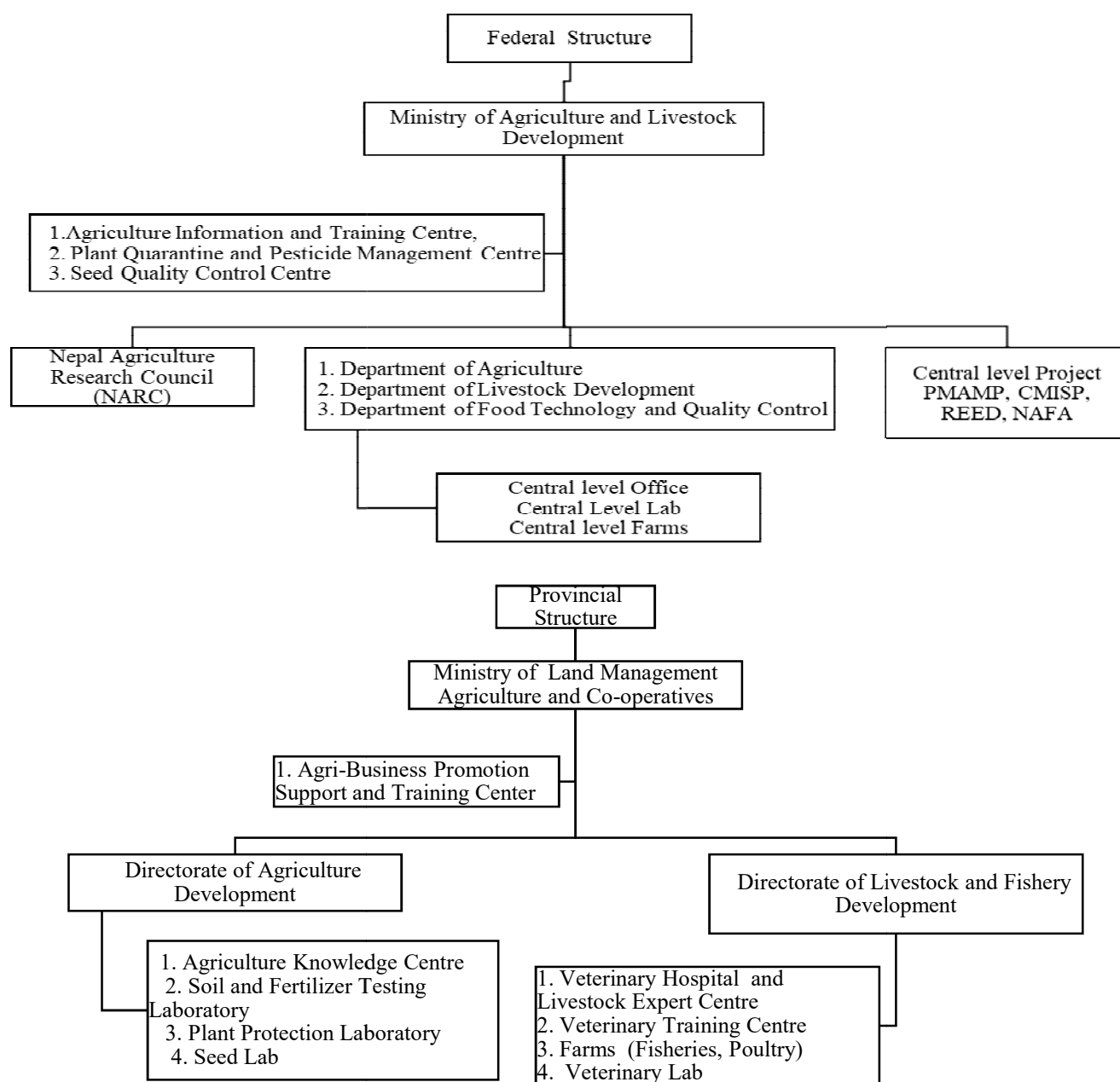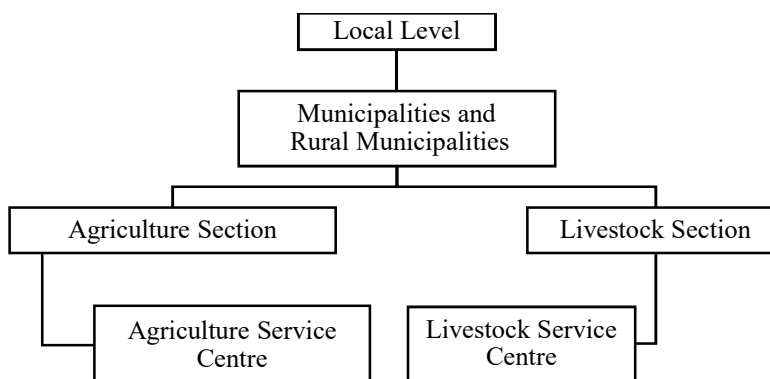
Table 2:Institutions of Administration in Federalization

Level	Institution
Federal	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development • Department of Agriculture • Department of livestock services • Department of food technology and quality control
State	Ministry of Land, Cooperative and Agriculture Ministry • Directorate of Agriculture Development • Directorate of Livestock and Fishery Development • Agriculture Knowledge Centre • Veterinary Hospital and Livestock Expert Centre
Local	Municipal executives • Agriculture Section • Livestock Section

Source: Thapa and Devkota (2019)

In this federalized structure, Table 2 shows that institutions are organized across three levels: at the federal level, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development oversees major departments; at the state level, the Ministry of Land, Cooperative, and Agriculture manages directorates and specialized centers; and at the local level, municipal executives directly administer agriculture and livestock sections to ensure services reach farmers. Figure 1 illustrates this organizational structure under federal governance, visually emphasizing the devolution of power and responsibilities, the pathways for bottom-up planning, farmer engagement, and context-specific service delivery, while underscoring the need for coordination across the three tiers to achieve efficient, equitable, and sustainable agricultural extension.

Figure 1: Three Levels of Government in Nepal's Agriculture Sector

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │    Federal  Structure    │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │ Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock │
                    │         Development      │
                    └─────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
│ 1.Agriculture Information and Training Centre, │
│ 2. Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Centre │
│ 3. Seed Quality Control Centre        │
└──────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────┐  ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
│ Nepal Agriculture │  │ 1. Department of Agriculture            │  │ Central level Project │
│ Research Council  │  │ 2. Department of Livestock Development   │  │ PMAMP, CMISP,    │
│     (NARC)        │  │ 3. Department of Food Technology and Quality Control │  │ REED, NAFA       │
└──────────────────┘  └────────────────────────────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘

            ┌──────────────────────┐
            │  Central level Office │
            │  Central Level Lab    │
            │  Central level Farms  │
            └──────────────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │  Provincial  │
                    │  Structure   │
                    └──────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────────────────┐
                    │ Ministry of Land Management │
                    │ Agriculture and Co-operatives │
                    └──────────────────────────┘

            ┌──────────────────────────┐
            │ 1. Agri-Business Promotion │
            │ Support and Training Center │
            └──────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ Directorate of Agriculture │              │ Directorate of Livestock and Fishery │
│      Development       │                  │          Development          │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ 1. Agriculture Knowledge Centre │    │ 1. Veterinary Hospital and    │
│ 2. Soil and Fertilizer Testing  │    │ Livestock Expert Centre       │
│ Laboratory                      │    │ 2. Veterinary Training Centre │
│ 3. Plant Protection Laboratory  │    │ 3. Farms  (Fisheries, Poultry) │
│ 4. Seed Lab                     │    │ 4.  Veterinary Lab            │
└──────────────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────────────┘
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                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Local Level  │
                    └──────┬───────┘
                    ┌──────┴────────────┐
                    │ Municipalities and│
                    │ Rural Municipalities│
                    └──────┬────────────┘
            ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
    ┌───────┴────────┐            ┌────────┴────────┐
    │ Agriculture Section│         │ Livestock Section│
    └───────┬────────┘            └────────┬────────┘
      ┌─────┴──────────┐          ┌────────┴─────────┐
      │ Agriculture Service│       │ Livestock Service │
      │      Centre        │       │      Centre       │
      └────────────────┘          └──────────────────┘
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Source: Dahal et al., 2020

Discussion: Farmers and Extension Service Delivery in Nepal

The federalization of Nepal's agricultural sector has significantly reshaped the delivery of extension services, creating both opportunities and challenges. The development of agricultural structures at the municipal level has enhanced farmers' involvement in the agricultural planning process, including their right to declare and access agricultural supplies, as well as connections with service providers (Nepali, 2018). With the devolution of authority from central to federal, state, and local levels, municipal executives now directly manage agriculture and livestock services (Jaishi & Paudel, 2020). This structural reform brings extension services closer to farmers, enabling greater local engagement, bottom-up planning, and alignment of programs with community needs. Farmers now have improved access to inputs, technical guidance, and advisory services, enhancing their capacity to adopt new technologies, increase food production, and raise household income. The institutional restructuring also facilitates coordination between public, private, and community-based extension offices, offering a more integrated approach to service delivery (Tamang et al., 2020).

The establishment of effective extension services requires good governance, accountability, and optimal use of local resources and powers (Dahal et al., 2020). However, many developing countries, including Nepal, face challenges such as low local funding, dependence on unstable central government grants, difficulties in hiring and retaining staff, and corruption or financial mismanagement by local authorities (Mangheni & Nkonya, 2011). In Nepal, insufficient understanding of governance, institutionalization, and human resource management remains a major challenge for provincial and local governments (Dahal et al., 2020). Despite the formal devolution of power, traditional centralized mindsets and top-down working practices continue to create difficulties for implementers (Shrestha, 2023).

Farmers' access to public extension services is also uneven, influenced by geography and farm size (Shrestha & Sanjel, 2018). The current restructuring of services is characterized by overlapping authorities, insufficient communication channels, and uneven institutional frameworks (Devkota & Thapa, 2019). Newly established provincial and local institutions often lack the experience and expertise to deliver agricultural services effectively, and extension officers may prefer federal or provincial assignments over local positions, limiting local operational capacity. Figure 1 illustrates Nepal's agricultural organizational structure under federal governance, emphasizing the devolution of power and responsibilities from central authorities to local bodies, the potential for bottom-up planning, farmer engagement, and locally relevant services, while highlighting the need for coordination across the three tiers to ensure effective service delivery (Dahal et al., 2020).

The effectiveness of extension workers, the relevance of their programs, service levels, and farmers' participation all impact farmers' ability to access services. Accessibility, in turn, shapes farmers'

perceptions of service value (Oluwasusi & Akanni, 2014). While farmers generally trust the technical expertise of extension officials and find the information clear and useful (Khanal et al., 2023), they express dissatisfaction with the cost, timeliness, and limited availability of services. Farmers often accept extension support when it is need-, demand-, or market-based (Babu & Sah, 2019).

Under federal governance, it is imperative that all levels of government uphold good governance principles. Institutionalizing effective extension delivery can improve farmers' food production, income, and overall standard of living (Dahal et al., 2020). Technology adoption is a key prerequisite, and advisory services play a critical role in providing technical expertise generated by national agricultural research institutions. Despite these advancements, local governments still face challenges such as low-quality services, difficulties in accessing inputs, weak market linkages, and limited bargaining power for farm produce (Dhital, 2017). Large farmers and landowners often receive preferential treatment, leaving smallholders underserved (MoAD, 2016), although farmers generally support the devolution of services to the local level (Bishwakarma et al., 2022).

Policy-level constraints further affect service delivery. While federalization enables local and provincial policy formulation, gaps persist in design and execution. Less than one percent of the national agriculture budget is allocated to extension, and the absence of a federal-level agricultural act complicates coordination among government tiers (Bishwakarma et al., 2022; Shrestha, 2023). Frequent restructuring of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, coupled with weak linkage between elected officials and technical staff, undermines consistent policy implementation (Burlakoti & Nettle, 2024). Decentralization has enhanced inclusivity and responsiveness, but local authorities still face significant capacity constraints in planning, managing, and monitoring extension programs effectively (Tamang et al., 2020).

Overall, the discussion aligns with the study's purpose of assessing institutional reforms and challenges in strengthening agricultural extension under Nepal's federal governance system. It evaluates the reforms introduced through federalization, including the devolution of authority and creation of multi-tiered structures that bring extension services closer to farmers. Simultaneously, it highlights challenges such as limited financial and human resources, weak institutional capacity, coordination difficulties, inequitable access for smallholders, and policy-level gaps. By examining both structural changes and their practical implications for farmers, the discussion provides evidence-based insights into how federal governance reforms impact the effectiveness, responsiveness, and inclusivity of agricultural extension services in Nepal, confirming that the study's purpose is met.

Conclusion

Agricultural extension in Nepal is central to enhancing productivity, food security, and rural livelihoods, and federalization has created opportunities for local governments to manage services, foster bottom-up planning, and engage farmers in decision-making. Municipal-level management has improved access to inputs, technical guidance, and locally relevant programs, while also facilitating coordination between public, private, and community-based extension services. Despite these gains, challenges persist, including overlapping responsibilities, weak institutional capacity, limited coordination across federal, state, and local levels, preferential treatment of large farmers, and low budget allocation. Addressing these gaps through strengthened institutional capacity, clarified roles across government tiers, and enhanced skills of extension workers is essential to ensure farmer-inclusive, demand-driven planning. Policy implications include prioritizing participatory planning, equitable access to inputs, credit, and technical support, and promoting digital tools and public-private partnerships to expand outreach, particularly in remote areas. Future research should examine the long-term impacts of decentralized extension, technology-driven interventions, and innovative governance approaches to achieve a sustainable, inclusive, and effective agricultural extension system that meets the diverse needs of Nepalese farmers.

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Rural Nepal's Political Economy: Dependency, Migration, and Agricultural Stagnation

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Nepal's agricultural sector, central to rural livelihoods, is shaped by structural underdevelopment and economic dependency, influenced by imports, remittances, and migration. This study examines the relationships and combined impact of these factors on agriculture's contribution to GDP using 25 years of secondary data (2000–2024) from the World Bank, analyzed through correlation and regression in SPSS 25. Findings highlight the negative influence of imports and remittances, reflecting Nepal's core-periphery economic structure, while migration shows minimal direct effect. The results underscore how reliance on external flows perpetuates rural marginalization and limits sectoral growth. The study emphasizes the need for policies that strengthen domestic agriculture, reduce external dependency, and promote sustainable, inclusive rural development, ensuring that growth translates into broader structural transformation.

Keywords: political economy, center-periphery, underdevelopment, growth and stagnation, Nepal

Introduction

Nepal's rural economy functions within a political-economic system characterized by persistent underdevelopment, driven by unequal power dynamics, structural disparities, and a pronounced core-periphery divide. Historically and currently, state development strategies have systematically favored urban and core areas politically, administratively, and economically, leading to the institutional marginalization of rural regions. This neglect manifests in insufficient investment, infrastructure, and policy focus, perpetuating cycles of economic stagnation and disarticulation (Dhakal & Paudel, 2023). Consequently, rural areas remain structurally disadvantaged, with agriculture as the primary livelihood for many, experiencing prolonged decline.

Despite its critical role in food security and rural employment, the contribution of agriculture, forestry, and fishing to Nepal's GDP has consistently decreased over the last twenty years. This paradox, where national economic growth coexists with rural stagnation, exemplifies what dependency and structuralism theorists term "uneven development": aggregate indicators improve while marginalized sectors and regions see no corresponding gains (Chaudhary, 2020). Nepal's rural underdevelopment is thus not merely a technical failure but a reflection of political-economic priorities that value external flows like remittances and imports over internal structural transformation.

The rapid expansion of remittances (now 26–30% of GDP) epitomizes this dependency. While temporarily reducing poverty and boosting consumption, remittances have simultaneously reduced agricultural labor participation and entrenched a rentier economy reliant on foreign employment (Chhetri et al., 2020; Thapa-Parajuli et al., 2025). Migration from rural areas to cities or abroad further intensifies farm labor shortages. Remittance income is often channeled into non-productive uses like housing and consumption rather than productive investments, worsening the fragility of rural production systems (Tuladhar et al., 2014; Ghimire & Kapri, 2020).

This dynamic illustrates a classic contradiction in Nepal's political economy: macroeconomic growth driven by external flows occurs alongside a lack of structural change in the domestic rural economy. This

"growth without development," typical of peripheral economies in dependency theory, sees rising GDP obscure widening socio-economic disparities between the urban core and rural periphery (Koirala & Bashyal, 2025). The uneven trajectory hinders inclusive and sustainable rural transformation, instead revealing how global and national political-economic relations systematically reproduce rural underdevelopment.

This study has examined aspects of Nepal's rural structure and remittance rise, yet research holistically analyzing these dynamics through a political economy and core-periphery lens remains limited. Existing literature often isolates remittances, agricultural decline, and migration, failing to adequately situate them within broader systems of resource distribution, policy neglect, and institutional power imbalances. The paradox of macroeconomic growth alongside rural stagnation, particularly as a manifestation of peripheral underdevelopment, has received insufficient attention. A significant gap exists in integrating these issues into a coherent framework that demonstrates how central dominance in governance and investment perpetuates rural marginalization. This study addresses this gap by critically analyzing Nepal's rural stagnation through a political economy perspective, emphasizing core-periphery inequalities and linking remittance dependency, agricultural decline, and migration to overarching processes of structural inequality and underdevelopment.

Problem Statement
Nepal's rural economy is fundamentally shaped by a political economy characterized by underdevelopment, structural dependency, and persistent core-periphery disparities. Key rural sectors—agriculture, forestry, and fishing—which have long sustained rural livelihoods, are experiencing a declining share of GDP, indicative of deeper stagnation in rural productive capacity. Despite substantial inflows of remittances and significant labor migration, anticipated improvements in rural productivity and sustainability have not been realized.

The rising ratio of imports to GDP underscores a growing dependence on foreign goods and services, revealing weaknesses in domestic production, particularly within the rural agrarian economy. Concurrently, while personal remittances provide vital income for rural households, they have inadvertently reduced agricultural labor participation and intensified rural economic dependency (Dhakal & Paudel, 2023; Ghimire & Kapri, 2020). Persistent net outmigration from peripheral rural areas to cities or international labor markets further entrenches demographic imbalances, deepening the center-periphery development gap (Koirala & Bashyal, 2025). Although imports, remittances, and net migration have been examined individually, their combined impact on the declining contribution of agriculture to GDP lacks thorough empirical and theoretical exploration. This crucial oversight obscures the structural forces and policy deficiencies perpetuating rural stagnation and developmental exclusion within Nepal's political economy.

Theoretical Review
The political economy perspective offers a broad framework for analyzing development by focusing on the influence of power structures, institutional arrangements, and historical contexts. It emphasizes that economic outcomes and social progress are deeply connected to political governance and global systems of influence (Bardhan, 2005). In Nepal, this approach sheds light on why rural regions often experience economic stagnation and receive limited attention in national development policies.

The center-periphery model, derived from dependency theory, highlights persistent inequalities between dominant regions (the center) and marginalized areas (the periphery) (Prebisch, 1950). Within this structure, rural parts of Nepal function as the periphery, heavily depending on urban areas and foreign economies for employment, goods, and investment. This dependence restricts independent development and sustains long-term underdevelopment.

Underdevelopment theory, advanced by Frank (1967), challenges the idea that underdevelopment is simply an early stage of development. Instead, it asserts that underdevelopment results from unequal and exploitative relationships between global and national actors, whereby resources, labor, and capital are extracted from peripheral regions to benefit the core, leaving the periphery deliberately disadvantaged. While economic growth is often viewed as a primary indicator of national progress, it does not ensure inclusive development (Todaro & Smith, 2020). In the context of Nepal, economic expansion is frequently urban-centered, neglecting rural areas and deepening disparities in income, services, and opportunities.

Stagnation refers to the prolonged lack of progress in sectors like agriculture or regions such as rural Nepal. It is typically caused by low levels of investment, structural constraints, and the outward flow of labor and resources (Byres, 2003). These conditions create a cycle of marginalization, dependency, and continued economic stagnation.

Empirical review

Koirala and Bashyal (2025) explored the interplay between migration, economic development, and socio-ecological changes in Nepal. By reviewing 42 carefully chosen scholarly articles, they employed thematic analysis to outline four major themes: the use effect of remittances on individual livelihoods, the offset effect related to land use, the substitution effect due to workforce reduction, and the neglect effect resulting from fewer active household members managing land. The study highlights the critical need to understand these interconnected impacts to guide effective policy aligned with Nepal's broader economic goals.

Thapa-Parajuli et al. (2025) investigated the impact of remittances on household spending patterns in rural Nepal, drawing on data from the World Bank's Nepal Household Risk and Vulnerability Survey Panel (2016–2018).Utilizing instrumental variable regression, they measured how remittance inflows affect different consumption categories. Their findings indicate that remittances significantly boost overall household spending, particularly on essential needs such as food, education, and healthcare, contributing to improved nutrition and human capital. Importantly, they found no notable increase in spending on non-productive items like tobacco and alcohol.

Research by Dhakal and Paudel (2023) investigated the trends and economic implications of remittances in Nepal using secondary data from official reports and academic publications. Applying descriptive statistics and correlation analysis through MS Excel, their findings reveal a rising trend in remittance inflows. Nepal ranks 19th globally in remittance receipts and their share of GDP. Remittances are strongly positively associated with GDP, trade deficit, consumption, and capital formation, while showing a negative correlation with agricultural GDP. The relationship with inflation was positive but weak.

Chhetri and Dhakal (2020) examined the status of remittance and its economic effects using secondary data and statistical methods. They observed a yearly rise in the number of Nepalis seeking foreign employment, with Malaysia as the top destination, followed by Gulf countries. Their analysis showed no significant link between remittance inflows and the expansion of agricultural land. Nonetheless, remittances have supported poverty and unemployment reduction, helped sustain foreign exchange reserves, and improved the balance of payments. A strong positive correlation was observed between remittance inflows and GDP, while a significant negative relationship was found between remittances and the GDP share of agriculture, forestry, and fishing.

Ghimire and Kapri (2020) assessed how different types of remittances—earned and unearned—affect agricultural productivity in Nepal. Using a three-stage least squares (3-SLS) model to address endogeneity concerns, they found that earned remittances had a greater impact on agricultural

productivity compared to unearned remittances, suggesting that the two types have distinct economic effects. Similarly, Chaudhary (2020) examined how two decades of remittance inflows have influenced the social, economic, and political conditions of migrant households. The study identified remittances as crucial for improving living standards, reducing poverty, and raising political and social awareness. Migrant households experienced notable income growth, enabling higher spending capacity and asset acquisition. Many formerly landless families acquired land, and access to modern technology improved significantly among these households, unlike their non-migrant counterparts.

Likewise, Tuladhar et al. (2014) explored the effects of migration and remittances on agricultural output through descriptive and correlation analysis. They found that migration negatively impacts agricultural yields due to labor shortages. Moreover, although remittance-recipient households had increased income, they did not invest in agricultural tools or inputs that could enhance productivity. The study highlights two key points: labor migration reduces available agricultural labor, and remittances are not being channeled into productivity-enhancing investments in the agricultural sector.

Research on migration and remittances in Nepal highlights complex and sometimes contradictory effects on rural households and agriculture. Studies show that remittances improve household income, consumption, nutrition, education, and overall living standards (Thapa-Parajuli et al., 2025; Chaudhary, 2020; Dhakal & Paudel, 2023). However, remittances often do not translate into investments that enhance agricultural productivity, and labor migration reduces the available workforce, negatively affecting farm output (Tuladhar et al., 2014; Chhetri & Dhakal, 2020). While some research distinguishes between earned and unearned remittances (Ghimire & Kapri, 2020) or explores socio-ecological effects (Koirala & Bashyal, 2025), there remains a gap in understanding the combined macro- and micro-level impacts of migration and remittances on rural economic development. Specifically, few studies systematically examine how dependency on remittances interacts with declining agricultural contribution to GDP and long-term underdevelopment in rural Nepal, indicating the need for research that links household-level dynamics with broader political-economic outcomes.

Research Objectives

The research has set the following objectives and hypotheses.

Objectives

- To analyze the relationship between total imports to GDP, remittance inflows in USD, and net migrations with the percentage contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP.
- To examine the impact of total imports, remittances, and net migration on the contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP.

Hypotheses

- **H_1:** Total imports to GDP have a significant impact on the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP in Nepal.
- **H_2:** Amount of remittance in USD has a significant impact on the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP in Nepal.
- **H_3:** Net migrations have a significant impact on the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP in Nepal.

Methodology

The causal research design is used with the population as all annual economic records of Nepal relevant

to agriculture, remittance, and migration up to the present time. The sample of the study consists of 25 yearly observations of Nepal-related variables from 2000 to 2024. The data are secondary in nature and collected from the World Bank. Correlation and regression analyses are used. The data analysis tool is SPSS version 25. The dependent variable is the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP (Y), and the independent variables are total imports to GDP (X_1), amount of remittance in USD (X_2), and net migrations (X_3). The results are analyzed using Pearson correlation and regression. The regression model is:

Model 1: $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e$

Table 1 presents the key variables used in the study along with their measurements and theoretical justifications. The dependent variable captures the contribution of agriculture, forestry, and fishing to GDP as a proxy for rural economic stagnation, while the independent variables—imports, remittances, and net migration—represent factors linked to economic dependency, labor outmigration, and center-periphery demographic imbalances.

Table 1 Variableand their measurement

Type	Variable	Measurement	TheoreticalJustification
Dependent (Y)	Agriculture,forestry, and fishing, value added (%of GDP)	Percentage contribution of agriculturetoGDP	Proxyforruraleconomic stagnation
Independent 1 (X_1)	Importsofgoodsand services(%ofGDP)	Ratiooftotalimports to GDP	Economicdependencyand weakrural production
Independent 2 (X_2)	Personal remittance received (USD)	Amountremittancein USD	labor outmigration and dependencyon external income
Independent 3 (X4)	Net migrations	Total number (immigrants − emigrants)	Center-periphery demographicimbalance

Source:WorldBank

Findings
The study examines how key economic factors influence the contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP. Correlation analysis reveals the strength and direction of relationships between the agricultural GDP share and variables such as imports, remittances, and net migration. Table 2 presents the correlation analysis of the variables. The correlation between imports to GDP and the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP is negative (−0.707) and statistically significant (p = 0.000). The correlation between the amount of remittance in USD and the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP is also negative (−0.935) and significant (p = 0.000). The correlation between net migrations and the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP is negative (−0.044) but not significant (p = 0.836).

Table 2Correlations Analysis

	Percentage contribution of agriculturetoGDP	Ratioof total importsto GDP	Amountremittance in USD	Net migrations

Percentage contributionof agriculturetoGDP	1		
Totalimports to GDP	-.709[**]	1	
Amountremittancein USD	-.935[**]	.587[**]	1
Net migrations	-.044	.176	-.093	1

Source:WorldBank

The correlation analysis shows that higher imports and remittance inflows are strongly associated with a lower contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP, while net migration has no significant effect.

Likewise, the following findings present the impact of imports, remittances, and net migration on the contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP. The regression results indicate that together, these factors explain 91.9% of the variation in agricultural contribution, with imports and remittances showing a statistically significant negative effect, while net migration is not significant. Table 3 shows the impact of the independent and dependent variables. The R^2 value of 0.919 represents the combined effect of total imports to GDP, remittance inflows in USD, and net migration on the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP, accounting for 91.9% of the variation. The remaining 8.1% of the variation is attributed to other factors not covered in this study. Overall, the model is statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000.

Table 3 RegressionAnalysis

Variables	B	Sig	VIF
Constant	44.095	.000	1.662
Totalimports to GDP	-0.298	.014	1.625
AmountremittanceinUSD	-1.208	.000	1.099
Net migrations	-2.713	.223	1.662
R-Square	0.919		
F-change	79.51	0.000	

Source:WorldBank

The impact of total imports to GDP on the percentage contribution of agriculture to GDP is negative and statistically significant, as indicated by a beta value of -0.298 and a significance level of 0.014. Similarly, the impact of remittance inflows in USD on agriculture's contribution to GDP is negative and significant, with a beta value of -1.208 and a significance level of 0.000. In contrast, the impact of net migrations on agricultural GDP contribution is negative but not significant, with a beta value of -2.713 and a significance value of 0.223.

Objective Results
The first objective, analyzing the relationship between total imports to GDP, remittances in USD, and net migrations with the percentage contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP, is supported by the correlation analysis. Results show that both total imports and remittances have a strong and significant negative relationship with agriculture's GDP contribution, whereas net migration exhibits a weak and insignificant negative relationship. This indicates that higher import reliance and remittance inflows are associated with a declining share of agriculture in GDP, while migration does not show a statistically significant direct correlation.

The second objective, examining the impact of these variables on agricultural contribution, is confirmed through regression analysis. The model explains 91.9% of the variation in agriculture's GDP share. Total imports and remittances have a statistically significant negative impact, while net migration has a negative but statistically insignificant effect. These results highlight the dominant influence of imports and remittances on the sector's declining economic contribution, validating the study's focus on macroeconomic drivers.

