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Aim and Scope

Journal of APF Command and Staff College (JAPFCSC) is an annual peer-reviewed journal launched by APF Command and Staff College, Kathmandu, Nepal since 2018. Journal is one of the most-important sources of producing and disseminating the knowledge to the related subjects. In order to be scientific, knowledge must be systematic, methodological, general, and critical. The journal will be an impetus for carrying recent theoretical, conceptual, methodological and new paradigms of security, development, and peace studies. The journal welcomes original, academic and research from multi and interdisciplinary perspectives. Professors, academics, researchers, policy makers and students may see learning opportunity and will be highly benefited from the research based articles included in the journal.

Call for Paper

Every year there will be announcement of call for paper and the last submission date of articles will be mentioned in call for paper. After receiving the evaluation report, it will be sent to the author for further revision. Finally, the author will submit his/her paper to the research committee. The editor-in-chief has right to accept or reject the articles for publication. The author has to acknowledge to the organization or institution if the research has been financially supported by them. The authors receive the copies of the issue in which their article appears. The audiences are suggested to go through www. nepjol.info or college website for reading the papers published in this journal.

It aims to identify the areas of research which are as follows: national and international security, national integration, national and international law, peace, development, planning, foreign policy, ecology, environment and climate change along with global commons (but not limited to).

The research article should have more than 6,000 words; 3,000 words for book review and research notes; 250 words for abstract including five keywords. The research work should be based on global research methodology. After receiving the manuscripts, they will first be reviewed by the editorial board and subsequently sent to the anonymous reviewers for evaluation. The authors will not be charged any fee for publishing their articles. The editorial board reserves right to edit, moderate or reject the article submitted. Plagiarism will be checked in accordance with the regulations of Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

Editorial

The editorial board is pleased to publish the Journal of APF Command and Staff College Volume 9, No. 1, 2026. We believe that the contributions by the authors in this issue reflect conceptual, theoretical and empirical research works in their respective fields. The researches have been confined to ethos of security, development and peace spectrum. It encompasses articles from scholars, researchers and practitioners aligning it with contemporary issues and security related dynamics of modern era. Professors, academics, researchers, policy makers and students may seize learning opportunity from the articles included in this journal.

The articles published in this journal are predominantly research-based. Views expressed in the articles are purely personal and academic opinion of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by APF Command and Staff College and the editorial board. We would like to express sincere thanks to all the contributors for their respective inputs.

The Editorial Board
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Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury: Insights from the Armed Police Force, Nepal

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Abstract

The Armed Police Force (APF), Nepal functions in high-stress and morally complex environments, making its personnel vulnerable to challenges related to Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) and Moral Injury (MI). An attempt was made to examine the link between SWB and MI and explored group differences across key demographic and service-related variables. A total of 167 APF service personnel participated in the study and completed the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) and the Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES). Results revealed a weak but positive link between spiritual well-being and moral injury. No notable differences in SWB or MI were observed across groups based on age, gender, marital status, years of service, rank, deployment in conflict versus non-conflict areas, or combat exposure. However, a notable difference emerged in moral injury between service personnel with higher and lower educational levels, with lower-educated service personnel reporting greater moral injury. In contrast, no significant difference in spiritual well-being was found across educational levels.

Introduction

Armed Police Force (APF), Nepal is a paramilitary nature organization responsible for border management, internal security, counterinsurgency, revenue support, disaster response, and humanitarian assistance. Due to these roles, APF personnel regularly operate in high-stress and morally complex environments such as conflict zones, disaster areas, and peacekeeping missions. These demands increase their risk of psychological strain and exposure to morally challenging situations.

Well-being is generally conceptualized as a multidimensional state of positive functioning encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of human life (Ryff, 1989). It reflects an individual's quality of life, emotional stability, meaningful relationships, and ability to cope effectively with demands in one's life (Diener, 1984). Maintaining well-being is crucial for the members of high-risk professions like paramilitary forces, who need to sustain resilience and operational readiness.

Within this broader framework, spiritual well-being assumes a critical role. Spiritual well-being (SWB) plays a crucial role in overall health (Ellison, 1983; Moberg, 2002). It encompasses a sense of meaning, purpose, connection, and inner peace. Studies indicate that spiritual well-being can alleviate stress, enhance resilience, and aid in healthy coping, particularly among high-stress groups such as military personnel (Pargament, 1997). For paramilitary forces, spiritual well-being serves as a protective element, enabling them to remain strong and resilient in the face of ongoing difficulties and moral dilemmas.

On the other hand, Moral injury (MI) is the profound emotional, psychological, and spiritual distress that occurs when an individual engages in or witnesses' actions that clash with their moral or ethical principles (Litz et al., 2009; Shay, 2014). In contrast to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is primarily linked to fear, moral injury is linked to feelings of guilt, shame, betrayal, and internal conflict (Bryan et al., 2018). Research on military and veteran populations indicates that moral injury can result in depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and challenges in everyday life (Griffin et al., 2019; Koenig et al., 2019).

Although SWB and MI have been extensively studied in Western military and veteran contexts, they remain underexplored in South Asian region, particularly among paramilitary forces such as the APF in Nepal. The socio-cultural background of Nepal, which values community, family ties, and spiritual traditions, may influence how APF service personnel experience spiritual well-being and moral injury. Factors such as education, rank, training, and deployment may also affect their responses to morally difficult situations.

This research employs Positive Psychology as its primary framework. Positive Psychology, a sub-branch of psychology, centers on recognizing and fostering human strengths, resilience, well-being, and flourishing, rather than merely focusing on deficits or disorders (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). By placing spiritual well-being and moral injury within this context, the research underscores the possibilities for growth, coping, and resilience among APF service personnel, drawing attention to elements that can improve mental, emotional, and spiritual health, even in high-pressure, ethically complex situations.

Understanding how SWB and MI relate in this context is important. It can add to global research on the mental and spiritual health of security forces and help develop culturally appropriate programs to build resilience, reduce stress, and improve the well-being of APF service personnel.

Review of Literature

Udovicich et al. (2025) examined the relationships between moral injury, self-coldness, self-warmth, depression, and suicidality among 400 retired police officers. Their findings revealed that moral injury, self-coldness, and self-warmth showed only weak and independent associations with suicidal ideation, while depression emerged as the strongest correlate of suicidality. This study is grounded in the cognitive-emotional model of moral injury (Litz et al.), which conceptualizes moral injury as the psychological aftermath of violating deeply held moral beliefs. Additionally, the inclusion of self-warmth and self-coldness reflects the influence of self-compassion theory (Neff), highlighting how internal emotional attitudes may buffer or intensify vulnerability to suicidal thoughts.

Levi-Belz et al. (2025) conducted a longitudinal study involving 374 Israeli combat veterans to explore relationships among exposure to potentially morally injurious events (PMIEs), trauma-related guilt, self-forgiveness, and suicide risk. Their results demonstrated that PMIE exposure predicted higher guilt, lower self-forgiveness, and increased suicide risk. Notably, self-forgiveness moderated these associations, protecting veterans with higher self-forgiveness from increased guilt and suicidality. This work reflects self-forgiveness and moral repair models, which emphasize the restoration of moral identity and reduction of moral dissonance following distressing events.

Similarly, D'Alessandro-Lowe et al. (2025) studied 181 public safety personnel, including police officers and paramedics, and found that moral injury was associated with reduced organizational support, diminished emotional wellness, and lower levels of self-compassion and social support. Here, the findings align with organizational stress frameworks as well as social support buffering models, suggesting that contextual factors such as institutional support which play a vital protective role against the psychological impact of moral injury.

Allen et al. (2023) investigated ethical dilemmas among veterans of the UK Service Police using semi-structured interviews. Veterans reported instances where military commands conflicted with personal values, experiences of betrayal by trusted authorities, and feelings of disillusionment, shame, and guilt. These findings resonate strongly with Shay's betrayal model of moral injury, which conceptualizes moral injury as a violation of trust by leadership or institutions.

Torkaman et al. (2021) examined spiritual well-being and life purpose among 301 Iranian soldiers. Their results showed high spiritual well-being and moderate life purpose, reflecting underlying spiritual well-being and existential meaning frameworks. These models propose that spirituality and purpose in life play a central role in promoting resilience and emotional balance during morally or psychologically distressing experiences.

Brémault-Phillips et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study with Canadian military personnel exploring the relationship between spirituality, religion, and moral injury. Their findings showed that morally injurious experiences often triggered spiritual struggles -such as guilt, anger toward God, or loss of faith-while spirituality also served as a significant coping resource. This dual function aligns with Pargament's religious coping theory, which distinguishes between positive and negative spiritual coping and highlights their differential psychological outcomes.

Tricia (2019) examined moral injury in female veterans deployed during OEF/OIF. The participants reported experiences of gender-based harassment, sexual trauma, and professional marginalization, followed by a lack of recognition and respect upon returning home. These themes align with feminist trauma theory, which emphasizes the gendered nature of trauma, structural inequalities, and the compounded moral distress experienced by women in male-dominated institutions.

Tuttle et al. (2019) studied moral harm and compassion fatigue among 454 Finnish police personnel. Their findings demonstrated higher levels of compassion fatigue and moral injury, which corresponded with reduced compassion satisfaction. This study draws on Figley's compassion fatigue model, highlighting how repeated exposure to distressing incidents can erode emotional resources and lead to moral and empathic exhaustion.

Evans et al. (2018) explored whether spiritual struggles mediated the association between morally injurious events and psychological distress. Results indicated that veterans who reported more religious or spiritual suffering also showed higher levels of anxiety, despair, and PTSD symptoms. This again reinforces spiritual struggle frameworks, which propose that disruptions in spiritual meaning-making can exacerbate psychological distress.

Finally, Zappalla (2018) examined combat veterans and found that lower spiritual wellness predicted higher levels of moral injury, suggesting that spiritual well-being may serve as a protective factor. This aligns with spiritual resilience models, which underscore the role of spiritual resources in mitigating moral distress.

Existing studies have identified relationships between moral injury, spiritual well-being, and psychological distress within military and public safety personnel (Udovicich et al., 2025; Levi-Belz et al., 2025; D'Alessandro-Lowe et al., 2025; Brémault-Phillips et al., 2019). However, research in several respects remains limited. Very few studies investigate police or paramilitary forces within the South Asian region, like the Armed Police Force of Nepal, especially active-duty personnel exposed to ongoing morally challenging events. Also, though spiritual well-being is an identified protective agent, its role in mitigating moral injury within policing contexts remains underexplored. Gender, occupational culture, and institutional factors may modulate moral injury; however, these variables are generally not considered (Tricia, 2019; Allen et al., 2023). Most studies adopt quantitative or retrospective designs, with only a few qualitative insights into lived experiences and coping processes.

These gaps bring forth the need for studies on the interplay of moral injury and spiritual well-being among active APF service personnel that may inform interventions to enhance resilience, moral repair, and psychological well-being.

Objective

To evaluate the spiritual well-being and moral injury experienced by the service personnel of Armed Police Force, Nepal.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant association between spiritual well-being and moral injury among Armed Police Force service personnel.

H2: Armed Police Force service personnel with higher education levels will report lower levels of moral injury compared to those with lower education levels.

H3: No significant differences in spiritual well-being or moral injury will be observed based on age, gender, marital status, rank, years of service, deployment area or combat exposure.

Research Methodology

The research design refers to the overall plan or strategy guiding a study to ensure that questions can be thoroughly and systematically pursued. In general, research designs may be descriptive, correlational, experimental, exploratory, or mixed-methods, depending on the objectives. Similarly, research approaches identify the way data are collected and analyzed, and these can be quantitative, qualitative, or a mixture of both. Quantitative approaches involve the collection of numerical data using structured tools such as surveys, questionnaires, and standardized scales, enabling statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. Qualitative approaches aim to understand experiences, meanings, and social contexts through methods such as interviews, focus groups, observation techniques, and content analysis. Mixed-methods approaches integrate both quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to provide a more complete understanding of the research problem. Data collection techniques include self-report methods, direct observation, analysis of secondary data, and experimental manipulations, among others, based on the purpose of the study and population. Effective research design will also incorporate the selection of appropriate tools and techniques that are valid, reliable, and suitable for participants while following basic ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary response. When research design, approach, and methods of data collection are carefully aligned, researchers can ensure that meaningful, accurate, and generalizable results are obtained from their studies.

From a philosophical perspective, the ontology that underpins this research makes the assumption that moral injury and spiritual well-being are actual, quantifiable constructs that exist within people and can differ depending on the situation and demographic group. This research is guided by positivist epistemology, which emphasizes objective measurement, standardized tools, quantifiable relationships, and statistical inference as legitimate methods of learning about psychological phenomena.

In our study we have employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational research design in investigating the association of spiritual well-being and moral injury among APF service personnel in Nepal. A quantitative approach was followed to allow for objective measurement of both constructs, with standardized instruments, and statistical testing of the hypotheses of the current study. The current study also provided a descriptive and comparative perspective whereby differences in spiritual well-being and moral injury were analyzed based on different demographic and service-related variables, which included age, gender, marital status, education, rank, years of service, deployment area, and combat exposure. Responses were gathered using structured self-report questionnaires that included Spiritual Well-being Scale (SWBS) and Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES), which measured religious and existential well-being and exposure to morally injurious experiences along with relevant associated distress, respectively. A demographic questionnaire was also administered to elicit information about personal and occupational characteristics related to the study. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique as a strategy of ensuring representation from key groups within the APF. Strict ethical considerations were taken into account through informed consent and ensuring confidentiality.

Variables

In the present study, several demographic and service-related characteristics were treated as independent variables, including age group, gender, marital status, education level, rank, years of service, deployment area (classified as high-stress or low-stress locations), and combat exposure. These variables were selected because they represent key factors that may influence the psychological and spiritual experiences of Armed Police Force service personnel. The dependent variables in the study were spiritual well-being and moral injury.

Sample

Using a purposive sampling approach, the study drew a sample of 167 personnel serving in the Armed Police Force, Nepal across multiple regions. The participants included 157 male personnel and 10 female personnel.

Participation Requirements

The study included Armed Police Force service personnel who were between 18 and 55 years of age, currently serving in the force, and who provided informed consent to participate. Individuals who declined to participate or did not give consent were excluded from the study.

Tools

Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS)

This scale was developed by Paloutzian and Ellison in 1982. It is a self-report questionnaire, which was designed to examine the overall quality of a person's spiritual health. It consists of 20 items which is rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The higher scores indicating greater perceived spiritual well-being. It has shown strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's α typically exceeding .85.

Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES)

It was developed by Litz and colleagues in 2013. It is a self-report instrument consisting of nine items rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Higher scores indicate greater exposure to morally challenging events. The scale demonstrates good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging between .80 and .90.

Procedure

Permission to collect data was secured from the Chief of the Armed Police Force (APF), Nepal. A Google Form link was then distributed to APF service personnel who consented to participate. The study's goals were explained to the participants, and they received assurances that their answers would be kept private and used only for research. Clear instructions were provided within the Google Form, and the research team made themselves available via phone and email to address any questions or concerns from participants.

Findings and Discussion

Using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the data analysis was conducted. The calculations included the mean, standard deviation (SD), t-values, and correlation.

Table 1

Demographic Details of Armed Police Force Service Personnel (N=167)

Variables	Categories	F	%
Age	25-35 Years	24	14.4%
	36-45 Years	100	59.9%
	46-55 Years	43	25.7%
Gender	Male	157	94%
	Female	10	6%
Marital Status	Married	159	95.2%
	Unmarried	8	4.8%
Education	10^{th}	14	8.4%
	12^{th}	24	14.4%
	BA	17	10.2%
	MA	108	64.7%
	MPhil	2	1.2%
	PhD	2	1.2%

Years of service	5-10 Years	13	7.8%
	11-15 Years	20	12%
	16-20 Years	39	23.4%
	More than 20 Years	95	56.9%
Religion	Hinduism	154	92.2%
	Buddhism	6	3.6%
	Christianity	4	2.4%
	Kirat	2	1.2%
	Islam	1	0.6%
Rank	DIG	2	1.2%
	SSP	8	4.8%
	SP	24	14.4%
	DSP	45	26.9%
	INS	44	26.3%
	SI	10	6%
	ASI	4	2.4%
	Other rank	30	18%
Posting area	Conflict Zone	92	55.1%
	No Conflict Zone	75	44.9%
Combat exposure	Yes	90	53.9%
	No	77	46.1%

Source: Google Forms survey data (2025).

Table 2

The Relationship Between Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury in APF Service Personnel

		Spiritual well-being	Moral Injury
Spiritual well-being	Pearson Correlation	1	0.027*
	N	167	167
Moral Injury	Pearson Correlation	0.027*	1
	N	167	167

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 2 shows the relationship between spiritual well-being and moral injury in APF service personnel. It suggests that the two variables have a weak positive association.

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values for Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among APF Service Personnel with Higher and Lower Educational Levels.

	Higher educational level N=129		Lower educational level N=38		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	83.81	10.17	83.86	12.19	0.02(NS)
Moral Injury	31.95	8.83	36.32	8.48	2.68*

NS-No Significant, *Significant at p<0.05

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 3 exhibits that APF service personnel with higher educational levels reported slightly lower spiritual well-being (M = 83.81, SD = 10.17) compared to those with lower educational levels (M = 83.86, SD = 12.19); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 0.02 indicated that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant. In terms of moral injury, APF service personnel with lower educational levels showed higher scores (M = 36.32, SD = 8.48) than those with higher educational levels (M = 31.95, SD = 8.83). The t-test value of 2.68 revealed that this difference was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of Spiritual well-being and Moral Injury in Older and Younger APF Service Personnel.