Hypotheses Results

The three hypotheses were tested using correlation and regression results. H_1 (total imports significantly impact agricultural GDP share) and H_2 (remittances significantly impact agricultural GDP share) are accepted, as both variables show strong negative and statistically significant effects. H_3 (net migration significantly impacts agricultural GDP share) is not accepted, given its negative but statistically insignificant effect. These outcomes confirm that while imports and remittances are key factors influencing agriculture's economic contribution, net migration does not have a direct measurable effect in the model, highlighting the complex dynamics of rural labor and macroeconomic change.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence on the complex relationships between total imports to GDP, remittance inflows, net migration, and the contribution of agriculture to Nepal's GDP. Both correlation and regression analyses indicate that total imports and remittances exert a strong and statistically significant negative effect on agriculture's share of GDP, while net migration has a weak and statistically insignificant effect. These results align with the political economy and dependency frameworks discussed in the literature, highlighting structural factors that shape rural stagnation and uneven development in Nepal.

Imports, Remittances, and Agricultural Decline

The negative relationship between imports and agricultural contribution underscores the vulnerability of Nepal's rural economy to external dependence. As the regression analysis shows, total imports explain a significant portion of the decline in agricultural GDP, reflecting patterns of core-periphery dependency. This aligns with Byres (2003) and Frank (1967), who argue that peripheral regions are systematically disadvantaged when resources, labor, and capital are extracted to support core regions. In the Nepalese context, increasing import dependency reduces incentives for domestic agricultural production, contributing to stagnation in rural livelihoods.

Similarly, remittance inflows have a strong negative impact on agriculture's share of GDP. This finding confirms earlier research by Chhetri et al. (2020), Dhakal and Paudel (2023), and Tuladhar et al. (2014), which highlight that while remittances improve household income, they often fail to translate into productive investment in agriculture. Remittances, although critical for household consumption, health, and education (Thapa-Parajuli et al., 2025; Chaudhary, 2020), contribute to a rentier economy that diminishes labor participation in farming and weakens local production systems. The findings also resonate with Koirala and Bashyal (2025), who describe the "substitution effect," wherein remittances reduce the active workforce in agriculture, indirectly limiting productivity.

Migration and Labor Dynamics

Interestingly, net migration exhibits a negative but statistically insignificant effect on agriculture's GDP contribution. While migration is often cited as a driver of labor shortages in rural areas, this study suggests that its direct effect on agricultural output may be less pronounced than that of macroeconomic

factors like imports and remittances. This aligns with observations by Tuladhar et al. (2014) and Chhetri and Dhakal (2020), which highlight that migration primarily interacts with agricultural productivity through labor substitution and household labor allocation, rather than producing a directly measurable impact at the macroeconomic level. It also indicates that remittance-led consumption and import dependency may overshadow the direct effects of labor migration on agricultural contribution.

Integration with Literature

The findings support the theoretical framing of uneven development and center-periphery disparities. As noted in the introduction and theoretical review, Nepal's rural periphery is structurally disadvantaged due to historical and ongoing political-economic prioritization of urban cores (Dhakal & Paudel, 2023; Prebisch, 1950). The observed negative effects of imports and remittances confirm that macroeconomic growth does not automatically translate into rural development, reflecting the "growth without development" paradox described by Koirala and Bashyal (2025).

Empirical studies reviewed in this research also reinforce the observed patterns. For instance, Thapa-Parajuli et al. (2025) and Chaudhary (2020) emphasize that remittances enhance household well-being but do not necessarily promote productive investment in agriculture, which aligns with the study's regression results. Ghimire and Kapri (2020) distinguish between earned and unearned remittances, suggesting that the type of remittance may further moderate its impact on agricultural productivity. This nuance highlights the need for future research to disaggregate remittance types when assessing their economic consequences.

Additionally, the thematic insights from Koirala and Bashyal (2025)—use, offset, substitution, and neglect effects of remittances—help explain why remittance inflows, while improving living standards, can still contribute to agricultural decline. Households increasingly prioritize consumption over investment in land, labor, and agricultural technology, reinforcing a dependency-driven cycle of underdevelopment. Tuladhar et al. (2014) similarly note that while remittance households have higher incomes, they often avoid investing in productivity-enhancing tools, which contributes to stagnation in rural agricultural output.

Policy and Structural Implications

The combined insights from the literature and empirical results point to a systemic issue: Nepal's rural periphery remains dependent on external financial flows and vulnerable to structural inequalities. High reliance on imports and remittances perpetuates a cycle of stagnation, labor substitution, and declining agricultural GDP contribution. The findings reinforce the need for policies that promote productive use of remittances, strengthen domestic agricultural production, and reduce overdependence on imports. Targeted interventions could include incentives for agricultural investment, rural infrastructure development, and mechanisms to channel remittances into productivity-enhancing projects, thereby addressing both immediate household needs and long-term sectoral sustainability.

In summary, the discussion highlights that Nepal's rural agricultural economy is deeply shaped by structural and macroeconomic factors, particularly imports and remittance inflows, which exert strong and significant negative effects on agriculture's contribution to GDP. While net migration shows a weak and statistically insignificant effect, the findings suggest that macro-level financial dependencies overshadow the direct impact of labor movement. The study integrates these results with the literature, confirming that remittances often improve household well-being but do not translate into productive agricultural investment, contributing to a rentier economy and reduced labor participation in farming. Imports further

weaken domestic agricultural incentives, reflecting center-periphery and dependency dynamics that sustain rural stagnation. The discussion underscores the need for policy interventions that channel remittances into productive uses, promote domestic agricultural investment, and reduce overreliance on imports, thereby supporting sustainable rural development and addressing structural inequalities in Nepal's political economy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Nepal's rural agricultural economy is deeply shaped by a political-economic structure of dependency and uneven development, where high reliance on imports and remittance inflows significantly reduces agriculture's contribution to GDP, while net migration has minimal direct effect. The findings highlight the interaction between household-level financial behaviors and broader macroeconomic forces, reflecting structural and policy-related drivers of rural underdevelopment. The study underscores the need for integrated policy interventions that promote the productive use of remittances, strengthen agricultural infrastructure and technology, and reduce overdependence on imports to enhance rural economic resilience. Future research could examine the differentiated impacts of earned versus unearned remittances, explore household-level behavior in relation to macroeconomic trends, and identify policy frameworks that effectively link remittance flows, local production systems, and labor migration patterns to support inclusive and sustainable rural development in Nepal.

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Land Reform and Peasant Marginalization in Nepal: Evaluating the 1964 Act through a Marxian Perspective

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Abstract

Nepal's Land Reform Act of 1964 marked a critical juncture in the country's transition from a feudal agrarian system to a modern developmental state. This study evaluates the socio-economic impacts of the reform on the peasantry class, particularly smallholder farmers, through a Marxian analytical lens. Drawing from secondary qualitative and quantitative data, including policy archives, empirical case studies, and scholarly critiques, this paper contends that the 1964 reform aimed to dismantle traditional landlordism but fell short in eradicating class inequality and land-based exploitation. While the reform nominally introduced tenancy rights and land ceilings, structural loopholes enabled elite landlords to retain control over large landholdings by circumventing laws through proxy ownership and kinship-based fragmentation. Moreover, the reform failed to challenge the deeply entrenched class hierarchy, reinforcing semi-feudal relations in many rural areas. Findings indicate that the reform had mixed outcomes: while some tenant farmers benefited from land titles and legal protection, others remained landless or vulnerable to informal tenancy arrangements. The research utilizes Marx's theory of historical materialism and the class struggle to demonstrate how legal reforms, without revolutionary transformation in the ownership structure, merely reproduced existing inequalities under a new guise. The study concludes by recommending a renewed policy framework that addresses loopholes, ensures distributive justice, and centers peasant agency. This research contributes to broader discourses on agrarian transformation, state-led reforms, and postcolonial class dynamics in South Asia.

Keywords: landownership systems, agrarian reforms, Nepalese peasant, peasant livelihoods

Introduction

The agrarian transformation of Nepal has long been shaped by historical class structures rooted in a feudal landholding system. Prior to the 1950s, the rural economy of Nepal was overwhelmingly characterized by landlord-tenant relations, where a small elite class of landowners controlled vast tracts of arable land while most cultivators worked under exploitative tenancy arrangements (Regmi, 1978). The introduction of the Land Reform Act of 1964 was a landmark state intervention that sought to disrupt this asymmetrical socio-economic structure by abolishing the zamindari-style landlordism and empowering tenant farmers. This legislative effort was driven by the post-Rana state's aspiration to modernize agriculture, curb rural unrest, and strengthen its control over land revenue (Blaikie, Cameron, & Seddon, 2002). Despite its progressive aims, however, the actual outcomes of the reform remain heavily contested.

From a Marxian theoretical perspective, land is not merely a productive asset but a central axis around which class struggle and exploitation revolve. Marx's (1867/1976) historical materialism posits that legal reforms alone cannot resolve the contradictions of a feudal agrarian structure without fundamentally transforming the relations of production. In the Nepali context, although the 1964 reforms introduced ceilings on landholding, tenancy security, and redistribution schemes, the persistence of informal tenancies, bureaucratic manipulation, and elite capture suggests that the reforms served to stabilize, rather than revolutionize, class relations (Upreti, 2001).

This paper interrogates the degree to which the Land Reform Act of 1964 alleviated structural inequalities faced by the peasantry. It also explores how the reform operated within a framework of class compromise rather than rupture. By doing so, the study raises broader questions about state-led land reform programs in post-feudal societies and their capacity to catalyze genuine socio-economic transformation. The paper specifically focuses on the experiences of smallholder cultivators, tenant farmers, and landless laborers— the rural subalterns often left out of formal land entitlements.

Empirical data collected from secondary literature, case studies, and government reports suggest that while the reform did provide some legal recognition and security to tenants, it failed to redistribute land on a significant scale (Ojha, 1983; Adhikari, 2008). Moreover, the landed elite, often well-connected to political and administrative networks, successfully evaded redistribution mandates through kinship partitioning, falsified land records, and manipulation of tenancy registers (Sharma, 2001). As such, the reform served more as a mechanism for political legitimization than a revolutionary restructuring of agrarian relations.

The significance of this inquiry lies not only in revisiting a major historical policy event but also in contributing to contemporary policy debates in Nepal, where land inequality, rural poverty, and agrarian distress remain pressing issues. In fact, successive governments have launched additional reform attempts, such as the National Land Policy (2019), in part as a response to the limitations of the 1964 Act. These recent developments further highlight the relevance of critically assessing past reforms through rigorous theoretical and empirical frameworks.

Land inequality and rural poverty remain serious problems in Nepal. Studying the 1964 Land Reform Act through a Marxian perspective helps us understand why the reform failed to bring real change for tenant farmers, smallholders, and landless laborers. By examining how class, elite control, and state policies shaped the outcomes, this research highlights important lessons for current and future land reform efforts. Therefore, the study **"Land Reform and Peasant Marginalization in Nepal: Evaluating the 1964 Act through a Marxian Perspective"** is important to understand past challenges and guide policies for reducing rural inequality in Nepal.

Literature Review
This literature review is organized into three main parts. First, the policy review looks at the history and legal framework of land reform in Nepal, examining how laws were designed to redistribute land and protect tenant farmers. Second, the theoretical framework applies a Marxian perspective to understand how land reforms affected class relations and whether they challenged or reinforced existing inequalities. Finally, the empirical studies section reviews evidence from past research on the outcomes of the 1964 land reform, highlighting both the successes, such as granting land titles to some tenants, and the limitations, including ongoing landlessness and informal tenancy arrangements.

Policy Review: Historical and Legal Context of Land Reform in Nepal
Nepal's land tenure system before the 1950s was characterized by semi-feudal arrangements dominated by Birta (tax-free grants), Jagir (state service-based grants), and Raikar (state-owned land managed by tenants) systems. These systems concentrated land ownership in the hands of elites such as royals, military officials, and civil administrators, leaving cultivators vulnerable to rent extraction and eviction (Regmi, 1978). The Rana oligarchy (1846–1951) institutionalized landlordism by strengthening hereditary landholding rights while relegating cultivators to dependent tenancy status (Blaikie et al., 2002).

Following the political changes of 1951, the Nepali state adopted a development-oriented agenda that emphasized agrarian reform as a tool for modernization. After the peasants' revolution in many places of

the country, the Land Reform Commission Report of 1953 laid the groundwork for tenancy protection and land redistribution. This culminated in the Land Reform Act of 1964, which introduced three main policy mechanisms: (1) abolition of intermediaries (landlords), (2) fixation of land ceiling limits, and (3) granting ownership rights to tenants (Government of Nepal, 1964). However, implementation remained inconsistent. According to the National Planning Commission (NPC, 1980), elite resistance, administrative corruption, and lack of political will undermined the objectives of the Act. The 1991 World Bank review concluded that land ceiling enforcement was sporadic, and redistributive outcomes were minimal. The High-Level Land Reform Commission in Nepal appears to agree with these conclusions (see Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2010).

In summary, while the 1964 Land Reform Act aimed to modernize Nepal's agrarian structure and empower tenant farmers, its implementation was hampered by elite resistance, bureaucratic inefficiency, and limited political will, resulting in minimal redistribution and persistent rural landlessness.

Theoretical Framework: Marxian Critique of Agrarian Reform
From a Marxian perspective, land reform must be understood not merely as a technical or administrative endeavor, but as a terrain of class struggle between the landed elite and the landless or land-poor peasantry (Marx, 1867/1976). Marx viewed land as a form of capital embedded in social relations, and agrarian reform as a potentially revolutionary means of transforming production relations. However, in the absence of proletarian leadership or mass mobilization, state-led reforms often become mechanisms for "passive revolution" (Gramsci, 1971), wherein the ruling class co-opts reform agendas to maintain social order.

Applied to Nepal, the 1964 reform represented a case of top-down restructuring aimed at diffusing agrarian unrest and integrating the peasantry into the state apparatus, rather than disrupting the foundations of elite dominance. Scholars such as Upreti (2004) argue that the reform served to "defuse class tensions without redistributing power." Similarly, Hart (1986) warns that reforms that operate within the limits of bourgeois legality tend to reinforce existing hierarchies by legalizing elite advantages.

Lenin's writings on agrarian questions also provide insights. He emphasized the importance of land collectivization and full peasant mobilization as essential for dismantling landlordism (Lenin, 1907/1964). The lack of such mobilization in Nepal, combined with a weak state structure, meant that reforms were captured by local power brokers who manipulated the process in their favor.

Contemporary neo-Marxist scholars have advanced this critique by linking Nepal's land reform with global capitalist integration. Sugden (2013) argues that the state's interest in capitalist development, especially through rural monetization and agricultural commercialization, shaped land policies that prioritized efficiency over justice. This ideological orientation made reform technocratic rather than emancipatory, favoring wealthier peasants and landlords who could adapt to market logic.

In sum, the Land Reform Act of 1964 illustrates how state-led agrarian reforms in Nepal, while framed as emancipatory, primarily reinforced existing class hierarchies, leaving the rural peasantry only partially empowered and highlighting the limits of reform without grassroots mobilization and structural transformation.

Empirical Studies: Evidence of Outcomes and Limitations
Numerous empirical studies confirm the limited redistributive success of the 1964 land reform. Adhikari (2008), in a survey of hills and Tarai villages, found that most tenant cultivators had not received land titles even decades after the reform. In many cases, landlords pre-emptively registered land in the names

of kin to evade ceiling laws. Similarly, Acharya and Zafarullah (1992) documented widespread manipulation of tenancy records, with government officials often complicit in excluding genuine tenants.

Ojha (1983) observed that in the Tarai region, where land values were higher, elite families converted landholdings into multiple titles using fictitious names, thus nullifying ceiling provisions. This not only maintained but often expanded elite control over land. In contrast, in the hill regions, poor infrastructure and fragmentation made land less lucrative, resulting in a relatively higher proportion of tenant ownership, though still limited.

Rural sociologists have highlighted the reform's gender and caste biases. Tamang (2002) found that women's land rights were almost entirely ignored in implementation. Similarly, lower-caste Dalit households remained landless at disproportionately high rates. The Agricultural Census of Nepal (2001) reported that only 10% of the total land was owned by the bottom 50% of cultivators, indicating persistent inequality. Fieldwork-based studies also report a mismatch between legal entitlements and social reality. For example, Ramesh (2011) notes that although tenancy rights were nominally protected, informal evictions continued in many areas, as tenants lacked legal literacy or access to justice. Moreover, even when ownership was granted, the small plot sizes—often under 0.5 hectares—were insufficient for livelihood security, reinforcing dependence on seasonal wage labor or out-migration (Community Self-Reliance Centre, 2005).

Recent policy evaluations echo these concerns. The National Land Policy of 2019 acknowledges past failures and proposes a shift toward integrated land governance, with digitized records, gender equity, and recognition of informal settlements (MoLRM, 2019). However, critics argue that without addressing underlying class interests and enforcing existing laws, the cycle of elite capture may persist (Paudel et al., 2020).

While the 1964 Land Reform Act was a progressive milestone on paper, its actual implementation was marred by contradictions, elite resistance, and systemic inertia. From a Marxian standpoint, this aligns with the view that reforms enacted from above, without mass mobilization or structural rupture, are bound to be limited in emancipatory potential. The empirical findings, drawn from various geographic and demographic contexts, support the argument that land reform in Nepal has been more symbolic than transformative. Overall, these empirical findings underscore that the 1964 Land Reform Act, despite its progressive intentions, largely failed to alter entrenched land hierarchies, leaving the Nepali peasantry—particularly women, lower-caste groups, and tenant farmers—marginalized and highlighting the enduring gap between reform policy and substantive agrarian justice.

Research Gap
Despite decades of scholarship on Nepal's 1964 Land Reform Act, significant gaps remain in understanding its broader structural and socio-economic implications for the peasantry. While existing studies document limited redistributive success, elite manipulation, and persistent inequalities along class, caste, and gender lines, few have systematically analyzed how these dynamics interacted with state policy, local power structures, and grassroots responses to shape long-term agrarian outcomes. Moreover, most research emphasizes either legal frameworks or isolated empirical cases, without integrating a class-conscious theoretical lens that links policy design to lived peasant realities. Addressing this gap, the present study—*From Feudalism to Reform: The Implications of Land Reform Acts of 1964 on Nepali Peasantry*—adopts a Marxian perspective to critically examine how the reform mediated class relations, reinforced or challenged elite dominance, and affected the socio-economic agency of smallholder cultivators, tenant farmers, and landless laborers. By combining historical, theoretical, and empirical insights, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the reform's emancipatory limits and enduring structural consequences for rural Nepal.

Objectives
This study primarily seeks to examine the historical and socio-economic impact of the Land Reform Act of 1964 on Nepal's rural peasantry. First, it investigates whether the reform led to a substantive redistribution of land and the dismantling of feudal power structures that had historically oppressed tenant farmers and landless laborers. Second, the research evaluates the extent to which the reform transformed class relations in the countryside, particularly considering ongoing land inequality, elite dominance, and the persistence of informal tenures. By exploring these dimensions through a Marxian theoretical lens, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how reform laws in post-feudal societies can reproduce, rather than eliminate, structural inequalities.

Methodology
This research adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology that relies on secondary data analysis (Pederson et al., 2020), with particular emphasis on class analysis and historical structural critique. Drawing on the Marxian framework of historical materialism, the study treats land not only as a productive resource but as a social relation embedded within broader structures of power and exploitation (Marx, 1976). The analysis is based on diverse secondary sources including legislative documents such as the 1964 Land Reform Act and subsequent land policy amendments, empirical studies and surveys from the Agricultural Census of Nepal (1981, 2001) and reports by the Ministry of Land Reform and Management (MoLRM), peer-reviewed academic literature from scholars like Regmi (1978), Blaikie et al. (2002), Upreti (2004), Adhikari (2008), and Paudel et al. (2020); theoretical contributions from classical and neo-Marxist thinkers such as Marx, Lenin (1907/1964), Gramsci (1971), and contemporary agrarian political economists like Sugden (2013).

The following section presents findings on: limited redistribution and the persistence of land inequality, elite capture and administrative subversion, continued marginalization of landless and Dalit communities, inadequate tenancy security and informal evictions, gender exclusion in land ownership, emergence of a rural petty bourgeoisie and agrarian stratification, impact on peasant livelihoods, and reform as a tool of state legitimization.

Findings

Limited Redistribution and the Persistence of Land Inequality
Although the Land Reform Act of 1964 legally established ceilings on landholding and promised tenancy rights, it led to only limited land redistribution in practice. Most of the productive land remained concentrated in the hands of a small elite. This result contradicted the intended goal of dismantling semi-feudal ownership and achieving equitable access to land.

The Agricultural Census of 2001 reported that over 70% of cultivators owned less than one hectare of land, while fewer than 5% of households controlled more than 25% of arable land (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2001). In many Tarai districts, landed elites used kin-based partitioning and fake ownership transfers to circumvent land ceiling rules (Ojha, 1983). Thus, while the law appeared progressive on paper, it enabled landlords to preserve ownership under legally permissible guises, reinforcing what Marx (1976) described as the transformation of formal equality into substantive inequality through capitalist legal forms.

Elite Capture and Administrative Subversion
Empirical studies show that Nepal's landed elites manipulated the implementation of the reform through political influence and bureaucratic collusion. Landlords often bribed officials to keep tenant names off formal registers (Adhikari, 2008). In some areas, such as Siraha and Saptari, peasants who had cultivated

land for decades found themselves excluded from legal recognition, while absentee landlords registered false tenants to retain ownership (Sharma, 2001).

In effect, the reform enabled a process of elite capture, whereby the dominant class leveraged state structures to reassert their control. This aligns with Gramsci's (1971) concept of passive revolution, wherein dominant groups accommodate limited reform to prevent broader systemic upheaval. The restructuring of land ownership occurred within the boundaries of the existing class structure, serving to pacify peasant unrest without genuinely transforming rural power relations.

Continued Marginalization of Landless and Dalit Communities
The reform failed to address landlessness and caste-based exclusion in any substantive way. Dalits and other marginalized communities remained disproportionately without land. According to Community Self-Reliance Centre (2005), over 85% of Dalit households remained either landless or near-landless decades after the reform's introduction. The 2001 census data corroborated this, showing that landless households had barely decreased in number since the 1970s (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

In rural hill regions such as Ramechhap and Gorkha, lower-caste tenants reported that even after receiving tenancy certificates, they lacked the financial and legal resources to formalize land titles (Tamang, 2002). Moreover, informal tenancy arrangements, often based on verbal agreements and mediated by local elites, continued to dominate in the absence of institutional follow-up. This reproduced dependency and exploitation, despite formal legal protection.

Inadequate Tenancy Security and Informal Evictions
Though the Act promised tenancy rights, it lacked effective enforcement mechanisms. Many tenants were evicted before they could be formally recognized, while others received only partial land rights that did not correspond to their actual cultivated area (Upreti, 2004). Landowners preemptively transferred land to relatives or sold it off before registration, leaving tenants legally disenfranchised.

Ramesh (2011) documented widespread cases where tenants were either unaware of their legal rights or unable to navigate complex legal systems to claim them. In these instances, state law proved insufficient in the face of customary and informal power relations that continued to structure rural land tenure. Marx (1976) famously noted that the state under capitalism serves the interests of the dominant class through its control of law and coercion. The same happened, as an observation borne out by Nepal's reform experience.

Gender Exclusion in Land Ownership
Women's exclusion from the land reform process was systematic and sustained. Until legal amendments in the 2000s, women were not recognized as equal landowners unless explicitly listed in documentation, which was rare. Tamang (2002) reported that less than 5% of land titles were in women's names prior to 2002. Even after reforms to inheritance laws, implementation remained weak, particularly in rural areas where patriarchal norms dominated.
        This absence of gender justice in land reform reflects what Hart (1986) describes as structural omissions in reformist policies that prioritize class relations while ignoring intra household dynamics and social reproduction. The continued exclusion of women from land rights impeded their economic autonomy and reinforced traditional gender hierarchies within rural peasant households.

Emergence of a Rural Petty Bourgeoisie and Agrarian Stratification
While the reform failed to create a classless peasantry, it did give rise to a rural petty bourgeoisie a small class of relatively well-off peasant proprietors who benefited from land titles and used them for credit

access and commercialization. These smallholders were often located in mid hill regions, where land values were lower and landlord resistance weaker (Blaikie et al., 2002).

Impact on Peasant Livelihoods

The Land Reform Act of 1964 had a mixed impact on the livelihoods of Nepal's rural peasantry. While the legal recognition of tenancy rights and limited land redistribution provided some tenants with improved tenure security, many peasants continued to struggle with insufficient landholding sizes that were inadequate for subsistence farming (Adhikari, 2008; Community Self-Reliance Centre, 2005). The persistence of landlessness and informal tenancy forced many smallholders and landless laborers to depend on seasonal wage labor, sharecropping, or migration to urban areas for supplemental income (Tamang, 2002). Consequently, despite formal reforms, rural livelihoods remained precarious, with limited access to credit, agricultural inputs, and markets further constraining productivity and economic stability (Blaikie, Cameron, & Seddon, 2002). These livelihood insecurities highlight the partial nature of reform impacts and the continued vulnerability of the peasantry within Nepal's semi feudal agrarian structure

However, the stratification of the peasantry accelerated as these smallholders began leasing land to even poorer laborers, thereby recreating exploitative relations under different terms. In Marxist terms, this signifies a transformation of relations of production that maintains surplus extraction, albeit in more decentralized or diffuse forms (Lenin, 1964). The emergence of small capitalist farmers thus coexisted with the persistence of landlessness, reproducing a dual agrarian economy.

Reform as a Tool of State Legitimization

Finally, the reform served as a political function for the newly emerging state, allowing it to consolidate legitimacy among the rural masses while maintaining its alliance with landed elites. The Panchayat regime (1960–1990), under King Mahendra and later King Birendra, used the language of reform to neutralize class-based opposition and promote a controlled modernization agenda (Whelpton, 2005). This dual strategy emancipatory rhetoric combined with minimalist implementation is emblematic of what Poulantzas (1978) termed authoritarian statism, where the state claims developmental legitimacy while preserving elite interests.In this sense, the 1964 Land Reform Act was not a revolutionary rupture but a hegemonic compromise that absorbed peasant grievances into the framework of bureaucratic governance. It demonstrates how law can function ideologically, appearing to offer change while materially entrenching the status quo.

In summary, the findings indicate that the Land Reform Act of 1964, despite its progressive intentions, achieved only limited redistribution of land and largely failed to dismantle entrenched semi-feudal hierarchies in rural Nepal. Elite capture, administrative subversion, and bureaucratic manipulation enabled landed families to circumvent ceilings and maintain control, while Dalits, women, and other marginalized groups remained systematically excluded from land ownership. Tenancy rights were inconsistently enforced, informal evictions persisted, and the emergence of a small rural petty bourgeoisie further stratified the peasantry, reproducing exploitative relations under new forms. Overall, the reform functioned more as a tool for state legitimization and the pacification of rural unrest than as a transformative mechanism, highlighting the gap between legislative promises and substantive agrarian justice in Nepal.

Discussion

The empirical evidence presented in this study substantiates the claim that the Land Reform Act of 1964, though radical in rhetoric, was conservative in its outcomes. From a Marxian perspective, this is unsurprising. Legal reforms within capitalist and semi-feudal societies are often designed to mediate, not abolish, and class antagonisms. Marx (1976) warned that legal changes imposed from above without revolutionary class mobilization tend to reproduce existing property relations in more institutionalized

forms. This is precisely what occurred in Nepal, where the reform functioned as a state led containment of rural unrest rather than a transformative redistribution of productive assets.

The dominant pattern was one of passive revolution, a Gramscian concept whereby dominant classes concede limited reform to preempt mass mobilization (Gramsci, 1971). Rather than dismantling the feudal order, Nepal's land reform adapted it to a bureaucratic and legalistic framework. Landlords retained their power not through overt coercion but through legal manipulation, administrative capture, and kin-based land fragmentation. As Upreti (2004) noted, the reform legitimized elite land control under a democratic guise, thereby displacing class conflict into legal and institutional arenas.

Another key Marxist insight validated by this study is Lenin's (1964) critique of petty bourgeois reformism. The emergence of a smallholder class beneficiaries of partial redistribution created a buffer zone between the elite and the landless. This new class, while materially better off, often reproduced exploitative relations by renting land or hiring labor. Thus, the reform did not eliminate class divisions; it reorganized them into a new hierarchy, fragmenting the peasantry and diluting collective resistance. The persistence of informal tenancy and landlessness further reinforces the Marxian argument that property relations are not simply legal, but social and political. Even decades after the reform, tenants and landless laborers remained subordinated to local elites through customary power, informal credit systems, and patron-client networks. This reflects Marx's (1867/1976) assertion that bourgeois legal equality conceals material inequality.

Moreover, the exclusion of Dalits, women, and landless migrants from the reform's benefits points to the intersectionality of class with caste and gender. While Marxism traditionally centers class, neo-Marxist scholars such as Hart (1986) and Sugden (2013) have emphasized that class exploitation often intersects with other forms of structural oppression. Nepal's land reform failed in part because it did not account for these intersecting inequalities, instead assuming a homogenous peasant subject. The reform's symbolic function also deserves attention. As Whelpton (2005) observed, the Panchayat regime utilized land reform discourse to promote national unity and development without challenging landed aristocracy. This reflects Poulantzas's (1978) theory of authoritarian statism, where the state expands its administrative reach under the guise of reform while maintaining capitalist (or semi-feudal) accumulation structures.

In sum, the findings confirm that the 1964 Land Reform Act was a case of class management, not class emancipation. While the legal apparatus promised redistribution, the underlying social relations remained intact. This underscores the Marxian premise that without a rupture in the relations of production, reforms tend to reproduce the very inequalities they claim to resolve.

Conclusion And Policy Implications

The 1964 Land Reform Act in Nepal was a historic attempt to break with centuries of feudal land relations and promote equitable rural development. However, as this study has shown, the reform largely failed to deliver on its transformative promise. While it introduced legal ceilings, tenancy protections, and redistribution mechanisms, its implementation was undermined by elite resistance, administrative collusion, and socio-political inertia. Landlords retained control through legal manipulation and kin-based fragmentation, while tenants, Dalits, women, and landless laborers remained marginalized. The creation of a rural petty bourgeoisie further diluted the egalitarian agenda, reproducing class hierarchy in new forms.

From a Marxian standpoint, the reform exemplifies how legal interventions without revolutionary rupture tend to serve hegemonic interests. The Nepali state, particularly under the Panchayat system, used land reform to legitimize its authority while preserving elite dominance. This contradiction between reformist discourse and class-reinforcing outcomes is central to understanding the reform's limitations. Policy implications emerge clearly: future land reform must go beyond bureaucratic technicalities and address the material relations of production. Land reform must be coupled with institutional accountability, tenancy rights enforcement, digitization of land records, and targeted redistribution to historically excluded groups, including women, Dalits, and landless peasants. Additionally, genuine land

reform should be part of a broader program of rural structural transformation that integrates credit access, agricultural support services, and political empowerment of the rural poor. Without confronting the entrenched structures of rural class domination, any reform no matter how progressive on paper risks becoming yet another chapter in the history of unfulfilled promises.

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Reimagining Nepal's Future: AI for Human Development and Education

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Abstract

AI can help Nepal build a better future in human development and education. This review paper examines the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) for human development and education in Nepal. Drawing on national policy documents, global reports, and academic studies, the review highlights AI's applications across sectors including education, health, agriculture, finance, and disaster management, and its capacity to drive economic growth, social transformation, and human capital formation. In education, AI supports personalized learning, intelligent tutoring, predictive analytics, and digital assistants, contributing to inclusive and equitable access while advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). Despite these opportunities, Nepal faces challenges including policy gaps, limited infrastructure, low AI literacy among teachers, and ethical and data privacy concerns. Lessons from international experiences, notably China's strategic digital investments, underscore the importance of stakeholder collaboration, faculty upskilling, and human-centered AI policies. The review concludes that integrating AI thoughtfully can enhance institutional efficiency, reduce inequalities, and strengthen Nepal's capacity for socio-economic and educational transformation. Future research should explore AI-driven innovations in governance, health, and sustainable development, ensuring alignment with national priorities and global best practices. Integrating AI in Nepal's education system can reduce inequalities and accelerate progress toward sustainable human development.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Human Development, Education, Nepal, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is quickly becoming a powerful driver of change, with the capacity to revolutionize human development and education worldwide. In Nepal, the 2025 Nepal National AI Policy

Draft envisions AI applications across a wide array of sectors, including education, health, transportation, tourism, agriculture, finance, disaster management, art, and entertainment, positioning AI as a key driver of long-term economic progress and social transformation (Government of Nepal, 2025). The state has committed to facilitating AI adoption through policy incentives, funding, and capacity-building initiatives, highlighting AI's centrality to human capital development and national competitiveness.

Despite this vision, Nepal faces significant challenges that threaten the effective diffusion of AI. With a medium Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.622 and education inequality at 39.8% (United Nations Development Programme, 2025), structural barriers, limited digital infrastructure, low AI literacy among educators, and gaps in regulatory frameworks hinder equitable and ethical adoption. Globally, universities are integrating AI into curricula, reskilling academic staff, and enhancing students' analytical capabilities, demonstrating that human development and AI readiness are closely intertwined (Stanford University, 2025).

AI's influence in education is particularly significant, offering personalized learning, intelligent tutoring, predictive analytics, and digital assistants that can enhance access, equity, and quality in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) (UNESCO & Stanford University, 2025). However, adoption remains constrained by limited teacher training, infrastructural gaps, ethical concerns, and the risk of widening digital divides (Filho et al., 2024; AlSagri & Sohail, 2024). Nepali higher education institutions (HEIs) have begun experimenting with AI applications in assessment, learning analytics, and administrative processes, yet strategic policies, faculty upskilling, and stakeholder engagement remain insufficient (see Crompton & Burke, 2023; Kuleto et al., 2021; Kang & Xu, 2025).

Given this context, there is a critical need to understand the potential of AI to foster human development and educational transformation in Nepal, identify structural and policy barriers, and explore lessons from international experiences to inform contextually appropriate strategies. This study, based on a comprehensive literature review, aims to examine the intersection of AI, human development, and education in Nepal, providing insights into the opportunities, challenges, and policy implications for fostering an inclusive, ethical, and sustainable AI-driven future.

Methodology

This study uses literature review and policy analysis, together called document analysis. It assesses the importance of AI in Nepal's human development and education. Document analysis provides a systematic approach for examining existing public policies and assessing their relevance to the research focus (Bowen, 2009; Cardno, 2018). We have reviewed key Nepal's national and international policy documents reviewed in this study. The insights derived from these documents were organized thematically to facilitate a structured presentation of findings and discussion (Bin-Qiang et al., 2024). The outcomes of this document analysis are presented and discussed in the subsequent section.

Literature Review

This literature review is structured around three interrelated themes: AI in human development, AI in education, and Nepal's need: AI into Human development and education.

AI in Human Development

AI is increasingly recognized as a transformative force shaping human development and civilizational progress. The 2025 Nepal National AI Policy Draft highlights AI's potential applications across diverse sectors, including education, health, transportation, tourism, agriculture, finance, disaster management, art, and entertainment (Government of Nepal, 2025). The draft further mentions that in the long run, AI is expected to drive both economic progress and social transformation. The state commits to supporting AI development through facilitation, funding, and policy incentives. AI integration is anticipated to reshape learning systems and educational practices, thereby influencing human capital formation (Government of Nepal, 2025). According to the United Nations Development Programme (2025), AI is not merely a technological advancement but represents a broader civilizational transformation (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025). Nepal's Human Development Index (HDI) stands at 0.622, placing it in the medium human development group, with education inequality at 39.8%, signaling the urgency for inclusive and equitable educational and developmental policies (UNDP, 2025). The report emphasizes three priority actions for human development in the AI era: creating a complementarity economy where AI works alongside people rather than replacing them; fostering intentional innovation so that human opportunities are embedded in AI design and use; and strengthening vital human capabilities to enable individuals to thrive in an AI-driven future (UNDP, 2025, p. 6).

The 16th Periodic Plan (2024/25–2028/29) envisions good governance, social justice, and national prosperity, emphasizing the identification and elimination of structural barriers to development across sectors and aiming to boost production, productivity, and competitiveness (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2024, p. 12). Globally, universities are formulating AI-related strategies including introducing AI-based courses into academic programs, enhancing students' digital and analytical skills, and training and reskilling academic staff (Stanford University, 2025). Stanford University further added that the future of human progress is inseparably linked to AI, with expansion largely dependent on each nation's readiness and access to AI resources. Policymakers are urged to prioritize investment and regulation to enable smooth AI adoption (Stanford University, 2025).

AI in Education

AI's influence in education has grown rapidly, shaping pedagogy, curriculum design, and learning assessment. UNESCO and Stanford University (2025) emphasize the reinterpretation of SDG 4 (Quality Education) in light of AI's growing influence, recommending the leveraging of AI tools to guarantee that all individuals can access quality education by 2030 (UNESCO & Stanford University, 2025, p. 380). The 2015–2030 SDG framework originally framed SDG 4 as ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, but did not anticipate the rapid development of AI, which has since reshaped development strategies through AI-driven digital technologies and data-based policy and planning mechanisms (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2017, p. 28). AI enables personalized educational content tailored to learners' needs, assists students from varied linguistic and cultural groups, reduces learning disparities caused by gender, socio-economic conditions, and geography, and strengthens individualized learning while preparing students for labor market demands (Lainjo, 2024). Filho et al. (2024) note that AI applications in higher education support the realization of SDGs, promote environmentally sustainable development through predictive analytics, enhance interaction and community building via chatbots and digital assistants, improve teaching and

learning quality through intelligent tutoring, and contribute to more efficient university operations, though limited digital infrastructure and IT training restrict widespread adoption.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2019a) underscores the necessity of skill development for teachers to transition from AI users to active contributors, while highlighting challenges in preparing educators and AI systems to adapt to educational contexts, limited public dialogue, and the need for a global policy framework to ensure human-centered AI development (UNESCO, 2019a). AI's rapid evolution is described as "racing ahead at lightning speed" (UNDP, 2025, p. v). Arini and Nursa'ban (2024) show AI's applications in automatic assessment, curriculum design, and virtual tutoring, positively contributing to SDG 4 but risking deepened digital divides and overdependence on technology. Academic institutions are reorganizing priorities to include AI adoption, integrating AI-enhanced curricula across disciplines, and emphasizing expansion of AI competencies in post-secondary education and specialized training programs (UNESCO, 2019b). Regulatory systems are necessary for ethical and accountable AI implementation (Jungwirth & Haluza, 2023). AI supports disadvantaged groups through virtual simulations, addressing economic and geographic barriers, and fosters social, economic, and environmental development, yet requires stronger investments in infrastructure and teacher training (AlSagri & Sohail, 2024). AI redefines learning methods, encourages pedagogical innovation, supports research-driven education, strengthens institutional efficiency, and plays a crucial role in advancing SDG 4 by improving access to education (UNESCO, 2024). Challenges in academic integrity and responsible AI application must be addressed to ensure sustainable and ethical education (Artyukhov et al., 2024). Savec and Jedrinović (2025) note AI's role in achieving SDGs through digital literacy and innovation, while highlighting persistent challenges in data protection, accessibility, and the need for regulatory frameworks and ethical codes.

AI's integration in curricula has generated both opportunities and risks. Many students misuse AI for direct copying, fostering unethical research practices and diminishing critical thinking, while overdependence may suppress originality (Khatri & Karki, 2023). Embedding AI in curricula, as at the University of Florida, prepares skilled and market-oriented graduates, and AI literacy is crucial for workforce readiness (Southworth et al., 2023). Absence of clear policies, weak infrastructure, and limited strategic vision slow AI adoption in academic institutions (Mahat et al., 2025). Global initiatives highlight the creation of AI frameworks, regulations, and ethical standards, which Nepal could adapt to its local context (Center for Social Innovation and Foreign Policy, 2025). Traditional resistance to change, institutional inertia, subscription costs, ethics, fairness, and biases in generative AI present additional challenges (Akinwalere & Ivanov, 2022; Samadi et al., 2024; Perera & Lankathilaka, 2023). Responsible AI use requires balancing human creativity and efficiency, proper guidance, mentorship, and development of AI literacy among students and teachers (Saaida, 2023; Paudel & Ghimire, 2021; Zamir et al., 2023; Gurung & KC, 2023). Generative AI tools support independent learning, lesson planning, grading, and data-driven insights, although privacy, collaboration, pedagogy integration, and sustained learner engagement remain concerns (Chapagai & Adhikari, 2024). Policies are essential for AI adoption to mitigate plagiarism, cybersecurity issues, and low digital literacy (Dempere et al., 2023).

Nepal's Need: AI into Human Development and Education

Nepal faces unique challenges in AI adoption due to policy gaps, infrastructure limitations, and human resource constraints. AI adoption in Nepal is slow due to low policy prioritization, necessitating legal guidelines to align initiatives with national goals (Silwal, 2022). Teachers require AI-related digital literacy to effectively guide learners, and there is ongoing debate about optimal integration methods (Neuman, 2023). Addressing AI challenges requires collaboration among policymakers, innovators, academics, and students, alongside integrated frameworks to manage data privacy and security concerns (Raghuvanshi et al., 2024; Lawaju et al., 2024). AI cannot be ignored in university curricula, research, or teaching, with successful implementation dependent on teachers' technological proficiency (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2024). Even in Europe, advanced AI frameworks struggle to foster public engagement, illustrating a global challenge (Tubella et al., 2024). Contrasting perspectives suggest AI should be mainstreamed for global educational value, while cautioning against undermining teachers and shifting decision-making to machines (Bearman et al., 2023).

AI can deliver instant instruction, feedback, and guidance, improving intelligent tutoring, and higher education institutions must embed AI in teaching, learning, and policy to support creativity, ethics, and digital literacy (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Chan & Hu, 2023). University academics in Nepal increasingly show awareness and enthusiasm for AI adoption, yet urgent policy development is needed to regulate and encourage its responsible use, thereby strengthening teaching and learning quality (Obenza et al., 2023; Karki & Karki, 2025). Tools like ChatGPT enhance productivity, support independent research, and provide access to diverse learning resources (Ranabhat et al., 2024). China's experience shows that strategic investment in digital technologies drives human resource development and economic growth, offering a model for Nepal (Krishna et al., 2025; Rêgo et al., 2024). AI contributes to knowledge creation but also risks reinforcing inequalities and declining critical thinking, particularly affecting learners with limited access (Ruano-Borbalan, 2025).

AI applications in HEIs include assessment, predictive analytics, AI assistants, intelligent tutoring systems, and management of student learning, while addressing financial and enrollment challenges through affordable digital support and virtual assistants (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Kuleto et al., 2021). Nepali scholars emphasize AI ethics, active learning, and intelligent tutoring, but institutions often lack adequate training, structured adaptation to evolving learner and industry needs, and systems to harness AI's rapid progress (Deroncele-Acosta et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024). While AI promotes technology-driven, interactive learning, risks include academic dishonesty, reduced critical skills, and limited access for marginalized learners, necessitating inclusive, stakeholder-informed policies and regulatory frameworks to ensure enhanced learning outcomes (O'Donnell et al., 2024; Vieriu & Petrea, 2025; Ocen et al., 2025). Digital transformation in HEIs progresses through stages of resource digitization, digitalization of teaching, and integration with intelligence, with faculty mindset and upskilling crucial for improving student intake and international reputation (Kang & Xu, 2025; Koseda et al., 2025).

Discussion: Diffusing AI into Nepal's Development and Education

AI is being recognized more and more as a powerful catalyst with significant impacts on human development and the advancement of civilization. The 2025 Nepal National AI Policy Draft emphasizes

AI's potential applications across sectors such as education, health, transportation, tourism, agriculture, finance, disaster management, art, and entertainment, projecting long-term economic progress and social transformation. State facilitation, funding, and policy incentives are intended to support AI integration, which is anticipated to reshape learning systems and influence human capital formation (Governement of Nepal, 2025). The draft was approved by the Government of Nepal in August 2025, aiming to provide a technology-driven and prosperous future for Nepali citizens (Prasain, 2025).The United Nations Development Programme (2025) highlights Nepal's medium HDI of 0.622 and education inequality at 39.8%, signaling the urgency of policies that ensure equitable access and human-centered AI development. Priority actions include fostering a complementarity economy, embedding human opportunities into AI design, and strengthening human capabilities to thrive in an AI-driven future (UNDP, 2025, p. 6). Globally, universities are embedding AI into academic programs, enhancing students' digital and analytical skills, and reskilling academic staff, reflecting the inseparable link between human progress and AI readiness (Stanford University, 2025). Nepal's 16th Periodic Plan (2024/25–2028/29) further underscores the need to remove structural barriers and boost production, productivity, and competitiveness, reinforcing the role of AI as a driver of national development (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2024, p. 12).

AI's impact on education is particularly significant, reshaping pedagogy, curriculum design, and assessment methods. UNESCO and Stanford University (2025) emphasize the reinterpretation of SDG 4 (Quality Education) through AI, advocating for the use of AI tools to ensure inclusive access to education by 2030. AI enables personalized learning, reduces disparities caused by socio-economic, linguistic, and geographic factors, and strengthens preparedness for labor market demands (Lainjo, 2024). AI also supports SDG achievement through intelligent tutoring, predictive analytics, and digital assistants that foster sustainable development and enhance teaching quality, though gaps in infrastructure and training limit widespread adoption (Filho et al., 2024; AlSagri & Sohail, 2024). UNESCO (2019a, 2024) stresses the need for teachers to evolve from AI users to active contributors, ensuring ethical and accountable AI implementation while fostering research-driven education and institutional efficiency. Challenges such as academic integrity, data privacy, and digital inequities highlight the need for robust regulatory frameworks and ethical codes to maximize AI's benefits while mitigating risks (Artyukhov et al., 2024; Savec & Jedrinović, 2025; Jungwirth & Haluza, 2023).

Despite AI's potential, Nepal faces unique challenges in adoption due to policy gaps, limited infrastructure, and human resource constraints. Low prioritization and insufficient legal guidelines slow integration, while teachers' limited AI literacy constrains effective use in classrooms (Silwal, 2022; Neuman, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among policymakers, innovators, academics, and students, along with integrated frameworks to manage data privacy and security (Raghuvanshi et al., 2024; Lawaju et al., 2024). AI applications in Nepali higher education institutions (HEIs) can enhance assessment, learning analytics, tutoring, and administrative efficiency, while fostering knowledge creation, digital literacy, and global competitiveness (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Kuleto et al., 2021; Kang & Xu, 2025). Lessons from China demonstrate that strategic investments in digital technologies drive human capital development and economic growth, providing a potential model for Nepal (Krishna et al., 2025; Rêgo et al., 2025). Effective policy, stakeholder-informed strategies, and faculty upskilling are essential to ensure AI promotes interactive, inclusive, and ethical education, reduces

inequities, and strengthens Nepal's capacity to benefit from AI-driven development (O'Donnell et al., 2024; Vieriu & Petrea, 2025; Koseda et al., 2025).

In summary, AI holds transformative potential for human development and education, offering opportunities to enhance learning quality, equity, and human capital formation. While global experiences demonstrate its benefits, Nepal faces structural, policy, and capacity-related challenges that must be addressed through strategic investment, faculty development, and ethical, inclusive frameworks to fully leverage AI for national development and sustainable progress.

Conclusion and Future Implications

AI possesses the capacity to transform human development and education in Nepal, providing opportunities to boost economic growth, promote social inclusion, and ensure fair access to learning. Incorporating AI into Nepal's national development plans and higher education system can help overcome structural challenges, promote educational equity, and enhance human capital to keep pace with the fast-changing global economy. However, successful adoption requires robust policies, ethical and accountable regulatory frameworks, faculty upskilling, and investment in digital infrastructure to ensure inclusive access and minimize risks such as academic dishonesty and digital inequities. Future research and policy efforts should focus on designing human-centered AI systems, fostering AI literacy across all levels of education, and exploring innovative applications in governance, health, and sustainable development. The implications extend beyond academia, as strategic AI integration can empower citizens, enhance institutional efficiency, and position Nepal as a resilient and competitive participant in the global AI-driven development landscape.

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Ethnic Diversity and National Cohesion in Nepal: Addressing Contested Identities

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Abstract

The issue of identity has played a significant role in shaping Nepal's political and social dynamics. This term paper examines ethnic diversity and national cohesion in Nepal.The study draws on scholarly articles and other relevant publications. The primary focus is on the growing tension between ethnic diversity and national integration, which has contributed to the emergence of contested identities in Nepal's nation-building efforts.For this research, relevant literature and publications were gathered from secondary sources. A descriptive and interpretive methodology was employed to achieve the study's objectives. The findings reveal that minority languages and cultural practices in Nepal have historically been marginalized, resulting in inequality and contested identities. Additionally, geographic and structural factors have intensified disparities among ethnic groups.The study emphasizes that promoting equal recognition of languages, cultures, and opportunities—together with inclusive policies and awareness programs—is vital for strengthening national integration and fostering social cohesion. It recommends that inclusive language policies, equitable access to resources and opportunities, and intercultural initiatives are essential strategies for reducing contested identities and supporting sustainable national integration in Nepal.

Keywords: contested identity, cultural group, ethnicity, national integration

Introduction

According to Scott and Marshall (2009), "ethnicity" differs from race, which is typically understood in biological terms. Members of an ethnic group often share cultural traits such as religion, language, occupation, or political affiliation, going beyond mere racial characteristics. Ethnicity also differs from social class, as it can cut across socioeconomic divisions. It reflects a "we-feeling" among group members and exists when individuals claim a particular identity and are acknowledged by others as belonging to that group (Barth, 1969). Ethnicity is a complex and sensitive concept, shaping social cohesion, political engagement, and national unity. In Nepal, a country marked by significant ethnic, linguistic, and geographic diversity, tensions frequently emerge when ethnic identity intersects with socioeconomic inequalities. Following the democratic transition in 1990, ethnic consciousness increased, giving rise to new identities, organizations, and grievances, while attempts to forge a unified national identity through common language, culture, and politics largely proved unsuccessful (Sapkota, 2014; Upadhyay, 2013).

This research examines the connection between ethnicity and national integration in Nepal, analyzing how ethnic diversity and identity claims interact with initiatives aimed at fostering a cohesive national identity, especially in the context of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal.

Literature Review

This study draws on an extensive review of existing literature to examine the relationship between ethnicity and national integration in Nepal. The review utilizes credible sources, including academic journals, research articles, and books, which were critically analyzed to establish both conceptual and empirical foundations. It incorporates both Nepalese and international perspectives, offering a

comprehensive understanding of ethnicity, contested identities, and the mechanisms of national integration. Particular emphasis is placed on the complex and often debated issues of national cohesion in multi-ethnic societies.

Political integration, as defined by Karl W. Deutsch, refers to "the integration of political actors or political units, such as individuals, groups, municipalities, regions, or countries with regard to their political behavior." In this sense, political integration implies a relationship where the actions of political actors or units are shaped by mutual influence. Similarly, Anwar S. Dil (1968) describes integration as "the process by which individuals and groups come to see themselves and their children as part of collective experiences in history, willing to give their loyalty to the group," emphasizing the psychological and social dimensions of cohesion.

Regarding societal integration, Majeed (2010) stresses the alignment of functional and psychological aspects of society with its collective identity or spirit. Coleman and Rosenberg (1971) highlight the importance of bridging gaps between elites and the broader population to foster a participatory political community. Jahan (1973) further notes that national integration involves establishing a political system that incorporates or transcends regional subsystems.

From a broader perspective, national integration involves recognizing and valuing a shared identity among diverse groups within a nation. Despite differences in caste, community, religion, culture, geography, or language, people acknowledge common bonds and collective belonging. National integration promotes development, stability, inter-group harmony, and reduces regional, linguistic, or caste-based discrimination. It enhances patriotism, fosters brotherhood, and encourages tolerance and social cohesion. Ahmad, Ghosh, and Reifeld (2000) observe that national integration is a multidimensional, dynamic process shaped by historical, political, social, cultural, and economic factors, which interact to sustain a functional political and social system.

Despite its theoretical clarity, achieving national integration remains challenging in multi-ethnic societies. In Nepal, political development has historically relied on national integration to bridge regional and ethnic differences and establish shared political values. However, the post-1990 democratic period demonstrates the persistent tension between ethnic identities and national unity, as seen in rising ethnic consciousness, demands for recognition, and disputes over provincial naming. While previous studies have examined ethnic mobilization, political integration, and nation-building in Nepal, few have systematically explored how ethnicity interacts with national integration under the federal system and constitutional framework.

The literature indicates that national integration encompasses both political and socio-cultural dimensions, whereas ethnicity reflects distinct cultural, social, and historical identities. Studies at both national and international levels emphasize that successful integration requires balancing loyalty to the state with acknowledgment of ethnic diversity. Nevertheless, gaps remain in understanding how ethnic identities influence, and at times challenge, the process of national integration in Nepal. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the complex relationship between ethnicity and national integration, offering insights into how contested identities shape Nepal's nation-building process.

Objective and Methodology
The main objective of this paper is to explore the relationship between ethnicity and national integration in the Federal Government of Nepal. This study employs a qualitative research approach to comprehensively analyze the dynamics of ethnicity and national integration in Nepal. The qualitative aspect involves an in-depth assessment of existing literature and scholarly discourse (Wickham, 2019) on national integration to address the research questions. An extensive analysis of existing discourse leads to

the assessment of the contrasting and intertwining aspects of ethnicity and national integration. This approach provides historical context, theoretical insights, and contemporary viewpoints on ethnicity and national integration. The findings are presented under the following headings: Ethnicity and Identity in Nepal, Post-1990 Ethnic Movements and Nation-Building in Nepal, and National Integration.

Findings

Ethnicity and Identity in Nepal
According to Scott and Marshall (2009), the concept of "ethnicity" differs from race, which is often understood in biological terms. While members of an ethnic group may display certain racial characteristics, they also typically share cultural traits such as religion, occupation, language, or political affiliation. Ethnic groups should also be distinguished from social classes, as ethnicity often cuts across socioeconomic divisions, bringing together individuals who share—or are perceived to share—common attributes that go beyond class distinctions. For example, Jews in the United States represent a classic ethnic group: despite differences in racial background (ranging from Eastern Europe to North Africa), social class, mother tongue, political views, and religious observance (from orthodox to secular), they identify collectively as Jewish, setting them apart from—but not necessarily in opposition to—the broader American society.

Ethnicity and ethnic identity have become important and widely debated topics. Ethnicity is inherently complex and sensitive, with sociological, anthropological, and historical knowledge playing a key role in informing political discussions around it. Ethnicity refers to a group of people who share a distinct identity that differentiates them from other groups. It reflects the "we-feeling" among members, existing when individuals claim a particular ethnic identity for themselves and are recognized by others as belonging to that group (Barth, 1969).

A group is considered ethnic if its members share certain characteristics that set them apart from the majority within a culture. While an ethnic group may have biological traits linked to racial differences, these traits alone are insufficient to define ethnicity. Ethnicity is defined by a group of people who perceive themselves as connected through real or imagined shared ancestry. When members adopt the attitudes, values, beliefs, cultural practices, language, or specific dialects of their group through socialization, this is known as behavioral ethnicity (Inayatullah, 1988; Peter, 1991). Ethnicity is not something individuals can choose; it is an inherent aspect of identity.

Ethnic identity reflects a logic of cultural belonging within a community, shaped by a complex interplay of ethnic, cultural, and historical factors that distinguish one group from another. No country in the world is racially uniform, and Nepal is no exception. The country is notable for its exceptional ethnic, linguistic, and geographic diversity. Conflicts often emerge when ethnic identity clashes with socioeconomic inequalities. Such ethnic tensions have a significant impact on national integration, which refers to the unity, solidarity, and social cohesion among people of different castes, religions, genders, and communities within a nation.

This study examines ethnicity in Nepal, considering factors such as religion, language, caste, territory, and its relationship to national integration. In Koshi Province, ethnic disputes have arisen over demands to name the province based on caste identity. The research emphasizes the importance of reducing inter-ethnic tensions, ensuring that all ethnic communities receive equitable access to political representation and economic resources.

Post-1990 Ethnic Movements and Nation-Building in Nepal
The period following 1990, characterized by the emergence of democracy amid political turbulence,

evolved more into a phase of "ethnic assertion" rather than "nation building" (Gellner, 2007). The greater democratic freedoms of the 1990s allowed various ethnic and sociocultural groups to participate in multi-party politics, enabling them to reassess the social and political roles traditionally assigned to them based on ethnicity and caste. However, the government's ongoing efforts to promote a unified national identity were weakened by violent conflicts, which reshaped and sometimes rejected established social and cultural practices during the transitional period. The risks posed to educational institutions during these conflicts have been noted as attacks on education (UNESCO, 2010), a phenomenon also observed in the post-conflict Truth and Reconciliation Commissions of countries such as Timor-Leste, Peru, and Sierra Leone.

The core nature of these ethnic movements—whether political, cultural, economic, or a combination of these—remains ambiguous. While the movements emphasize cultural identity and ethnic recognition, they often do not directly address challenges related to livelihoods, living standards, access to resources, education, healthcare, income opportunities, or poverty reduction. Development is frequently perceived as secondary to cultural rights. As a result, diverse perspectives and approaches for resolving these issues continue to emerge. Theoretically, this positions the ethnic movements neither as fully aligned with collective development efforts nor as entirely opposed to mainstream development agendas (Sapkota, 2014).