	Older APF service personnel N=43		Younger APF service personnel N=124		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	82.79	9.96	84.17	10.84	0.72(NS)
Moral Injury	31.48	7.86	33.41	9.22	1.21(NS)

NS-No Significant

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 4 depicts that younger APF service personnel reported slightly higher spiritual well-being (M = 84.17, SD = 10.84) than older personnel (M = 82.79, SD = 9.96); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 0.72 revealed that no statistically significant difference was found between the groups. Similarly, younger APF service personnel showed marginally higher moral injury scores (M = 33.41, SD = 9.22) compared to older personnel (M = 31.48, SD = 7.86). The t-test value of 1.21 indicated that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant.

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among Male and Female APF Service Personnel.

	Male N=157		Female N=10		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	83.71	10.45	85.60	13.45	0.54(NS)
Moral Injury	33.02	9.00	31.40	7.62	0.55(NS)

NS-No Significant

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 5 indicates that female APF service personnel reported slightly higher spiritual well-being (M = 85.60, SD = 13.45) than male personnel (M = 83.71, SD = 10.45); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 0.54 revealed that no statistically significant difference was found between the groups. Similarly, female APF service personnel showed marginally lower moral injury scores (M = 31.40, SD = 7.62) compared to male personnel (M = 33.02, SD = 9.00). The t-test value of 0.55 indicated that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant.

Table 6

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among Married and Unmarried APF Service Personnel.

	Married APF service personnel N=159		Unmarried APF service personnel N=8		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	83.87	10.62	82.88	11.13	0.25(NS)
Moral Injury	32.75	8.88	36.25	9.42	1.08(NS)

NS-No Significant

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 6 demonstrates that married APF service personnel reported slightly higher spiritual well-being (M = 83.87, SD = 10.62) than unmarried personnel (M = 82.88, SD = 11.13); however, the difference between the groups was minimal. The t-test value of 0.25 indicated that the difference was not statistically significant. In terms of moral injury, unmarried APF service personnel had marginally higher scores (M = 36.25, SD = 9.42) compared to married personnel (M = 32.75, SD = 8.88). The t-test value of 1.08 revealed that the difference between the two groups was also not statistically significant.

Table 7

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values for Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among APF Service Personnel with Higher and Lower Educational Levels.

	Higher educational level N=129		Lower educational level N=38		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	83.81	10.17	83.86	12.19	0.02(NS)
Moral Injury	31.95	8.83	36.32	8.48	2.68*

NS-No Significant, *Significant at $p<0.05$

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 7 exhibits that APF service personnel with higher educational levels reported slightly lower spiritual well-being (M = 83.81, SD = 10.17) compared to those with lower educational levels (M = 83.86, SD = 12.19); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 0.02 indicated that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant. In terms of moral injury, APF service personnel with lower educational levels showed higher scores (M = 36.32, SD = 8.48) than those with higher educational levels (M = 31.95, SD = 8.83). The t-test value of 2.68 revealed that this difference was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 8

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among APF Service Personnel with Longer and Shorter Years of Service.

	Longer years of service N=96		Shorter years of service N=71		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	83.63	9.50	84.03	11.96	0.24(NS)
Moral Injury	32.17	9.25	33.94	8.32	1.28(NS)

NS-No Significant

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 8 illustrates that APF service personnel with shorter years of service reported slightly higher spiritual well-being (M = 84.03, SD = 11.96) compared to those with longer years of service (M = 83.63, SD = 9.50); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 0.24 indicated that the variation between the groups was negligible. In terms of moral injury, personnel with shorter years of service showed marginally higher scores (M = 33.94, SD = 8.32) than those with longer years of service (M = 32.17, SD = 9.25). The t-test value of 1.28 revealed that this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 9

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among Higher and Lower Ranking APF Service Personnel.

	Higher ranking APF service personnel N=136		Lower ranking APF service personnel N=31		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	83.68	9.92	84.32	13.29	0.30(NS)
Moral Injury	31.85	8.59	37.61	8.79	3.35(NS)

NS-No Significant

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 9 demonstrates that APF service personnel with lower ranking reported slightly higher spiritual well-being (M = 84.32, SD = 13.29) compared to those with higher ranking (M = 83.63, SD = 9.92); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 0.30 indicated that the variation between the groups was negligible. In terms of moral injury, lower-ranking APF service personnel showed higher scores (M = 37.61, SD = 8.79) than higher-ranking personnel (M = 31.85, SD = 8.59). The t-test value of 3.35 revealed that this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 10

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among APF Service Personnel Posted in High Conflict and No Conflict Zone.

	Posted in conflict areas N=93		Posted in non-conflict areas N=74		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	83.47	9.51	84.00	11.28	0.32(NS)
Moral Injury	33.85	9.19	31.74	8.52	1.51(NS)

NS-No Significant

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 10 unveils that APF service personnel posted in non-conflict areas reported slightly higher spiritual well-being (M = 84.00, SD = 11.28) compared to those posted in conflict areas (M = 83.47, SD = 9.51); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 0.32 indicated that the variation between the groups was negligible. In terms of moral injury, personnel posted in conflict areas showed higher scores (M = 33.85, SD = 9.19) than those in non-conflict areas (M = 31.74, SD = 8.52). The t-test value of 1.51 revealed that this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 11

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Spiritual Well-Being and Moral Injury among APF Service Personnel With and Without Combat Exposure.

	With Combat Exposure N=77		Without Combat Exposure N=90		
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t
Spiritual well-being	84.87	11.60	81.45	12.22	1.84(NS)
Moral Injury	32.61	9.23	33.20	8.67	0.42(NS)

NS-No Significant

Source: Based on Google Forms survey data (2025) analyzed using IBM SPSS

Table 11 illustrates that APF service personnel with combat exposure reported slightly higher spiritual well-being (M = 84.87, SD = 11.60) compared to those without combat exposure (M = 81.45, SD = 12.22); however, the difference was minimal. The t-test value of 1.84 indicated that the variation between the groups was negligible. In terms of moral injury, personnel with combat exposure showed slightly lower scores (M = 32.61, SD = 9.23) than those without combat exposure (M = 33.20, SD = 8.67). The t-test value of 0.42 revealed that this difference was not statistically significant.

Discussion

The current study investigated the spiritual well-being and moral injury among Armed Police Force service personnel in Nepal. Consistent with the first hypothesis, the results revealed a modest positive association between spiritual well-being and moral injury. This suggests that personnel with higher spiritual well-being reported slightly higher moral injury, which contrasts with findings by Zappalla (2018), who observed that stronger spiritual well-being and a greater sense of meaning and purpose were associated with lower moral injury among veterans. This discrepancy may reflect contextual differences, cultural factors, or the nature of paramilitary service in Nepal.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the study found that APF service personnel with higher education levels experienced lower moral injury compared to those with lower education levels, although no significant differences were observed in spiritual well-being across education groups. This finding suggests that while spiritual beliefs may remain relatively stable across educational backgrounds, cognitive resources, coping strategies, and access to supportive networks afforded by higher education can protect personnel from moral injury. APF service personnel with lower education may face increased exposure to frontline duties, higher-risk assignments, and limited adaptive coping strategies, contributing to greater vulnerability to morally injurious experiences.

Aligned with the third hypothesis, no significant differences were found in spiritual well-being or moral injury based on age, gender, or marital status, nor across other demographic and service-related variables such as years of service, rank, deployment in conflict versus non-conflict areas, or combat exposure. These results may be attributed to the cohesive organizational culture of the APF, standardized training, shared ethical codes, and common exposure to occupational stressors, which help to buffer against disparities in moral injury and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, the consistent availability of peer support, resilience training, and culturally grounded spiritual practices may serve as protective factors, contributing to the relatively uniform levels of spiritual well-being and moral injury across diverse groups of personnel.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of education as a factor influencing moral injury while emphasizing that spiritual well-being may be more deeply rooted in personal beliefs and cultural norms. These findings underscore the need for tailored interventions focusing on developing adaptive coping strategies, resilience, and institutional support, particularly for personnel with lower educational backgrounds, to mitigate moral injury while supporting overall spiritual well-being.

Conclusion

The findings of the study reflect a modest positive association between spiritual well-being and moral injury among the personnel of the Armed Police Force. Except for education level, most demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, years of service, rank, deployment in either a conflict or non-conflict area, and combat exposure did not have significant differences in either spiritual well-being or moral injury. Those with higher education reported lower moral injury than those at lower educational levels, while spiritual well-being did not differ significantly across education groups.

These results could be interpreted within the framework of Moral Injury Theory, advanced by Litz et al. (2009) and Shay (2014), which clearly states that psychological and emotional harm occurs as a result of experiences that infringe upon one's personal moral or ethical values. The findings also echo Meaning-Making Theory, articulated by Frankl (1959) and Park (2010), which framed the particular role of personal resources, such as spirituality, in dealing with situations that represent moral difficulty. In this perspective, spiritual well-being may function as a protective factor, allowing personnel to process morally injurious experiences and maintain psychological resilience.

Whereas past research underlined more frameworks in terms of self-compassion, religious coping, and social support, the current study argues that education and spiritual resources may have a particularly great part in mitigating moral distress among APF personnel. These results add support for incorporating interventions focused on spiritual support with education into programs aimed at promoting the mental and moral health of paramilitary personnel.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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Policy Implication on Effectiveness of Disaster Management Training in Armed Police Force, Nepal

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of policy frameworks on the effectiveness of disaster management training within the Armed Police Force (APF), Nepal. Adopting a mixed-methods design, the research integrates quantitative data from 178 trained APF personnel with qualitative insights from interviews. Advanced analytical techniques, including Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), regression analysis, t-tests and ANOVA, were employed to examine the relationships between policy and training effectiveness. The results suggest that policy plays a positive and meaningful role in improving training effectiveness ($\beta = 0.040$, $p < 0.05$), a finding that is further supported by regression analysis ($\beta = 0.095$, $p < 0.01$). Although the strength of this effect is modest, it clearly shows that well-designed policies help create a supportive environment for better training outcomes. Interestingly, the study also found no significant differences across demographic groups such as gender, age, rank, years of service and work level indicating that employees across all levels share a similar view on the effectiveness of the *training .Qualitative findings reinforce quantitative results, highlighting the importance of policy coherence, continuous training mechanisms, resource adequacy and alignment with international standards. The study advances the policy–practice discourse in disaster governance by empirically validating the role of structured policy frameworks in enhancing operational readiness. The research contributes both theoretically and practically by offering evidence-based insights for policy refinement, capacity building and institutional strengthening, thereby supporting more resilient and effective disaster response systems in Nepal and comparable contexts.*

Introduction

Disasters are conceptualized by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) as severe disruptions that significantly impair the functioning of communities and exceed their capacity to cope using available resources (UNDRR, 2017). In the case of Nepal, exposure to multiple hazards, including earthquakes, floods, landslides and disease outbreaks that makes it one of the most disaster-prone countries in the region (MOHA, 2017). This heightened vulnerability is largely shaped by the country's rugged terrain, geologically fragile structure, and the increasing impacts of climate variability. Within this governance landscape, the Ministry of Home Affairs assumes a central coordinating role, working in close collaboration with key security institutions such as the Armed Police Force, Nepal Army and Nepal Police, all which function as frontline responders during emergencies. Security agencies, in general, play a vital role in disaster management through rapid response, coordination, and operational support (Barbee, 2007). Since its establishment in 2001, the Armed Police Force (APF) has evolved into a key national institution in disaster response and relief, demonstrating operational efficiency and adaptability in crisis situations, which has strengthened public confidence and institutional credibility (Khatri, 2013; Thapa, 2013).

Located in the Himalayan region, Nepal grapples with disaster risks due to its diverse topography, fragile geology, and variable climatic conditions (MOHA, 2017). The country is highly vulnerable to hazards such as floods, landslides, glacial lake outburst floods and earthquakes, making it one of the most disaster-prone nations in the world (Petley et al., 2007; MoHA, 2011). Nepal has taken important steps to strengthen its disaster risk management system, particularly with the introduction of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Act, 2017. This law has helped bring the country's efforts more in line with global frameworks like the Hyogo Framework for Action and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, reflecting a growing commitment to managing disasters in a more coordinated and forward-looking way. Despite these developments, challenges remain in translating policy provisions into effective training outcomes and operational preparedness. While existing literature has examined disaster management systems and community-based approaches, there is limited empirical research assessing how policy frameworks specifically influence the effectiveness of disaster management training within Nepal's security forces, particularly in the post-DRRM Act context.

This research focuses on evaluating the Armed Police Force, Nepal's efficacy in disaster management in Nepal, with a specific emphasis on assessing the policy implication and effectiveness of training programs. The systematic creation of policy plans, legislative provisions, institutions, and their roles and duties in dealing with disasters are major contributors to the success of disaster management efforts (Quarantelli, 1988; Wisner et al., 2004;). The research aims to identify gaps in training initiatives and understand the perceptions of APF personnel regarding policy and the effectiveness of disaster management training. By exploring the relationships between these key factors, the research seeks to contribute to Nepal's overall resilience by improving disaster response and preparedness. The proposed hypotheses suggest that robust policies are linked to enhanced disaster management training effectiveness. Additionally, the study hypothesizes that perceptions of training effectiveness vary significantly across demographic variables such as gender, age, rank, years of service, and levels of work within the APF. Employing a case study approach, the research aims to use various measures to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the disaster management training program and provide insights for strengthening Nepal's disaster response capabilities.

To address this gap, the present study explores how policy influences training effectiveness within the Armed Police Force (APF) Nepal, while also examining whether this relationship varies across key demographic factors. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study seeks to generate a comprehensive understanding of how policy structures shape training outcomes. Ultimately, the findings aim to contribute both to theoretical advancements in disaster governance and to practical improvements in policy design, capacity building, and institutional preparedness in Nepal.

Review of Literature

This study adopts a narrative and integrative literature review approach, combining theoretical, policy, and empirical perspectives to build a comprehensive understanding of disaster management training effectiveness. The review is essential for situating the study within existing scholarship, identifying key variables influencing training outcomes, and establishing the research gap, particularly in relation to policy–practice linkages within the Armed Police Force, Nepal.

Theoretical Review

The theoretical review provides the conceptual foundation for understanding disaster management and training effectiveness. It draws upon interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology, risk studies, and disaster governance to explain how disasters are conceptualized, managed, and influenced by institutional frameworks (Alexander, 2002; Beck, 1992; Wisner et al., 2004).

Acts of Nature

The term "Acts of Nature," also known as "Acts of God," refers to natural events or disasters that are beyond human control and are not caused by human actions (Hochstrasser, 2000). "Acts of Nature," are natural disasters beyond human control, like earthquakes and hurricanes, with catastrophic impacts on lives, property and environment. These events stem from geological and weather processes, emphasizing their unpredictability and the need for preparedness, response, and recovery measures. Legal and insurance frameworks often consider liability, with some policies excluding coverage for Acts of Nature due to their unpredictability. While acknowledging human influence on certain events, the theory prioritizes strategies to mitigate impacts and enhance resilience in the face of unpredictable natural disasters.

The Theory of Joint Effects of Nature and Society

The theory of Joint Effects of Nature and Society recognizes that the interactions between nature and human society can have significant implications for both (McKibben, 2006). The theory of Joint Effects of Nature and Society recognizes the interplay between nature and human society, emphasizing vulnerability to disasters and resilience in coping with them. It links social factors like poverty and governance to disaster impacts while acknowledging influence of human activities on natural events. Advocating a holistic disaster management approach, it integrates physical and social sciences, community engagement, and vulnerability reduction to enhance resilience and promote sustainable development in the face of environmental hazards.

The Theory of Social Constructions

The theory of social constructions posits that reality and meaning are not inherent in objects or events, but rather they are created and shaped through social interactions and cultural processes (Döbler, 2022). The theory of social constructions suggests that reality and meaning are products of social interactions and cultural processes, rather than inherent in objects or events. Individuals and societies construct and interpret the world around them through shared beliefs and cultural practices, shaping behaviors and identities. While critics caution against relativism, proponents argue for its value in understanding social phenomena and promoting social change. Ultimately, the theory underscores the socially constructed nature of reality, offering insights into societal norms and power dynamics for critical examination and potential transformation.

The Risk Theory

Risk theory, spanning various disciplines, focuses on assessing and managing risks through systematic identification and evaluation (Beck, 1992). It emphasizes subjective risk perception influenced by personal and cultural factors, necessitating tailored risk communication. Risk management strategies aim to prevent or mitigate risks, considering uncertainties and probabilities, with the precautionary principle advocating preventive actions amid scientific uncertainty. Stakeholder engagement ensures transparency and inclusivity in decision-making. Overall, risk theory offers tools for enhancing safety and resilience by considering uncertainties, diverse perspectives, and effective communication and engagement. Overall, risk theory provides valuable tools for systematically assessing and managing risks, enhancing safety, resilience, and well-being through considerations of uncertainties, diverse perspectives, and effective communication and stakeholder engagement (Rakow, 2010).

The Uncertainty Theory

Uncertainty theory is a branch of decision theory that addresses situations where there is incomplete information or ambiguity about the outcomes of decisions (Rios, 1997). Unlike traditional approaches, it recognizes the subjective nature of uncertainty, where probabilities may be unknown or imprecise. Subjective probability allows individuals to assess outcomes based on available information and personal experiences. Applied in various fields, uncertainty theory aids in informed decision-making by incorporating subjective assessments of uncertainty, enhancing effectiveness in complex environments. Overall, uncertainty theory contributes to more informed and effective decision-making in complex and uncertain environments (Bonatti, 1984).

Empirical Review

Building on the theoretical foundations of disaster management, which emphasize risk, vulnerability, governance, and institutional response (Beck, 1992; Wisner et al., 2004), empirical studies provide practical insights into how policies and training systems operate in real-world contexts. These studies highlight the importance of coordinated frameworks, institutional capacity, and continuous training in enhancing disaster response effectiveness.

The National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF), endorsed by the Government of Nepal in 2013, serves as a practical guide for organizing and managing disaster response across the country (MoHA, 2013). Its main aim is to ensure that national and international support is well coordinated, especially during large-scale disasters that exceed the government's immediate capacity. The framework lays out clear objectives, coordination mechanisms, operational arrangements, and strategic directions for both preparedness and response. By addressing key gaps in disaster risk management, it also clarifies the roles and responsibilities of government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international partners, helping different stakeholders work together in a more unified and effective way (MoHA, 2011, 2013).

Nerby (2017), in *Disaster Management in Nepal: In Theory and in Practice*, examines Nepal's vulnerability from both biophysical and social perspectives and analyzes disaster management practices such as mitigation and decentralization. The study evaluates the extent to which Nepal's disaster management policies align with international best practices, providing a comprehensive overview of existing frameworks and institutional arrangements.

From an organizational perspective, Devi and Shaik (2012) underscore the critical role of training and development in enhancing human capital and improving organizational performance. Their four-stage cyclic model for measuring training effectiveness encompassing training needs assessment, training design, trainer performance, and trainee performance offers a systematic framework for evaluating and strengthening training outcomes.

In the Nepalese context, Bista (2023) highlights that community-based disaster management has significantly contributed to mobilizing local communities and integrating indigenous knowledge into disaster risk reduction practices. However, persistent challenges such as inconsistent funding, limited technical capacity, and weak coordination between national and local levels continue to constrain long-term resilience and sustainability (Bista, 2023; MoHA, 2017).

Internationally, studies suggest that policy coherence, institutional capacity, and continuous training are key determinants of effective disaster management systems (Wisner et al., 2004). However, there is still very limited research that clearly shows how policy frameworks actually affect training effectiveness in paramilitary or security institutions, particularly in developing countries.

Overall, the empirical literature indicates that while Nepal has established important policy and institutional frameworks, significant gaps remain in implementation, coordination, and capacity development. More importantly, there is limited empirical evidence examining how policy frameworks influence the effectiveness of disaster management training within security institutions such as the Armed Police Force. This study addresses this gap by providing an integrated analysis of policy–training linkages in the APF, Nepal.

Objective

This study focuses on the connection between disaster management training policies and the effectiveness of training in the Armed Police Force, along with the differences in perceived effectiveness based on the demographic and professional traits of APF personnel.

Hypotheses

A hypothesis is a tentative statement about the relationship between two or more variables that can be tested through research (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In line with the research objectives, the study proposes and tests the following hypotheses:

H1: Well-structured disaster management training policies in the Armed Police Force positively influence the effectiveness of disaster management training.

H2: Perceptions of disaster management training effectiveness differ significantly across demographic characteristics (gender, age, rank, years of service, and level of work).

Positioning the hypotheses within this broader research framework ensures methodological coherence, where quantitative testing complements qualitative insights, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of policy–practice linkages in disaster management training.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the effectiveness of disaster management training within the Armed Police Force (APF) of Nepal. Guided by a pragmatic research perspective (Creswell & Clark, 2017), it combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, while a social constructivist lens helps to better understand participants' experiences. A convergent parallel design was applied, meaning that both types of data were collected at the same time, analyzed separately, and then brought together for a comprehensive understanding. This article is substantially revised and updated version of the author's MPhil thesis submitted in 2023 to the Department of Public Administration, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

The study population comprised APF personnel involved in disaster management. A cluster sampling technique ensured representation across ranks, units, and operational levels. A total of 178 respondents participated in the survey, providing sufficient data for statistical analyses such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Additionally, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected officers and field personnel to obtain in-depth insights.

The study focused on two key constructs, Policy (5 items) and the Effectiveness of Disaster Management Training (9 items), both measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Policy Construct looked at how clear, relevant, and well-implemented the training policies are, while the Effectiveness construct examined outcomes such as skill development, operational readiness, and overall response performance.

Primary data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed literature and official policy documents. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, regression, ANOVA, and SEM, while the qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. To ensure the quality of the findings, validity and reliability were maintained using established measures such as Cronbach's alpha and test–retest methods.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the main findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses to address the study's research questions and hypotheses. The quantitative results are summarized using descriptive statistics and model assessments, supported by relevant tables and figures. Qualitative insights are included to add context and help explain the patterns observed in the data. Together, these findings provide a well-rounded understanding of how policy frameworks relate to the effectiveness of disaster management training within the Armed Police Force, Nepal.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis is crucial in summarizing survey data, adopting Moser and Korstjens' (2018) approach. It scrutinizes demographics, including gender, age, rank, service years, and professional roles. The aim is to give a concise overview and extraction of insights for a holistic understanding of the research landscape, particularly in our study policy implication on the effectiveness of disaster management training.

Validity and Reliability

When assessing the reliability and validity of latent variables, it is important to follow well-established threshold criteria. In this study, the measurement model was evaluated using factor loadings, communalities, Cronbach's alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) within the PLS-SEM framework. Factor loadings indicate how well each item represents its underlying construct; values above 0.7 are preferred, although values above 0.5 are still considered acceptable (Hulland, 1999; Sachin & Rajesh, 2022).

Communalities show how much of the variance in each indicator is explained by the latent variable, with values above 0.4 generally considered adequate (Sanchez, 2013). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency, where values above 0.7 suggest that the items reliably measure the same construct (Nunnally, 1994). Convergent validity was examined using AVE, and a value greater than 0.5 indicates that the construct explains at least half of the variance in its indicators (Haji-Othman & Yusuff, 2022).

In addition, George and Mallery (2019) provide a useful guideline for interpreting reliability scores: values above 0.9 are excellent, above 0.8 are good, above 0.7 are acceptable, above 0.6 are questionable, above 0.5 are poor, and below 0.5 are considered unacceptable.

Table 1 presents the assessment of validity and reliability for two key constructs: "Policy" and "Effectiveness." Each construct is measured through a set of items designed to capture different aspects of the underlying concept. The data are derived from factor analysis, where latent variables explain the relationships among these items. Ensuring that these measures are both valid and reliable is essential, as it strengthens the credibility of the study's findings and the conclusions drawn from them.

For the Policy construct, five items (Policy1 to Policy5) were used to capture different aspects of the concept. The factor loadings, ranging from 0.697 to 0.794, suggest that all items are well aligned with the Policy factor. The communality values show how much of each item is explained by the factor–for example, Policy1 has a communality of 0.462, meaning that about 46.2% of its variation is explained by the Policy construct. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.808 indicates good internal consistency, showing that the items work well together in measuring the same concept. Likewise, the AVE value of 0.566 exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.5, confirming that the construct demonstrates good convergent validity.

For the Effectiveness construct, nine items (Effectiveness1 to Effectiveness9) were included. The factor loadings range from 0.628 to 0.802, indicating that the items are reasonably to strongly related to the underlying factor. The communality values, ranging from 0.408 to 0.877, show that a meaningful portion of each item's variance is explained by the construct. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.877 reflects a high level of internal consistency, suggesting that the items are reliably measuring effectiveness. Similarly, the AVE value of 0.505 meets the acceptable threshold, indicating that the construct has satisfactory convergent validity.

The results shown in the table confirm that the constructs are reliable, as all Cronbach's alpha values are above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1994). In addition, convergent validity is also well established, since all AVE values exceed 0.5 (Al-Qudah et al., 2022). Overall, the findings indicate that the factors demonstrate solid factor loadings, good internal consistency, and acceptable convergent validity. This suggests that the measurement items are effectively capturing the underlying constructs they are intended to represent.

Table 1

Measurement of Validity and Reliability

Construct	Items	Loading	Communality	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Policy	Policy1	0.697	0.462		
	Policy2	0.749	0.55		
	Policy3	0.760	0.537	0.808	0.566
	Policy4	0.794	0.665		
	Policy5	0.757	0.622		
Effectiveness	Effectivness1	0.743	0.567		
	Effectivness2	0.720	0.527		
	Effectivness3	0.685	0.483		
	Effectivness4	0.633	0.408		
	Effectivness5	0.628	0.422	0.877	0.505
	Effectivness6	0.766	0.569		
	Effectivness7	0.700	0.481		
	Effectivness8	0.802	0.639		
	Effectivness9	0.713	0.512		

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

a) Structural Equation Model (SEM)

The path coefficient value 0.040 (Table 2) between Policy and Effectiveness was produced automatically by the SEM software Smart PLS as a standardized regression weight (β) showing the strength and direction of their relationship. It is calculated from the covariance and correlation among the observed indicators of both constructs. The SEM algorithm estimates this coefficient by determining how much variance in Effectiveness is explained by Policy. The value 0.040 indicates a small but positive effect, while the double asterisks (**) denote statistical significance at the 5% level, confirming that the relationship is not due to chance. This result supports Hypothesis 1, which states that better disaster management training policies in the Armed Police Force enhance the effectiveness of disaster management training.

Table 2

Structural Equation Model

Structural path			Estimate
Policy	➡	Effectiveness	0.040**

** indicates significance at 5%

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

b) Discriminant Validity

The presented table provides insights into the discriminant validity of the constructs "Policy" and "Effectiveness." The values in Table 3 were derived from the Smart PLS SEM output, which automatically calculates the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), mean scores, standard deviations (SD), and correlations among constructs to test discriminant validity. For the construct Policy, the AVE value of 0.808 and for Effectiveness, 0.877, indicate that a substantial portion of variance in their respective indicators is explained by each construct, confirming strong internal consistency and convergent validity. The average scores (Policy = 4.228; Effectiveness = 4.231) and their standard deviations reflect consistent respondent perceptions across indicators. Discriminant validity is confirmed, as the square roots of the AVE for both constructs are higher than their inter-construct correlations. This indicates that Policy and Effectiveness are clearly distinct concepts, while still being positively related. This finding further supports Hypothesis 1, suggesting that clear and well-structured disaster management training policies in the Armed Police Force positively contribute to the overall effectiveness of disaster management training.

Table 3

Discriminant Validity

Construct	Average Score	SD	AVE	Policy
Policy	4.228	0.523	0.808	0.752
Effectiveness	4.231	0.423	0.877	

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares (PLS) within the SEM framework to better understand how Policy affects Effectiveness. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.095$) shows a positive link, indicating that when disaster management training policies improve, the effectiveness of training also tends to improve. In simple terms, stronger policies contribute to better training outcomes.

The result is statistically significant at the 1% level, meaning there is a very high level of confidence that this relationship is real and not due to chance. Overall, this finding supports Hypothesis 1 and highlights that well-designed and properly implemented training policies in the Armed Police Force play a meaningful role in strengthening the effectiveness of disaster management training programs.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 4 gives the demographic characteristics of the informants. In examining various demographic factors, the study reveals a notable gender imbalance, with 90.4% males and 9.6% females in the sample of 178 participants. Regarding ranks, "Constable" dominates at 43.3%, followed by "Senior Officer" at 38.2%. The tenure distribution shows a significant portion serving for 16-20 years (30.9%), while in terms of work levels, 62.9% are in "Tactical level" roles, 32.0% in "Managerial level," and 5.1% in "Policy level." Age-wise, the "36-45" group is the largest at 39.33%, followed by "18-25" (32.02%) and "26-35" (23.03%), with the smallest proportion in the "46-55" age group at 5.62% (Table 4). The percentages account for the entire dataset, providing a comprehensive overview of demographic distributions among the individuals surveyed.

Table 4

Demographic Characteristics of Informants

Gender	Number of informants	Percent
Male	161	90.4
Female	17	9.6
Total	**178**	**100**
Rank		
Constable	77	43.3
Billadar	19	10.7
Junior officer	14	7.9
Senior officer	68	38.2
Total	**178**	**100**
Years of service in APF		
5 and below	61	34.3
6-10	22	12.4
11-15	17	9.6
16-20	55	30.9
21 and above	23	12.9
Total	**178**	**100**
Level of work		
Tactical level	112	62.9
Managerial level	57	32.0
Policy level	9	5.1
Total	**178**	**100**
Age		
18-25	57	32.02
26-35	41	23.03
36-45	70	39.33
46-55	10	5.62
Total	**178**	**100**

Source: Field Survey (2023).

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Gender

Table 5 presents the results of a t-test comparing how male and female personnel perceive the effectiveness of disaster management training (DMT) in the Armed Police Force, Nepal. While females reported a slightly higher average score (4.33) compared to males

(4.22), the difference is minimal. The statistical test results (t = 1.048, p = 0.296) show that this difference is not significant. In practical terms, this means that both male and female participants share a similar view regarding the effectiveness of the training. As a result, Hypothesis 2 is not supported, indicating that there is no meaningful gender-based difference in how DMT effectiveness is perceived within the Armed Police Force, Nepal.

Table 5

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Gender

t-test

Gender	Number	Average Score	SD	t value	p value
Male	161	4.220	0.419	1.048	0.296
Female	17	4.333	0.471		
Total	178				

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Age

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) is a statistical method used to check whether there are meaningful differences between the average values of three or more independent groups (Connelly, 2021). ANOVA was used to see whether people of different age groups view the effectiveness of training differently. Table 6 includes age categories "18–25," "26–35," "36–45" and "46–55" along with the number of participants, their average scores, and standard deviations. The results show an F-value of 0.404 and a p-value of 0.750. Since the p-value is quite high, it means there is no meaningful difference between the age groups. In simple terms, participants of all ages tend to view the effectiveness of disaster management training in a similar way. Therefore, Hypothesis 2, which expected differences across age groups, is not supported by the findings.

Table 6

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Age

Age	Number	Average Score	SD	F value	p value
18-25	57	4.270	0.376	0.404	0.750
26-35	41	4.190	0.493		
36-45	70	4.214	0.420		
46-55	10	4.300	0.435		
Total	178	4.231	0.423		

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Rank

As noted by Connelly (2021), ANOVA is used to determine whether there are meaningful differences in average scores across three or more independent groups. In this study, Table 7 presents the comparison across different ranks Constable, Billadar, Junior Officer and Senior Officer along with the number of participants, average effectiveness scores, and standard deviations.

The results show an F value of 1.407 and a p-value of 0.242, which indicates that the differences observed among the ranks are not statistically significant. In simple terms, personnel across all ranks tend to have a similar perception of disaster management training effectiveness. Therefore, Hypothesis 2, which expected differences across rank groups, is not supported by this study.

Table 7

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Rank

Rank	Number	Average Score	SD	F value	p value
Constable	77	4.224	0.445	1.407	0.242
Bildar	19	4.088	0.360		
Junior officer	14	4.111	0.346		
Senior officer	68	4.247	0.424		
Total	178	4.231	0.423		

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Service of Year

Given the lack of significant differences in variances, ANOVA was applied to assess the significance of average scores across various service years. Table 8 outlines service year categories ("5 years and below," "6-10 years," "11-15 years," "16-20 years," and "21 years and above"), participant counts, average effectiveness perception scores, standard deviations (SD), ANOVA F value, and associated p-value. The F value of 1.047 with a p-value of 0.242 (Table 8) suggests no significant difference in effectiveness perception among different service year periods. Consequently, Hypothesis 2, proposing a significant difference in DMT effectiveness perception across years of service, is not supported by this study.

Table 8

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Service Year

Service year	Number	Average Score	SD	F value	p value
5 and below	61	4.282	0.374		
6-10	22	4.253	0.431		
11-15	17	4.085	0.545	1.407	0.242
16-20	55	4.168	0.448		
21 and above	23	4.333	0.358		
Total	178	4.231	0.423		

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Level of Work

ANOVA, a statistical method for comparing means across multiple groups, was employed to assess the significance of average scores among different levels of work (Tactical, Managerial, and Policy). Table 9 includes the number of responses, average scores, standard deviations, F values, and p-values for each level of work. The F value of 1.517 with a p-value of 0.222 (Table 9) suggests no significant difference in the perception of effectiveness of disaster management training across different levels of work. Consequently, Hypothesis 2, positing a significant difference in DMT effectiveness perception among various work levels, is not supported by this study.

Table 9

Relationship between Perception of Effectiveness with Level of Work

Level of work	Number	Average Score	SD	F value	p value
Tactical	112	4.215	0.445		
Managerial	57	4.224	0.381	1.517	0.222
Policy	9	4.470	0.368		
Total	178	4.231	0.423		

Source: Based on Field Survey data (2023) analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Thematic Analysis of Response

Thematic analysis might involve, identifying patterns and recurring themes across the data (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016).

Understanding Disaster Management Training Policies

Interview participants conveyed their perspectives on the effectiveness of disaster management training policies in the Armed Police Force, Nepal. Overall, participants recognized APF's policies as well-defined and comprehensive to some extent, emphasizing the need for further refinement. Positive aspects highlighted include the establishment of a dedicated training school in Kurintar, Chitwan, and ongoing training programs, along with the presence of disaster response teams in each unit. However, concerns were raised about the adequacy of resources for these teams, calling for continuous training and overlapping sessions. A key development has been the shift from the Natural Calamity Act, 1982 to the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Act, 2017, which clearly defines the role of the Armed Police Force in disaster response. The importance of adhering to guidelines issued by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) is emphasized, along with the use of standardized operating procedures to ensure effective and consistent training implementation. Participants highlighted APF's adaptive approach to disaster management, refining strategies based on operational experiences. Suggestions included aligning training with international standards and expanding the scope beyond domestic scenarios. In summary, while APF's disaster management policies were generally viewed positively, participants identified areas for improvement, such as resource adequacy, continuous training, international standard alignment, and policy refinement based on practical experiences. The transition to the DRRM Act 2017 and adherence to guidelines reflect ongoing efforts to enhance disaster response effectiveness.