The post-1990 democratic period was unpredictable in many respects. For the first time in Nepal's history, ethnicity-building emerged as a prominent issue. New ethnic identities were formed, organizations were established, and grievances surfaced across social, political, and economic spheres. The national identity promoted through schools and government institutions—shaped by the country's autocratic past—was perceived as highly exclusionary by ethnic minorities, lower castes, religious groups, and the Madhesi population of the southern Terai region. The Madhesis have argued that hill communities have developed ethnic stereotypes about them, simplifying and misrepresenting their identity based on assumed typical characteristics (Upadhyay, 2013).

Efforts to cultivate a single, unified "national identity" through a common culture, a single language, and centralized political structures have largely failed. Despite progress in infrastructure and expanded access to education in recent decades, systemic horizontal inequalities remain, hindering social integration. Recent conflicts highlight the continued political emphasis on national identity. Given the lack of comparative studies examining ethnicity versus national integration—two contested dimensions of Nepal's nation-building process following the 2015 Constitution—this paper seeks to investigate the relationship between ethnic diversity and national integration in Nepal.

National Integration
National integration refers to the unification of diverse elements to create a cohesive whole. It fosters a deep sense of "we-feeling," belonging, and patriotism among individuals. When effectively achieved, it enables a balanced and harmonious relationship among different segments of society, allowing people to perceive themselves as part of an integrated and stable social structure.

National integration can be understood as a process that operates at two levels: community integration and pluralistic integration. In practice, it involves the coming together of individuals from diverse backgrounds, with continuous interaction that is not hindered by social hierarchies. In such integrated settings, people develop a sense of "we-feeling," reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Ethnicity and national integration represent a political ideology advocating for a unified nation characterized by shared values, citizenship, and collective identity, while moving beyond exclusive ethnic loyalties. During Nepal's democratic movements of 1951, 1990, and 2006, citizens took to the streets

demanding democracy and equal rights for all, transcending ethnic divisions. These movements highlighted collective action for rights and freedoms, regardless of caste, gender, or ethnicity, underpinned by shared values, symbols, and institutions (2001). The roots of national integration can be traced to the 18th century under Prithvi Narayan Shah, who unified multiple principalities. This process responded to the country's ethnic and cultural diversity, promoting a common Nepali identity that surpassed ethnic distinctions, thereby laying the groundwork for nationalism in Nepal (Gurung, 2001).

Scholars note that national integration involves both state-building and nation-building. State-building occurs when political elites establish new institutions and structures to influence society, regulate behavior, and mobilize resources. Nation-building, on the other hand, emphasizes the cultural dimensions of political development, encouraging people to shift their loyalty from smaller communities, tribes, or villages to a broader, centralized political system.

Discussion
In this study, the terms Nepali culture and national life culture are used interchangeably, as both refer to the same concept. Nepali culture embodies the collective beliefs, practices, arts, traditions, and customs of the people. It includes both tangible and intangible elements, serving as a vital foundation for national integration in Nepal, where diverse ethnic and cultural groups together create the broader Nepali identity (Gurung & Bhandari, 2008). The combined cultural practices of all ethnic groups form the nation's cultural fabric, often described as Nepal's nationalized culture (Sapkota, 2014). Examples include a shared sense of nationalism, respect for others, recognition of the constitutional monarchy as a unifying institution, and adherence to indigenous practices such as hospitality and community cooperation (Gurung, 2001).

Language, as a key component of culture, plays a central role in national integration (Coleman & Rosenberg, 1971). Although Nepali is the official national language, the mother tongues of minority communities have often been neglected or marginalized (Upadhyay, 2013). These languages, however, are essential to the country's cultural mosaic and should receive equal recognition and protection (Ahmad, Ghosh, & Reifeld, 2000). Promoting linguistic diversity alongside Nepali is crucial to fostering inclusivity, mutual respect, and understanding among different communities (Barth, 1969). The traditional idea of "one religion, language, and culture" needs reconsideration, supporting equal status for all cultural, linguistic, and religious groups while encouraging decentralized development that benefits marginalized populations (Majeed, 2010).

Historical geographic and structural inequalities have contributed to uneven distribution of resources and opportunities among ethnic groups (Sapkota, 2014). Special attention should be given to disadvantaged tribes and lower castes to improve their living conditions, while ensuring that integration preserves their cultural identity (Gellner, 2007). Constitutional provisions should support the formation of multi-ethnic organizations, allowing communities to safeguard and promote their cultural heritage without constraints, thereby strengthening social cohesion (Ahmad, Ghosh, & Reifeld, 2000).

Educational initiatives and awareness programs are essential for reducing ethnic tensions and enhancing national integration (Anwar, 1968). Following the principle of "get educated and get organized" can empower communities to participate meaningfully in nation-building (Wickham, 2019). Equal opportunities must be ensured across caste, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, class, and occupation (Upadhyay, 2013). Political representation should reflect the proportional participation of diverse communities to guarantee fairness and inclusivity in governance (Coleman & Rosenberg, 1971).

Finally, promoting inter-caste and inter-community marriages, particularly between populations of the Terai and hill regions, can accelerate cultural integration and help reduce long-standing social divides

(Gurung, 2001). Encouraging these social interactions supports acculturation while respecting ethnic identities, contributing to the broader goal of a united yet culturally diverse Nepal (Barth, 1969).

Conclusion

This study highlights the intricate relationship between ethnicity and national integration in Nepal. While the country's ethnic and cultural diversity strengthens its national identity, ongoing inequalities and post-1990 ethnic movements reveal that recognition of cultural differences can sometimes conflict with broader development objectives. Building an effective nation requires striking a balance between honoring ethnic diversity and promoting inclusive institutions and common values. Future research should examine the effects of policies under the 2015 Constitution, inter-ethnic political participation, education, and social integration initiatives on national unity. Recognizing ethnicity as both a source of identity and a potential cause of division can help policymakers and researchers foster a culturally diverse yet cohesive Nepal.

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Beyond Subsistence: Neoliberal Reforms and the Political Economy of Rural Transformation in Nepal

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Abstract

The penetration of capitalist and neoliberal economic policies has significantly transformed Nepal's peasant economy, resulting in varied assessments of their socio-economic consequences. This study critically examines these transformations, with particular focus on changes in rural livelihoods, land tenure, and agricultural productivity over the period 1961–2023. To this end, a quantitative research design is employed, analyzing longitudinal secondary data from national and international agencies, including the Central Bureau of Statistics and World Bank Development Indicators, through time-series and pre-post comparative methods. Descriptive statistics are applied to clearly elucidate trends in landholding patterns, input usage, crop yields, household indebtedness, landlessness, income inequality, and agricultural employment. The findings reveal a marked decline in landholding size and the agricultural sector's contribution to GDP, which occurs alongside increased rural vulnerability despite observable productivity gains. Furthermore, the growing reliance on remittances underscores a significant shift in livelihood strategies away from agriculture. Taken together, these structural changes underscore the persistence of dispossession and socio-economic disparities, which have been exacerbated by neoliberal reforms. Consequently, the study emphasizes the urgent need for agrarian reforms that prioritize equitable land distribution, improved rural credit access, and comprehensive social protection.

Keywords: peasant economy, neoliberalism, landholding, agricultural productivity, social inequality

Introduction

As of 2024, around 1.3 billion people are directly engaged in agriculture globally—900 million on-farm and 400 million off-farm (World Bank, 2024). Asia leads with over 800 million agricultural workers, followed by Africa, Latin America, and Europe/North America. About 70–80% of global farmland is managed by 500 million family farms, producing over 80% of the world's food. In Nepal, 62% of households are engaged in agriculture (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The average landholding has declined to 0.55 hectares, and only 45% of households meet food needs from farm income.

The peasant economy, traditionally grounded in subsistence agriculture, communal land tenure, and localized production–consumption systems, has long constituted the backbone of rural societies across the Global South (Netting, 1993). However, these agrarian structures are increasingly under pressure from the expansive forces of capitalism and neoliberalism. Capitalism, broadly defined, is an economic system characterized by private ownership of the means of production, capital accumulation, and the pursuit of profit through market exchange (Wood, 2002). Meanwhile, neoliberalism, emerging as a dominant ideological and policy paradigm since the late twentieth century, emphasizes deregulation, privatization, free trade, and the reduction of state intervention in economic affairs (Harvey, 2005). Together, these forces have profoundly reshaped agrarian societies worldwide, disrupting traditional livelihoods and social relations.

While some scholars argue that capitalist development has contributed to agricultural modernization, technological advancement, and enhanced market access (Ellis, 2000; Pingali, 2007), critical perspectives caution against the often-detrimental consequences of capitalist penetration into rural economies. This process, conceptualized as "accumulation by dispossession," involves the systematic marginalization of smallholders through land dispossession, exploitative labor regimes, and incorporation into unequal global value chains dominated by agribusiness and finance capital (Harvey, 2003; Bernstein, 2010). As McMichael (2009) notes, rather than uplifting peasants, capitalist expansion frequently subordinates them to market logics that prioritize profit over livelihood security.

Moreover, neoliberal reforms have intensified these contradictions. Instituted widely through Structural Adjustment Programs promoted by international financial institutions, neoliberal policies have dismantled crucial state supports for agriculture such as subsidies, extension services, rural credit, and price stabilization mechanisms (Patnaik, 2007; Bello, 2009). Consequently, these policy shifts exposed peasant producers to increasingly volatile global markets, increased rural indebtedness, and exacerbated social inequalities (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010). Although neoliberalism celebrates entrepreneurialism and market freedom, its impact on rural communities has often been exclusionary, disproportionately affecting historically marginalized groups (Harvey, 2005).

Nepal's agrarian sector, embedded in a distinct socio-political context and undergoing reforms since the 1990s, mirrors these regional trends but also exhibits unique characteristics. Market liberalization and state withdrawal from rural development have contributed to land fragmentation, feminization of agriculture, and increased rural outmigration (Paudel & Andersen, 2010; Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). Furthermore, the growing reliance on remittances has transformed rural livelihoods, reconfiguring socio-economic relations and local power structures (Thieme & Wiss, 2005). Despite some opportunities emerging from neoliberal restructuring, such as access to new markets and investment, these changes have deepened inequalities, vulnerability, and social dislocation in Nepal's countryside.

Existing literature highlights these transformations, yet frequently addresses them in isolation, lacking integrated, longitudinal analyses that connect global economic paradigms with localized agrarian realities. Moreover, Nepal's specific political economy and cultural diversity necessitate a nuanced study that situates capitalist and neoliberal restructuring within the country's unique social fabric and governance contexts. This gap in scholarship motivates the present research, which employs secondary time-series data to provide a comprehensive, context-sensitive examination of the capitalist and neoliberal impact on Nepal's peasant economy. This study contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches agrarian political economy by integrating Nepalese realities into broader global debates on capitalism and neoliberalism. Practically, it offers policymakers, development agencies, and civil society critical insights into the evolving vulnerabilities, adaptive strategies, and livelihood transformations among Nepal's smallholder farmers. Such insights are essential for formulating inclusive rural development policies that promote equity, resilience, and sustainable livelihoods.

Literature Review

Understanding Key Concepts
Understanding the transformation of Nepal's rural economy requires a clear grasp of three interrelated concepts: peasant economy, capitalism, and neoliberalism. These frameworks help explain how traditional agrarian systems are being restructured under the influence of global economic forces.

The *peasant economy* refers to a system of subsistence-oriented agricultural production primarily organized at the household level, where family labor is central and production is mainly for consumption rather than profit. Peasants are a distinct social group positioned between tribal and industrial societies.

This dual character is what Shanin (1973) terms the "part-society" nature of peasant communities, in which local production coexists with external economic demands. Furthermore, Chayanov (1925) emphasized that peasant households operate according to a unique logic that balances labor inputs and consumption needs, rather than maximizing profits. Consequently, this leads to economic behaviors such as risk-aversion, diversified production, and reliance on family labor rather than wage workers (Ellis, 1988). Polanyi's (1957) substantivist perspective additionally highlights that peasant economies are embedded in social relations—kinship, reciprocity, and redistribution—rather than governed solely by market forces.

Capitalism, in contrast, is an economic system where production is privately owned, labor is compensated through wages, and profits are generated primarily through market transactions. Marx (1867) framed capitalism as driven by the extraction of surplus value, thereby transforming land, labor, and agricultural production into commodities. Scholars like Wood (2002) and Bernstein (2010) identify key capitalist mechanisms that include the commodification of land (Harvey, 2003), the shift from subsistence polyculture to market-oriented monocropping (Pingali, 2007), and proletarianization, which refers to peasants losing land access and becoming wage laborer (Vong Nanhthavong et al., 2022). Importantly, this process is uneven and often incomplete, resulting in hybrid agrarian structures where capitalist and pre-capitalist elements coexist (Burawoy, 1985; Bernstein, 2010). Moreover, persisting semi-feudal relations in land tenure and labor complicate this transformation (Blaikie et al., 1980).

Neoliberalism is a political-economic ideology advocating market liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and reduced state intervention. Emerging globally in the late twentieth century, it aims to restore market dominance and class power (Harvey, 2005). In agrarian settings, neoliberalism often entails the withdrawal of state supports such as subsidies and extension services (Patnaik, 2007), as well as exposing farmers to global competition through trade liberalization (McMichael, 2009) and the financialization of agriculture, which links producers to volatile global markets (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010). Consequently, these reforms have led to agrarian restructuring, increased vulnerability, and erosion of traditional social safety nets (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1990s epitomize this shift, dismantling key protections and exacerbating rural livelihood challenges (Paudel & Andersen, 2010).

Nepal's rural economy is shaped by the coexistence of traditional peasant practices, capitalist forces, and neoliberal reforms. While peasant households prioritize subsistence and social cohesion, capitalist mechanisms like land commodification and market-oriented production, alongside neoliberal policies, expose them to global market pressures and vulnerability. This hybrid transformation highlights that rural development must balance economic integration with the protection of local livelihoods and social networks.

Theoretical Contestation
The penetration of capitalism and neoliberalism into peasant societies has been theorized through multiple critical lenses, each unveiling distinct dimensions of agrarian transformation. Central to this discourse is the tension between perspectives that emphasize structural dispossession and those that highlight peasant agency and adaptation, reflecting the complexity of agrarian change under global capitalism.

Marxist political economy, grounded in Marx's (1867) concept of primitive accumulation, sees capitalist development as an extractive force that dismantles traditional peasant systems. Through enclosures, market dependency, and conversion of subsistence producers into wage laborers, capitalism disrupts rural life. Lenin (1899) and Kautsky (1899) further illustrated how capitalist agriculture creates rural class divisions. Bernstein (2010) argues that neoliberal globalization intensifies this process, incorporating peasant households into exploitative global value chains. Harvey's (2005) notion of *accumulation by*

dispossession reinforces this by showing how neoliberalism—through privatization and commodification of commons—deepens rural subordination to capital, often resulting in precarity and displacement.

In contrast, Chayanovian theory (Chayanov, 1925) emphasizes the labor–consumption balance of peasant households, where production is guided by family needs rather than market imperatives. This framing presents the peasant economy as rational and adaptive. Scott's (1976) *moral economy* complements this by revealing how peasants use risk-averse strategies—like crop diversity and communal labor—to resist market volatility and ecological threats. These perspectives highlight how peasant systems persist and adapt within capitalist environments.

Feminist political ecology adds further depth, particularly by revealing the gendered impacts of agrarian change. Scholars like Agarwal (1994) and Federici (2012) show how neoliberal reforms disproportionately burden women—due to male migration, landlessness, and loss of access to commons—while deepening gendered divisions of labor and care. These analyses demonstrate that capitalist restructuring also transforms rural gender relations and domestic economies.

The *depeasantization* debate bridges these perspectives. Bryceson (2000a, 2000b) contends that capitalist development dissolves peasant livelihoods through diversification and declining farming identities. However, others counter this trajectory. Van der Ploeg (2013) and Borras (2012) document "repeasantization" through agroecology and collective resistance. Rigg (2006), using the term "post-peasant," describes how rural households blend subsistence, migration, and informal labor under neoliberalism. Together, these views emphasize multiple, contested pathways of rural transformation.

Overall, theoretical engagement with peasant change under capitalism reveals a dialectical process: while market integration disrupts subsistence systems, it also generates spaces for adaptation and resistance. The key challenge lies in explaining why some communities are dispossessed while others reshape capitalist relations for autonomous survival—pointing to a dynamic, uneven terrain of negotiation and reinvention.

Global and National Policy Shifts

The policy frameworks that have shaped the transformation of peasant economies under capitalism and neoliberalism are closely linked to global financial institutions and national policy shifts since the 1980s. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) initiated by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in the Global South enforced fiscal austerity, trade liberalization, and the withdrawal of state subsidies from agriculture (McMichael, 2005; Clapp, 2016). These reforms prioritized macroeconomic stabilization and export-led growth, systematically dismantling the protective mechanisms that had supported smallholder farmers, including price supports, extension services, and rural credit facilities. As a result, peasants were increasingly exposed to volatile global markets without state buffers, intensifying their economic precarity and marginalization (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010).

In parallel, neoliberal agricultural policy promoted land tenure reforms that encouraged the commodification and privatization of land. Influenced by the World Bank's land policy guidelines, countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America adopted policies that prioritized formal titling and individual ownership, often undermining customary rights and collective forms of landholding (Borras et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2015). These measures facilitated large-scale land acquisitions by agribusiness and investors, contributing to processes of land grabbing and dispossession. The institutionalization of these reforms was legitimized through discourses of efficiency, productivity, and modernization, aligning national development agendas with global capitalist imperatives (Zoomers, 2010; Cotula, 2013).

In Nepal, policy shifts since the 1990s reflect these global trends. Following its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2004, Nepal adopted liberalization policies that prioritized market integration over subsistence security (Paudel, 2016). The Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP, 1995–2015) and subsequent Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS, 2015–2035) emphasized commercialization, contract farming, and public–private partnerships, with limited attention to land redistribution or smallholder resilience. While these policies aimed at boosting agricultural growth, they have often marginalized peasants lacking access to capital, infrastructure, and secure tenure (Ghimire, 2013; Rimal, 2018). The promotion of agribusiness models and input-intensive farming has deepened class differentiation in rural areas, reinforcing the structural vulnerabilities of peasant households.

Thus, global and national policies under capitalism and neoliberalism have exposed Nepali peasants to market volatility, prioritized land privatization, and promoted commercialization. Programs like SAPs and strategies such as APP and ADS have marginalized smallholders, deepening rural inequalities and reinforcing structural vulnerabilities in Nepal's agrarian economy.

Empirical Review: Impact on Peasant Economy
The penetration of capitalist and neoliberal economic reforms into Nepal's rural landscape has produced divergent outcomes within the peasant economy. While some agrarian households have leveraged new opportunities for economic advancement, others have experienced growing precarity, marginalization, or limited transformation.

Empirical evidence suggests that capitalist integration has produced measurable gains for specific segments of the peasantry, particularly households with better access to infrastructure, market linkages, and financial capital. Rigg (2006), in a regional study of the Middle Hills and peri-urban zones, documents a gradual shift from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture among better-positioned households. Sharma and Shrestha (2022) report that vegetable producers in the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley experienced a 5.3% annual income growth by supplying produce to urban markets. Similarly, Daniel's (2001) household survey indicates that rural non-farm employment—facilitated by liberalization policies—contributed to a reduction in absolute poverty for 22% of households. These studies collectively highlight that, under favorable conditions and with state investment in roads, irrigation, and credit, neoliberal reforms can offer viable alternatives to subsistence livelihoods.

Conversely, a substantial body of research points to increased vulnerability among smallholder farmers negatively affected by neoliberal restructuring. Uprety (2021), drawing on data from the Tarai region, finds that the adoption of hybrid seeds led to a 290% increase in input costs, while real crop prices declined by 18% between 2005 and 2015—forcing 61% of surveyed households into informal debt cycles. Blaikie et al. (1980) describe a pattern of "peripheral stagnation," wherein 72% of villages located more than 15 kilometers from district centers remain economically marginalized and disconnected from growth benefits. National Census data (2021/22) further confirm a surge in rural landlessness—from 12% to 29% since 1995—despite falling national poverty rates. These findings suggest that neoliberal reforms have deepened spatial and class-based inequalities within rural Nepal, benefiting the well-connected while exacerbating the exclusion of already vulnerable communities.

Research also documents persistent resistance or insulation from capitalist transformation within certain peasant communities. Dahal's (1981) ethnographic study in the western hill districts indicates that 61% of households maintain subsistence-oriented production systems, prioritizing food security over market integration. A study by Jha (2016) on Tharu communities in Bardia highlights cultural resistance to high-yield rice varieties, which were rejected due to concerns over ritual purity, despite potential income gains. Similarly, Blaikie et al. (1980) report that 68% of villages in the far-western region continue to depend on barter systems and remain largely untouched by market reforms. This body of evidence shows that such

patterns are not merely byproducts of remoteness but represent deliberate and adaptive livelihood strategies shaped by historical experience, cultural norms, and the limited relevance of neoliberal incentives for these communities.

Research Gaps

The existing scholarship reveals three critical gaps that demand further empirical and theoretical exploration. First, although studies by Blaikie et al. (1980) and Uprety (2021) provide detailed accounts of the economic effects of neoliberal reforms, they lack intersectional analysis. Key mediating factors—such as gender dynamics in intra-household labor allocation, caste-based disparities in land access among Dalits, and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems—are either underexplored or absent. This omission is particularly striking in Rigg's (2006) otherwise nuanced livelihood analysis.

Second, the predominant reliance on cross-sectional data (e.g., National Census 2021/22; Daniel, 2001) limits the ability to assess temporal dynamics. For instance, while Sharma and Shrestha (2022) report a 5.3% annual income increase among peri-urban farmers, the lack of longitudinal tracking leaves it unclear whether these gains reflect sustained transformation or short-term advantage. This study addresses this gap by employing a longitudinal data analysis approach, using time-series data from 1960 to 2025 (where available), enabling a comprehensive assessment of long-term trends and structural changes in Nepal's peasant economy.

Third, new challenges such as climate change impacts on commercial crops and the rise of digital marketplaces have received little attention in Nepal's agrarian research. Despite early warnings from Ghimire (1992) about the vulnerability of peasant economies to external shocks, these contemporary issues remain largely unexplored. This gap hampers the development of policies that can effectively support sustainable and resilient rural livelihoods.

Objectives and Methodology

The key objective of this study is to critically examine how capitalist and neoliberal economic penetration has reshaped Nepal's peasant economy. Specifically, the study explores the socio-economic transformations in rural livelihoods, land use, and agricultural productivity associated with these economic changes.

This study employs a quantitative research design combining longitudinal time-series analysis (see Kehr & Kowatsch, 2015) with a pre-post comparative framework to examine the impacts of capitalist and neoliberal economic penetration on Nepal's peasant economy, specifically comparing periods before and after the 1990s reforms. Secondary data spanning from 1961 to 2023 were sourced from authoritative national and international agencies, including the World Bank, United Nations bodies, and Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics, ensuring data reliability and validity.

Key socio-economic and agricultural indicators were extracted for specified intervals to enable robust trend analysis. Descriptive statistical methods facilitated the identification, comparison, and interpretation of significant changes over time. To complement the quantitative analysis, a systematic literature review was conducted, drawing on peer-reviewed studies and authoritative reports that address capitalist transformation, neoliberal reforms, and agrarian dynamics in Nepal and similar contexts. The study's positivist epistemological stance also prioritizes measurable economic shifts and evidence-based interpretation.

This following section presents findings on agricultural engagement and household profile, productivity gains vs. peasant vulnerability, dispossession and social stratification:

Findings
This section presents empirical evidence on long-term changes in Nepal's agrarian system, highlighting both macroeconomic transformations and micro-level rural dynamics. Drawing on time-series data, three major patterns are examined: agricultural engagement and household profile, productivity gains versus peasant vulnerability, and dispossession and social stratification.

Agricultural Engagement and Household Profile
Agriculture remains central to Nepal's economy, with 62% of households engaged in agricultural activities (CBS, 2022). However, disaggregated data on smallholder farmers by province is limited. The average household size among farming families has decreased from 5.4 persons in 2011/12 to 4.7 in 2021/22, reflecting demographic changes and possible migration patterns. Similarly, landholdings have consistently declined—from 1.1 hectares six decades ago to just 0.55 hectares in 2021/22—highlighting the growing fragmentation of farmland (CBS, 2022). Only 45% of households now meet their food needs through farm income, suggesting persistent food insecurity and underproductivity. Moreover, the proportion of farmers accessing credit for agriculture has dropped significantly, from 21.8% in 2011/12 to just 11.7% in 2021/22 (CBS, 2022), indicating reduced investment capacity or access barriers in rural finance. Thus, agriculture remains vital in Nepal, but shrinking landholdings, declining household sizes, limited access to credit, and persistent underproduction highlight growing challenges for smallholder farmers and rural food security.

Productivity Gains vs. Peasant Vulnerability
Nepal's agricultural sector has undergone profound transformation over the past six decades, marked by rising productivity, increased input use, and significant shifts in economic and livelihood patterns (see Table 1).

Table 1 reveals several significant trends in Nepal's agricultural development. First, regarding input intensification, fertilizer consumption increased dramatically from a minimal 0.08 kg/ha in 1961 to 9.89 kg/ha by 1980, then rose sharply to 40.09 kg/ha in 1995, eventually peaking at 115.33 kg/ha in 2020 before declining to 67.84 kg/ha by 2022. This pattern demonstrates not only the rapid adoption of chemical inputs but also their subsequent volatility in recent years.

Concurrently, cereal yields showed consistent improvement, rising from 1,846 kg/ha in 1961 to 1,920 kg/ha by 1990, then increasing further to 2,149 kg/ha in 2000, and ultimately reaching 3,218 kg/ha by 2022. While these yield gains indicate enhanced productivity, they occurred alongside important structural changes in the agricultural sector. Most notably, agriculture's contribution to GDP declined substantially from 64.6% in 1965 to 38.2% in 2000, and then to just 21.2% by 2023, reflecting the sector's diminishing economic importance.

Simultaneously, remittance inflows grew from being negligible in the early period to accounting for 1.5% of GDP by 1993, then expanding significantly to 14.9% by 2005, and ultimately reaching 27.6% by 2015 before stabilizing around 26.9% in 2023. This growth in remittances corresponds with the declining agricultural GDP share, suggesting a shift in rural livelihood strategies.

The temporal progression of these indicators reveals distinct phases of agricultural transformation. The pre-reform era (1960s–1980s) was characterized by gradual input adoption and modest yield improvements. The liberalization period (1990s–2000s) witnessed accelerated input intensification and the beginning of structural economic changes. Finally, the most recent phase (2010s–2023) shows both the peak of input dependence and emerging signs of instability in the agricultural production model, as evidenced by the fluctuating fertilizer application rates.

These quantitative patterns collectively document Nepal's transition from traditional, subsistence-oriented farming to modern, input-dependent agriculture, accompanied by significant changes in the sector's economic position and the livelihood strategies of rural households. The data particularly highlight the paradox of simultaneous productivity gains and growing vulnerability, as seen in the coexistence of rising yields with declining sectoral importance and unstable input regimes. The post-2015 volatility in fertilizer use, dropping sharply from its peak, raises important questions about the sustainability of this agricultural development model.

Table 1
Agricultural Modernization Indicators

Indicator	1960s–1980s (Pre-Reform)	1990s–2000s (Liberalization)	2010s–2023 (Neoliberal Peak)
Fertilizer Use (kg/ha)	0.08 (1961) → 9.89 (1980)	31.25 (1990) → 40.09 (1995)	115.33 (2020) → 67.84 (2022)
Cereal Yield (kg/ha)	1,846 (1961) → 1,920 (1990)	2,149 (2000)	3,218 (2022)
Remittances (% GDP)	0%	1.5% (1993) → 14.9% (2005)	27.6% (2015) → 26.9% (2023)
Agri GDP Share	64.6% (1965)	38.2% (2000)	21.2% (2023)

(Note. Data compiled from World Bank (2025), World Development Indicators, and Central Bureau of Statistics (2022), Nepal.

Overall, Nepal's agricultural sector exhibits a complex trajectory of modernization, characterized by notable productivity gains alongside declining economic significance and increasing household vulnerability. These trends underscore the need for sustainable policies that balance input intensification, rural livelihoods, and long-term sectoral stability.

Dispossession and Social Stratification
Nepal's rural population has faced mounting economic vulnerability, with more households incurring debt and losing land despite successive reforms—particularly during the post-conflict period (see Table 2). Table 2 reveals intensifying trends of rural dispossession over the past three decades. Household debt among farmers rose from 60% in 1995/96 to 70% by 2003/04, a ten-percentage-point increase within a single survey interval. This rise reflects growing reliance on credit in the early reform years, likely linked to rising input costs and unstable agricultural returns. However, no comparable national data exist after 2004, constraining analysis of more recent debt patterns.

Landlessness followed a steady upward trajectory. Rural households without land increased from 12% in 1995 to 15% in 2001, then to 20% in 2011, and further to 29% by 2022. This near-doubling over 25 years signals deepening land insecurity despite legal reforms and decentralization initiatives. The sharpest growth occurred during the post-conflict restructuring phase (2011–2022), indicating unresolved issues in agrarian redistribution.