Perceptions of Training Effectiveness

The insights gathered from interview participants provide a positive evaluation of the effectiveness of the disaster management training programs conducted by the Armed Police Force, Nepal. Key sentiments include the acknowledgment of enhanced professionalism and efficiency among personnel, with the training directly contributing to their capabilities in real-world disaster scenarios. The efficacy of the programs is recognized across a spectrum of disaster scenarios, showcasing the adaptability and effectiveness of APF personnel in various challenging situations. Improved performance, increased professionalism, and dedication are noted outcomes of the training efforts, contributing to the organization's effectiveness in disaster response. Participants suggest that expanding training to a global level and providing international exposure could further enhance the skill set and effectiveness of APF personnel. Despite resource limitations, the organization has demonstrated effective performance in disaster response situations, indicating untapped potential that could be fully realized with improved resource allocation. In summary, the positive perception of APF's disaster management training effectiveness, coupled with insights on potential improvements, highlights the organization's commitment to enhancing disaster response capabilities and the need for strategic considerations in resource allocation and international exposure.

Overall Reflection and Suggestions

Based on interview participant responses, critical factors for enhancing the effectiveness of disaster management training within the Armed Police Force, Nepal are identified. These factors encompass a holistic approach to training, emphasizing mindset, communication, rule implementation, technological adaptation, expertise tailored to specific disasters, motivation, geographic diversity, career advancement, policy enrichment and recognition. The key themes suggest that cultivating a positive mindset, policy enhancement and effective communication are foundational, followed by the importance of adhering to established rules and regulations for coordinated crisis response. Embracing advanced technologies, tailoring expertise to different disaster types, policy refurbishment and offering motivation through incentives contribute to the effectiveness of training. Recognizing Nepal's geographical diversity, participants propose tailored training programs specific to different regions. Linking disaster management training to career advancement and professionalism enhances individual commitment. Access to contemporary training resources and recognizing changing hazard patterns are considered essential for maintaining relevance and effectiveness. In summary, the suggested critical factors underscore the multifaceted nature of disaster management training, emphasizing adaptability, policy enrichment, and strategic alignment to ensure optimal outcomes in various disaster scenarios.

Conclusion

This study explored how policy frameworks shape the effectiveness of disaster management training within the Armed Police Force (APF), Nepal. The findings show that when policies are clear, practical and consistently implemented, they make a real difference in improving the quality and impact of training. By bringing together both quantitative results and qualitative insights, the study confirms that stronger policies are linked to better training outcomes. In simple terms, policies are not just formal documents, they actively support capacity building, preparedness and operational performance.

An important finding is that factors such as gender, age, rank, years of service and level of work do not significantly influence how participants view training effectiveness. This suggests that the training system within APF is fairly consistent and inclusive, providing similar benefits across different groups and levels of personnel.

From a broader perspective, the study helps explain how good policies translate into better practice in disaster management. It shows that well-structured and coordinated policies can strengthen institutional readiness and improve response capability. Practically, the findings highlight the need to regularly review and update policies, adopt new technologies, learn from international best practices and ensure that resources are used effectively to further strengthen disaster management capacity.

Looking ahead, future research could examine how training improvements perform over time, compare results with other security or humanitarian organizations and explore ways to integrate climate change adaptation into training systems. Overall, the study reinforces a simple but important message: effective disaster management begins with strong and well-aligned policies that connect planning with action, ultimately strengthening both institutional preparedness and national resilience.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author

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Entrepreneurship Beyond Barriers: Women's Tourism Ventures in Dolpa, Nepal

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Abstract

This study examines women's tourism entrepreneurship in Dolpa, Nepal, one of the world's most remote districts, where isolation, institutional voids, and patriarchal structures create barriers to entrepreneurial action. Through analysis of interviews with 23 women tourism entrepreneurs and 5 key informants from local government, the research explores how women navigate constraints to establish tourism ventures including homestays and handicrafts. Using Theory of Planned Behavior, feminist entrepreneurship theory, and sustainable entrepreneurship models, the study reveals women's adaptive capacity through bricolage strategies and kinship networks. Despite lacking formal credit and infrastructure, participants established viable micro-ventures driven by economic necessity. Findings show multidimensional empowerment: economic gains through income generation; social empowerment via enhanced decision-making; and psychological growth through increased self-efficacy. However, achievements remain fragile due to income volatility, capital scarcity, and infrastructural deficits. The study extends entrepreneurship theory by demonstrating *agency in extreme contexts, enriches feminist scholarship by revealing resistance within patriarchal constraints, and advances sustainable entrepreneurship models. Findings inform policy recommendations including microfinance mechanisms, infrastructure investments, training programs, and gender-responsive tourism policies for transforming women's entrepreneurship from survival strategies to sustainable development pathways.*

Introduction

Dolpa District is the largest administrative district in Nepal, covering an area of 7,889 km² in the Karnali Province of western Nepal. It is a remote Himalayan enclave of rugged glacial valleys, ranging in elevation from 1,525 m to 7,625 m above sea level, with extreme isolation preserving ancient Tibetan-influenced cultural traditions. Inhabited principally by agro-pastoral communities, the dominant religions are Bon and Nyingma-pa Buddhism. The district has a sparse population of about 42,774 according to the 2021 census, who depend on subsistence farming, yak herding, and the trade of medicinal fungi such as Yarsagumba. At the same time, they face threats from national park restrictions, climate variability, and poor infrastructures. Key features include Shey Phoksundo National Park, a biodiversity hotspot, and villages like Do-Tarap, where communal rituals and transhumance maintain ethnic Dolpo-pa identity in the face of encroaching modernization and state integration (Zhu, 2015).

Historically, Dolpa's economy was based on the salt and wool trade routes between Tibet and lowland Nepal (Snellgrove, 1961, pp. 120–125). While women also contributed through household production, such as wool processing, dairy, and barley farming, they rarely acted as independent traders due to gender norms that relegated them to household labor (Snellgrove, 1961, pp. 200–205). As such, in villages such as Dho Tarap, women managed herding and weaving cooperatives informally, but economic agency was communal with male-led transhumance at the forefront (Zhu, 2015, p. 15). This era represents a type of "caring economy" wherein women's unpaid labor maintains family livelihoods but is not valorized as entrepreneurship in its own right (Testa, 2018, p. 8).

Dolpa's opening to outsiders in the 1920s brought minimal cash economies through tourism and exportation of medicinal plants, providing some women with opportunities to engage in handicrafts for barter or sale in small-scale ways (Snellgrove, 1961, pp. 200–205). Basic education and health initiatives followed integration into Nepal's monarchy post-1950s, but customs remained patriarchal in nature, with women confronting various obstacles to owning property or obtaining access to credit (Acharya & Pandey, 2018, p. 25). Establishment of Shey Phoksundo National Park in the 1980s constricted grazing land further, pushing women into informal enterprises such as homestays or herb collection, but without training for true entrepreneurial endeavors (Zhu, 2015, p. 28).

Starting in the 1990s, however, Nepal began to develop a national push for women's empowerment through programs such as the Micro-Enterprise Development Programme, or MEDEP, creating over 53,000 micro-enterprises (1999–2011), with breakdowns by region, gender (67.9% women-led) and caste which targeted rural women in districts including Dolpa (Karki, 2013, pp. 33-34). The 2006 peace process after the Maoist conflict also empowered women through quotas in local governance, enabling them to engage in community-based enterprises (K.C. et al., 2017, p. 12). These initiatives allowed women to take part in decision-making positions at different levels. However, scaling up remained constrained by gender norms, as women often reverted to subsistence amid male out-migration (Good Return, 2022, p. 4).

At present context, women here are establishing tourism ventures like homestays, teahouses, and handicraft enterprises that challenge assumptions about entrepreneurship's preconditions and women's economic agency in marginalized spaces. This study examines how they do it, and what their experiences reveal about entrepreneurship beyond barriers. Mainstream entrepreneurship theory emphasizes resource access, institutional support, and market proximity as prerequisites for venture creation (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurs exploit opportunities by assembling resources within supportive institutional environments that provide legal frameworks and reduce transaction costs (North, 1990). This resource-based view struggles to explain entrepreneurial emergence in contexts of resource scarcity and institutional absence (Mair & Martí, 2009; Welter, 2011). This study has led scholars to reconceptualize entrepreneurship as resource creation through bricolage, "making do with what is at hand" (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 333), recognizing entrepreneurial agency as operating through constraints (Sarasvathy, 2001). Dolpa exemplifies this paradox. Located in Nepal's Karnali Province at elevations between 2,000 and 7,000 meters, the district lacks road connectivity and basic infrastructure, experiencing food insecurity for six months annually (Gentle & Thwaites, 2016). Its population of 37,000 is scattered across 1,600 households (CBS, 2021), with formal institutions concentrated in the district headquarters (Upreti & Müller-Böker, 2010). Yet Dolpa is becoming a tourism frontier. Phoksundo Lake and Shey Phoksundo National Park attract tourists (Spoon, 2011), while the region's monasteries and depiction in Eric Valli's Himalaya (1999) have created visibility (Sacareau, 2009). Tourism growth has created demand for accommodation and services (Nyaupane & Budruk, 2009), increasingly met by women entrepreneurs.

Women's entrepreneurship has moved from marginal to central in scholarship, but theories often treat gender as a variable, not a core entrepreneurial dimension (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Brush et al., 2009). Early studies compared male and female entrepreneurs in motivations and choices, implicitly viewing women's entrepreneurship as lacking compared to men (Marlow & Patton, 2005). Recent work uses feminist views, recognizing entrepreneurship as gendered and influenced by patriarchal structures that disadvantage women (Welter et al., 2014). Women face universal entrepreneurial challenges and gender-specific barriers in institutions, markets, and households (Brush et al., 2009; Minniti & Naudé, 2010), such as limited property rights, credit access, mobility, unequal household labor, exclusion from networks, and social sanctions (Kabeer, 1999; Mayoux, 2001; Duflo, 2012). In South Asia, these barriers are severe. Patriarchal systems, son preference, early marriage, dowry, and purdah limit women's autonomy, education, and economic roles (Acharya & Bennett, 1981). In Nepal, despite gender equality laws, women's entrepreneurship is mostly in informal, low-capital sectors like agriculture, handicrafts, petty trade where growth is limited (Tamang et al., 2014). Women struggle to access credit (only 12% get formal loans), receive business training (fewer than 5% in programs), and face time poverty due to domestic duties. 3-5 hours daily on unpaid care work versus 30 minutes for men) (ILO, 2019).

These challenges intensify in rural areas, where isolation compounds gender inequality. In Nepal's mountain districts, women's literacy rates lag 20-30 percentage points behind men's; maternal mortality remains high due to limited healthcare; and Chhaupadi, menstrual seclusion in huts—persists despite legal prohibition (Ranabhat et al., 2015). Women's mobility is restricted by terrain and cultural norms; their access to markets, information, and services is limited (Lama & Budhathoki, 2013). Here, women's entrepreneurship represents an act of resistance against intersecting marginalization.

Tourism is promoted as a development strategy for peripheral regions, promising income, jobs, and cultural preservation without heavy industrial infrastructure (Scheyvens, 2000; Ashley et al., 2001). For women, tourism entrepreneurship is seen as suitable: it can be home-based, utilizes 'feminine' skills (hospitality, cooking, handicrafts), requires low capital, and offers cultural exchange and empowerment opportunities (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012; Ferguson, 2011).

Critical tourism scholars have challenged this optimistic narrative, documenting how tourism development often reinforces inequalities (Britton, 1982; Mowforth & Munt, 2016). Women's tourism work is characterized by low pay, instability, harassment, and confinement to service roles, while men dominate management, guiding, and transportation positions (Sinclair, 1997; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). Tourism revenues leak to external operators, leaving minimal benefits in destinations (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). Tourism's impacts, commodification of traditions and environmental degradation, disproportionately affect women, who manage cultural reproduction and natural resources (Nepal, 2000).

In Nepal's mountain regions, tourism development has shown mixed impacts. The Everest and Annapurna regions have seen tourism growth, generating income but creating wealth disparities and environmental stress (Nyaupane & Budruk, 2009; Stevens, 1993). Women's participation has increased through lodge ownership and handicraft sales, but faces constraints from limited education and male control over income (Gurung & Seeland, 2008; Lama, 2000). In remote areas like Dolpa, where tourism is nascent, the dynamics remain underexplored. Despite literature on women's entrepreneurship in developing countries (Brush et al., 2009; Minniti & Naudé, 2010), rural entrepreneurship (Korsgaard et al., 2015), and tourism entrepreneurship (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000), their intersection lacks systematic understanding of how women navigate barriers, gender inequality, and resource scarcity to sustain tourism ventures in extreme contexts.

Existing research has examined women's entrepreneurship in rural Nepal (Lama & Budhathoki, 2013; Tamang et al., 2014) but rarely focuses on tourism or extreme remoteness. Studies of tourism entrepreneurship in Nepal (Nyaupane & Budruk, 2009; Spoon, 2011) have documented community impacts but not specifically analyzed women's experiences or gender dynamics. Research on entrepreneurship in extreme contexts (Welter, 2011) has theorized constraint navigation but lacks empirical grounding in highly marginalized settings. And feminist entrepreneurship scholarship (Ahl & Marlow, 2012) has critiqued mainstream theory but rarely engages with geographic extremity as a dimension of marginalization.

This study addresses these gaps by examining women's tourism entrepreneurship in Dolpa, that, how do women entrepreneurs navigate institutional voids, resource scarcity, and patriarchal structures to establish and sustain tourism ventures in extreme contexts, and what are the implications for entrepreneurial theory and development practice?

Through qualitative analysis of interviews with 25 women tourism entrepreneurs in Dolpa district, this research makes three contributions. Theoretically, it extends entrepreneurship theory by showing how entrepreneurial agency operates in extreme contexts through bricolage, network mobilization, and adaptation rather than resource acquisition and opportunity exploitation. It advances feminist entrepreneurship by revealing how gender intersects with geography, ethnicity, and class to shape entrepreneurial possibilities and constraints. It also contributes to tourism studies by documenting how women's tourism entrepreneurship in peripheral regions challenges both empowerment narratives and exploitation critiques. Empirically, the study provides insights into women's tourism entrepreneurship in remote environments, revealing barriers, creative strategies, and outcomes for empowerment and community development. Practically, the findings inform policy by identifying interventions, infrastructure development, financial inclusion, skills training, and legal reform to support women's tourism entrepreneurship in marginalized regions, while highlighting the limitations of top-down approaches that ignore local realities and women's agency.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Foundations

The combination of three theoretical approaches, namely the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Institutional Theory, and Feminist Theory, complements and allows for multilevel analysis of individual agency, institutional constraints, and systemic gender inequality in the context of women's tourism entrepreneurship.

Theory of Planned Behavior and Entrepreneurial Intention: Ajzen's (1991) TPB suggests that intentions arise because of attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control; in entrepreneurship, these considerations link favorable attitudes, social approval, and self-efficacy with intentions (Krueger et al. 2000). In women, structural barriers increase uncertainty; intentions are prioritized toward autonomy over achievement, which increases the gap between intention and action in resource-scarce settings (Kanwal et al., 2021; Leroy et al., 2009).

Institutional Theory and Entrepreneurship: Institutions-formal (laws, rights) and informal (norms)-embed and shape entrepreneurship (North, 1990; Scott, 1995). Supportive environments lower transaction costs but voids necessitate bricolage via networks (Bruton et al., 2010; Mair & Martí, 2009). For women, patriarchal norms and segregated networks impede access, which calls for "institutional work" to create legitimacy and trust (Welter et al., 2014; Korsgaard et al., 2015).

Feminist Theory: Feminist theory challenges mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship's gender-blind assumptions, revealing how entrepreneurship is fundamentally gendered, shaped by patriarchal structures and masculine norms that position women as "other" relative to an implicitly male entrepreneurial ideal (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Brush et al., 2009). Contemporary feminist entrepreneurship scholarship analyzes how gender inequality is produced and transformed through entrepreneurial activity (Henry et al., 2016; Villaseca et al., 2024).

TPB, institutional theory, and feminist theory provide complementary insights into women's tourism entrepreneurship in extreme contexts. TPB explains individual intention formation through attitudes, norms, and perceived control. Institutional theory examines how formal and informal institutions create barriers and opportunities shaping entrepreneurial possibilities. Feminist theory highlights how patriarchal structures disadvantage women while recognizing their agency in transforming these structures. Integrating these perspectives creates a multi-level framework. This framework guides the subsequent empirical analysis.

Conceptual Foundations

Mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship defines entrepreneurship as "the process by which individuals, either independently or within organizations, pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control" (Brush et al., 2009, p. 9). This definition emphasizes opportunity recognition and exploitation, with entrepreneurs identifying market gaps to create value (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). However, these definitions assume resource availability that may not exist in extreme contexts. Alternative views frame entrepreneurship as bricolage, "making do by applying combinations of resources at hand to new problems and opportunities" (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 333). This perspective, emphasizing creative resource recombination, particularly applies to developing countries where institutional voids necessitate improvisation (Mair & Martí, 2009). For this study, entrepreneurship is conceptualized as the process through which individuals identify opportunities, mobilize resources (through acquisition or bricolage), and create ventures that generate economic and social value, while navigating uncertainty and institutional constraints. This definition accommodates both opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurship, recognizing that motivations and strategies vary across contexts.