Income inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, also widened. While data for the 1990s are unavailable, the coefficient was 32 in 2003, rose to 34 in 2011, and reached 36 by 2020. This rising inequality parallels the decline in agricultural livelihoods and the widening urban–rural divide, underscoring its structural nature.

The share of the population engaged in agriculture declined sharply—from 75.8% in 1980 to 60.1% in 2000, then to 50.3% in 2010, and just 43.4% by 2020. This sustained drop reflects both economic diversification and displacement from land-based livelihoods. The overlap of this decline with rising landlessness and inequality suggests that the transition has not been accompanied by secure livelihood alternatives for the rural poor.

Taken together, these indicators reveal a multi-dimensional pattern of dispossession—marked by increasing debt, land loss, declining agricultural employment, and worsening inequality. While the absence of updated household debt data limits understanding of the 2010s and 2020s, existing evidence points to deepening vulnerability across Nepal's rural population.

Table 2
Dispossession Indicators

Indicator	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
Household Debt (% farmers)	60% (1995/96)	70% (2003/04)	No data	No data
Landlessness (% rural HH)	12% (1995)	15% (2001)	20% (2011)	29% (2022)
Gini Coefficient	No data	32 (2003)	34 (2011)	36 (2020)
Agri Employment (%)	75.8% (1980)	60.1% (2000)	50.3% (2010)	43.4% (2020)

Note. Data compiled from national household surveys and global indicators. Debt percentages refer to farmer households only. Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (NLSS 1996, 2004; Census 2011, 2021); World Bank (2021), *World Development Indicators*; ILO (2023), *ILOSTAT*.

Overall, the data illustrate that Nepal's rural population has experienced growing economic vulnerability over the past three decades, marked by rising household debt, expanding landlessness, widening income inequality, and declining agricultural employment. These trends reflect a pattern of multi-dimensional dispossession, indicating that economic diversification and reforms have not adequately secured livelihoods for rural households. The findings highlight the need for targeted policies to address land insecurity, reduce inequality, and provide sustainable alternatives for the rural poor.

Discussion

This study's findings strongly align with key theoretical frameworks explaining the transformation of Nepal's peasant economy under capitalism and neoliberalism. The steady increase in landlessness—from 12% in 1995 to 29% in 2022—supports Marxist political economy perspectives on dispossession (Marx, 1867; Harvey, 2005). The concept of *accumulation by dispossession*, in which neoliberal policies facilitate land commodification and marginalization, is clearly evident in Nepal's rural context. This trajectory also reflects Blaikie et al.'s (1980) observations of *peripheral stagnation* and the rising debt burdens documented by Uprety (2021), which together reveal the deepening structural vulnerabilities of peasant households. These patterns support Bernstein's (2010) critique that capitalist and neoliberal reforms often exacerbate inequalities rather than resolve them.

Conversely, documented gains in agricultural productivity—such as rising cereal yields and increased fertilizer use until 2020—align with Chayanovian theory (Chayanov, 1925) and Scott's (1976) notion of peasant agency and adaptation. These frameworks help explain how peasant households, despite

structural constraints, adopt diverse strategies to sustain their livelihoods. This is consistent with Rigg's (2006) concept of the *post-peasant*, describing households that balance subsistence with market engagement.

Policy analyses of Nepal's Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP) and Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) reveal a persistent gap between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities. While these policies emphasize commercialization and public–private partnerships (Paudel, 2016), they have failed to address rising landlessness, debt dependency, and income inequality. This outcome mirrors broader critiques of Structural Adjustment Programs (McMichael, 2005; Clapp, 2016), which caution that market-first reforms often undermine smallholder security and deepen exclusion. The study thus reinforces calls for Nepal's agrarian policies to be reoriented toward equity, redistributive justice, and sustainability (Ghimire, 2013).

Empirically, this study validates and extends prior findings while introducing new insights. It confirms the increase in rural debt and inequality documented in the Nepal Living Standards Surveys (NLSS) while highlighting post-2015 volatility in fertilizer use—a trend that earlier literature has not examined in depth. The persistence of rising landlessness, despite periodic land reform rhetoric, underscores that redistributive policies remain politically weak or co-opted. Meanwhile, case studies by Sharma and Shrestha (2022) on peri-urban farmers benefiting from commercialization are echoed here, suggesting that access to infrastructure, credit, and supportive local governance critically shapes who benefits from neoliberal transitions.

Another important dimension concerns migration and remittance dynamics. Numerous studies (e.g., Seddon, Adhikari & Gurung, 2002; Maharjan et al., 2013) show that labor migration has become a key strategy for rural households coping with agrarian stress and land fragmentation. This study's data on increasing household debt, coupled with stagnant or declining agricultural returns, support these findings. They also indicate that remittances—while essential—are increasingly directed toward consumption and debt repayment rather than productive investment. This pattern aligns with Sugden (2017) argument that rural development in Nepal is influenced more by a remittance-dependent agrarian "exit" than by genuine structural transformation.

A significant contribution of this research lies in its longitudinal approach, using time-series data spanning six decades. Unlike previous cross-sectional studies (Daniel, 2001; Sharma & Shrestha, 2022), this extended analysis reveals not only gradual but accelerating trends of dispossession, inequality, and agricultural decline. The post-2015 decline and volatility in fertilizer use mark a new development, raising critical questions about the sustainability of Nepal's input-dependent agricultural system.

In sum, this study confirms and extends dominant theories and empirical evidence on Nepal's agrarian transformation. It highlights capitalism and neoliberalism's dual role in generating productivity gains for some while deepening dispossession and inequality for many. The findings also critique the limits of state policy and identify emerging risks to sustainability and food sovereignty. Collectively, these insights underscore the urgency of inclusive, redistributive, and context-sensitive rural development strategies that fully engage with the complexities of Nepal's evolving peasant economy.

In summary, Nepal's peasant economy has shifted from subsistence-based livelihoods to a landscape marked by both opportunities and vulnerabilities under capitalism and neoliberal reforms. While some households have benefited from commercialization and productivity increases, structural dispossession, debt burdens, and inequality persist, leaving many peasants insecure. Market-driven policy interventions, including the APP and ADS, have largely failed to address these inequities, highlighting the limitations of neoliberal growth models. The findings point to the need for inclusive, redistributive, and context-

sensitive strategies that balance productivity with equity to ensure the long-term sustainability of Nepal's rural economy.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study set out to examine how capitalism and neoliberalism have shaped Nepal's peasant economy over recent decades, with a focus on land distribution, livelihoods, and structural transformation. Drawing on longitudinal data and secondary sources, it found that while agricultural productivity has improved in certain areas, the overall trajectory is characterized by declining landholding sizes, reduced food self-sufficiency, and increased marginalization of smallholder farmers. These changes have weakened Nepal's agrarian base, heightened rural vulnerability, and increased dependence on remittances and off-farm labor.

The study's significance lies in its intersectional approach and use of long-term national data to critically analyze the erosion of the peasant economy. It contributes to an understanding of how development policies shaped by neoliberal logic can deepen existing inequalities. Future research should investigate micro-level impacts across caste, ethnicity, and gender, and explore alternative agrarian models that prioritize equity, food sovereignty, and sustainable livelihoods.

The findings underscore the urgent need for agrarian reforms that prioritize smallholders' land rights, access to credit, and food sovereignty. Given the declining landholding sizes and reduced reliance on agriculture for food security, policy frameworks should promote integrated rural development through investment in agro-based industries, cooperatives, and equitable land redistribution. Addressing the structural drivers of landlessness and migration will require ensuring inclusive access to resources and strengthening social protection mechanisms for rural households. A shift from neoliberal growth models toward equity-centered development planning is essential to revitalizing Nepal's peasant economy and fostering sustainable rural livelihoods.

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Landlessness and the Reproduction of Rural Inequality in Nepal

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Abstract

Landlessness and persistent agrarian inequalities in Nepal continue to shape rural poverty, reflecting the enduring effects of historical land tenure systems, social hierarchies, and uneven policy implementation. The purpose of this study is to examine how landlessness reproduces rural inequality in Nepal by exploring the historical, social, economic, and geographic factors that shape access to land and its consequences for poverty and social exclusion. Findings show that landlessness remains the key driver of rural inequality in Nepal, with smaller landholdings directly linked to higher poverty, deepening structural marginalization, and compounded vulnerabilities for women, Dalits, and indigenous communities. The research also identifies future avenues for exploring intergenerational landlessness, migration, and the effectiveness of reforms to promote inclusive rural development in Nepal.

Keywords: agrarian relations, landlessness, rural inequality, Nepal, feudal tenure systems

Introduction

Nepal's economy is basically driven by the agrarian system and subsistence farming. The majority of people's main occupation is farming, and most festivals are closely tied to the cultivation calendar. Due to the legacy of the feudal tenure system, the structure of Nepal's agrarian sector has historically been characterized by manifest disparities in land ownership, which have sustained socioeconomic stratification and rural poverty (Regmi, 1976; Upreti, 1994). The population of rural Nepal continues to experience cycles of exploitation and marginalization due to unequal access to land, despite numerous land reform initiatives since the mid-20th century (Blaikie, Cameron & Seddon, 2002).

The majority of peasants were reduced to tenant farmers or landless laborers due to the historical dominance of feudal land tenure systems like Birta (land grants to elites), Raikar (state-owned land), and Kipat (communal land for indigenous groups). Despite the formal abolition of feudalism in the 1950s, its structural legacy still influences modern agrarian relations, with 17% of households experiencing landlessness (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Nepal's ongoing land inequality is an ingrained socio-political phenomenon that intersects with caste, ethnicity, and gender hierarchies, making it more than just an economic problem (Bennett, 2005; Gellner, 2007). Landlessness disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including women, Dalits, and indigenous communities (Adivasi Janajatis), restricting their access to political agency, credit, and livelihoods (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Nightingale, 2011). Landed elite opposition and ineffective bureaucracy have hindered the implementation of progressive land reform laws, such as the Land Act of 1964 and its amendments (Joshi & Mason, 2007). Because of this, land reforms have mostly failed to topple long-standing power structures, permitting historical injustices to continue (Sugden & Gurung, 2021). A complex web of power dynamics involving landless laborers, sharecroppers, landlords, and tenants characterizes agrarian relations in Nepal. These relationships are ingrained in political structures and social hierarchies; economic power, credit availability, political engagement, and social mobility are still significantly influenced by land ownership. Therefore, landlessness is more than just a lack of

property; it is a state of structural marginalization that is frequently accompanied by food insecurity, housing insecurity, displacement vulnerability, and denial of state services.

With an emphasis on the structural elements that maintain landlessness despite policy initiatives, this study investigates the ways in which Nepali agrarian relations perpetuate rural inequality. Using frameworks from political economy and historical institutionalism (North, 1990; Bernstein, 2010), the purpose of this study is to examine how landlessness reproduces rural inequality in Nepal by exploring the historical, social, economic, and geographic factors that shape access to land and its consequences for poverty and social exclusion. The study adds to larger discussions on social justice, rural development, and agrarian change in Nepal. It makes the case that, in order to achieve significant land reform, systemic adjustments addressing the interlocking disparities that underlie rural poverty are just as important as redistributive measures.

Literature Review

Nepal's persistent rural inequality is deeply rooted in historical land tenure systems such as Birta, Raikar, and Kipat, which concentrated land ownership in the hands of elites while marginalizing tenant farmers and landless laborers (Regmi, 1976; Upreti, 1994; Blaikie, Cameron, & Seddon, 2002). Despite the formal abolition of feudalism in the 1950s and multiple land reform initiatives, landlessness remains widespread, affecting 17% of households (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2021). Scholarship highlights that land inequality intersects with caste, ethnicity, and gender, disproportionately disadvantaging women, Dalits, and indigenous groups (Bennett, 2005; Gellner, 2007; Nightingale, 2011; Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). Moreover, elite resistance, bureaucratic inefficiency, and weak policy implementation have limited the effectiveness of reforms like the Land Act of 1964, allowing structural marginalization to persist (Joshi & Mason, 2007; Sugden et al., 2016). These studies establish a clear link between agrarian relations, land access, and the reproduction of rural inequality in Nepal.

However, gaps remain in understanding how these inequalities are reproduced across generations and mediated by social, political, and economic relations. While existing literature documents the prevalence of landlessness and its socio-economic consequences, fewer studies examine the interplay of land tenure, household relations, and access to credit or resources in shaping ongoing vulnerability (Sugden, 2019; Shrestha, 2020). In addition, limited attention has been given to the ways caste, ethnicity, and gender intersect to reinforce landlessness and constrain rural mobility (Nightingale, 2011; Gellner, 2007). By addressing these gaps, this study situates landlessness not merely as a lack of property but as a structural mechanism that perpetuates social and economic inequality in Nepal's rural communities.

Objective and Methodology

This study examines how landlessness reproduces rural inequality in Nepal by exploring the historical, social, economic, and geographic factors that shape access to land and its consequences for poverty and social exclusion. The research primarily analyzes policy documents, including the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022–23) (see Bowen, 2009; National Statistics Office, 2024). The secondary data from these documents empirically supports mapping patterns of land ownership, land distribution, and the persistence of landlessness and near-landlessness across various regions and demographic groups. The following section presents the results under the headings: land ownership status and poverty gap, and regional disparities.

Results

Land Ownership Status and Poverty Gap

The statistical analysis of land ownership in Nepal highlights significant correlations between landholding size and poverty, revealing pronounced disparities across rural and urban populations. Key findings reveal

stark disparities: landless households show the highest poverty headcount rate nationally (20.15%), which intensifies in rural areas (33.41%). The poverty gap and squared poverty gap metrics demonstrate that landless populations experience deeper and more severe poverty. Notably, while landless households constitute 34.56% of Nepal's population, they represent 34.34% of the poor, indicating near-proportional representation in poverty statistics.

Rural areas exhibit more extreme patterns, with landless rural households facing a 33.41% poverty rate despite comprising only 16.62% of the rural population. Urban areas show slightly moderated but still significant patterns, with landless urban residents accounting for 42.42% of the urban population but 41.32% of the urban poor. The data clearly illustrate an inverse relationship between landholding size and poverty incidence, with poverty metrics consistently declining as landholding increases. This structured analysis provides valuable insights for targeted poverty alleviation and land reform policies in Nepal.

Table 1: Land Ownership Status in Nepal

Land Ownership Status	Incidence			Distribution	
	Headcount rate	Poverty gap	Squared Poverty gap	of the poor	of the population
Nepal					
No Land	20.15	4.63	1.49	34.34	34.56
<0.2 ha.	23.32	5.22	1.76	22.62	19.66
0.2-1 ha.	20.36	4.27	1.37	35.16	34.98
1-2 ha.	16.14	4.25	1.51	6.18	7.76
2+ ha	11.38	2.20	0.65	1.70	3.04
Rural					
No Land	33.41	8.82	3.28	22.54	16.62
<0.2 ha.	27.13	6.56	2.23	22.34	20.30
0.2-1 ha.	23.48	4.97	1.61	46.30	48.62
1-2 ha.	16.88	3.23	0.95	7.36	10.74
2+ ha	9.91	2.11	0.53	1.50	3.70
Urban					
No Land	17.86	3.91	1.19	41.32	42.42
<0.2 ha.	21.57	4.60	1.54	22.78	19.38
0.2-1 ha.	18.07	3.76	1.19	28.56	29.00
1-2 ha.	15.61	4.99	1.92	5.48	6.44
2+ ha	12.25	2.25	0.71	1.84	2.76

Source: NLSS report 2022/23

Overall, the persistence of landlessness in Nepal plays a central role in reproducing rural inequality, as reflected in the distribution of poverty across different landholding groups. The statistical analysis shows that landless households bear the heaviest burden of poverty, particularly in rural areas, where a third of landless households live below the poverty line despite representing a smaller share of the population. As landholding size increases, poverty incidence, depth, and severity consistently decline, highlighting the strong inverse relationship between land ownership and economic well-being. These patterns underscore

how unequal access to land not only entrenches poverty but also perpetuates structural inequality, emphasizing the need for targeted land reform and poverty alleviation strategies to address Nepal's enduring rural disparities.

Regional Disparities

Data from the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022–23) reveal stark provincial disparities in poverty incidence. Sudurpashchim Province is the most severely affected, with a poverty headcount rate of 34.16%, followed by Karnali (26.69%) and Lumbini (24.35%). Madhesh Province exhibits a rate of 22.53%, while Koshi reports 17.19%. In contrast, Bagmati Province records the lowest poverty rate at 12.59%, reflecting its economic advantages as an urban and administrative hub. The mountainous Gandaki Province reports a relatively lower rate of 11.88%, likely due to tourism and remittance-based economies.

These disparities highlight the intersection of geographic isolation, agrarian dependency, and uneven development, with historically marginalized regions such as Sudurpashchim and Karnali bearing the heaviest burdens. The data underscore the urgent need for targeted poverty alleviation strategies that address regional structural inequities.

Figure 1. Poverty Incidence (Headcount)

Source: Nepal Living Standards Survey IV 2022-23 Summary Report
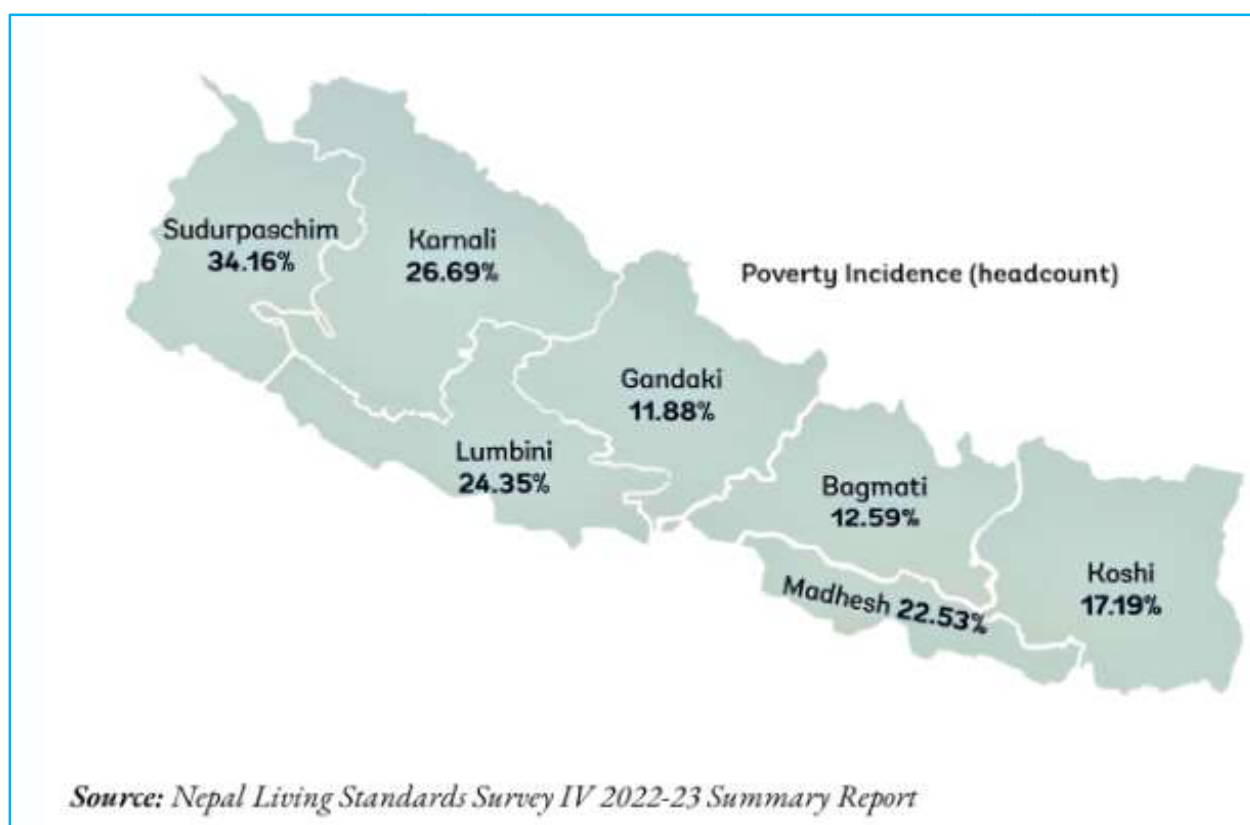
The Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022–23) highlights how regional disparities in land access and economic opportunity reinforce rural inequality across the country. Provinces such as Sudurpashchim and Karnali, marked by geographic isolation and heavy dependence on subsistence agriculture, experience the highest poverty rates, while economically advantaged regions like Bagmati show significantly lower poverty. These patterns demonstrate that structural factors—landlessness, limited infrastructure, and

uneven development—intersect with geography to reproduce inequality across rural Nepal. The findings underscore the critical need for regionally targeted interventions, including land reform and rural development policies, to address the persistent spatial and economic inequities that sustain poverty.

Discussion of Findings

This study illuminates the enduring role of landlessness in reproducing rural inequality in Nepal, emphasizing how historical, social, and geographic factors converge to sustain structural marginalization. The persistence of landlessness is deeply rooted in historical land tenure systems such as Birta, Raikar, and Kipat, which concentrated land ownership in the hands of elites while systematically marginalizing tenant farmers and landless laborers (Regmi, 1976; Upreti, 1994; Blaikie, Cameron, & Seddon, 2002). Despite formal legal reforms and policy interventions since the 1950s, including the Land Act of 1964, landlessness remains widespread, affecting a significant portion of households and disproportionately impacting women, Dalits, and indigenous communities (CBS, 2021; Bennett, 2005; Gellner, 2007; Nightingale, 2011; Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). These historical and social dimensions reveal that land access is not merely a matter of property rights but a critical determinant of social and economic inclusion.

Empirical findings from the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022–23) reinforce this perspective by demonstrating a strong inverse relationship between landholding size and poverty incidence, depth, and severity. Landless households face the highest poverty rates nationally, which are particularly pronounced in rural areas, where structural constraints, limited infrastructure, and dependence on subsistence agriculture exacerbate vulnerability. These patterns are consistent with prior research highlighting that poverty is not evenly distributed but closely aligned with land access and tenure relations (Joshi & Mason, 2007; Sugden et al., 2016). The near-proportional representation of landless households among the poor suggests that landlessness functions as both a direct and indirect mechanism of social exclusion, reproducing inequality across generations.

Regional disparities further underscore the interaction of geographic isolation, agrarian dependency, and historical marginalization in perpetuating inequality. Provinces such as Sudurpashchim and Karnali exhibit the highest poverty rates, reflecting limited access to productive land, weak infrastructure, and dependence on subsistence farming, whereas urbanized and economically advantaged regions like Bagmati display lower poverty levels. These findings highlight that rural inequality in Nepal is not solely a function of landholding patterns but also a product of the spatial distribution of economic opportunities and public services. The persistence of extreme poverty in historically marginalized regions aligns with the notion that structural inequality is reproduced through intertwined social, economic, and geographic relations (Bennett, 2005; Nightingale, 2011). The study also reveals critical intersections between landlessness and social hierarchies, including caste, ethnicity, and gender. Women, Dalits, and indigenous groups face compounded vulnerabilities due to limited land access, which restricts their economic autonomy, bargaining power within households, and ability to leverage social networks for mobility and resilience. This confirms that land inequality operates not only as an economic deficit but also as a mechanism of social exclusion, reproducing hierarchies and limiting access to development opportunities (Gellner, 2007; Shrestha, 2020).

Taken together, these findings illuminate the structural mechanisms through which landlessness reproduces rural inequality in Nepal. Land access is not an isolated factor; it is embedded within broader social relations, policy frameworks, and regional disparities. The persistence of high poverty among landless households, particularly in rural and marginalized provinces, underscores the insufficiency of past reform measures and the need for multidimensional interventions that combine land redistribution, targeted poverty alleviation, and rural development initiatives. Policies must address not only the quantitative aspects of land reform but also the qualitative dimensions of access, including social, gender,

and caste-based barriers. In summary, landlessness in Nepal functions as both a symptom and a driver of structural inequality. Historical land tenure systems, limited policy implementation, social hierarchies, and geographic isolation collectively reproduce poverty and constrain rural mobility. Addressing rural inequality thus requires integrated approaches that link land reform with social protection, infrastructure development, and inclusive governance. By situating landlessness within the broader framework of social and economic relations, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how rural inequality is reproduced and provides evidence for designing more equitable interventions in Nepal's agrarian landscape.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Landlessness remains a central driver of rural inequality in Nepal, with historical land tenure systems, weak reform implementation, and geographic isolation concentrating poverty among landless households, particularly women, Dalits, and indigenous groups. Empirical evidence shows a clear inverse relationship between landholding size and poverty, with marginalized provinces like Sudurpashchim and Karnali most affected. Addressing this requires targeted land redistribution, secure tenure, and enforcement of reforms, complemented by rural infrastructure development, access to credit, livelihood diversification, and gender-sensitive programs. Policies must be tailored to regional contexts to reduce structural and social inequalities. Future research could explore intergenerational landlessness, migration, and educational outcomes, as well as assess the effectiveness of ongoing reforms, to guide inclusive and sustainable rural development in Nepal.