Rural entrepreneurship differs from urban entrepreneurship through its geographic context of sparse populations, limited infrastructure, and reliance on natural resources (Korsgaard et al., 2015). Kalantaridis and Bika (2006, p. 1562) define it as "the creation, operation, and growth of business ventures in rural locations that generate value for the community and contribute to economic development." This definition reflects rural entrepreneurs' embeddedness in local networks and their role in addressing community needs (Stathopoulou et al., 2004). In developing countries, rural entrepreneurship aids poverty reduction through SMEs, which provide 80% of rural employment but face barriers including poor connectivity and limited credit access (Yadav et al., 2022; Naudé, 2010). In Nepal's Karnali Province, poor road connectivity affects market access and entrepreneurial entry, particularly during monsoons (Rokaya & Pandey, 2024), perpetuating poverty cycles (Gentle & Maraseni, 2012). This study conceptualizes rural entrepreneurship in Dolpa as necessity-driven venture creation using local resources while navigating isolation and institutional voids through community strategies.

Women's entrepreneurship encompasses "the process through which women identify, develop, and bring to life a business concept, product, or service, navigating gender-specific constraints, including socio-economic and cultural barriers, to create economic value" (Brush et al., 2009, pp. 9-10). This definition highlights gender-specific barriers: restricted property rights, limited credit access, mobility constraints, unequal household labor, exclusion from male networks, and cultural norms that delegitimize women's economic participation (Minniti & Naudé, 2010; Kabeer, 1999). Women's entrepreneurship serves as a vehicle for empowerment, enabling women to gain financial independence, enhance societal position, and contribute to development through innovative ventures (Sangolagi & Alagawadi, 2016). In Nepal, women's entrepreneurship has evolved from informal activities to formalized ventures, though progress remains uneven (Tuladhar, 1996; Tamang et al., 2014). Women operate mainly in informal sectors with lower entry barriers but limited profitability, constituting only 22% of registered entrepreneurs (Khanal and Shrestha, 2019; Shrestha, 2023). Rural women face additional challenges: limited market access, restricted mobility, and inadequate infrastructure (Lama, 2013). For this study, women's entrepreneurship in Dolpa is conceptualized as establishing tourism-related micro-ventures that generate income and enhance autonomy, while navigating barriers of gender inequality, geographic isolation, and institutional voids through strategies that leverage resources and shift cultural norms.

Tourism entrepreneurship involves creating ventures providing goods and services to tourists, from accommodation and food services to guiding, transportation, and cultural products (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). In peripheral regions, tourism entrepreneurship is promoted as a development strategy leveraging natural and cultural assets, promising income generation and employment creation (Scheyvens, 2000; Ashley et al., 2001). For women, tourism entrepreneurship is considered suitable: it can be home-based, builds on "feminine" skills, requires low capital investment, and enables cultural exchange (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012; Ferguson, 2011). However, critical scholars document how tourism development reproduces inequalities (Britton, 1982; Mowforth & Munt, 2016). Women's tourism work often involves low pay, seasonal instability, and confinement to low-status roles, while men dominate higher-paid positions (Sinclair, 1997; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). Women's participation through lodge ownership remains constrained by limited education and male control over income (Gurung & Seeland, 2008; Lama, 2000). This study conceptualizes tourism entrepreneurship in Dolpa as women's micro-ventures capitalizing on tourism demand from natural attractions and cultural heritage, operating within constraints of seasonal demand and patriarchal norms.

Empirical Review: Barriers, Strategies, and Outcomes

Patriarchal structures constitute the primary barrier to women's entrepreneurship in rural developing contexts, manifesting through cultural norms that confine women to domestic roles and restrict their authority over resources (Dean & Ford, 2017). In rural settings, societal expectations position women's household responsibilities as primary, making entrepreneurial pursuits secondary (Nayak & Nayak, 2025, p. 11). This creates time poverty: women spend 3–5 hours daily on unpaid care work versus 30 minutes for men, leaving minimal time for business (ILO, 2019). Dean and Ford (2017, p. 17) argue that patriarchal entrepreneurial discourses frame leadership as masculine, questioning women's business competence and reinforcing stereotypes that women lack the rationality and decisiveness required for entrepreneurship, thereby limiting their legitimacy (pp. 184–185). In rural Nepal, women require male permission for travel, property ownership, and financial transactions, while their economic contributions remain undervalued (Acharya & Bennett, 1981). Terjesen and Elam (2009, p. 1102) show that in patriarchal rural societies, women face restricted social capital, hindering access to mentorship and funding, while exclusion from male-dominated business networks creates further structural disadvantages (Brush et al., 2019).

These patriarchal norms also generate social stigma that questions women's competence and entrepreneurial legitimacy. UNESCAP (2022, p. 35) notes that Nepali women struggle to gain trust from financial institutions, suppliers, and customers, a stigma arising from perceptions of women as homemakers that leads to doubts about their entrepreneurial commitment and capability (p. 12). Phillip (2024) highlights how gender stereotypes portraying entrepreneurship as masculine cause women, especially in male-dominated fields, to face impostor syndrome. One participant recounts: "Being in a male-dominated industry, I'm the only woman. In million-dollar negotiations, a guy asked me for coffee, assuming I was the secretary" (p. 107). Such experiences foster self-doubt and undermine confidence, further restricting women's access to credit, suppliers, and customers (p. 54).

Patriarchal exclusion extends to social capital and professional networks, compounding the barriers women face. Limited access to networks hinders women entrepreneurs by restricting growth opportunities and knowledge acquisition (Terjesen & Elam, 2009; Brush et al., 2019). In rural Nepal, geographic isolation and patriarchal norms worsen these deficits, with UNESCAP (2022, p. 12) noting that "restricted mobility and household burdens prevent women from accessing mentorship and networks, critical for success." Exclusion from male-dominated networks, where information, opportunities, and resources are negotiated, creates competitive disadvantages (Terjesen & Elam, 2009, p. 1102). Brush et al. (2019, p. 7) highlight that "women's limited participation in ecosystems restricts access to mentors and networks that drive growth," a particularly significant constraint in resource-scarce areas where informal networks substitute for weak formal institutions (Korsgaard et al., 2015).

Structural exclusion is most acutely felt in the domain of finance, where women-led businesses globally face a $1.7 trillion financing gap (MicroSave, 2025). In Bangladesh, women hold only 6.5% of loan assets due to high collateral demands and discriminatory lending practices (MicroSave, 2025, p. 1), challenges compounded by limited financial literacy and cultural norms restricting women's economic independence (Women's World Banking, 2014). In rural Nepal, women's access to finance is further constrained by limited mobility during pregnancy and lactation, which restricts participation in microfinance training programs, while household responsibilities and physical tasks limit program engagement more broadly (Sharma & Thapa, 2008, p. 4). Sima et al. (2021) highlight similar barriers for rural Gambian women, including collateral shortages stemming from patriarchal inheritance laws and institutional gender biases (pp. 31–32). Bhandari (2023) notes that Nepali women's restricted access to economic resources limits business opportunities, with cultural constraints rooted in patriarchal norms (p. 37). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that financial exclusion stems from gendered property rights and discriminatory institutions that systematically deny women economic autonomy.

Financial barriers are compounded by geographic isolation, which restricts market access, increases transportation costs, and limits supply chain integration. In rural Nepal, poor transportation infrastructure and gender norms restrict women's mobility, forcing them to operate home-based enterprises far from markets and energy sources, thereby limiting access to supply chains and customers (Asian Development Bank, 2020, p. 39). Poor roads lead to dispersed production and increased post-harvest losses, particularly affecting women in agriculture (International Finance Corporation, 2018, p. 27), while in Nepal's mountain regions, weak road connectivity results in high transportation costs and limited private sector involvement, confining women traders to local markets (World Food Programme & FAO, 2011, p. 40). These infrastructural deficits create spatial traps in which women entrepreneurs cannot access higher-priced urban markets, while urban traders cannot reach remote producers, perpetuating low-value entrepreneurship (Rokaya & Pandey, 2024).

Underpinning many of these barriers is a deficit in education and entrepreneurial skills that limits women's ability to start and scale SMEs. In rural India, lack of access to quality education restricts women's financial literacy, while insufficient training programs exacerbate challenges in managing businesses, particularly under socio-cultural constraints that prioritize household duties (Ankita et al., 2025, p. 719). In rural Nepal, limited access to education and training restricts women entrepreneurs' ability to scale SMEs, with poor infrastructure and cultural norms further limiting mobility (Asian Development Bank, 2020, p. 37).

Bosma et al. (2020, p. 69) note that women entrepreneurs in developing economies face barriers due to lower educational attainment, which limits their market competitiveness and capacity to navigate complex business environments (Ankita et al., 2025; Nikhila et al., 2025).

Yet despite these intersecting structural, financial, and educational constraints, women entrepreneurs in rural contexts demonstrate considerable agency, drawing on social networks, resourcefulness, and strategic negotiation to navigate and, in many cases, transcend these barriers. A primary adaptive strategy involves leveraging kinship networks, women's groups, and community embeddedness to compensate for institutional voids (Bakas, 2014; Welter et al., 2014). Bakas (2014) shows through ethnographic research that women entrepreneurs in rural Greece integrate family support into their businesses, transforming gender roles while contributing to local economies (pp. 91–107), with entrepreneurial motivations focused on community benefits rather than individual economic gain. Research on Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India similarly demonstrates how collective organization enables women to pool resources and build business skills (Pandhare et al., 2024; Borah et al., 2025). Pandhare et al. (2024) demonstrate that SHGs empower rural Indian women through access to savings and loans, leading to increased income and decision-making power (pp. 9–10). However, while social networks provide critical support in resource-scarce contexts, dependence on bonding social capital may limit access to the diverse resources available through bridging social capital (Korsgaard et al., 2015).

Alongside collective strategies, women entrepreneurs in constrained environments practice bricolage, recombining available resources to overcome scarcity (Baker & Nelson, 2005). This involves using household assets for business purposes, transforming cultural knowledge into marketable products, and improvising solutions to infrastructural deficits (Müller, 2016). For tourism entrepreneurs, bricolage includes converting homes into homestays, using family members as labor, and adapting traditional practices for tourist consumption (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). In rural Greece, women handicraft makers integrate production into household routines (Bakas, 2014), while in Nepal, women lodge owners combine hospitality with agriculture, using farm products for guests while accommodating domestic duties (Gurung & Seeland, 2008). However, bricolage carries limitations: while it enables venture creation under constraints, it may also perpetuate small-scale operations and restrict growth trajectories (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

Women also navigate constraints through incremental norm negotiation, expanding their autonomy by demonstrating economic contribution and strategically framing entrepreneurship as compatible with prevailing cultural values (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012; Bakas, 2014). This involves presenting businesses as extensions of domestic roles, emphasizing family benefits, and securing male family support by demonstrating income contributions (Lama, 2000). In rural Uganda, women tourism entrepreneurs frame their ventures as serving family needs and community development, gaining legitimacy by aligning with culturally valued roles (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). In Nepal, women entrepreneurs emphasize their businesses' contributions to children's education and household welfare, securing husbands' support through economic necessity (Tamang et al., 2014). Where successful, such entrepreneurship can shift gender norms by demonstrating women's capabilities and creating social precedents for future generations (Kabeer, 1999).

The cumulative effect of these strategies is reflected in the outcomes women entrepreneurs achieve, which are multidimensional, spanning economic, social, and psychological dimensions, though they are not without ambivalence. At theneconomic level, women's entrepreneurship generates income that improves household welfare and reduces poverty (Kanwar & Arrawatia, 2022). Pandhare et al. (2024) found that microfinance and SHGs improved household consumption, income, and savings in rural Indian households (p. 5). Krishnaveni (2025) illustrates this through notable examples: Kudumbashree SHGs in Kerala transformed 50,000 women into micro-entrepreneurs in organic farming and catering, generating ₹500 crore annually (p. 238), while Amul's dairy cooperatives increased earnings for 3.6 million rural women from ₹1,200 to ₹12,000 monthly (p. 241). Kanwar and Arrawatia (2022) show how micro-entrepreneurship enables women to contribute to farm management while managing homes, increasing family income and independence (pp. 54–56), with micro-enterprises helping rural women improve children's education and household economic status (p. 57). Nevertheless, income generation does not automatically guarantee women's economic empowerment if men retain control over earnings or if income is channelled exclusively toward household needs rather than women's own agency (Kabeer, 1999).

Beyond economic gains, entrepreneurship enhances women's social and psychological empowerment, though these outcomes are equally complex. Socially, Adhikari and Ghimire (2022) find that micro-enterprises in Nepal's Parbat District increase women's involvement in social groups and household decision-making (p. 103), enabling them to challenge gender norms and assume community leadership roles (p. 104). Kim et al. (2022) find that women in social entrepreneurship address gender discrimination and promote community development in emerging markets (p. 955), while Ogbari et al. (2024) show that social empowerment aids poverty alleviation among Nigerian women entrepreneurs by reducing gender disparities through better resource access (p. 9). At the psychological level, entrepreneurship fosters enhanced self-confidence, self-efficacy, and personal accomplishment (Kanwal et al., 2021; Jalil et al., 2023). Kanwal et al. (2021) demonstrate that personality traits such as extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness enhance entrepreneurial intention through self-leadership, promoting adaptability and converting individual traits into motivational strategies for entrepreneurial development. Jalil et al. (2023) further show that psychological capital, encompassing self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, directly influences Malaysian women's entrepreneurial intentions, with attitudes serving as a partial mediator. However, the accumulation of business responsibilities on top of existing domestic duties risks creating time poverty that can offset these gains, underscoring the ambivalent nature of entrepreneurial outcomes for women in rural contexts (ILO, 2019).

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

This literature review has synthesized scholarship across entrepreneurship theory, feminist perspectives, tourism studies, and development literature to establish a conceptual foundation for analyzing women's tourism entrepreneurship in extreme contexts. Three key insights emerge. Building on these insights, this study employs an integrated conceptual framework that positions women's tourism entrepreneurship in Dolpa as shaped by three intersecting dimensions: institutional context (formal and informal institutions that create barriers and opportunities), entrepreneurial agency (women's strategies for navigating constraints through bricolage, network mobilization, and norm negotiation), and empowerment outcomes (economic, social, and psychological changes resulting from entrepreneurship). This framework guides the empirical analysis, enabling systematic examination of how context shapes agency and how agency produces outcomes under conditions of extreme constraint.

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative research grounded in interpretive phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of women tourism entrepreneurs in Dolpa, Nepal. Qualitative methodology is appropriate for investigating complex phenomena where understanding subjective meanings and contextual nuances is essential (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretive phenomenological approach explores how women entrepreneurs navigate barriers and construct identities within extreme contexts of geographic isolation and patriarchal norms (Smith et al., 2009).

The study is situated in Dolpa, a remote district in Nepal's Karnali Province. Dolpa was selected as the research site for exemplifying extreme constraints on women's entrepreneurship: geographic isolation with minimal roads, mountainous terrain at 1,525-7,625 meters elevation, sparse population, institutional voids with limited government and financial services, nascent tourism around Phoksundo Lake and Bon heritage, and patriarchal norms in Dolpo-pa communities (Gentle & Maraseni, 2012; Spoon, 2011).

The study population comprised women entrepreneurs operating tourism-related SMEs in Dolpa, including homestays, teahouses, and handicrafts. Purposive sampling identified participants meeting criteria: female ownership, minimum one-year operation, and interview willingness (Patton, 2015). Participants were identified through community referrals along trekking routes. The sample included 23 women entrepreneurs representing diverse tourism ventures, varying in business types, ethnicities, and experience. This aligned with qualitative research saturation principles (Guest et al., 2006). Five key informants from local government and tourism officials provided insights into institutional contexts shaping women's entrepreneurship in Dolpa.

Data Collection Procedure and Instruments

Data collection occurred during three-month tourism season. Semi-structured interviews explored phenomena while maintaining focus (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interview guides covered entrepreneurial motivations, venture establishment, resources, barriers, and operations. Interviews with women entrepreneurs were conducted in Nepali for 60-90 minutes, while key informant interviews of 45-60 minutes addressed institutional contexts. The researcher observed ventures and maintained field notes and a reflexive journal (Ortlipp, 2008; Spradley, 2016). The study followed ethical principles including informed consent and confidentiality (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Participation was voluntary with withdrawal rights. Pseudonyms are used in reporting, with identifying details omitted.

Data analysis used thematic analysis to identify and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method aligned with the study's interpretive phenomenological approach and could generate detailed accounts of complex phenomena (Nowell et al., 2017). Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: Phase 1: Audio recordings were transcribed in Nepali, translated to English, and reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy and note initial patterns. Phase 2: Using NVivo 12, transcripts underwent line-by-line coding, generating over 150 codes through inductive and deductive approaches. Phase 3: Codes were organized into potential themes using visual mapping to explore relationships. Phase 4: Themes were reviewed against data to ensure internal coherence and external distinctions, with some themes being merged or discarded. Phase 5: Final themes were defined by articulating their essence and named concisely. Phase 6: Findings were written up with supporting participant quotes illustrating patterns, accompanied by analytical narrative interpreting themes.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings from in-depth interviews with 23 women tourism entrepreneurs in Dolpa District, one of Nepal's most geographically remote and economically marginalized areas. The analysis is structured around three complementary theoretical lenses: (i) the Theory of Planned Behavior, (ii) feminist entrepreneurship theory, and (iii) sustainable entrepreneurship theory. Each lens highlights a distinct aspect of the participants' entrepreneurial experiences. Together, these frameworks illustrate how women in extremely resource-constrained environments develop entrepreneurial intentions, overcome patriarchal and institutional barriers, and achieve empowerment and sustainability through their ventures. The participants' voices are prominently featured, with direct quotations used to preserve the authenticity of their lived experiences and ground theoretical interpretations in empirical reality.

Entrepreneurial Intentions and Behaviors: Theory of Planned Behavior Lens

Participants showed positive attitudes toward tourism entrepreneurship as a path to economic stability and family welfare, driven by both necessity and opportunity. Participant 2 (Suprabha Guest House, Tripurakot) started her venture with Rs. 5,000 from maternal savings: "*I stepped away from politics to create something more stable for my family. Tourism was growing, and I saw an opportunity*." Participant 3 (Himal Hotel, Ringmo), widowed at 24, started her hotel with Rs. 1.5 lakh: "*After my husband died, I had to stand on my own feet. Now I employ a local girl and support my family*." Attitudes were also shaped by perceived social benefits, with Participant 7 (Dolma Tea House, Chhepka) stating: "*We provide affordable meals to trekkers and porters. It feels good to contribute to our village's reputation*." This reflects how attitudes in collectivist cultures combine individual and communal welfare considerations.

Closely related to these attitudes, subjective norms, perceived social pressures, emerged as critical enablers of entrepreneurial intentions. All participants cited family support as pivotal, particularly from mothers, husbands, or siblings, reflecting Nepal's kinship-oriented structure where family approval legitimizes women's economic activities. Participant 7 described: "*I do all the cooking, and my husband handles supplies from Dunai. We work as a team*," a model that embodies normative approval for family-based ventures as household strategy. Similarly, Participant 19 relied on her sister in their tea shop operation. Community norms showed mixed influences, while locals appreciated economic contributions, skepticism persisted. Participant 19 noted: "*Women's leadership faces admiration but also scrutiny, especially when borrowing money*." These ambivalent norms reflect transitional gender ideologies where women's entrepreneurship gains acceptance but remains contested.

Beyond normative pressures, perceived behavioral control, beliefs about one's capacity to perform entrepreneurial behaviors, was constrained by systemic barriers, yet participants demonstrated adaptive strategies that sustained operations. Financial constraints dominated narratives, with all 23 participants reporting no access to formal credit and relying entirely on personal or family savings. Participant 3 noted: "*No banks operate in remote Ringmo. Expansion depends on personal savings*." Infrastructural deficits further eroded control, with Participant 2 describing: "*Poor roads, no internet, limited electricity make everything harder*." Yet adaptive behaviors emerged alongside these constraints:

Participant 7 streamlined operations, "*I prepare simple meals that trekkers appreciate*", while Participant 2 reinvested profits incrementally: "*I started with Rs. 5,000 and expanded by reinvesting earnings*." These strategies of simplification and incremental growth show how women maintain agency despite low perceived control, suggesting that TPB's control construct may underestimate resilience in conditions of scarcity.

Taken together, these findings reveal a notable persistence gap in the TPB framework. While strong intentions driven by positive attitudes and family norms did translate into venture creation, low perceived control perpetuated micro-scale operations rather than growth. Participant 3 expressed this tension directly: "*I want to expand, add more rooms, but without loans, it's impossible. My intentions are there, but means are not*." This sustained operation without scalability extends TPB by demonstrating that entrepreneurial behaviors can persist at subsistence levels even when control remains minimal.

Gender Dynamics and Empowerment: Feminist Entrepreneurship Lens

Feminist perspectives illuminate how participants negotiated agency within patriarchal structures, subverting gender roles through their ventures while simultaneously operating within cultural constraints. Participant 3's narrative exemplifies this agency: "*Society expected me to depend on relatives. Instead, I built a hotel and employ another woman*." Participant 19 co-founded her shop with similar resolve: "*People doubted two women could run a business. We proved them wrong*." Yet patriarchal norms continued to constrain operational autonomy, Participant 7's cooking role aligned with traditional women's work, while Participant 2 acknowledged: "*I manage the guest house, but major decisions require my husband's approval.*" Social stigma questioning women's entrepreneurial competence compounded these structural constraints. Participant 19 noted: "*Lenders questioned our ability to repay, saying women are unreliable*," limiting access to informal credit, while Participant 2 faced community scrutiny: "*Some admire my success, but others say I neglect my children*." This gendered scrutiny, largely absent for male entrepreneurs, reflects the masculine entrepreneurial discourses identified in feminist scholarship (Dean & Ford, 2017), to which Participant 3 responded with quiet defiance: "*I prove my competence daily by running a profitable hotel*."

Geographic and social isolation further restricted women's access to professional networks and mentorship, reinforcing their dependence on kinship ties. Participant 17 noted: "*We rarely interact with other entrepreneurs. No training, no business groups. We learn by trial and error*," while Participant 7 stated: "*No institutional support exists. I learned cooking from my mother, not formal training.*" Only Participant 3 had attended an

NGO workshop, describing such opportunities as rare. Networks were consequently limited to family: Participant 2 stated, "*My mother taught me management. My husband connects me to suppliers. Beyond family, I have no business contacts*." This reliance on kinship networks, while providing essential support, restricts exposure to diverse knowledge and markets, reflecting the institutional neglect of remote women entrepreneurs documented in the literature (Brush et al., 2019).

Despite these intersecting barriers, entrepreneurship generated multidimensional empowerment outcomes. Economically, ventures provided income and financial autonomy: Participant 3 stated, "*I earn enough to educate my child and save modestly*," while Participant 2's guest house supported her family and employed local women. Socially, entrepreneurship enhanced status and community influence, with Participant 3 observing: "*Community members now seek my advice on tourism. My voice matters more in village meetings*," and Participant 19 adding: "*Running this shop with my sister shows that women can lead*." Psychologically, entrepreneurship boosted self-efficacy and confidence: Participant 2 reflected, "*Building this from Rs. 5,000 to a respected guest house fills me with pride*." These narratives illustrate how entrepreneurship cultivates psychological capital, confidence, resilience, and hope, consistent with empowerment literature (Jalil et al., 2023). However, empowerment remained fragile, with Participant 3 cautioning: "*One bad season, one health crisis, and everything could collapse*," underscoring feminist critiques that empowerment without structural support is inherently vulnerable.

Sustainability Practices and Impacts: Sustainable Entrepreneurship Lens

Tourism SMEs generated modest but meaningful economic impacts through local multiplier effects. Participant 2 stated: "*Trekker spending increased revenue and supported local food vendors. Money circulates in the village*," while Participant 3 noted: "*Phoksundo tourists book my hotel, and I employ a local girl, creating two incomes*." Economic sustainability was, however, constrained by seasonality: Participant 7 explained, "*We earn during trekking season (April–October) but struggle in winter. Savings barely last*," and Participant 17 added: "*Our tent shop operates only in summer. Off-season, we rely on yarsagumba collection*." The absence of finance further prevented scaling, with Participant 3 stating: "*With a loan, I could add rooms and offer heating. But no banks exist here*," perpetuating micro-scale operations and limiting growth potential.

Beyond economic impacts, ventures fostered social sustainability by strengthening community ties and preserving cultural identity. Participant 3 noted: "*Tourism boosts pride in our Bon culture. Trekkers learn about our traditions*," while employment of local women enhanced social equity, Participant 3's hiring of a village girl provided income and demonstrated to other women that opportunities exist. However, social tensions also emerged: Participant 2 observed, "*Some neighbors envy my success, creating friction*," and Participant 19 noted that competition for tourists can strain relationships, suggesting entrepreneurship can simultaneously enhance cohesion and introduce inequalities requiring careful management. Cultural dilution risks were minimal, with Participant 3 stating: "*We share our culture authentically, without compromising traditions for profit*," aligning with sustainable tourism principles.

Participants also demonstrated environmental consciousness, though infrastructural gaps posed ongoing challenges. Participant 2 described composting and use of biodegradable materials, Participant 3 noted regular cleanup near Phoksundo Lake and use of reusable containers, and Participant 7 limited waste through simple meal preparation. Yet Participant 2 acknowledged: "*Without infrastructure, pollution risks grow as tourism increases*," and Participant 3 observed water scarcity during peak season. Participant 17 mentioned wildlife disturbance from increased foot traffic, while rising firewood demand pressured local forests. Institutional support was conspicuously absent: Participant 19 stated, "*Policies exist on paper, but implementation is zero*," and Participant 3 added: "*We pay taxes but get no services*," leaving women entrepreneurs without the systemic backing needed to sustain environmental practices.

Looking ahead, participants articulated modest growth aspirations tempered by realism. Participant 2 envisioned modest expansion, adding rooms and improving facilities, while emphasizing that infrastructure improvements such as roads and internet access would help immensely. Participant 3 hoped for increased tourism alongside better waste management and water systems, and identified digital marketing training as a priority. Strategies emphasized collective action: Participant 7 suggested forming a women entrepreneurs' cooperative to pool resources and negotiate better supply prices, while Participant 19 proposed mobile training programs and microloans tailored to remote areas. These visions collectively underscore the need for systemic interventions to realize the entrepreneurial potential of women in Dolpa's remote tourism economy.

Collectively, these findings offer a graound picturisation of womens' tourism entrepreneurship in Dolpa, highlighting both the constraints and generative aspects. Participants navigated overlapping barriers, such as patriarchal norms, financial exclusion, geographic isolation, and institutional neglect, yet exhibited remarkable agency through adaptive strategies, community integration, and gradual negotiation of norms. Their ventures yielded multidimensional outcomes, including economic income, social empowerment, and environmental stewardship, although these achievements remained fragile and dependent on personal resilience rather than on structural support. These findings expand existing theoretical frameworks by illustrating how the TPB's control construct underestimates women's persistence in scarcity, how feminist entrepreneurship manifests through quiet subversion rather than overt resistance, and how sustainability is practiced as an everyday necessity rather than a strategic choice in remote rural contexts.

Discussion

This study examined socio-cultural and economic barriers confronting women entrepreneurs in Dolpa's tourism sector, strategies for navigating these constraints, and multidimensional empowerment impacts. Findings reveal a complex landscape where resilience coexists with systemic marginalization, generating modest but meaningful empowerment that remains fragile without structural support. This section integrates findings with theoretical frameworks and existing literature, highlighting contributions and implications.

This study extends TPB by demonstrating how extreme resource scarcity and geographic isolation moderate the intention-behavior relationship. While TPB predicts that positive attitudes, supportive norms, and high perceived control lead to strong intentions and subsequent behaviors (Ajzen, 1991), findings reveal that in hyper-remote contexts, strong intentions (driven by necessity and family support) translate into venture creation despite low control, but result in persistent micro-scale operations rather than growth.

This ‘persistence gap’, sustained operation without scalability, suggests that TPB's control construct may underestimate resilience mechanisms in extreme scarcity. Women in Dolpa employ adaptive strategies, incremental reinvestment, simplification, resourcefulness, that maintain agency even when structural control is minimal. This finding challenges TPB's assumption that low control inhibits behavior, revealing instead that behaviors can persist at subsistence levels, driven by necessity and normative obligations.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of collectivist norms in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. Unlike Western contexts where TPB emphasizes individual attitudes, Dolpa women's intentions are deeply embedded in family and community norms, with entrepreneurship framed as household strategy rather than individual pursuit. This suggests that TPB requires cultural adaptation to account for collectivist motivations in non-Western settings (Kanwal et al., 2021; Leroy et al., 2009). Findings enrich feminist entrepreneurship theory by revealing how women in patriarchal mountain societies negotiate agency within and against cultural constraints. Consistent with feminist perspectives (Brush et al., 2009; Henry et al., 2016), women in Dolpa face systemic barriers, limited capital access, social stigma, restricted networks,that reflect patriarchal structures marginalizing women economically.

However, the study also reveals spaces for resistance and transformation. Women subvert traditional gender roles by leading ventures, challenge stigma through performance of competence, and extend empowerment relationally by employing other women. This aligns with social feminism's emphasis on relational approaches (Ngwenya & Aigbavboa, 2018) and feminist entrepreneurship's focus on collective empowerment (Villaseca et al., 2024). Critically, findings underscore that empowerment remains incomplete and fragile without structural change. Women gain economic autonomy and social status, yet remain constrained by property laws, credit exclusion, and infrastructural deficits. This supports feminist critiques that individual empowerment without systemic reform perpetuates vulnerability (Dean & Ford, 2017), calling for policies that dismantle patriarchal structures rather than merely enabling women to navigate them.

The study also contributes by documenting entrepreneurship in an under-researched context, indigenous Dolpo-pa communities, where intersections of gender, ethnicity, and remoteness create compounded marginalization. This extends intersectional feminist analysis (Adhikari et al., 2024) by showing how geographic isolation amplifies gender-based barriers, necessitating place-based interventions. It was found that, how women-led tourism SMEs in Dolpa embody sustainable entrepreneurship's triple bottom line, economic viability, social equity, and environmental stewardship, albeit reactively and at micro-scales (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Economically, ventures generate income and local multipliers; socially, they foster employment, cultural pride, and gender norm challenges; environmentally, they adopt conservation practices and promote eco-awareness. This aligns with research on women's relational and ethical entrepreneurial approaches (Harrington et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2024), suggesting that women entrepreneurs in patriarchal societies integrate sustainability not through formal frameworks but through values of community welfare and environmental care embedded in cultural practices.

However, findings reveal that sustainability remains fragile due to systemic constraints. Seasonal volatility, capital scarcity, and infrastructural deficits threaten economic sustainability. Social tensions from inequality and competition challenge social sustainability. Absent waste management and water systems endanger environmental sustainability as tourism scales. This underscores that sustainable entrepreneurship requires enabling ecosystems, finance, infrastructure, policy, not just entrepreneurial intent (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Findings resonate with broader literature on rural women's entrepreneurship in South Asia, confirming barriers such as limited finance (MicroSave, 2025), restricted mobility

(Asian Development Bank, 2020), social stigma (UNESCAP, 2022), and network deficits (Brush et al., 2019). However, Dolpa's extreme isolation amplifies these barriers, with complete absence of roads, banks, and digital connectivity creating unique challenges absent in less remote rural areas. The study also confirms empowerment impacts documented in literature, economic gains (Pandhare et al., 2024; Krishnaveni, 2025), social agency (Adhikari & Ghimire, 2022; Kim et al., 2022), and psychological growth (Jalil et al., 2023; Kanwal et al., 2021), while revealing that in hyper-remote contexts, these gains are more modest and precarious, requiring sustained support to prevent reversal.

Contextually, findings highlight Dolpa-specific factors shaping entrepreneurship: tourism dependence on Phoksundo Lake and trekking routes; Bon Buddhist cultural heritage as tourism asset; seasonal volatility due to harsh winters; reliance on Yarsagumba (caterpillar fungus) collection for capital; and absence of institutional presence. These factors create a unique entrepreneurial ecosystem distinct from other rural Nepali contexts, underscoring the need for place-based policies.

Findings generate several policy recommendations for fostering gender-inclusive rural tourism development in mountain regions, like; establishing mobile banking units or community-based microfinance cooperatives in remote areas, offering collateral-free loans with flexible repayment aligned to seasonal tourism income. Gender-sensitive lending criteria should recognize women's economic contributions and provide financial literacy training. Prioritizing road connectivity, reliable electricity, internet access, and waste management systems in tourism corridors. These investments would reduce operational costs, expand market reach, and enhance environmental sustainability, benefiting all entrepreneurs while disproportionately empowering women by reducing mobility constraints.

Deploying mobile training programs covering business management, digital marketing, hospitality standards, and sustainable tourism practices. Scheduling should accommodate women's household responsibilities, and content should be culturally appropriate and delivered in local languages. Similarly, facilitating formation of women-led cooperatives to pool resources, negotiate bulk supply purchases, share knowledge, and advocate collectively for policy support. Cooperatives can also provide peer mentorship and reduce isolation. Integrating gender considerations into tourism planning, ensuring women's participation in decision-making, equitable benefit distribution, and protection from exploitation. Policies should incentivize women-led ventures through tax breaks or preferential licensing. Establishing waste collection and recycling infrastructure, water conservation programs, and renewable energy sources (solar) to support sustainable tourism growth. Engage women entrepreneurs in co-designing these systems to ensure practicality. Further, strengthen local government capacity to deliver services in remote areas, including business development support, health services, and education. Establish tourism information centers that can also serve as hubs for entrepreneur networking.

Conclusion

The study explores how women in Dolpa, a remote district of Nepal, engage in tourism-related entrepreneurship despite facing multiple challenges. It finds that these women show strong resilience, they use family support and local tourism opportunities to start small businesses that not only improve their livelihoods but also challenge traditional gender roles and boost their confidence and psychological well-being.

However, their entrepreneurial efforts are limited by serious obstacles such as lack of access to credit, poor infrastructure, limited education, social stigma, and restrictions on mobility. As a result, their businesses tend to remain small and vulnerable. The research builds on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by showing how scarcity and constraints influence the link between women's intentions and actual business behavior. It also contributes to feminist entrepreneurship theory by showing how women exercise agency (the ability to act and make choices) even within restrictive social and economic conditions. To strengthen women's entrepreneurship in such regions, the study recommends integrated solutions, such as better access to finance, improved infrastructure, training opportunities, support through women's cooperatives, and legal reforms to reduce gender inequality.

Overall, the study highlights that women entrepreneurs in isolated areas like Dolpa can play a vital role in poverty reduction and gender equality, if they are supported through systemic investments and inclusive development policies**.** It urges scholars and policymakers to rethink development models to make them more equitable and sustainable, while recognizing the lived experiences of women from remote regions.