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भालेश्वरदेखि कश्यपेश्वरसम्म धार्मिक पर्यटनको नजरमा काभ्रेपलाञ्चोकका प्रमुख शिवलिङ्गहरु

परशुराम अधिकारी र माया अधिकारी

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शिक्षक, काठमाडौं विश्वविद्यालय हाई स्कूल

सार

काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्ला धार्मिक एवम् पौराणिक दृष्टिले पावन भूमि हो । यस आलेखमा काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्लामा रहेका स्कन्दपुराण वर्णित कश्यपेश्वरदेखि चण्डेश्वर,विकटेश्वर, धनेश्वर, इन्द्रेश्वर र भालेश्वरसम्मका प्रमुख ६ ओटा शिवलिङ्ग र शिवपीठको पौराणिक सन्दर्भ, वर्तमान अवस्थिति र धार्मिक पर्यटनको सम्भावनालाई केलाउने प्रयास गरिएको छ । यसका साथै उल्लिखित शिवपीठमा वर्षभरिमा लाग्ने प्रमुख मेला, पर्व, जात्रा उल्लेख गरी धार्मिक पर्यटनको पदमार्ग पहिचान गर्ने प्रयत्न गरिएको छ । यसका निमित्त गुणात्मक अध्ययन विधिलाई उपयोगमा ल्याइएको छ । यो लेख तयार पार्नका लागि आवश्यक तथ्याङ्कहरू प्राथमिक र द्वितीय स्रोतबाट सङ्कलन गरिएको छ । प्राथमिक स्रोतका लागि स्थलगत अवलोकन तथा तत् तत् स्थानका अग्रजहरूसँग सोधपुछ र अन्तर्वार्ता लिइएको छ । द्वितीय स्रोतका रुपमा विभिन्न सन्दर्भपुस्तक, पत्रपत्रिका र डिजिटल सामग्रीको उपयोग गरिएको छ । सङ्कलित तथ्याङ्कहरूलाई विश्लेषण गर्दा काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्ला धार्मिक र पौराणिक दृष्टिले पावन शिवतीर्थको जिल्ला हो भन्न सकिन्छ । विदेशी पर्यटक र सनातनी हिन्दु धार्मिक पर्यटनको प्रचुर सम्भावना पनि भएकोले धार्मिक पदमार्ग पहिचान गर्नु आवश्यक देखिन्छ । शिवतीर्थ क्षेत्रका शैवमार्गी र अन्य स्थानीय नागरिकहरूलाई शिवधामको प्रचार प्रसार र संरक्षणमा उत्प्रेरित गर्न सके शिवतीर्थको महत्व बृद्धि भई धार्मिक पर्यटनमा टेवा पुग्ने देखिन्छ ।

शब्दकुञ्जी:काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक, धार्मिक पर्यटन, शिवलिङ्ग,ऐतिहासिक र पौराणिक

विषय प्रवेश

हिन्दु धर्ममा शिवको स्थान अत्यन्त पवित्र मानिन्छ । त्रिमूर्ति (ब्रह्मा, विष्णु, महेश्वर) मध्ये संहारक र पुन निर्माणका देवता शिवको आराधना नेपालमा वैदिककालदेखि चलिआएको छ । उनी योगी, गृहस्थ र अघोरी जस्ता बहुरुपमा पुजिन्छन् । शिवलिङ्ग यिनै बहुरुपी शिवको निराकार प्रतीक हो जसले अनन्त शक्ति र चेतनाको संयोजनलाई जनाउँछ । शिवलिङ्गको दार्शनिक महत्व गहिरो छ । लिङ्ग (स्तम्भ) र योनि (आधार) को संयोजनले सृष्टि उत्पत्तिको सङ्केत गर्छ भने यसले निर्गुण ब्रह्माको अवधारणालाई प्रतिनिधित्व गर्छ । शिवपुराण अनुसार शिवलिङ्गको पूजा साक्षात् शिवसेवा हो । नेपालमा शिवलिङ्गको अवस्थिति ऐतिहासिक र पौराणिक दुबै दृष्टिले महत्वपूर्ण छ । यहाँ ६४ शिवलिङ्गको पौराणिक संकल्पना प्रचलित छ जुन पूर्णताको प्रतीक (६४ कला, ६४ योगिनी) हो(ढकाल, २०७५) । वास्तविक सङ्ख्या प्रतीकात्मक भए पनि देशभर फैलिएका शिवधामहरूको सांस्कृतिक महत्व अपार छ । नेपालमा दुई मान्य ज्योतिर्लिङ्ग छन् । काठमाडौंको पशुपतिनाथ र खोटाङको हलेसी महादेव । गोकर्णेश्वरलाई अर्धज्योतिर्लिङ्गको रुपमा चिनिन्छ । सामान्य शिवलिङ्ग र ज्योतिर्लिङ्गबीच महत्वपूर्ण भिन्नता छन् । ज्योतिर्लिङ्ग स्वयम्भु हुन् जहाँ अनौठो शक्तिले शिव प्रकट भएको मानिन्छ । सम्पूर्ण भारतीय उपमहाद्वीपमा १२ ओटा मात्र ज्योतिर्लिङ्ग छन् जसलाई सम्पूर्ण हिन्दु समुदायले पवित्र मान्छन् (पौडेल, २०८०)। यिनको दर्शनले मोक्षको मार्ग प्रशस्त गर्छ भन्ने विश्वास छ । सामान्य लिङ्ग मानवनिर्मित वा प्राकृतिक हुन सक्छन् । यी असंख्य छन् र स्थानीय स्तरमा पूजित हुन्छन् । यिनको दर्शनले पुण्यलाभ हुन्छ भन्ने मान्यता प्रचलित छ ।

काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्ला नेपालको मध्यपहाडी क्षेत्रमा अवस्थित छ जसलाई हिमालयको काख र पवित्र नदीहरूको उद्गमस्थल मानिन्छ । यो क्षेत्र आध्यात्मिक दृष्टिले काठमाडौं गोसाइँकुण्ड यात्रामार्गको महत्वपूर्ण कडी हो । यहाँका शिवलिङ्गहरूले प्राकृतिक सुन्दरता, ऐतिहासिकता र धार्मिक एकताको अनौठो संगम प्रस्तुत गर्दछन् । भालेश्वरदेखि कश्यपेश्वरसम्म फैलिएका ६ ओटा प्रमुख शिवलिङ्गहरू काभ्रेका गौरव हुन् । विकटेश्वर (शिवपुरी) प्राकृतिक गुफामा रहेको भयङ्कर रुपको प्रतीक हो । चारुमति शिव (चाँगुनारायण) पार्वतीको शान्त अवतारसँग सम्बन्धित छ । गौरीघाट शिव (भक्तपुर) बागमतीको तटमा गौरीशिव युगल मूर्तिको रुपमा रहेको छ । गोकर्णेश्वर (गोकर्ण) अर्धज्योतिर्लिङ्ग मानिन्छ जहाँ राजा गोकर्णले तपस्या गरेको मानिन्छ । कश्यपेश्वर (गुह्येश्वरी) ऋषि कश्यपद्वारा स्थापित पशुपतिको उपक्षेत्र हो । ढोकेश्वर महादेव (दोलखा) हिमाली क्षेत्रमा रहेको गोरखनाथ साधनास्थल हो(ढकाल, २०७५) ।

काभ्रेपलाञ्चोकमा धार्मिक पर्यटनको विशाल सम्भावना छ । श्रावण महिनामा कावेरी तिलोत्तमा यात्रा गर्ने परम्परा र महाशिवरात्रीमा रातभर जागरण गर्ने चलनले हजारौं तीर्थयात्री आकर्षित गर्छन् । स्थानीय नेवार र तामाङ संस्कृतिको दर्शन तथा पर्वहरूमा देवनृत्य (छाली नाच) जस्ता सांस्कृतिक अनुभवहरू पर्यटकलाई आकर्षित गर्न सक्छन् । यसले गाउँले होमस्टे, स्थानीय खाना (भटमास,सिस्नु) र हस्तशिल्प (धातुको मूर्ति,पाथी) जस्ता आर्थिक अवसरहरू सिर्जना गर्न सक्छ । भालेश्वरदेखि कश्यपेश्वरसम्मको यात्रालाई काभ्रे शिव सर्किट (परिक्रमा) को रुपमा विकास गर्न आवश्यक छ । यसका लागि बाटोमार्ग जडान, धर्मशाला निर्माण, डिजिटल प्लेटफर्ममा भर्चुअल टुर र स्थानीय युवालाई गाइडको रुपमा प्रशिक्षण दिनु जरुरी छ ।

काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्लाका शिवलिङ्गहरू केवल पत्थरका टुक्रा होइनन् । यी हजारौं श्रद्धालुका आश्था, इतिहासका साक्षी र समुदायका गौरव हुन् । यी पवित्र स्थलहरूलाई धार्मिक पर्यटनको केन्द्रमा राखेर काभ्रेले आध्यात्मिक नेपालको नयाँ पहिचान बनाउन सक्छ । स्कन्दपुराण र नेपाल माहात्म्य जस्ता ग्रन्थहरूले यस क्षेत्रको महत्व प्रमाणित गर्दछन् । काभ्रे जिल्लामा पर्यटन विभागको २०८० सालको तथ्याङ्क अनुसार श्रावण महिनामा ५० हजारभन्दा बढी तीर्थयात्रीहरू आउने गरेका छन्(काभ्रेली गुञ्जन, २०८२) ।त्यसैले यस लेखमा काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्लाभित्रका प्रमुख ६ शिवलिङ्गहरूको संक्षिप्त जानकारी गराउन खोजिएको छ । यसले स्थानीय एवम् तीर्थयात्रीहरूलाई मन्दिरको अवस्थिति र जनविश्वासको बारेमा विशेष जानकारी दिने छ ।

अध्ययनको उद्देश्य

पौराणिक मान्यता अनुसार भालेश्वरदेखि कश्यपेश्वरसम्मका प्रमुख ६ ओटा शिवलिङ्गहरुको पौराणिक अवस्थिति र वर्तमान अवस्थिति पर्गेल्नु यस लेखको मुख्य उद्देश्य हो । यसका अतिरिक्त ती शिवतीर्थप्रतिको जनविश्वास र तत् स्थानमा लाग्ने विशेष पर्वमेलाका साथै धार्मिक पर्यटनको अवस्था उल्लेख गर्नु यस आलेखको अर्को उद्देश्य रहेको छ ।

अध्ययन विधि :

यस लेखका लागि आवश्यक पर्ने सामग्रीको स्रोतका लागि गुणात्मक विधि उपयोग गरिएको छ । प्राथमिक स्रोतका रुपमा सम्बन्धित क्षेत्रको स्थलगत अवलोकन गर्नुका साथै मन्दिरसँग सरोकार राख्ने व्यक्तिहरुसँग औपचारिक, अनौपचारिक सोधपुछ र अन्तर्वार्ता लिइएको छ । त्यसैगरी द्वितीय स्रोतका रुपमा पुस्तकहरु, पत्रपत्रिका लगायतका सामग्रीहरु उपयोग गरिएको छ । यिनै उपलब्ध सामग्रीहरुका आधारमा लेखलाई वर्णनात्मक ढाँचामा विश्लेषण गरिनेछ ।

काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्लाभित्र पर्ने ६ प्रमुख शिवलिङ्गहरुको संक्षिप्त जानकारी

१. भालेश्वर :

हिमवत्खण्ड प्रकरण ५ अध्याय ९९ मा निकुञ्ज पर्वतको गन्दर्भतीर्थमा भालेश्वर रहेको उल्लेख गरिएको छ । शास्त्रीय मान्यता अनुसार दक्षप्रजापतिले आयोजना गरेको यज्ञमा आफ्ना पति महादेवलाई नबोलाएपछि बाबुसँग रिसाएर सतीदेवीले यज्ञकुण्डमा प्रवेश गरी जलेर देह तयाग गरेकी थिइन् । आफ्नी आर्धाङ्गिनीको मृत्युबाट पीडाबोध गरी महादेव सतीदेवीलाई बोकेर पृथ्वी परिक्रमा गर्ने क्रममा निकुञ्ज पर्वतको शिखरमा पुगेका र त्यहाँ सतीदेवीको शरीरबाट निधार (संस्कृत भाषामा भाल) खसेपछि त्यस ठाउँमा लिङ्ग पैदा भएकोले उक्त स्थानको नाम भालेश्वर रहन गएको भन्ने जनविश्वास रहेको छ ।

भालेश्वरमा विरुपाक्षले आफूले गरेको पापबाट मुक्त हुन माघ कृष्ण नवमीका दिन रातभर जाग्राम बसेर गन्दर्भतीर्थमा स्नान गरी विधिपूर्वक शिवलिङ्गको पूजा गरेका थिए भन्ने गरिन्छ । यो गन्दर्भतीर्थ लीलावती, सुखस्रवा र रोशमती नदीको संगममा रहेको छ । यसै स्थानमा स्वर्गकी अप्सरा रम्भाको श्राप परेको सुमुख नाम गरेको गन्दर्भले गालव नामका ऋषिलाई भेटेर आफूले रम्भाप्रति गरेको व्यभिचारबाट मुक्त हुन के गर्नुपर्ला भन्ने जिज्ञासामा गालव ऋषिले निकुञ्ज पर्वतको थुम्काको शिरमा रहेको शिवलिङ्गमा शिवजी प्रकट नभएसम्म पूजा गर्यौ भने फल पाउने छौ भनी बताएको कुरा हिमवत्खण्डमा उल्लेख भएको पाइन्छ । सोही मुताविक सुमुखले निरन्तर महादेवको उपासना गर्दा फागुन कृष्ण अष्टमीका दिन सो लिङ्गबाट शिवको उत्पत्ति भएको र सुमुखको तपस्याबाट खुसी भई वरदान दिएर सोही शिवलिङ्गमा अन्तर्धान हुनुभएको थियो भन्ने पौराणिक मान्यता रहेको पाइन्छ । यसै तथ्यबाट भालेश्वर शिवतीर्थको पौराणिक महत्व झल्किन्छ भने जसले गन्दर्भतीर्थमा स्नान गरी भालेश्वर लिङ्गको पूजा गर्छन् तिनको सम्पूर्ण कामना पूरा भई शिवलोकमा जान पाउने विश्वास गरिन्छ ।

गन्दर्भतीर्थ भालेश्वर काठमाडौंबाट ३५ कि.मि र पनौती बजारबाट साँढे २ किलोमिटरको दूरीमा दक्षिण पश्चिमपट्टि पर्दछ । पनौती नगरपालिका वडा नं १२ कलाँती भूमिडाँडको रोशी बजार नजिकै चिण्डुको पुछारमा भालेश्वर महादेव मन्दिर रहेको छ । मन्दिर छेवैको रोसमती, लिलावती र सुखस्रवा (पौराणिक नाम) हाल रोशी र विहावर नदीको संगममा गन्दर्भघाट रहेको छ । सुमुख नामको गन्दर्भले यसै स्थानमा स्नान गरेको हुनाले यसलाई गन्दर्भघाट पनि भन्ने गरेको पाइन्छ ।

भालेश्वर पावन शिवधाम हो । यहाँ शिव महादेवको पाइला परेको र स्वयम् महादेवको प्रादुर्भाव भएको स्थान भएकोले यो पवित्र शिवालय पनि हो । भालेश्वर महादेवको विराट धार्मिक र सांस्कृतिक महिमा छ । यस मन्दिरमा आई पूजा गरेपछि आफ्ना इच्छाहरु पूरा भएको कुरा भक्तजनहरु बताउँछन् । यहाँ विशेष गरी शिवरात्री, बालाचतुर्दशी, तीज, एकादशीमा दर्शनार्थ मानिसहरुको उल्लेख्य भीड लाग्ने गरेको छ । विवाह, व्रतवन्ध, रुद्री, श्राद्ध जस्ता धार्मिक कर्मका लागि पनि भक्तहरु पुग्ने गर्दछन् (अधिकारी र अधिकारी, २०२५)।

२.इन्द्रेश्वर :

स्कन्दपुराणको हिमवत्खण्डको अध्याय ९८ मा इन्द्रेश्वर शिवधामको चर्चा उल्लेख भएको पाइन्छ (लाकोजू, २०७८)। इन्द्रेश्वर कुञ्ज पर्वतको शचीतीर्थमा पर्दछ । इन्द्रेश्वर हाल पनौती बजारको पुछारमा रहेको छ । पनौती प्राचीन स्मारक क्षेत्र पनि हो । शास्त्रीय भनाइ अनुसार मिथिला क्षेत्रको ब्रह्मापुरी भन्ने ठाउँमा गौतम ऋषि र उनकी पत्नी अहल्या बसोवास गर्थे । इन्द्रले नारदमार्फत अहल्याको रुपसौन्दर्यको बयान सुनेका थिए । वगैंचामा फूल टिप्तै गरेका बखत रुपवती अहल्यालाई देखेर इन्द्र कामवासनाले ग्रस्त हुन्छन् । गौतम ऋषि स्नान गर्न गएका बेला ऋषिको भेषमा इन्द्रले अहल्याको सतीत्व लुट्छन् । यो दृश्य ऋषिले देखेर शरीरभरि हजार योनी बनुन् भन्ने श्राप दिन्छन् । इन्द्रको शरीरभरि योनी देखेर इन्द्राणी र अप्सराहरु लजाउँछन् र गिज्याउँछन् ।

आफ्नो पतिको त्यो दुर्दशा हटाउन इन्द्राणीले बृहस्पतिलाई अनुरोध गरेपछि बृहस्पतिले रुद्रावती र लीलावती नदीको संगममा स्नान गरेर शिवको उपासना गरे पाप नाश हुने उपाय बताई दिए । त्यसपछि इन्द्र र इन्द्राणी दुवैले महादेव र पार्वतीको ध्यान भक्ति गर्न थाले । दुवैको ध्यान भक्तिबाट प्रशन्न भएर भगवती पद्मावती प्रकट भइन् । त्यसको एक वर्षपछि असार पूर्णिमाको दिन इन्द्र ध्यानमग्न रहेको स्थलमा लिङ्ग उत्पत्ति भई सोही लिङ्गबाट महादेव प्रकट भएर इन्द्रको पापमोचन गर्नुभयो भन्ने पौराणिक कथन रहेको पाइन्छ । यसरी इन्द्रेश्वर शिवलिङ्ग रुद्रावती, लिलावती र पद्मावती नदीको त्रिवेणी संगममा विराजमान भई इन्द्रेश्वर महादेवका रुपमा प्रशिद्ध छ(पनौती नगरपालिकाको कार्यालय, २०७९) ।तसर्थ आज पनि

जुन पुरुषले इन्द्रेश्वर लिङ्गको भक्ति उपसना गर्छ र जुन नारीले इन्द्राणीको आराधना गर्छे त्यस्ता व्यक्ति सम्पूर्ण पापकर्मबाट मुक्त भएर शिवधाम जान पाउँछन् भन्ने जनभावना रहेको पाइन्छ ।

नेपालका प्राचीन मन्दिरहरू मध्ये इन्द्रेश्वर महादेव मन्दिर हाल पनौती नगरपालिका वडा नं ७ पनौती बजारको पुछारमा पुन्यमाता र रोशी खोलाको संगममा रहेको छ । इन्द्रेश्वर काठमाडौंबाट करिब ३२ कि.मि. को दुरीमा रहेको छ । यस मन्दिरमा र यस मन्दिरका नाउँमा विभिन्न जात्रापर्व हुने गर्दछन् । जेठ पूर्णिमामा महादेवको रथ जुधाउने जात्रा, माघ महिनामा साँखुबाट माधवनारायणको आगमन, भक्तपुरबाट नवदुर्गाको आगमन हुने गर्दछ र यस्ता पर्वमा भक्तालुहरूको व्यापक उपस्थिति हुने गर्दछ । यसका अतिरिक्त इन्द्रेश्वर शिवधाममा शिवरात्री, मकरमेला, बालाचतुर्दशी, तीज, जनै पूर्णिमा, सोमबार, श्रावण महिना र माघ महिनामा तिर्थलुहरूको घुइँचो लाग्ने गर्दछ । बिहान नित्य पूजा र साँझमा सन्ध्या आरति भव्य रुपमा हुने गर्दछ । विदेशी पर्यटकहरूको आकर्षणको केन्द्र समेत रहेको इन्द्रेश्वर हिन्दु धर्मावलम्बीहरुका लागि आश्थाको पावन शिवधाम हो ।

३.धनेश्वर :

स्कन्द पुराण अन्तर्गत हिमवत खण्डको अध्याय ९६ मा धनेश्वर महादेवको माहात्म्य उल्लेख गरिएको पाइन्छ (ढकाल, २०७५)। पौराणिक मान्यता अनुसार धनेश्वर मन्दिर रौद्रागिरि पर्वतको उग्रतीर्थका रुपमा प्रसिद्ध छ । प्राचीन समयमा भृगु ऋषिले सय वर्षसम्म यस स्थानमा तपस्या गरेपछि धनेश्वर लिङ्ग प्रकट भएको हो भन्ने विश्वास रहेको छ । किंवदन्ती अनुसार शिवदास नाम गरेका व्यक्ति पूर्वजन्ममा कुनै दान नगरेका कारण गरिव भएकोले घुम्दै जानेक्रममा यस स्थानमा आएर १२ वर्षसम्म शिव आराधना गरेपछि लिङ्गबाट सगुण शिव उत्पत्ति भई वर माग्न भनेको र उसले प्रशस्त धनदौलतसहित लिङ्ग धनेश्वरका नामले प्रख्यात होस् भनेर मागेपछि भोलेनाथ शङ्करले तथास्तु भनी अन्तर्धान हुनु भएको भन्ने पौराणिक मान्यता रहेको पाइन्छ ।

सतीदेवीलाई बोकेर पृथ्वी परिक्रमा गर्न निस्केका श्री महादेव यस ठाउँमा आइपुग्दा सतीदेवीको कान पतन भएपछि यस शीवपिठको उत्पत्ति भएको भन्ने जनविश्वास पनि रहेको पाइन्छ ।आज पनि चौसठ्ठी गणलाई साथमा लिएर भक्तहरूलाई धन ऐश्वर्य दिने धनेश्वर शिवधाममा जो व्यक्तिले महादेवको पूजाउपासना गर्छन् तिनीहरु धनधान्यले पूर्ण हुन्छन् र पापकर्मबाट मुक्त भई शिवलोक प्राप्त गर्दछन् भन्ने आमधारणा रहेको छ । धनेश्वर महादेव मन्दिर हाल पनौती नगरपालिका वडा नं ५ मा पर्दछ । काठमाडौंबाट २७ किलोमिटरको दुरीमा रहेको यो मन्दिर अरनिको राजमार्ग बनेपा चारदोबाटो चोकबाट दक्षिणतर्फ १२ सय मिटरको दुरीमा अवस्थित छ । पञ्चमुखी शिवलिङ्ग धनेश्वरको मुख्य विशेषता हो । हिजोआज विशेषगरी शिवरात्री, तीज, श्रावण महिना, माघ महिना, सोमवार, धान्यपूर्णिमा, बालाचतुर्दशी जस्ता पर्वमा देशका विभिन्न स्थानदेखि भक्तजनहरु धनेश्वरको शिवउपासना गर्न आउछन् भने ती अवसरमा निकै ठूलो भीडभाड देख्न पाइन्छ ।

४.चण्डेश्वर :

स्कन्द पुराण अन्तर्गत हिमवतखण्डको अध्याय ९५ मा चण्डेश्वर शिवलिङ्को चर्चा गरिएको पाइन्छ । पुराण अनुसार स्कन्दगिरि पर्वतको उग्रतीर्थमा चण्डेश्वर शिवलिङ्ग रहेको छ । सबै प्राणीमा दयाको भाव राख्ने सत्यवादी च्यवन ऋषिले योगको सिद्धान्त अनुसार योगासनमा बसी आफ्नो शरीरमा शिवको आह्वान सहितको ध्यान गर्दा चण्डेश्वर शिवलिङ्ग उत्पत्ति भएको थियो भन्ने जनविश्वास रहेको छ । पौराणिक मत अनुसार सोही लिङ्गबाट सगुण महादेव उत्पत्ति भई च्यवनलाई मुक्त हुने वरदान दिएर उसै लिङमा अन्तर्धान हुनुभयो । यो कुरा दानव अन्धक पुत्र चण्डले शुक्राचार्यमार्फत थाहा पायो । यसै तीर्थमा असुर चण्डले विधिपूर्वक उग्र तपस्या गरेको थियो भन्ने गरिन्छ । चण्डासुरको तपस्याबाट खुसी भई महादेव सोही लिङ्गबाट सगुण उत्पत्ति भएर चण्डसुरलाई वरदान माग्न भनेपछि चण्डासुरले देवता र राक्षस कसैले पनि मलाई मार्न नसकून् र मेरो नामबाट हजुरको नाम चण्डेश्वर रहोस् भनेर बरदान मागेपछि महादेव चण्डासुरलाई वरदान दिएर सोही लिङमा अन्तर्धान हुनभएको पौराणिक तथ्य पाइन्छ ।

महादेवको वरदानको शक्तिले उन्मत्त चण्डासुर स्वर्ग, आकाश, पाताल चारैतिर गई युद्ध गर्छ । सबैलाई जित्दै जान्छ । अन्तमा लड्ने कोही नभए पछि महादेवसँग लड्न पाऊँ भनी प्रार्थना गर्छ । महादेव र चण्डासुरको घनघोर युद्ध हुँदा पनि चण्डसुर मर्दैन सोही बेला महादेव अलप हुन्छन् र एउटा (छिद्र) प्यालबाट चण्डीकादेवी बाहिर निस्केर तरवारले चण्डासुरको घाँटी काटी टाउको हातमा लिएपछि देवताहरु खुसी हुन्छन् र चण्डीकादेवी सोही छिद्रबाट विलिन भएको प्रसङ्ग हिमवतखण्डमा पाइन्छ ।चण्डसुर मार्ने चण्डिकादेवीलाई हिजोआज चण्डेश्वरीका नामले चिनिन्छ । हाल बनेपाको चण्डेश्वरी परिसरमा चण्डेश्वर महादेव र चण्डेश्वरी मन्दिर आमनेसामने रहेका छन् । यसरी शक्तिको दुरुपयोग गर्ने असुर स्वभावका मानिसलाई चण्डेश्वर महादेव र चण्डेश्वरी माईले सधैं दण्डित गर्छन् र शक्तिको दुरुपयोग गर्नेहरु पनि छिटै नासिन्छन् भन्ने जनविश्वास आज पनि जीवन्त बनेर रहेको छ ।हाल चण्डेश्वर महादेव मन्दिर बनेपा नगरपालिका वडा नं ५ घोगेचौरमा अवस्थित छ । अरनिको राजमार्ग बनेपा चारदोबाटोबाट करिब १ कि.मि उत्तरपूर्वको दुरीमा रहेको यो शिवधाम काठमाडोदेखि करिब २७ कि.मि पूर्वमा पर्दछ । चण्डेश्वर महादेव मन्दिर चण्डेश्वरी मन्दिरकै परिसरमा रहेको छ । यहाँ हरेक दिन बिहान प्रभाती यात्रामा जाने मानिसहरुको भीड देख्न पाइन्छ । बुद्धजयन्ती, शिवरात्री, तीज, बालाचतुर्दशीमा यहाँ विशेष जात्रा मेला लाग्ने गर्दछ । चण्डेश्वर र चण्डेश्वरीको मन्दिर सँगै रहेकाले यहाँ सधैं भक्तजनको घुइँचो भई नै रहन्छ । विशेष गरी नवरात्रीमा टाढाटाढाबाट दर्शनार्थीहरु आफ्नो भाकल पूरा गर्न यहाँ आउने गर्दछन् ।

५. विकटेश्वर :

स्कन्द पुराणभित्र हिमवतखण्डको अध्याय ९७ मा विकटेश्वर शिवतीर्थको महिमा भेटिन्छ । पुराण अनुसार विकटेश्वर द्रोणाचल पर्वतमा पर्दछ भने पुष्पतीर्थका नामले प्रसिद्ध छ । प्राचीन कालमा विकट नामको अनार्य (अधर्मी) ले पशुचौपायको शिकार गर्दा पश्चातापमा परी यस स्थानमा आएर तपस्या गर्दा लिङ्ग उत्पत्ति भएको र सोही लिङ्गबाट शिव महादेव उत्पत्ति भई प्रत्यक्ष दर्शन दिनु भएको भन्ने पौराणिक विश्वास रहेको छ । भगवान् शिवले उक्त व्याधाको तपस्याबाट सन्तुष्ट भई यो स्थान अब उप्रान्त तिम्रो नामबाट प्रसिद्ध हुने छ भन्ने वर दिएका कारण आजसम्म पनि यो ठाउँ

विकटेश्वर शिव तीर्थका नामबाट प्रख्यात छ । पछि विकटलाई देवताहरुले सेवा गरेकाले विकटेश्वर भएको भन्ने मान्यता पनि छ । आज पनि शिकार गर्दा लागेका पापबाट छुटकारा पाउन मानिसहरु यस स्थानमा आई शिवउपासना गर्छन् भन्ने अग्रजहरुको भनाइ रहेको छ ।

विकटेश्वर महादेव मन्दिर हाल बनेपा नगरपालिका वडा नं १३ भैंसेपाटीको रुद्रावती नदी किनारमा रहेको छ । काठमाडौंदेखि साँढे २२ कि.मि को दुरीमा पर्ने यो तीर्थ अरनिको राजमार्गबाड ८० मिटरको दुरीमा रहेको छ ।

यस पावन शिवधाममा शिवउपासना गरेमा मनोकांक्षा पूरा हुनाका साथै जीवनमा आउने संकट तथा विकट हरण भई पाप नष्ट हुने जनविश्वास रहेको छ । यस तीर्थको दर्शन गर्दा खासगरी पशुपक्षीवध र हिंसाबाट हुने पापबाट मोक्ष पाउन सकिन्छ भन्ने विचार अग्रजहरुको रहेको छ । विशेष गरी एकादशी, शिवरात्री, सोमवार, स्वस्थानी पूर्णिमा, बालाचतुर्दशीमा यहाँ विशेष मेला लाग्ने गर्दछ । यस तीर्थको परिसरमा हरि र हरको उपस्थिति हुन् यस तीर्थको अर्को विशेषता हो । रुद्रावती नदीको वारिपारि हरि र हरको वास रहेकोले हिजोआज यस ठाउँलाई हरिहर धाम पनि भन्ने गरिन्छ ।

६. कश्यपेश्वर :

स्कन्द पुराणका विभिन्न खण्डहरुमध्ये हिमवतखण्डको प्रकरण ५ अध्याय ९३ मा कश्यपेश्वर शिवलिङ्गको माहात्म्य उल्लेख गरिएको पाइन्छ । पौराणिक वचन अनुसार कश्यपेश्वर ककुदाद्रि पर्वतमा कश्यपतीर्थका नामले प्रसिद्ध छ (लाकोजु, २०६५) । यस ठाउँमा कश्यप नाम गरेका ब्राम्हणले जीवन र जगतको सृष्टि गर्ने उद्देश्यले शिवको आराधना गर्दा शिवलिङ्ग प्रादुर्भाव भएको र सोही शिवलिङ्गबाट महादेव उत्पत्ति भएर कश्यपलाई वर प्रदान गर्नुभएको भन्ने जनविश्वास रहेको पाइन्छ ।

प्राचीन कालमा म्लेच्छ (अधर्मी, अनार्य जाति) ले धर्म र अधर्मको चेष्टा नै नराखी जथाभावी भक्षण गर्ने, मनलाग्दी गर्दै हिँड्ने र पशु क्रीडामा समेत लिप्त हुँदा नपुंशक बनेपछि यस तीर्थमा आई लिङ्ग दर्शन गरे पश्चात ज्ञानी भएको किंवदन्ती पाइन्छ ।

धर्म र अधर्मको विवेक नराखी काम गर्दा नपुंशक भएको उक्त व्यक्तिले पुरुष शक्तिको कामना गरेर शिव उपासना गरेका कारण पुरुषमा बदलिएको भन्ने बुढापाकाहरुको भनाइ रहेको पाइन्छ । आज पनि आफ्नो धर्म र कर्म भुलेर विचार र कर्ममा नपुंशक भएका जो व्यक्तिले नारी वा पुरुष रुपको कल्पना गरी भक्तिपूर्वक कश्यपतीर्थमा दर्शन र स्नान गर्छन् तिनीहरुले पुरुष वा नारी शक्ति र रुप प्राप्त गर्दछन् भन्ने जनविश्वास रहेको छ । काठमाडौंदेखि उत्तरपूर्वमा करिब ५५ किलोमिटरको दुरीमा हालको मण्डनदेउपुर नगरपालिका पर्दछ । कश्यपेश्वर शिवतीर्थ काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्लाको सबैभन्दा कान्छो मण्डनदेउपुर नगरपालिका वडा नं ९ महादेववेंसीमा पर्दछ । अरनिको राजमार्गको जिरो किलो भन्ने ठाउँबाट लगभग ७ किलोमिटरको दुरीमा कश्यपेश्वर शिवमन्दिर अवस्थित छ । यस मन्दिरमा विशेषगरी चण्डीपूर्णिमा, बालाचतुर्दशी, तीजमा विशेष मेला लाग्छ भने शिवरात्री, श्रावण, माघ महिनामा भक्तजनको उल्लेख्य उपस्थिति रहने गरेको देखिन्छ ।