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Understanding Public Trust in Disaster Governance: Three Cases from Nepal's Mountain Region

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Abstract

In policy level, Nepal's climate governance is fully equipped with the required institutional and administrative arrangements and holds the capacity to manage and minimize the effects of climate disasters. However, there is a concern how these arrangements are translated into actions in the time of disaster and what implications does it have on the public trust and their sense of security. To understand this human security dynamics of trust, this paper examines the climate governance, public trust, and human security through three climate-induced disasters in the mountain region of Nepal's Bagmati Province: the 2021 Melamchi Flood, the 2024 Kathmandu Flood, and the 2025 Rasuwa Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). Drawing on ethnographic accounts, media reports, and institutional perspectives, the study explores how the state's reactive disaster governance has eroded citizens' trust in public institutions. In Melamchi, local early warnings mitigated casualties, yet prolonged displacement and delayed compensation revealed weak institutional commitment to recovery. The Kathmandu flood exposed the lack of political *will to preventive urban planning, where encroachment, poor drainage, and inconsistent enforcement deepened both physical and social vulnerabilities. The Rasuwa GLOF extended this crisis of trust beyond borders, as the absence of early warning and data-sharing from upstream China underscored Nepal's limited sovereignty in managing transboundary risks. Across these cases, disaster governance appeared visible but superficial, more performative than protective, reflecting systemic gaps between planning and practice. It argues that human insecurity in Nepal's climate context arises not only from environmental threats but also from declining public trust in the country's climate governance which is rooted in failures to anticipate risks and act with transparency and accountability. Therefore, building trust, both vertically between state and citizens and horizontally across communities and borders, emerges as a critical foundation for ensuring human security in the context of rising climate disaster in the mountain communities in Nepal.*

Introduction

Nepal's climate governance is fully equipped with the required institutional arrangements and holds the capacity to undertake various actions to manage and minimize the effects of the climate disasters. The government of Nepal has expressed its full commitment to manage the climate disaster giving it a top priority by ratified global climate agreements, such as the Paris Climate Accord, and adopted national frameworks including the Second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and the National Adaptation Plans (Karki, et al., 2021). To undertake the disaster related actions and responsibilities, it has also formulated required legal guidance and institutional mechanisms. A central legal guidance for the functioning of the climate governance is the *Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act* (2074/2017) to undertake preparedness, response, relief, and recovery related to the disaster. It assign the *Ministry of Home Affairs* (MoHA) as the lead coordinating body. As the institutional structure there is a *Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council* (chaired by the Prime Minister) at the national level that sets national policy (MoHA, 2023). There is also an *Executive Committee* (chaired by the Home Minister) implements policies and decisions. Another important institution is *National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA)* that functions under MoHA as the technical and coordinating body for research, planning, preparedness, and implementation (Karki, et al., 2021).

Likewise, there is a *National Emergency Operation Center (NEOC)* which manages information, early warning, rescue, and relief coordination. Similarly, there are institutional set up similar to national level at provincial, district and local levels and executive committee to manage the disaster. The major activities of these institutions are grouped into *preparedness*, *response*, *recovery* and *coordination*. The major activities within the preparedness are; early warning systems, monsoon preparedness plans, stockpiling relief materials, and training of rescue teams (including Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepal Army). As the response, the major activities are; rescue, relief, humanitarian aid management, and coordination with NGOs, UN agencies, Red Cross, and community organizations (MoHA, 2023). The recovery activities are; rehabilitation, reconstruction, psycho-social counseling, and livelihood restoration. Finally, the coordination includes the emphasis on multi-stakeholder collaboration across government levels, private sector, and international partners. However, how these various institutional arrangements, including the authorities and their capacities are translated into action in the time of disasters and able to ensure the safety of the lives and properties are the key concerns to calibrate the performance of the climate governance.

In this regard, the sense of security of the people in any development project is coming at the center stage including in disaster management. In other words, as there is high public trust in state institutions, the sense of security among the vulnerable population has also gone higher (Tom, 2017; Uprety, 2025 & UNDP, 2022). In contrast, if there is a low level of trust among the people over the state authorities, the sense of security has also gone decline (Gómez, 2022). Based on this explanation, the sense of security can be utilize to calibrate the performance of the climate governance as in other development projects. Therefore, this paper places people's trust in governance as a central dynamic of human security in the context of understanding the performance of climate governance in Nepal. How is the situation of people's trust on public institutions in the context of climate governance in Nepal? Closer examination of the recent scholarship on climate disaster and learning from the empirical cases can satisfy this question partially, if not completely.

Review of Literature

Scholars have approached the climate governance from various perspectives in the Himalayan context. Agrawal (2022) approaches the climate governance through an examination of *climate financing and institutional accountability*. His study traces the evolution of Nepal's climate governance framework; from the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA, 2010) and the Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA, 2011) to the more recent Climate Change Financing Framework (CCFF, 2017) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP, 2021–2050). Agrawal finds that while Nepal has made significant institutional progress in mobilizing climate finance, the translation of funds into tangible local results remains limited. This is due to systemic issues such as weak coordination, lack of ownership among local governments, and low fund absorption capacity (Agrawal, 2022). In contrast, Bishwokarma et al. (2021) observe the lack of localization of the national policies at the community level which directly affects the trust relationship between citizens and the state. Therefore, they propose a more structured model of *localization of climate governance* through their *four-pillar framework*: (1) policy and institutional arrangements, (2) communication and strategic partnership, (3) resource and implementation mechanisms, and (4) monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

Nixon et al. (2025) also observe the erosion of trust than the better performance of the institutional design itself. It is because the lack of understating the local context such as "whose knowledge counts" and how local governance systems mediate between diverse social actors. In disaster situations, as Nixon et al. (2025) emphasize that climate adaptation is *context-specific* and its outcomes depend on navigating the *political dynamics of governance* both vertically (across national and local levels) and horizontally (across communities, NGOs, and private actors).

Karki et al. (2021) also indicate the lack of people's trust on the climate centrally controlled climate governance. They argue that enhancing the adaptive capacity of local governments and fostering partnerships among communities, civil society, and state institutions are central to effective disaster governance. This approach underscores the need for *institutional synergy* and *collaborative learning*; both of which are critical to building long-term resilience and restoring public trust in local governance mechanisms. Their study stresses that the effectiveness of local action depends on capacity-building and the ability of local governments to coordinate across sectors and leverage resources.

Finally, a study on the perception of vulnerable families along the Koshi Riverbank by Shrestha and Chaudhary (2021) provides an important empirical lens for understanding the relationship between citizens and disaster governance institutions in Nepal. They show that multiple formal early warning mechanisms exist, including alerts from the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, the Ministry of Home Affairs, mobile phone companies, and local governments. However, these formal mechanisms have limited influence on the actual evacuation decisions of local people (Shrestha & Chaudhary, 2021). Instead, the local residents tend to rely on informal communication channels such as relatives, neighbors, and local observers (e.g., the "red flag" warning system). This behavioral pattern signals a crisis of trust in state-led communication; people do not believe that official messages are timely, accurate, or relevant to their lived realities.

Shrestha and Chaudhary (2021) also highlight that the past experiences with unreliable or exaggerated flood warnings have eroded people's confidence in institutional forecasts. Because warning messages are often framed in probabilistic or technical terms (“probability of rainfall”), local people perceive them as uncertain and not actionable (Shrestha & Chaudhary, 2021). Consequently, the credibility gap between formal disaster communication and local experience widens, leading to reactive rather than preventive evacuation behaviors. This finding shows that trust is a central dimension of disaster governance which can enhance the sense of security among the local people and significantly influence the disaster mitigation plans.

Taken together, these studies reveal a complex picture of disaster and climate governance in Nepal. Agrawal (2022) highlights the financial and institutional gaps that undermine credibility of the central authorities. Bishwokarma et al. (2021) observe the lack of localization of the national policies, whereas Nixon et al. (2025) and Karki et al. (2021) finds that the climate policies and plans formulated in the state level do not fit in the local contexts. Furthermore, Shrestha and Chaudhary (2021) exposes the structural fragmentation of governance, and indicate a crisis of trust in state-led communication system. All these studies indicate that there is serious gap rhetoric and realities of climate governance of the country which must have minimized the people's trust in the climate institutions. To get even a deeper level of understanding of the situation in the specific context, the following section examines three selected specific disaster cases occurred in last 5 years between 2021 to 2025 in the mountain region of central Nepal in Bagmati Province. The selected cases of disaster for this study are: the 2021 Melamchi flood, the 2024 Kathmandu flood, and the 2025 Rasuwa Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), each representing a different nature of disaster occur in the entire Himalayan arch of South Asia.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research on the climate governance. It examines the purposively selected three cases of climate disasters occurred in the last 5 years between 2021 to 2025 in the mountain region of central Nepal in Bagmati Province. The selected cases of disaster for this study are; the 2021 Melamchi flood, the 2024 Kathmandu flood, and the 2025 Rasuwa GLOF representing different geographies and sociopolitical context of the region. Each of the case has its specific type and trigger. And, it has its specific impacts and underlying causes. It has been assumed that these cases represent the latest phenomena of climate disasters occurring in the region.

The study adopts ethnographic approach to collect primary and secondary data in relation to the cases of the disaster. Among them, the major sources include narratives and reactions on social media, local and national news reports, institutional records, and targeted interviews with affected residents and local authorities. By triangulating these perspectives, the paper offers a grounded understanding of how trust in governance is constructed and contested during times of crisis, and what this reveals about the everyday human security of the marginal communities living in the mountain region of Nepal. A hypothesis is that during the time of disaster public expresses distrust on the institutions and authorities of the state. The latest Microsoft Word processing and various AI tools were utilized to analyze the data.

Findings and Discussion

The ethnographic details generated for this study are presented in selected three cases of disaster below. It also examines how the agencies responded and public reacted to them as the key findings of this study.

Melamchi Flood (Jun, 2021)

In June 2021, the Melamchi region of Sindhupalchok and Rasuwa districts witnessed one of the most devastating climate-induced disasters in recent memory. Though monsoon rainfall had just begun across Nepal, the magnitude and scale of destruction in Melamchi stunned experts and locals alike. Flood affected local resident reported that about 40 people died and few were missing, over 450 families were displaced, 46 houses, eight resorts and multiple bridges were swept away, trout farms and marketplaces were submerged, and entire neighborhoods were inundated with mud and debris (Mandal, 2021). Despite official rainfall data indicating only moderate precipitation in the region, the floodwaters rose to the first floors of buildings and left behind a catastrophic trail.

What unfolded in Melamchi was not a typical monsoon flood. Experts noted that the recorded rainfall levels in the affected areas were not sufficient to explain the scale of destruction. This pointed to deeper, systemic vulnerabilities rooted in the region's geology, legacy of 2015's earthquakes, and unregulated development practices (Acharya, et. al., 2015). Years of unchecked resource exploitation, road construction, and hydropower infrastructure development had significantly destabilized the fragile hillsides (ICIMOD, 2021). The flooding was likely caused by landslides blocking the river upstream, creating temporary dams that eventually burst, releasing massive waves of debris-laden water at intervals. This pattern represented a new and alarming type of disaster, one that was complex, unpredictable, and not easily attributable to natural causes alone.

In the days leading up to the flood in Melamchi, residents living along the upstream of the Melamchi River noticed unusual sedimentation and a sharp rise in the river's flow. Word spread quickly across local networks: through phone calls, social media, and direct warnings shouted from one settlement to another. As one local resident put it, *"We heard from our relatives in the upper village that the river was rising fast. That was our only warning, no message came from the central government."* The early communication among villagers and the coordinated efforts by local residents and municipal authorities significantly reduced casualties. Many families managed to save essential documents, jewelry, and small cash savings before the floodwaters reached their homes.

In the immediate aftermath, local authorities and national agencies, including the Nepal Army and Armed Police, engaged in rescue operations that saved hundreds of lives. But the response plan was not effective to ensure the quick and better relief. The agencies involved in relief operations without any coordination. A local municipal officer candidly admitted, *"There is slow response, blame-shifting among agencies, and poor relocation plans. Policies and action plans exist on paper, but implementation remains superficial and inconsistent."* The officer further explained that national agencies cited budgetary constraints and procedural bottlenecks, while many local governments lacked concrete disaster management plans. Even when Melamchi Municipality formulated its own local response plan, *"lack of integration and support from higher levels of government reduced its effectiveness."*

Many victims reported receiving minimal support; mostly small cash installments or temporary shelter assistance. A university student from Melamchi who was living in Kathmandu during the disaster recalled it after four years of the disaster:

> "There were large numbers of people and huge media trials, but the support was not going to the needy families properly. The municipality provided one installment of 25 thousand, but it was minimal support. Hundreds of families are still living temporarily and may downgrade their economic status for a long time to come."

She further explained that more than 150 families were still living in rented and temporary houses in nearby communities, unable to rebuild their homes in their original location. One victim replied:

> "It is the local municipality that has supported few cash in the beginning and supporting for materials to live and construct the houses. But that is all very insignificant. We are doing by ourselves trying to come back and getting involved in various other livelihoods."

The slow and uneven recovery process has deepened social resentment. Discussion with the locals of Melamchi revealed that the number of local youths seeking jobs outside the community has already gone high and the seeker for foreign employment has also increased.

As one displaced household head expressed in frustration, *"We are waiting for the government to come, but they only come with promises, not solutions. Those who suffered have to bear the dukkha (suffering) alone."*

This examination of the ethnographic details on the Melamchi Flood above show that the informal, community-based early warning system and the measures adopted by the local municipality were the first line of defense for downstream communities. But the pre-position of the relief materials, and well coordinated mechanism across different levels of government did not take place (DPNet, 2023). Consequently, the dozens of people lost their lives and there was a huge loss of properties. Likewise, the relief and recovery process took longer time. Displaced families could not fell safe for the long time after disaster and their trust with the institutions eroded severely. In moments of crisis, people expect the state to act as a protector and guarantor of safety. When that expectation is unmet, trust collapses. As observed during field conversations in Melamchi even after the years of disaster, many residents spoke of their experience not as a "natural disaster," but as a "failure of disaster governance."

Kathmandu Urban Flood (September, 2024)

The second case of climate disaster selected for this study is the urban flood of Kathmandu that occurred in the region in the late September 2024. Just days before Nepal's major festive season, the Kathmandu Valley witnessed one of the most intense urban flooding events in its recorded history of more than five decades. Between 27 and 28 September, 2024 the Kathmandu flood let to widespread flooding, road blockages, disrupting transportation, agriculture, livelihoods and public safety. The Nepali Times (2024) reported that triggered by a large-scale low-pressure system over northern India and a secondary cyclonic disturbance over western India, the region was bombarded with over 700 mm of rainfall in just 30 hours; equivalent to nearly half of the valley's annual average.

The NDRRMA reported 246 deaths, 183 injuries and 18 missing while more than 17,000 people rescued on these two day (UNCT, Nepal, 2024). Another field report on the flood has mentioned over 10,000 families displaced, nearly 6,000 homes destroyed, and more than 13,000 partially damaged widespread landslides, debris flows, river overflows, and infrastructural destruction across central Nepal, in Bagmati Province with 249 deaths and 177 injuries officially recorded (KC, 2025). Vulnerable groups, especially low-income families and informal settlers along the marginal areas of the Valley such as in riverbank and flood prone areas, bore the brunt of the disaster. What should have been a time of celebration and community gathering turned into a harrowing episode of displacement, loss, and despair. Streets became rivers, homes turned to mud, and families scrambled for safety as waters surged through the valley with terrifying speed.

The government of Nepal had led all the humanitarian and early rescue and recovery efforts in response to the flood including national and international agencies. The initial efforts concentrated on search and rescue, life saving, damage assessments and the provision of emergency shelter. It was reported that during the flooding in the Valley, over 3,000 security personnel were deployed (Ghimire, 2024). There were rafts and also aerial rescues for the people stranded by the floods. Likewise, the rescue from boats and using ropes were done in the midst of the flood.

The Nepali Times (2024) had further reported:

> "Security personnel have rescued 2,103 people, nearly 1,500 of them in Kathmandu Valley from the flooded areas with the help of other rescue agencies. Nepal Army helicopters were used to pluck stranded people from rooftops and river banks in the Valley."

There is no doubt that the rescue operations conducted immediately after the flooding helped to safe hundreds of lives and huge amount of properties. However, the overall effectiveness of the disaster governance did not turn satisfactory to the public in responding the flood including early warning system and coordinated efforts to conduct early responses and recovery plan. Though the response and recovery operations in the Valley was far more easier than in the Melamchi and it was the center of the country and highly accessible geography to conduct rescue operations public in the wide range have criticized the authorities.

Residents across the Kathmandu and Lalitpur, particularly those in low-lying settlements along the Bagmati, Bishnumati, and Nakkhu rivers, reported that official evacuation orders came only after floodwaters had already entered their homes. One local trader from Lalitpur, who lost her shop near the Nakkhu River, voiced her frustration: *" I lost my shop in Lalitpur to the floods. We live near Nakkhu River because it's all we can afford. No body told me about the flood before."*

While understanding the causes of the huge losses and damages just in two days we need to consider the disaster in a holistic perspective. An expert in the field posted a photo of the flood in Bagmati and wrote, *"the flood havoc of 28 September 2024 is an extreme example of encroachment of the waterway of all rivers inside Kathmandu Valley, greatly damaging infrastructures and lives."*

Another expert in the field of urban planning put his thoughts in a personal conversation (with the author) that it was not only the rain but the causes of the catastrophe were multiple and overlapping including government's delayed warning system and the absence of anticipatory planning. A municipal engineer interviewed after the flood admitted that *"plans for drainage improvement and flood zoning have existed for years, but political instability and lack of coordination stalled everything."*

Likewise, the local activists and journalists were particularly vocal in highlighting institutional complicity in social media posts. One widely shared post of 29 September, 2024 by a social activist following the disaster read: *"Kathmandu is drowning again! 322mm rain in 24 hrs, worst since 1970. Why are we still building structures on Bagmati riverbanks? Govt needs to stop approving these projects!"*.