तीर्थयात्रीका लागि महत्वपूर्ण जानकारी

मन्दिरको नाम	काठमाडौंदेखिको दुरी	सडकपहुँच	विशेष पर्व
भालेश्वर	३४ कि.मि	पक्की सडकमार्ग	शिवरात्रि,बालाचतुर्दशी, तीज, साउने सोमबार
इन्द्रेश्वर	३२ कि.मि	पक्की सडकमार्ग	शिवरात्रि, जनै पूर्णिमा,मकर मेला बालाचतुर्दशी,तीज,जेठको जात्रा (ज्या: पुन्ही)
धनेश्वर	२७ कि.मि	पक्की सडकमार्ग	शिवरात्रि, धान्य पूर्णिमा बालाचतुर्दशी,तीज
विकटेश्वर	२२.५ कि.मि	पक्की सडकमार्ग	शिवरात्रि, बालाचतुर्दशी, तीज, सोमबार
चण्डेश्वर	२७ कि.मि	पक्की सडकमार्ग	शिवरात्रि, बुद्ध जयन्ति बालाचतुर्दशी,तीज
कश्यपेश्वर	५५ कि.मि	पक्की सडकमार्ग	शिवरात्रि, चण्डि पूर्णिमा बालाचतुर्दशी,तीज

(पनौनी नगरपालिकाको कार्यलय, २०८०/०८१)

धार्मिक पर्यटनको सम्भावना र स्थानीयको बुझाइ

भोलेनाथ शङ्करले सतीदेवीलाई बोकेर यहाँका विभिन्न शिवधाममा पुगेको प्रसङ्ग अनि विरुपाक्षले नेमुनिसँग भालेश्वरदेखि कश्यपेश्वरसम्म तीर्थ गरेको (धार्मिक पर्यटन) प्रसङ्गले धार्मिक पर्यटन पौराणिक कालदेखि लौकिक कालसम्मै चलिरहेको देखिन्छ ।

स्थानीय सरकारले आआफ्नो क्षेत्रका शिवधमहरुलाई प्रचार प्रसार गरी धार्मिक पर्यटनको प्रवर्धन गर्न सक्छन् । तीर्थलुहरुलाई यी ६ ओटा शिवलिङ्गको एकैदिन धार्मिक परिक्रमा गराउन सकिन्छ । सामूहिक, संस्थागत र व्यक्तिगत रुपमा पनि आन्तरिक पर्यटन गर्न र गराउन सकिन्छ । पौराणिक महत्व बोकेका यस्ता पावनधामहरुको संरक्षण, प्रचार, संवर्धनमा हरेक शैवमार्गीहरु लाग्नु पर्छ भन्ने विचार स्थानीयहरुको रहेको पाइन्छ । धार्मिक पर्यटनलाई बढाउन सकियो भने स्थानीय नागरिकहरुको आर्थिक अवस्थामा सुधार ल्याउन सकिने धारणा स्थानीय बासिन्दाहरुको रहेको छ । स्थानीय उत्पादन,कला संस्कृति, व्यापार प्रवर्धनका लागि पनि धार्मिक पर्यटन कोसेढुङ्गा हुन सक्ने बुझाइ स्थानीयहरुको छ । यी क्षेत्रका स्थानीय निकायहरुले आपसी समन्वय गरी यी क्षेत्रमा लाग्ने विशेष जात्रापर्वहरुमा आफ्ना जेष्ठ नागरिकहरुलाई एक दिवसीय तीर्थयात्रा गराउने परम्परा सुरुवात मात्र गर्ने हो भने पनि यी शिवधामको गरिमा बढ्ने छ र धार्मिक पर्यटनमा नयाँ आयाम थपिने छ भन्ने बुझाइ स्थानीयबासीहरुको रहेको छ ।

निष्कर्ष

धार्मिक दृष्टिले काभ्रेपलाञ्चोक जिल्ला विभिन्न शिवतीर्थ भएको जिल्ला हो । पुराण वर्णित ६४ शिवलिङ्गहरु मध्ये प्रमुख ६ ओटा शिवलिङ्ग काभ्रेमा हुनुले यसको पुष्टि गर्दछ । गन्दर्भतीर्थदेखि शचीतीर्थ, उग्रतीर्थ, पुष्पतीर्थ हुँदै कश्यपतीर्थसम्म धार्मिक पदमार्ग पहिचान र संयोजन गरी स्वदेशी तथा विदेशी तीर्थयात्रीहरुलाई धार्मिक भ्रमण गराउन सके धर्म पनि बाँच्छ र पर्यटन पनि प्रवर्द्धन हुन्छ । हिन्दुहरु शिव र शक्तिका उपासक हुन् । स्थानीय मठमन्दिरको जगेर्ना गर्न, मानिसमा धार्मिक आश्था र चेतन जागृत गराउन यस्ता पौराणिक महत्व बोकेका धामहरुको प्रचारप्रसार गर्नु आवश्यक छ । अतः धार्मिक आश्था बोकेर तीर्थ गर्न रुचाउने भक्तजनलाई यी ६ ओटा शिवधामको एक दिवसीय परिक्रमा गराउने हो भने मात्र पनि धार्मिक पर्यटनमा टेवा पुग्न सक्छ ।

पनौती नगरपालिकाको भालेश्वर, इन्द्रेश्वर, धनेश्वर अनि बनेपा नगरपालिकाको विकटेश्वर, चण्डेश्वर तथा मण्डनदेउपुर नगरपालिकाको कश्यपेश्वर शिवधाममा धान्यपूर्णिमा, चण्डी पूर्णिमा, जेठ पूर्णिमा, जनै पूर्णिमा, तीज, शिवरात्री, नवरात्री जस्ता पर्वमा हजारौं धार्मिक पर्यटक पुग्ने गरेका छन् । यसलाई अझ विस्तार गर्न विभिन्न सामाजिक संघसंस्थाहरुले विभिन्न उमेरसमूहका यात्रीहरुलाई भालेश्वरदेखि कश्यपेश्वरसम्मको एकदिवसीय शिवतीर्थ धामयात्रा गराउने जस्ता कार्यक्रम तय गर्नु आवश्यक देखिन्छ । सनातनी हिन्दुहरुका लागि तीर्थ जानु भनेको पुण्य कमाउनु हो भन्ने बुझाइ छ । तीर्थाटनबाट धर्म र मोक्ष प्राप्त गर्न सकिन्छ भन्ने आम बुझाइ आज पनि जीवित छ । स्थानीय सरकारको समन्वयमा भालेश्वरदेखि कश्यपेश्वरसम्मको शिवतीर्थ यात्राको प्रबन्ध मिलाउने हो भने धार्मिक पर्यटन फस्टाउन सक्छ ।

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रोसनप्रसादश्रेष्ठ

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सारसंक्षेप

यसअध्ययनलेसुदूरपश्चिमनेपालकोडोटीजिल्लामाआयोजनाहुने१५दिनेबडीमालिकाधार्मिकयात्रारपूजाकोऐतिहासिक, सांस्कृतिक, रपर्यटनगतमहत्वविश्लेषणगर्दछ।योयात्रागोर्खालीसेनापतिअमरसिंहथापाद्वारानेपालएकीकरणपश्चात्सुरुगरिएकोऐतिहासिकपरम्पराहो, जसलेहालसम्मसामाजिक-धार्मिकएकताकोप्रतीककोरूपमाकार्यगर्दैआएकोछ।अध्ययनकोउद्देश्ययात्रामासमावेशधार्मिकअनुष्ठान, सांस्कृतिकपरम्परा, रस्थानीयसमुदायकोसहभागितालाईउजागरगर्नुरयसलेधार्मिकपर्यटनलाईकसरीसहयोगगर्नसक्छभन्नेबुझाइदिनुहो।अध्ययनलेप्रमुखसूचनादाताअन्तर्वार्तारप्रत्यक्षअवलोकनजस्तागुणात्मकविधिहरूप्रयोगगरेकोछ।डोटीजिल्लाकापुजारी, स्थानीयनेतृत्व, रप्रशासनिकअधिकारीहरूसँगगरिएकाअन्तर्वार्तालेयात्राकोप्रशासनिक, सामाजिक, रधार्मिकपक्षहरूउजागरगर्छभनेप्रत्यक्षअवलोकनलेअनुष्ठान, परम्परागतकार्यक्रम, रपर्यटकीयगतिविधिहरूकोवास्तविकअध्ययनगर्नमद्दतपुर्याएकोछ।यात्रालेधार्मिकश्रद्धा, सांस्कृतिकविविधता, रप्राकृतिकसुन्दरतालाईसंयोजनगरेरनेपालकोअद्वितीयपर्यटनआकर्षणकोरूपमाकार्यगरेकोदेखिन्छ।विशेषगरीपेटारोपरिक्रमा, खिरसेनमाखिरखुवाउनेपरम्परा, रविमकोटकोऐतिहासिकदरबारजस्तातत्वहरूलेयसलाईसांस्कृतिकपर्यटनकोमहत्वपूर्णगन्तव्यबनाउँछन्।तथापि, आधारभूतपूर्वाधारकोअभाव, सुविधाहरूकोखाँचो, रव्यवस्थितप्रचारकोकमीलेयसकोपूर्णपर्यटनक्षमतालाईसीमितबनाएकोछ।यसरी, बडीमालिकायात्रानेपालकोसांस्कृतिकविरासतरधार्मिकपर्यटनकोसम्भावनालाईप्रतिनिधित्वगर्दछ।यसकोसंरक्षण, व्यवस्थितविकास, रस्थानीयसहभागितालाईबढाउँदैयसलाईअन्तर्राष्ट्रियस्तरमाप्रचारगर्नआवश्यकछ, ताकियोसुदूरपश्चिमकोसामाजिक(आर्थिकविकासमाठूलोयोगदानपुर्याउनसकोस्।

कीवर्डहरू:बडीमालिकायात्रा, धार्मिकपर्यटन, सांस्कृतिकविरासत, डोटी, नेपाल

विषयप्रवेश

सनातनहिन्दुधर्म, विश्वकाप्राचीनतमधर्महरूमध्येएक, जसकोमूलमाब्रह्माण्डकोसृजन, पालनरसंहारगर्नेशक्ति१शक्ति०रूपीदेवीकोअवधारणाअटुटरूपमाबसेकोछ।यहीशक्तिलाईनैदेवीवाशक्तिकोरूपमापूजागरिन्छ, जसकाअनेकौंरूपहरू१दुर्गा, काली, पार्वती, लक्ष्मी, सरस्वतीआदि०विभिन्नअवतार, गुणरकार्यहरूद्वारामानवजीवनलाईनिर्देशन, सुरक्षारकल्याणप्रदानगर्छिन्।यसैशक्तिपूजाकोमहत्त्वपूर्णकेन्द्रहरूनैशक्तिपीठहुन्, जहाँदेवीसतीकोअंगवाआभूषणहरूखस्नेविश्वासगरिन्छ।नेपालमापनिबडिमालिका१बडीपीठ०, गुह्येश्वरी, शैलेश्वरी, पशुपतिनाथनजिकैकोबटुकभैरवसहितकोस्थानलगायतधेरैशक्तिपीठहरूछन्, जहाँदेवीकोविशेषशक्तिविद्यमानमानिन्छरकरोडौंश्रद्धालुहरूआस्थारश्रद्धाकोसाथदर्शनार्थआउँछन्।देवीकोपूजाविभिन्नसांस्कृतिकपर्वहरूमाअत्यन्तैउत्साहपूर्वकमनाइन्छ,

जसमादशैंसर्वाधिकप्रमुखछ।दशैंकोनवरात्रीमानौदिनदुर्गाकानौरूपहरूकोआराधनागरिन्छ, घरघरमाजमराराखिन्छ, भक्तिगीतगाइन्छ, रविशेषगरीकालरात्रि, महाष्टमीरविजयादशमीकादिनहरूमापशुबलि, पूजाआजारितिलककोविधिपुरागरिन्छ।यसलेनेपालीसमाजमापारिवारिकएकताकोबन्धन, सामाजिकसद्भाव, पारम्परिकमूल्यरसंस्कृतिकोपुनर्जागरणगर्नेकामगर्दछ।साथै, अन्यपर्वहरूजस्तैतिहारकोलक्ष्मीपूजा, बसंतपञ्चमीकोसरस्वतीपूजा, नवदुर्गा, चैतेदशैं, तीजआदिलेपनिदेवीभक्तिरसांस्कृतिकचेतनालाईजगाएकोहुन्छ।

यीधार्मिकआराधनाहरूकेवलकर्मकाण्डमात्रहोइनन्, मानवकल्याणकालागिगहिरोमनोवैज्ञानिक, सामाजिकरआध्यात्मिकआधारपनिप्रदानगर्दछन्।भक्तिरश्रद्धालेमानिसलाईआन्तरिकशान्ति, आशा, सहनशीलतारआत्मविश्वासप्रदानगर्छ।सामूहिकपूजा, भजनकीर्तनरपर्वहरूलेसामाजिकसम्बन्ध, सामूहिकचेतनारपारस्परिकसहयोगबढाउँछन्।देवीकोशक्तिरसंरक्षणमाविश्वासलेभयरअनिश्चितताबाटमुक्तिदिलाउँछ।यसरीधार्मिकआचरणहरूलेमानसिकस्वास्थ्यलाईउन्नतगर्ने, तनावघटाउनेरसामाजिकसद्भावकायमगर्नेमहत्त्वपूर्णभूमिकाखेल्दछन्।साथै, यीपरम्पराहरूसांस्कृतिकसंरक्षणकोजीवन्तसाधनहुन्।पूजाविधि, भक्तिगीत९भजन, भागल, मालश्री, न्याउली, नाचगान, पारम्परिकपोशाक, स्थानीयखाना, कलाकृतिरमौखिकइतिहासयसैधार्मिकअवसरहरूमाजिउँदोरूपमाहस्तान्तरणहुन्छन्।यसलेनेपालकोअमूर्तसांस्कृतिक विरासतलाईअक्षुण्णरूपमाबचाइरहनसहयोगपुर्‍याउँछ।शक्तिपीठहरूजस्तैबडिमालिकावागुह्योश्वरीजानेयात्रा, दशैंमाघरघरमागरिनेविधि, तीजमागरिनेसामूहिकनाचगान – यीसबैहाम्रोसांस्कृतिकडीएनएकोअभिन्नअंशहुन्।

यहीधार्मिकआस्था, सांस्कृतिकसम्पदारमानवकल्याणकोसम्बन्धलाईधार्मिकपर्यटनकोरूपमाव्यवस्थितगर्दनिपालकोपर्यटनक्षेत्रमाठूलोक्रान्तिल्याउनसकिन्छ।शक्तिपीठहरूविशेषगरीबडिमालिकाजस्तादुर्गमतरपवित्रस्थलहरूरदेवीपर्वहरूदशैं, तीजधार्मिकपर्यटनकाप्रमुखआकर्षणहुन्।यीस्थलहरूमाआउनेश्रद्धालुहरूकेवलदर्शनमात्रगर्दैनन्, तिनलेस्थानीयअर्थतन्त्रलाईहोमस्टे, स्थानीयखाना, हस्तशिल्प, गाइडसेवा, यातायातआदिमार्फतसहयोगपुर्‍याउँछन्।यसलेस्थानीयरोजगारीरआयसृजनागर्छ।साथै, पर्यटकहरूलेयहाँकोअद्वितीयसंस्कृति, परम्परा, इतिहासरप्राकृतिकसुन्दरतासँगपरिचितहुन्छन्, जसलेगर्दाउनीहरूमासांस्कृतिकसम्मानबढ्छरनेपालकोविविधताप्रतिकोजागरूकताफैलिन्छ।यसरीधार्मिकपर्यटनले स्थानीयसमुदायलाईआफ्नोसंस्कृतिरविरासतप्रतिकोगर्वबढाउने, तिनलाईसंरक्षणगर्नप्रेरितगर्नेकामपनिगर्दछ।तसर्थ, हिन्दुधर्ममानिहितदेवीशक्तिकोआराधना, यसकापवित्रशक्तिपीठहरू, विशेषगरीदशैंजस्ताविराटसांस्कृतिकपर्वहरू, तिनकोमानवीयकल्याणमापर्नेगहिरोप्रभाव, रयीसबैलाईधार्मिकपर्यटनसँगजोड्नेप्रयासनेपालकोसांस्कृतिकपहिचानसंरक्षण, सामाजिकसशक्तिकरण, आर्थिकविकास, रअन्तर्राष्ट्रियपहिचानकोदृष्टिलेअत्यन्तैनैमहत्त्वपूर्णरसार्थककदमहुनेछ।योकेवलपर्यटनविकासमात्रहोइन, हाम्रोजीवन्तसांस्कृतिकविरासतरआध्यात्मिकमूल्यहरूलाईविश्वसमक्षप्रस्तुतगर्नेएकसशक्तमाध्यमहो।

लेखकोउदेश्यतथाअनुसन्धानविधि

प्रस्तुतलेखलेखासगरेरनेपालराज्यकोएकिकरणअभियानमासफलताप्राप्तगरेपश्चातगोर्खालीसेनापतिअमरसिंहथापालेडोटीगौडाकोहाकिममहुदासिलगढीडोटीबाटशुभारम्भगरेको१५दिनेबडीमालिकाकोधार्मिकयात्रारपूजातथाउक्तअवधिमाबडीमालिकासँगसम्वन्धितबिभिन्नस्थानमाहुनेधार्मिकतथासांस्कृतिकपरम्पराहरू, अभ्यासहरुतथाक्यकलापहरुलाइउजागरगर्नेरधार्मिकपर्यटनमासहयोगगर्नेउद्देश्यराखेकोछ।यसअध्ययनमाप्रमुखसूचनादाताअन्तर्वार्ताविधिप्रयोगगरिएकोछ **(Bernard, 2017)**।अन्तर्वार्ताकालागिडोटीजिल्लाकापुजारी, स्थानीयनिर्वाचितप्रतिनिधिहरूरजिल्लाप्रशासनकावरिष्ठअधिकारीहरूलाईसूचनादाताबनाइएकोछ।यसअध्ययनमासह

भागीहुनमैलेडोटीजिल्लाप्रशासनकार्यालयलेगठनगरेको१५दिनेबडीपूजाकार्यक्रमसम्पन्नगर्नेसरकारीटोलीसँगआवद्धभए
कोथिएँ।यीविधिहरूकोप्रयोगलेयसअध्ययनपत्रलेखनमाप्रामाणिकतारव्यावहारिकअनुभवलाईसमेट्नसहयोगपुर्याएकोछ
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त्यस्तैप्रत्यक्षअवलोकनविधिकोपनिप्रयोगगरिएकोछ(**Creswell & Poth,**
2018)।अध्ययनकर्ताले बडीमालिकायात्रारपूजाकाविभिन्नधार्मिकतथासांस्कृतिकक्रियाकलापहरू,
परम्परागतअनुष्ठानहरू, रस्थानीयसमुदायकोसहभागितालाईप्रत्यक्षरुपमाहेर्ने,
रेकर्डगर्नेरविश्लेषणगर्नेकार्यगरेकाछन्।यसविधिलेयात्राकावास्तविकघटनाहरू, व्यवहार, रसामाजिक-
सांस्कृतिकसंदर्भहरूलाईबिनाकुनैपूर्वग्रहकोनजिकबाटअध्ययनगर्नमद्दतपुर्याएकोछ।अवलोकनकाक्रममाविशेषगरीपू
जा-अनुष्ठान, स्थानीयनेतृत्वकोभूमिका,
तथाधार्मिकपर्यटनसँगसम्बन्धितगतिविधिहरूमाकेन्द्रितगरिएकोछ।यसविधिलेअध्ययनलाईप्राथमिकस्रोतसँगजोड्नरवा
स्तविकतामाआधारितनिष्कर्षनिकाल्नसहयोगपुर्याएकोछ।

बडिमालिकाबडिपूजा

सुदुरपश्चिमक्षेत्रकोबाजुराजिल्लामाअवस्थितबडिमालिकादेवभूमिनेपालखण्डमापर्ने६४शक्तिपीठमध्येएकमहत्त्वपूर्णश
क्तिपीठहो।सतीदेवीकोबायाँकुम्मपतनभएकोयोशक्तिपीठबाटशिवजीनिवासकैलाशपर्वतकोसमेतदर्शनगर्नसकिन्छ।स्क
न्दपुराण,
मानसखण्डकोमालिकामहात्म्यअनुसार,ब्रम्हाजीस्वयंआफैलेविश्वकर्मालाईभनेरमालिकानिवासमापंचपुरीभनिनेमहेन्द्रपु
र, कुवेरपुर, गन्धर्भपुर,
नागपुरररराक्षसपुरबनाउनलगाउनुभएकोथियो।पंचपुर२२पाटनहुदैबझ्रेवेणुररुद्रनदिकोसंगमत्रिवेणीधाममास्नानगरीमालि
कादर्शनगर्नजानालेबषौँबर्षकोपापनष्टहुनेरपितृदोषबाटमुक्तभईन्छभन्नेमान्यताछ।पूर्वमागण्डकक्षेत्रदेखिपश्चिममाकुमा
ऊँरगढवालक्षेत्रसम्मकाहिन्दुधर्मावलम्बीहरुबडिमालिकाकोदिब्यदर्शनकालागीजानेगर्दछन्।
बडिमालिकाकोपुकारगरेकालेगोर्खालीसेनाकातत्कालिनसेनापतीअमरसिंहथापालेपश्चिमनेपालएकीकरणअभियानमास
फलताप्राप्तगरेकाथिए।मालिकाशक्तिप्रतिआस्थाबानबन्दैडोटीगौडाकाबडाकाजीअमरसिंहथापालेसेनाकोदलबलसहि
तबडिमालिकाकोधार्मिकयात्रामाजानुपर्नेपरम्पराकोथालनीगरेकाहुन्।मन्दिरमाचढ्ने–
पड्नेअन्नबालीकोसंकलनगर्नउनलेपैमामाभण्डारगृहकोसमेतनिर्माणगरेकाथिए।त्यसपछिलगतैजुम्लाकाराजाश्रुतिशाही
लेदरबारभित्रमालिकाथापनागरीचन्दननाथरछायाँनाथकोपुजागरीबडिमालिकामाडोलीपठाउनेपरम्पराबसालेकाथिए।प
छिल्लोसमयमाकालिकोटरबाजुराजिल्लाबाटपनिसरकारीपूजासामाग्रीलगेरमालिकाकोबडिपूजामाजानेप्रचलनरहेकोछ
।आगामीबर्षहरुमाअछामजिल्लाबाटसमेतसरकारीपूजासामाग्रीलगेरजानेतयारीभैरहेकोछ।

बर्षेनीश्रावणशुक्लचर्तुदशीकादिनयहाँमेलालाग्ने गर्दछ।मेलामापूजारी, सरकारीपूजाटोली, तिर्थयात्री,
दर्शनार्थीरपर्यटकहरूचड्ने–पड्नेबोकीव्यक्तिगतरुपमैबडिमाईकोयात्रामानिस्कन्छन्।डोटी, अछाम,
बाजुरारमलातीकागुठियारहरुभनेसामुहिकरुपमाबडिमाईकोयात्रामासरिकहुन्छन्।दर्शनगर्ननमिल्ले रनसक्नेहरुलेमाली
काथापेर,वासरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीसंगपूजासामग्री, भेटिपठाएरबडिमाईप्रतिआस्थादेखाउनेगर्दछन्।
सबैसरकारीपूजाटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुद्घवादशीकोबेलुकासम्मत्रिवेणीधाममापुग्मुपर्नेधार्मिकमान्यताछ।डोटीकोसरकारी
टोली१२औँदिनमा,
जुम्लाकोआठौँदिनमा,कालिकोटकोचौथोदिनमारबाजुराकोतेस्रोदिनमात्रिवेणीधाममापुग्दछन्।भोलिपल्टत्रयोदशीकोदि
नत्रिवेणीधाममाछन्नुहाएपछिसँगसँगैबडिमालिकापुगेरचर्तुदशीकादिनबडिपूजागर्दछन्।त्यसैलेयसलेखमाबडाकाजीअ
मरसिंहथापालेसिलगढीबाटशुभारम्भगरेको१५दिनेधार्मिकयात्रासहितकोबडिपूजालाईनिरन्तरतादिदै,यसैबर्षडोटीजि
ल्लाप्रशासनकार्यालयबाटसम्पन्नगराईएकोधार्मिकपदयात्रालाईसमेटिएकोछ, भनेजुम्ला,
कालिकोटरबाजुराजिल्लाकोसरकारीटोलीबाटसम्पन्नभएकोबडिपूजालाईसमेतसमेट्नेप्रयासगरिएकोछ।

धार्मिकपदयात्रावृत्तान्त

पहिलोदिन:श्रावण२१गते

दिलिपनगरादीदिपायलदिल्पेश्वरमठबाटमालिकामाईलाईचढाउनपठाईनेतीनमुठाभुरणीलाईजिल्लाप्रशासनबाटलगिने सरकारीपूजासामग्रीराखिएकोपेटारोमाराखिन्छ।पेटारोलाईप्रमुखजिल्लाअधिकारीकोनेतृत्वमापूजागरीनेपालीसेना, नेपालप्रहरीरसशस्त्रप्रहरीद्वारासलामीदिएपछिशैलेश्वरीलिगिन्छ।शैलेश्वरीरकालिकामन्दिरपरिक्रमागराईन्छ।त्यहाँचढ्नेपड्नेसामाग्रीराखेरदोस्रोपेटारोबनाएपछिदुबैपेटारोलाईसलामीदिईन्छ।

मालिकाकोनौदिदिबहिनीमध्येशैलेश्वरीमातालाईजेठीरबडिमालिकालाईकान्छीमानिन्छ।शैलेश्वरीमातालेबहिनीमालिका माईलाईपेटारोमाज्यूनारपठाईदिनेप्रचलनछ।दुबैदिद्दीबहिनीकोजयजयकारगर्दैनाचनथलीमापुगिईन्छ।मन्दिरमासंकल नभएकाचढ्नेपड्नेराखिएकोतेस्रोपेटारोलाईसँगसँगैराखीपुनसलामीदिईन्छ।त्यहाँबाटसरकारीटोली, तिर्थयात्रीरदर्शनार्थीहरुडिडितोलाअधेरीखोलामापुगेरतीनवटैपेटारोकोचढ्नेपड्नेछानेरएउटापेटारोबनाईन्छ।त्यसपछिस रकारीटोली, तिर्थयात्रीरदर्शनार्थीहरुखिरसैनफुलोटदुर्गाभवानीकोमन्दिरमापुग्छन्।त्यहाँस्थानीयहरुलेसरकारीटोलीरतीर्थयात्रीहरुला ईखिरखुवाएरस्वागतगर्नेप्रचलनछ।

दोस्रोदिन:श्रावण२२गते

खिरसेनस्थितदुर्गाभवानीलाईपुजेपछिस्थानीयद्वाराटोलीलाईबिदाईगरिन्छ।खिरसेनकोबाटोसाजघाट, गड्डीगाडहुदैसाजेश्वरमन्दिरपुगिन्छ।साजघाटबाटखप्तड्राष्ट्रियनिकुञ्जकोठेककाडामाडौंपुगेरकाँडामालिकाकोपूजागरि न्छ।योमन्दिरअमरसिंहथापालेस्थापनागरेकाहुन्।उनलेबि.स . १८६६माशिवपादुकाज्वालातिर्थजुम्लाबाटअग्निल्याएरबालेकोअखण्डदिपअहिलेपनिबलिरहेकोछ।उनलेनैकाडामाडौंमा डोटीकादशगाउँरकाडाकाचारगाउँमिलेरसंयुक्तरुपमाचर्तुमासपूजागर्नेव्यवस्थागराएकाथिए।उनलेस्थापनागरेकोतीन गाउँगुठिकोजग्गाअहिलेपनिस्थानीयहरुलेभोगचलनगर्दैआईरहेकाछन्।त्यसबापतउनीहरुलेआफ्नोमाना, चामलरघ्यूबडिमालिकामाचढाउनेप्रचलनछ।

तेस्रोदिन :श्रावण२३गते

काडामाडौंकास्थानीयलेटोलीलाईबिदाईगरेपछियात्राआगाडिबद्दछ।गाउँबस्तीहुदैअछामरडोटीकोसिमानापर्नेचौखुट्टे पुगिन्छ।शिवमन्दिरमाधुपबत्तीगिरेरश्रीकोटहुदैमार्कुसान्नाकोटबज्रयोगिनीमन्दिरमापूजाआजागरिन्छ।

चौथोदिन :श्रावण२४गते

बज्रयोगिनीमन्दिरपरिसरमाटोलीलाईबिदाईगरेपछिमार्कुमालिका– कालिकाथानपुगेरधुपबत्तीगिरिन्छ।मालिकाथापनागरेकोहुनालेयसस्थानलाईमालथापनापनिभनिन्छ।मौसमखुलेकोसमय मायहाँबाटबडिमालिकामन्दिरकोदर्शनगर्नसकिन्छ।त्रिपुरासुन्दरीमन्दिरहुदैबैद्यनाथधामपुगिन्छ।बडिमालिकामन्दिरमा अक्षेताबनाउनजेठमारोपिएकोधानको ५मानाचामलयहिबाटैपठाउनुपर्नेप्रचलनछ।पूजाकोक्रममायहाँपनिसशस्त्रप्रहरी द्वारामालिकासलामीदिइन्छ।बिदाईपछिसाफेबगरहुदैबुडिगंगाकोपुलतरेरभण्डारीगाउँपुगिन्छ।

पाचौदिन :श्रावण२५गते

भण्डारीगाउँबाटटोलीलाईबिदाईगरेपछिविमकोटदरबारपुगिन्छ।जीर्णअवस्थाकोयोऐतिहासिकदरबारलाईपुनःनिर्माणग र्नेयोजनाबनेकोरहेछ।दरबारपरिसरमाविमकोटेराजाकासन्तानलाईअभिनन्दनगरिन्छ।सरकारीटोलीलेराजालाईहँसाएर यात्राअगाडिबढाउनुपर्नेप्रचलनछ।राजाहाँसेभनेतिर्थयात्रिलाईशुभलाभहुनेमान्यताछ।मालिकासरापबाटमुक्तिपाउनरा जालेहाँस्नुपर्नेरहेछ।मालिकामाईलेयोगिनीरुपधारणगरेरभिक्षामाग्दैहिड्दाराजालेकामबासनाकोदृष्टिलेहेर्दासरापपरेकोर हेछ।सरापकाकारणराजाकासन्तानहरुबडिमालिकाजादैनन्।सरापबाटमुक्तिपाउनराजालेहाँस्नुपर्नेमात्रहोइनमालिका आउने– जानेतिर्थयात्रीकोसत्कारपनिगर्नुपर्नेरहेछ।राजालाईहँसाएपछिउनलेटोलीकासदस्यरतिर्थयात्रीहरुलाईटिकालगाईईच्छा

भोजनगराउछन्।राजालेबिदाईगरेपछिरोकायागाउँपुगिन्छ।यहाँकास्थानीयलाईपनिबडिमालिकाजाननमिल्नेरहेछ।उनी हरुलेगाउँकैनन्दामातालाईमालिकामाईकोदिदिमानीपुज्नेरहेछन्।रोकायागाउँबाटजावलास्थितखापरमाडौमन्दिरमापुगि न्छ।

छैटौ,सातौ, आठौरनवौदिन :श्रावण२६, २७, २८र२९गते

खापरमाडौंबाटबिदाईभएपछिसरानास्थितसोडषादेवीमन्दिरमापुगिन्छ।त्यहाँबाटखुशकोटगाजराफूलचढाउनेहुदैलवाढुं ग्रास्थितछतरामाईमन्दिरपुगिन्छ।मन्दिरसंगैकोसामुदायिकभवनमापेटारोराखिन्छ।यहाँलगातार३दिनबसेरदशमीकोदिन मायात्रालाईअगाडिबढाउनेपरम्पराछ।पहिलोरदोश्रीदिनमापूजासामग्रीरखानेकुराकोजोहोगरिन्छ।स्थानियसँगसरसल्ला हगरेरलिङ्गोकाट्नेरबोक्नेहरुकोनिनिधोगरिन्छ।नवौदिनमाभनेबसाईकोअन्तिमदिनभएकोलेकेहिबिशेषगतिविधिहरुगरि न्छ।स्थानियबिमकोटेराजाकासन्तान्द्वाराईच्छाभोजनगराईन्छ।दिनभरीजसोस्थानियलेमालिकाकोमहिमाअनिभागलगा उछन्।साँझपखपेटारोराखिएकोकोठामाधामिबसालिन्छ।धामीलेजुराएकोसाईतमापेटारोप्रस्थानगराउनुपर्नेप्रचलनछ।

दशौदिन :श्रावण३०गते

छतराबाटतोकिएकोसाईतमैटोलीलाईबिदाईगरिन्छ।खलाटुप्पाछेवैकोजंगलमालिङ्गोबनाईन्छ।खलाटुप्पापुगेपछिलिङ्गो लाईध्वजापताकालेसिंगांरीखलाटुप्पामाईकोमन्दिरमापरिक्रमागराईन्छ।छतरालवाढुंग्राकास्थानियहरुलेपनिसामुहिकरु पमालिङ्गोलैजानेप्रचलनछ।

एघारौदिन :श्रावण३१गते

खलाटुप्पाबाटजंगलकोबाटोबाखे्कोटहुदैगहतेमाईपुगिन्छ।डाँडोमाअबस्थितगहतेमाईथानपुगेरपूजागरिन्छ।त्यहाँबाटव रिपरिदेखिनेमनोरमद्ृश्यअनिभिरपखेरालाईनियाल्दैभितीखोलापुगिन्छ।

बाहौदिन :श्रावण३२गते

भितीखोलाबाटगाईगोठस्थितमन्दिरमापुगेरधूपबत्तीगरिन्छ।बस्तुभाउकोचरणक्षेत्रपाटनकोद्ृश्यलापगर्दैद्वादशीकादिनवे णीधामपुगिन्छ।जुम्लाबाटडोलीलिएरआउनेसरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुखलङ्गाबजार, तातोपानी, मुग्ला, सन्ज्यालबाडा, कुवा, नखर्ची, ढाडाकोट, दिउडा, टाङ्गोकाटियारबुढिमाईहुदैआठौंदिनमाबेणीधामपुग्दछन्।
कालिकोटबाटआउनेसरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुशम्भुनाथ, छेतेडी,
कैलाशगाडरबुढिमाईहुदैचौथोदिनमावेणीधामपुग्दछन्।बाजुराबाटआउनेसरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुमार्तडीबडीमालि काकोमन्दिरमामालिकासलामीसहितपुजागरेपछिबडिमालिकातर्फप्रस्थानगर्दछन्।मार्तडीबाटओडार, फुलचढाउने, सोतापाटन, घोडापाटन, भित्तिछिर्ना, नौफेरिरबुढिमाईहुदैतेस्रोदिनमावेणीधामपुग्दछन्।सबैसरकारीटोली, तीर्थयात्रीरदर्शनार्थीहरुद्वादशीकादिनमानैयहाँपुगेरदेवीकोस्तुती, भागलरन्याउलीगाउदैरातभरजाग्रामबस्नुपर्नेहुन्छ।

तेहौदिन :भाद्र१गते

त्रयोदशीकोब्रम्हमूहर्तबाटैदर्शनार्थीहरुलेवेणीधाममास्नानगर्नसुरुगर्दछन्।छत्रनुहाउनेसमयमाभनेडोटीरजुम्लाकोसरका रीटोलीकोउपस्तिथीहुन्छ।डोटीगोरखनाथकोपेटारोरलिङ्गोलाईदाजुकोरुपमारजुम्लाचन्दननाथकोपेटारोरलिङ्गोलाईभाई कोरुपमामानिन्छ।केहीबेरदुवैटोलीलेआ-
आफ्नोलिङ्गोजुधाउछन्अनीनुहाउनेछत्रखोसाखोसगर्छन्।जुनटोलीलेछत्रखोसेरपहिलानुहाउनसक्छतिनीहरुकोसबैपाप पखालिन्छरत्यसवर्षउनीहरुकोक्षेत्रमासहकाललाग्छभन्नेजनबिश्वासरहेकोछ।छत्रस्नानपछिपूजारीलेदुवैसरकारीटोलीका हाकिमलाईटिकालगाईबिदाईगर्दछन्।तत्पश्चातदुबैटोलीहरुआ–
आफ्नोपेटारोरलिङ्गोलिईबडिमालिकामन्दिरतर्फप्रस्थानगर्दछन्।बरमाग्रेहुदैलौरीबिनायकपुगेरधुपबत्तिगर्दछन्।बासुधा राकोजललिएरमालिकामाईलाईचढाउछत्रदिब्यदर्शनगर्छन्।

चौधौदिन :भाद्र२गते

चर्तुदशीकोदिनबडिमालिकाकोबडिपूजागरिन्छ।बिहानैदेखिदर्शनार्थीहरुबडिमाईकोदर्शनगर्दछन्।सरकारीटोलीकाहा किमहरुलेहोमपूजनकासामाग्रीपूजारीलाईहस्तान्तरणगरेपछिकेहिबेरहबनमाबस्दछन्।हबनकार्यसँगसँगैक्रमसडोटीर

जुम्लाकोसरकारीटोलीलेबडिपूजागर्दछन्।होमपुजनसकिनासाथैमालिकामाईलाईप्रसादकोरुपमातिलकअर्पणगरिन्छ।दर्शनार्थीहरुलाईतिलकबितरणगरेपछिचतुर्दशीपूजासकिन्छ।कर्णालीक्षत्रकासरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुत्रिवेणीधामहुदैआ–आफ्नोगन्तव्यस्थलफर्कन्छन्।डोटीरबाजुराकासरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुभनेबिष्णुपानीकोबाटोचिप्लेढुङ्ग,धर्मढुङ्गहुदैनाटेश्वरीमन्दिरझर्दछन्।

पन्ध्रौदिन :भाद्र३गते

जनैपूर्णिमाकोदिनभएकोलेनाटेश्वरीमन्दिरमाबिहानैदेखीपूजाआजाशुरुहुन्छ।मन्दिरछेवैमाहोमपूजनपनिगरिन्छ।हबनमाडोटीसरकारीटोलीकाहाकिमअनिवार्यरुपमासहभागीहुनुपर्नेहुन्छ।होमपूजनसकिनासाथपूजारीहरुद्वारासरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुलाईडोराोबाझ्नेरजनैफेर्नेकार्यहुन्छ।त्यसपछिकालिकामन्दिरमासरकारीटोलीरदर्शनार्थीहरुद्वाराबलिचढाइन्छ।प्रसादग्रहणकोकार्यसकिएपछिसरकारीटोलीकाहाकिमद्धाराडोटीबाटशुरुभएको१५दिनेधार्मिकयात्रासम्पन्नभएकोजानकारीगराईन्छ।

बडीपूजाकोऐतिहासिक, राजनीतिकरसांस्कृतिकमहत्त्व

बडीपूजानेपालकोसुदूरपश्चिममाअवस्थितबडिमालिकाशक्तिपीठमासम्पन्नहुनेएकप्राचीनधार्मिकपरम्पराहो,जसकोऐतिहासिकजराहिन्दूपौराणिकग्रन्थहरूमासमाइएकोछ।स्कन्दपुराणको ॢमालिकामाहात्म्यूअनुसारयोस्थल६४शक्तिपीठमध्येएकहोभनेरउल्लेखछ,जहाँसतीदेवीकोबायाँकुमखसेकोमानिन्छ।यसकोधार्मिकप्रासंगिकताब्रह्माजीद्वाराविश्वकर्मालाईनिर्देशनगरीपंचपुरी-महेन्द्रपुर, कुवेरपुर, गन्धर्भपुर, नागपुर,राक्षसपुरनिर्माणगराएकोकथासँगजोडिएकोछ।यहाँत्रिवेणीधाममास्नानगरीमालिकादर्शनगर्नालेबषौँकोपापनष्टहुनेमान्यताचलिआएकोछ।ऐतिहासिकअभिलेखहरूलेयसपरम्परालाई१८औँशताब्दीमागोर्खालीसेनापतीअमरसिंहथापासँगजोड्छन्।उनलेपश्चिमनेपालएकीकरणअभियानकोसफलताकालागिबडिमालिकाकोआशीर्वादलिनेपरम्परास्थापनागरे।थापालेनैकाडामाडौंमाबि. स. १८६६०माअखण्डदीपस्थापनागरे, भण्डारगृहनिर्माणगरे,रगाउँगुठीप्रणालीबाटमन्दिरकोव्यवस्थापनलाईसंस्थागतबनाए।यसैक्रममाजुम्लाकाराजाश्रुतिशाहीलेमालिकाथापनागरीचन्दननाथकोडोलीपठाउनेचलनसुरूगरे, जसलेगर्दाडोटी, जुम्ला, कालिकोट,बाजुरारअछामजिल्लालेसरकारीपूजाटोलीपठाउने२शताब्दीपुरानोपरम्पराकायमभएकोछ।यात्रामार्गमापर्नेशैलेश्वरीमन्दिर, विमकोटकोऐतिहासिकदरबार, रबज्रयोगिनीजस्तास्थलहरूलेयसकोऐतिहासिकनिरन्तरतालाईप्रमाणितगर्दछन्।

बडीपूजालेनेपालीराज्यव्यवस्थामाधर्मरशासनकोगहिरोअन्तर्सम्बन्धप्रस्तुतगर्छ।अमरसिंहथापालेयसलाईपश्चिमनेपालएकीकरणकोराजनीतिकऔजारकोरूपमाप्रयोगगरेकाथिए।मालिकाप्रतिआस्थालेगोर्खालीसेनाकोमनोबलबढाएरक्षेत्रीयविजयमासहयोगपुर्याएकोऐतिहासिकतथ्यछ।यसपरम्परालेराज्यरधर्मबीचकोसम्बन्धलाईसंस्थागतबनाउँदैहालूजिल्लाप्रशासनकार्यलयूद्धाराऔपचारिकपूजासामग्रीॢपेटारोॢपठाउनेप्रथास्थापितगरेकोछ।विमकोटेराजाकोउदाहरणलेयसकोराजनीतिकसूत्रस्पष्टहुन्छस्मालिकाकोश्रापबाटमुक्तिपाउनराजालाईतीर्थयात्रीहरूकोसत्कारगर्नुपर्नेरहाँस्बाध्यहुनेपरम्परालेधार्मिकविश्वासमार्फतसामाजिकअनुशासनकायमगर्नेराजनीतिकबुद्धिमत्तादेखाउँछ।यसलेदैवीयस्वीकृतिूमार्फतशासकीयवैधताकायमगर्नेमध्यकालीनरणननीतिलाईसमेतप्रतिबिम्बितगर्छ।त्रिवेणीधाममाडोटी, जुम्ला, बाजुरा,कालिकोटकासरकारीटोलीहरूकोभेटघाटलेराजनीतिकविविधताभित्रकोधार्मिकएकताकोनेपालीमोडेलप्रस्तुतगर्दछ,जुनराष्ट्रियएकीकरणकोप्रतीकहो।

बडीपूजानेपालकोबहुसांस्कृतिकपरम्पराकोजीवन्तप्रतिमानहो।यसलेगण्डकदेखिकुमाउँसम्मकाहिन्दुतीर्थयात्री, डोटेली, जुम्लेली, बाजुराली, अछामी,रकालिकोटेसमुदायहरूलाईएउटैधार्मिकधागोमाबाँध्छ।यसकोसांस्कृतिकविविधताअनुष्ठानहरूमास्पष्टदेखिन्छस्त्रिवेणीधाममाडोटीरजुम्लाकोटोलीबीचछत्रनुहाउनेप्रतिस्पर्धासामूहिकपापमोचनकोप्रतीकहोभनेविमकोटमाराजालाईहँसाउनेअनुष्ठान, बैद्यनाथमाअक्षेताचामलचढाउनेप्रथा,

रकालिकामन्दिरमाबलिचढाउनेचलनहरूलेअद्वितीयसांस्कृतिकपहिचानबोकेकाछन्।यात्राकालीनभागल, न्याउलीरमालिमागीतहरूस्थानीयभाषारलोककलाकोसंरक्षणगर्दछन्।सामाजिकसमन्वयकानमुनाहरूपनियत्रतत्रछ न्सिखरसेनमास्थानीयलेखिरखुवाएरस्वागतगर्ने, रोकायामानन्दामाताकोपूजागर्ने, विमकोटमाईच्छाभोजदिने, रयात्रागर्ननसक्नेलेभेटीपठाउनूप्रथाहरूलेसमुदायमासहकार्यबढाउँछन्।१५दिनेपदयात्रामासामूहिकलिङ्गोबोक्नूपरम्परा युवाहरूलाईसांस्कृतिकधरोहरसँगजोड्नेमाध्यमहोभनेत्रिवेणीदेखिबिष्णुपानीसम्मकोयात्रालेस्थानीयबास्तुकलारप्रकृति कोसांस्कृतिकअध्ययनगर्नेअवसरदिन्छ।

सांस्कृतिकरआध्यात्मिकआकर्षण

परापुर्वकालबाटैश्रावणशुक्लचर्तुदेशीकादिनबडिमालिकाकोबडिपूजागर्नेप्रचलनथियो।२०४१सालपछिभनेखप्तडबाबा कोअनुरोधमाखप्तडगंगादशहरामेलादेखिअसोजरकार्तिकसम्ममालिकामाईकोदर्शनगर्नसकिनेव्यवस्थागरियो।ततपश्चा तबडिमालिकाक्षेत्रमातिर्थयात्रीमात्रनभईस्वदेशीतथाबिदेशीपर्यटकहरुपनिजानेक्रमबद्दैगएकोछ।पछिल्लोसमयमासुदु रपश्चिममहोत्सवकोअबसरपारेरपर्यटनव्यवसायीलेदर्शनार्थीलाईहेलिकप्टरबाटबडिमालिकारखप्तडक्षेत्रमापुग्नेसुबिधाप्र दानगरेकाथिए।सिलगढीस्थितशैलेश्वरीमाताकोदर्शनगरेरबडिमालिकाकोधार्मिकयात्रामाजानेप्रचलनछ।बर्षेनीगिरिनेबडि मालिकाको१५दिनेधार्मिकयात्राशैलेश्वरीमन्दिरपरिषरबाटैशुभारम्भगरिन्छ।सिलगढीभएरधेरैरैजसोतिर्थयात्रीतथापर्यटकह रुखप्तडपुग्नेगर्दछन्।यसर्थिसिलगढीलाईबडिमालिकारखप्तडक्षेत्रकोप्रवेशद्वारकोरुपमालिनसकिन्छ।

सुदूरपश्चिमनेपालकोहृदयस्थलडोटीमाआयोजनाहुनेपन्ध्रदिनेबडिमालिकायात्रानेपालीपर्यटनकोएकअद्वितीयर अमूल्यसम्पदाहो, जसलेधार्मिकश्रद्धा, गहिरोइतिहास, जिवन्तसंस्कृति, मनोरमप्राकृतिकदृश्यावलोकन, रसामुदायिकजीवनकोएकअविस्मरणीयअनुभवसमेटेकोछ।योयात्राकेवलदर्शनार्थीहरूमात्रहोइन, सांस्कृतिकपर्यटन, साहसिकपर्यटन, रधार्मिकपर्यटनमारुचिराख्नेहरूकालागिपनिअत्यन्तैमहत्वपूर्णछ।यसकोपर्यटनमहत्वविविधआयाममादेखिन्छस्यात्राका विशिष्टरदुर्लभरीतिरिवाजहरूजस्तैपेटारोपरिक्रमा, सशस्त्रबलद्वारासलामी, खिरसेनमाखिरखुवाउनेपरम्परा, लवाढुंग्रामालिङ्गोबनाउनेकार्य, वेणीधाममाडोटीरजुम्लाकोलिङ्गोजुधाउनेछत्रस्नानकोहोड, रविमकोटमाराजालाईहँसाउनेप्रचलनलेविश्वमैनैफरकसांस्कृतिकझलकप्रस्तुतगर्दछ।यात्रालेविमकोटकोजीर्णदरबार, अमरसिंहथापाद्वारास्थापितअखण्डदीपबलेकोकाडामाडौंमालिका, साजेश्वर, बज्रयोगिनी, गहतेमाईथान, नाटेश्वरीलगायतऐतिहासिकरधार्मिकमहत्वकास्थलहरूसँगपरिचयगराउँछ, जसलेइतिहासप्रेमीलाईआकर्षितगर्दछ।डाँडा, खोला, जंगल, रगाउँबस्तीबाटबढ्नेयसकोमार्ग, विशेषगरीगहतेमाईबाटदेखिनेमनोरमदृश्यहरूलेप्राकृतिकसुन्दरताकोआनन्दलिनेरट्रेकिङ्गकोअनुभवखोज्नेपर्यटकलाई ताक्दछ।

स्थानीयसमुदायद्वाराटोलीलाईखिरखुवाउने, स्वागतगर्ने, ईच्छाभोजनगराउने, लिङ्गोबोक्नसहयोगगर्नेजस्ताकार्यहरूसामुदायिकपर्यटनकोबास्तविकरूपहुन्, जसलेगर्दापर्यटकहरूलेस्थानीयजीवनरआतिथ्यकोप्रत्यक्षअनुभवगर्नसक्छत्रयसलेस्थानीयअर्थतन्त्रलाईसहयोगपुग्छ।ब डिमालिकामन्दिरमाभव्यबडिपूजा, वेणीधाममाभागल, न्याउलीगाउनेरजाग्रामबस्नेपरम्परा, त्रिवेणीधाममास्नानरनाटेश्वरीमाजनैफेर्नेकार्यलेआध्यात्मिकशान्तिरपवित्रताकोखोजीगर्नेहरूलाईआकर्षितगर्दछ।यद्यपि, यसकोपर्यटनक्षमताअहिलेपूर्णरूपमाविकसितभएकोछैन।आवागमन, आवास, स्वास्थ्यसेवारअन्यआधारभूतसुविधाहरूकोअभावछ।यसलाईव्यवस्थितगर्ने, ऐतिहासिकस्थलहरूविशेषगरीविमकोटदरबारसंरक्षणगर्ने, स्थानीयसहभागितालाईबढाउने, रविश्वव्यापीरूपमाप्रभावकारीप्रचारगर्नेआवश्यकताछ।सारमा, बडिमालिकायात्रानेपालकोसांस्कृतिकविरासतकोएकज्योतिहोरयसलाईसंरक्षणगर्दैव्यवस्थितरूपमाविकासगरेमायोने पालीपर्यटनकोएकप्रमुखस्तम्भरविश्वभरिकासांस्कृतिकअन्वेषकहरूकालागिएकअनुपमगन्तव्यबन्नसक्छ।

सैद्धान्तिकविश्लेषण

एमिलदुर्खाइम(१९१२)कोधर्मसिद्धान्तअनुसारधर्मसमाजकोएकीकृतशक्तिहोजसलेपवित्ररअपवित्रकोविभाजनमार्फतसामूहिकचेतनानिर्माणगर्दछ।हिन्दुधर्ममायोसिद्धान्ततीर्थस्थलहरूजस्तैपशुपतिनाथ, मुक्तिनाथसंस्कारहरूयज्ञ, मेलामास्पष्टदेखिन्छजहाँभक्तजनकोसामूहिकउपस्थितिलेसामूहिकउत्साहसिर्जनागर्दछ, जसलेसमूहमाआध्यात्मिकऊर्जारसामाजिकएकताबढाउँछ।धार्मिकपर्यटनयसैसामूहिकअनुष्ठानकोविस्तारहो।दुर्खाइमकाअनुसारतीर्थयात्राएउटापवित्रक्रियाकलापहोजसलेव्यक्तिलाईसमूहसँगजोड्दछ।नेपालकोमकरमेलावाभारतकोकुम्भमेलामासामूहिकस्नानलेयात्रुहरूलाईयस्तैसामूहिकउत्साहकोअनुभवदिन्छ, जसलेउनीहरूकोधार्मिकपहिचानलाईसुदृढबनाउँछ।सांस्कृतिकपर्यटनकोअवधारणापनियससँगनजिकैजोडिएकोछ।हिन्दुपर्वहरूदसैं, तिहारमाप्रदर्शनहुनेलोकनृत्य, भजन, रसांस्कृतिकभोजहरूसमाजकोसामूहिकपहिचानलाईप्रतिबिम्बितगर्छन्।पर्यटकहरूयीसंस्कारहरूसँगसहभागिताजनाएरस्थानीयजीवनशैलीमाआत्मसातहुन्छन्, जसलेअन्तरसांस्कृतिकबुझाइरसम्मानबढाउँछ।स्वास्थ्यपर्यटनलेहिन्दुधर्मकापवित्रविधिहरूयोग, ध्यान, आयुर्वेदमार्फतव्यक्तिगतरसामूहिककल्याणलाईजोड्दछ।दुर्खाइमलेयीअभ्यासहरूलाईपवित्रकोटिमाराखेकाछन्।लुम्बिनीजस्ताध्यानकेन्द्रहरूमासमूहगतसाधनालेसामाजिकसमर्थनकोवातावरणनिर्माणगर्छ, जसलेअध्यात्मरमानसिकस्वास्थ्यबीचसेतोबेगरसिर्जनागर्दछ।दुर्खाइमकोसिद्धान्तलेहिन्दुआधारितपर्यटनलाईकेवलआर्थिकगतिविधिमात्रहोइन, बरुएउटासामाजिकसंयोजकप्रक्रियाकोरूपमाव्याख्यागर्दछ।यसलेपवित्रस्थलहरूमार्फतसामूहिकपहिचानकायमराख्ने, सांस्कृतिकपरम्पराहरूसंरक्षणगर्ने, रकल्याणकारीअभ्यासहरूप्रवर्धनगरेरसमाजमासामूहिककल्याणकोआधारनिर्माणगर्दछ।

निष्कर्ष

बडीपूजानेपालकोसामाजिकसंरचनामाऐतिहासिकगहिराइ, राजनीतिकसूझबूझ, रसांस्कृतिकसमृद्धिकोसमन्वयकारीबिन्दुहो।यसलेअमरसिंहथापाकोएकीकरणदेखिआधुनिकसरकारीसंस्थानहरूसम्मकोयात्रालाईधार्मिकअविच्छेद्यताबाटजोडेरनेपालीअस्मिताकोअमूर्तविरासतकोरूपमाकार्यगर्छ।योपरम्परा, धर्मरराजनीतिकोसहअस्तित्वूकोनेपालीमोडेलप्रस्तुतगर्दैसुदूरपश्चिमकोसामाजिक(धार्मिकढाँचालाईसुदृढपारिरहेकोछ, जहाँइतिहास, शासनरसंस्कृतिएउटैअविरलधारामाबग्नेअद्वितीयउदाहरणबन्नसफलभएकोछ।त्यसैले, बडीपूजाकेवलधार्मिकआयोजननभएरनेपालकोसामूहिकस्मृति, राजनीतिकबुद्धिमत्तारसांस्कृतिकअविरलताकोजीवन्तप्रमाणहो।यसलेऐतिहासिकघटनाहरूलाईएकीकरण, राज्यव्यवस्थागुठीप्रणाली, रसामाजिकमेलमिलापत्रिवेणीस्नानलाईएकैढाँचामाबाँधेरनेपालीअस्मिताकोअमूर्तसांस्कृतिकविरासतकोरूपमाकार्यगर्छ।योपरम्परानिरन्तरधर्मरराजनीतिकोसहअस्तित्वूकोनेपालीमोडेलप्रस्तुतगर्दैसुदूरपश्चिमकोसामाजिकढाँचालाईसुदृढपारिरहेकोछ।

बडिमालिकायात्रानेपालकोअमूर्तसांस्कृतिकविरासतकोएकज्योतिहो।यसलेसुदूरपश्चिमकोगौरवशालीइतिहास, जीवन्तसंस्कृति, अटूटधार्मिकआस्थारअद्भुतप्राकृतिकसुषमालाईएकैठाउँमासमेटेकोछ।यसलाईमात्रधार्मिकयात्रानमानी, नेपालीपर्यटनकोएकमहत्वपूर्णस्तम्भरविश्वकोसांस्कृतिकपर्यटननक्सामाराख्नव्यवस्थितविकास, संरक्षणरप्रचार-प्रसारगर्नुजरुरीछ।यसलेनेपालपर्यटनलाईविविधतादिने, सुदूरक्षेत्रकोविकासमायोगदानपुर्याउनेरविश्वभरकासांस्कृतिकअन्वेषकरआध्यात्मिकयात्रीहरूलाईआकर्षितगर्नेठूलोसम्भावनाबोकेकोछ।योयात्रासाँच्चैनेपालकोछुट्टैरअन्यपर्यटनआकर्षणहो।बडिमालिकारखप्तडक्षेत्रभित्रपर्यटकीयगतिवि

धिहरुलाईबढावादिनसकेमासमग्रसुदुरपश्चिमेलीरकर्णालीभेगकास्थानीयहरुकोजीविकोपार्जनमाउल्लेखनीयसुधारल्या उनसकिन्थ्यो।त्यसैलेयसतर्फसबैसरोकारवालाहरुस्थानीयजनप्रतिनिधि, बुद्धिजीवी, समाजसेवी, धार्मिकव्यत्तित्वतथासामाजिकसंघसंस्थाहरुकोध्यानाकर्षणहुनआबस्यकछ

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