Another widely circulated post lamented: *"Bagmati River swallowed homes in south Kathmandu. Unplanned urban sprawl and sand mining made this worse. When will Nepal learn?"*

A sarcastic post by an widely known opinion maker of the Valley read: *"Many thanks to the Sand Mafias; this is happening right now. The 365 days of unrestrained, uncontrolled sand extraction are causing this erosion and flooding. I hope you have a peaceful life sand extractors and buyers."*

Local residents were indicating their fingers to the government institutions for the losses. During the field study in Lalitpur in the aftermath of the 2024 Kathmandu flood, a local schoolteacher reflected on how the disaster had reshaped the economic landscape of the community. Sitting beside the partially submerged fields along the Nakkhu River, he described how the flood had eroded both livelihoods and aspirations;

> "The people who came to the Valley looking for a better life, those who bought small plots near the river, built homes, started small farms or shops, are now left with nothing. They invested everything here, and in one night, they became poor again. There is no compensation that can ever cover these losses. The land has lost its value, and so have the opportunities."

He pointed toward the upstream of the Nakkhu river down from Ranibu in Lalitpur and continued:

> "And where is the government now? It came with cameras and officials during the rescue–but even that was delayed. This time, the state failed to rescue on time. I heard of a family nearby; they climbed to their roof and kept shouting for help as the floodwater surrounded them from all sides. No one came. They all died."

> He further added:

> "This is not just about one flood. It's the long-term consequence of land grabbing and the commodification of the land. The land mafia took control of the riverbanks and sold them to low-income families. And now, once again, it is the poor who are paying the price."

Such sentiments capture the wider erosion of trust between the public and state institutions; a trust that depends not merely on post-disaster rescue, but on credible, inclusive, and preventive governance. Although emergency responses were swift in the aftermath in many areas of the Valley, with temporary shelters established and financial relief distributed to some victims, the larger public discourse emphasized that these were reactive gestures. The government's reliance on "firefighting governance" revealed structural weaknesses long embedded in Kathmandu's urban development model. The digital expressions of grief and accusation form an emerging ethnography of distrust, show how citizens publicly negotiate their insecurity in real time. What emerges is a collective recognition that the flood was not merely a hydrological disaster but a failure of governance foresight.

Rasuwa GLOF (July, 2025)

The third and the final case of disaster to examine the people's trust in public institutions for this study is the Rasuwa GLOF of July 8, 2025, the most recent among the selected ones. The GLOF unfolded when a wall of water and debris tore through the Rasuwa district in northern Nepal, obliterating infrastructure, claiming lives, and severing one of the country's primary cross-border links with China. In just minutes, the Miteri Bridge, Nepal's vital economic artery with the north, was swept away. Within hours, customs yards, police outposts, hydropower plants, and entire stretches of highway had vanished and twenty individuals were confirmed missing from the customs area alone (Lord, 2025). Bodies were recovered far from the downstream, attesting to the force and reach of the flash flood.

Unlike previous water-induced disasters triggered by heavy rainfall, this flood occurred without warning; there had been no rain at all. Satellite data and hydrological readings confirmed a sudden spike in river levels at the Timure and Syafrubesi stations between 3:00 and 3:30 a.m., supporting what would later be confirmed: this was a GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood), triggered by the collapse of a supraglacial lake that had formed rapidly on the Chinese side of the Himalayas, specifically near the Puripu Glacier (Shrestha, 2025).

Experts termed this flood as a transboundary hydrometeorological disaster; a grim demonstration of how climate change does not adhere to national borders. The glacial lake that burst began forming as a meltwater pond in December 2024, swelling rapidly through June 2025 (Lord, 2025). Experts from ICIMOD, an international agency working in the Himalayan region since more than 30 years, noted that these supraglacial lakes, often unstable and formed on the surface of debris-covered glaciers, are notoriously hard to monitor and can collapse without external triggers such as earthquakes or heavy rain (NSO, 2025). Their increasing prevalence in the Himalayas is a direct consequence of warming temperatures and melting glaciers—global phenomena with deeply local consequences.

Local responder described the scene as "*a sudden wall of water that came without a sound or signal,"* and survivors recounted waking to the sound of exploding debris rather than any official alert. One local trader met in Kathmandu said: *"We didn't even know the flood was coming. It came from the mountains, not from the sky. Nobody warned us; not the government, not the border people. Everything was gone in minutes."*

Digital ethnography from the time amplifies this frustration. A post on 24 July, 2025 gave counted the immediate loss and damages, *"Impact: – 20+ dead (Nepali & Chinese) – Homes, bridges, hydropower plants (200 MW lost), damaged; Dry port & trucks swept away. Even the vital Nepal-China Friendship Bridge was destroyed."*

Another widely circulated post on 24 July, 2025 declared: *"Himalayan Alarm: Rasuwa Flood. Nepal's Rasuwa district faced a deadly flood; not from rain, but from a glacial lake outburst in Tibet. A wake-up call from the melting Himalayas."*

As one activist summarized in a viral post of the following day of the disaster: *"Experts urge: Cross-border early warning systems. Climate-resilient infrastructure. Urgent regional cooperation. The Rasuwa flood is a glimpse of what unchecked glacier melt can unleash."* Social media further reflected this frustration with reactive governance. One post called for immediate reform, *"the mountains are melting, but our governments are frozen."*

This testimony from the Rasuwa GLOF reveals a profound sense of abandonment and uncertainty among borderland residents, sharply shaking public confidence in the state's capacity to anticipate, coordinate, and govern climate-induced risks. These capacities; early warning, cross-border communication, and institutional preparedness remain largely underdeveloped within Nepal's existing disaster governance architecture. The erosion of trust is not confined to affected communities alone; people across the country expressed heightened insecurity as scientists, experts, and climate activists publicly questioned not only the state's reactive response but, more critically, its failure to foresee and prevent foreseeable harm. From a human security perspective, the Rasuwa GLOF demonstrates how environmental insecurity transcends political boundaries, while governance responsibility remains territorially constrained. In such contexts, public trust becomes fragile, as citizens confront the limits of state authority in managing transboundary climate risks, leaving communities exposed not only to natural hazards but also to institutional uncertainty and political inaction.

This study brings three distinct cases of disaster undertook in different geographic and socio-political context together to understand how government responses and public reactions shape trust in disaster governance and, ultimately, human security. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during and after disasters, media reports, and social media narratives, the study adopted a form of *multi-sited* and *digital ethnography*. This methodological approach is particularly significant for examining trust, as public confidence or distrust is often articulated not only in face-to-face encounters but also through mediated and online spaces during moments of crisis.

Across all three cases, a striking pattern emerges: while people consistently acknowledged and expressed trust in immediate rescue efforts; such as helicopter evacuations, security personnel risking their lives, and emergency extractions from rooftops or riverbanks, there was little evidence of public recognition of successful climate or disaster governance. It shows that trust is momentary and situational, attached to visible acts of rescue rather than to planned preparedness, institutional coordination, or long-term recovery strategies. It does not mean the is to place priority on the momentary and situational acts but people were completely missing or simply unaware about the planned prevention, early warning, risk communication, and rehabilitation strategies of the authorities.

In Melamchi, local-level coordination (with local government) and informal warning systems, particularly information shared by upstream residents, played a crucial role in saving lives. This highlights the relative strength of horizontal trust within communities compared to vertical trust in state institutions. However, ethnographic conversations conducted years after the disaster reveal a significant decline in trust over time. Delayed compensation, unresolved relocation, and prolonged displacement of affected families undermined any opportunity to rebuild confidence in governance.

The Kathmandu flood illustrates how trust deficits are produced in the unplanned and densely urbanized contexts. Despite the large-scale mobilization of security forces and rapid rescue operations, public reactions emphasized bureaucratic inertia, fragmented accountability, and the absence of preventive governance. The revocation of zoning regulations, unregulated riverbank encroachments, and outdated drainage infrastructure became focal points of public anger. Their voices; often excluded from urban planning, re-emerged powerfully through social media and personal testimonies, expressing loss, frustration, and a profound sense of abandonment. The Rasuwa GLOF extended the crisis of trust beyond national boundaries. The lack of transboundary data sharing and early warning mechanisms with China exposed the limitations of Nepal's domestically oriented disaster governance architecture. In this case, trust erosion was not only vertical (citizens–state) or horizontal (among domestic stakeholders) but also external, raising doubts about the state's capacity to protect citizens in a shared and interdependent Himalayan ecology.

Taken together, these cases support the hypothesis that public expressions of distrust intensify during and after disasters, particularly when institutions appear reactive, opaque, and uncoordinated. Trust, as revealed through ethnographic evidence, is not an abstract attitude but a lived and performative relationship which is built through credible warnings, transparent and participatory decision-making, and equitable recovery, and eroded through delay, silence, exclusion and politicization.

Conclusion

The three selected disaster cases (Melamchi, Kathmandu, and Rasuwa) demonstrate that climate disasters in Nepal are not solely environmental events but deeply political and institutional moments that test the foundations of public trust and human security. Despite differences in scale, geography, and triggers, all three disasters expose a shared governance pattern characterized by reactive responses, fragmented coordination, and limited anticipatory capacity. These structural weaknesses have cumulative effects, gradually transforming episodic crises into enduring conditions of insecurity.

A key conclusion of this study is that human insecurity in Nepal's climate context is produced as much by governance failures as by environmental hazards. People no longer assess the state only by its ability to deliver relief, but by its willingness and capacity to anticipate risk, communicate honestly, and act consistently across all phases of disaster management. Trust, in this sense, emerges as both an outcome of governance and a prerequisite for effective disaster response. The ethnographic and digital narratives analyzed in this paper further reveal that trust is unevenly distributed. While rescue personnel often retain public respect, institutions responsible for planning, regulation, and recovery face growing skepticism. This disjuncture suggests that disaster governance exclude people or remains no more transparent in various phases of disaster preparedness. It also makes skeptical as if it remains narrowly focused on emergency response, while neglecting preparedness, prevention, and long-term rehabilitation, the very domains where trust is built or lost.

By triangulating local testimonies, institutional responses, and mediated public discourse, this paper contributes to disaster governance scholarship by foregrounding public trust as a central dimension of human security. It argues that rebuilding trust requires a transformation of governance from centralized and reactive control toward anticipatory, participatory, and solidaristic practices that recognize communities not merely as victims, but as agents of resilience. Without such a shift, climate disasters will continue to erode not only lives and livelihoods, but also the fragile social contract between citizens and the state in Nepal's mountain regions.

Disclosure Statement

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Protecting Human Rights across Borders: Inter-National Human Rights Institutions Collaboration in the Protection and Promotion of Rights of the Migrant Workers

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Abstract

This paper employs a qualitative research approach based on secondary sources, explores the emerging role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrant workers. National Human Rights Commission of Nepal and the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar signed their first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 16 November 2015. The study investigates how inter-NHRI collaboration facilitates the protection of migrant workers' rights across borders. The paper addresses the research question: Do NHRIs have transborder jurisdiction, and how has the collaboration between the NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar contributed to the protection and promotion of migrant workers' rights? The study demonstrates that such partnerships are vital for bridging national limitations in human rights protection, particularly in contexts where labor migration intersects with state responsibility beyond borders. The article also reviews international and regional practices and explores how NHRIs can act as effective agents of cross-border human rights accountability, especially when supported by formal agreements, shared monitoring mechanisms, and collaborative advocacy.

Introduction

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) established as an independent and autonomous state institutions by the statutes or the Constitution as an oversight agency and mandated for the protection, promotion and fulfilment of human rights (UN General Assembly, 2025). NHRIs include the ombudsperson, human rights commissions and established in compliance with the United Nations Paris Principles (United Nations, 1993). NHRIs play crucial roles for the protection of individual and collective rights set forth in the national and international human rights instruments. NHRCN is constitutionally mandated to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

This article examines the collaboration strategy especially through the signing of MoU among NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar for the better protection of rights of the Nepali migrant workers. NHRCN as an NHRI of Nepal concluded MoU with the NHRCQ for collaborative working to ensure protection of rights of the migrant workers and their families. Qatar is one of the major destination countries of Nepali migrant workers. The article also explores the activities concluded by the NHRIs of Qatar and Nepal individually and jointly for the protection and promotion of rights of the Nepali migrant workers. For this it has one research question: Do NHRIs have transborder jurisdiction and how has the collaboration among the NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar particularly through the signing of MoU contributed for safeguarding the rights of Nepali workers in Qatar? With this, the study aims to analyze the collaborative framework established through the MoU between the NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar for the protection of migrant workers' rights.

The NHRCN established formal relationship with NHRCQ on 16 November, 2015 by signing the MoU to enhance the protection of the rights of Nepali migrant workers. Similarly, another MoU has been signed second time for better protection of rights of migrant workers on 8th June, 2023 at Kathmandu. Following this, the NHRCQ has established a new community office at its headquarters specifically dedicated to serving Nepali communities. The community office is functioning through a system of volunteer representatives who have been nominated by embassies and community organizations. The Committee is responsible for receiving complaints and petitions from citizens and residents that include potential human rights violations and abuses.

Similarly, the Committee is also providing free legal consultation and advocacy for some cases of vulnerable groups, including workers, before the competent courts, through law firms collaborating with the Committee. Nepali workers now can file complaints at the

Human Rights Committee of Qatar regarding human rights violations in Nepali language. The Committee has also established the subcommittee on Labour Dispute Settlement and is mandated to resolve individual disputes. The number of complaints submitted by the Nepali nationalities to the National Human Rights Committee Qatar since the conclusion of MoU (2015 to 2024) is 1,876 which is a significant number. The data of resolution of the complaints is not available.

Moreover, within the NHRC Qatar, the Department of Legal Affairs is authorized to receive complaints related to rights violation and seeks solution through reconciliation and mediation. NHRC Qatar has a dedicated desk for receiving Nepali workers' complaints, accepting submissions in Nepali language via fax, 24/7 hotline, email, or in-person at community offices. These offices serve African, Indian, Nepali, and Filipino communities, bridging communication between petitioners and the NHRCQ.

Similarly, the National Human Rights Committee in Qatar aiming to promote and protect the rights of workers has published a comprehensive workers' rights handbook in simple Nepali language. In addition to this, NHRCQ also time and again organises remote educational symposium on the legislative developments for the benefit of the Nepali community.

The article begins by examining the international standards on the establishment of NHRIs and the history of formal relationship between constitutionally constituted body NHRC Nepal and the statutorily constituted body NHRC Qatar. It then analyses the NHRIs enabling laws and broader implication for the protection of human rights across borders emphasizing the value of constitutional and legal mandates. But this article does not discuss the voluntary, non-binding and informal state-led consultative processes such as Colombo Process and Abu Dhabi Dialogue. This state led processes are related to engaging seven Asian countries of labour destination and eleven countries of origin to address development in temporary labour mobility in Asia. To foreground the functional role of NHRIs, this does not analyse the bilateral agreement concluded by the governments of Nepal and Qatar.

Review of Literature

The responsibility of NHRIs in the promotion and protection of rights, both in their respective countries and in the broader international context has been explored in various documents (UN General Assembly, 1993) including in the scholarly written articles. NHRIs act as key bridging institutions between governments, civil society, and international human rights mechanisms (UN General Assembly, 1993). They are also contributing to accountability, promoting, preventing and protecting human rights and providing access to justice in the cross-border context (UN General Assembly, 1993). In this setting, the Paris Principles (United Nations, 1993) provide the responsibilities to NHRIs engaging with the international human rights system.

> The NHRIs should cooperate with the United Nations and any other organization in the United Nations system, the regional institutions and the national institutions of other countries that are competent in the areas of the protection and promotion of human rights (UNGA, 1993:2).

Similarly, Schuller and Utlu (2014, p.1) presents NHRIs as network and states the transnational features of business and the national character of NHRIs. The article spells out the mandate of NHRIs to collaborate for the business-related human rights, the necessity of a transnational NHRI strategy and current NHRIs network cooperation offering network models. The article provides a model for a wide-ranging network to the needs of NHRIs as well as to the external stakeholders to address the three dimensions: understanding, legitimacy and the system to access to resources (Schuller and Utlu, 2014, p.17).

Glušac (2016) explores the NHRIs' crucial role in safeguarding refugee and migrant rights within transit countries. This research, originally presented at Belgrade University's 3rd International Academic Conference on Human Security, examines how these institutions protect vulnerable populations during their journeys. Glušac (2016, pp. 6-9) further claims that:

> NHRIs can address the refugee crisis through complaint handling, investigations, legislative initiatives, torture prevention, ensuring asylum access, and cross-border cooperation. The scholar also highlights "the Belgrade Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Refugees and Migrants" as an outcome document of the conference. Considering Torture as a serious human rights violation, the NHRIs especially operate as National Preventive Mechanism for Torture (NPM) play vital role in preventing any form of ill treatment and torture. He further provides the example of Serbian National Human Rights Institution, known as the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman), which safeguards the rights of all individuals within Serbia's territory, including both Serbian nationals and foreign nationals such as Syrians and Iraqis.

Moreover, NHRIs of the European region adopted the Declaration aiming to protect and promote the Rights of the Refugees and Migrants in 2015 and made 9 points commitments for the protection of rights of refugees and migrants. The Declaration

(International Ombudsman Institute, 2015, p.3) recognizes the need of protecting migrants and encourages the NHRIs to lodge complaints in case of violation of rights and monitor the rights situation of migrants in collaboration with relevant human rights mechanisms ((International Ombudsman Institute, 2015, pp 3-4).

Middleton (2018) examines the role of NHRIs and international civil society in pursuing Extraterritorial Obligation (ETOs) cases in Southeast Asia to investigate human rights threatened by cross-border investment projects. The paper posits that the state's obligation to protect human rights beyond borders also known as extraterritorial obligation. Middleton (2018, p.2) further argues that the emergence of ETOs in Southeast Asia, and its future potential, depends upon a productive relationship between NHRIs and INGOs' networks. This article examines decision-making politics and political authority in transboundary river hydropower projects, drawing on Hensengerth's theoretical framework. The research methodology employs in-depth interviews and participatory observation (Middleton, 2018, p. 3) with community representatives, civil society organizations, and National Human Rights Institutions from Malaysia, Thailand and Laos, as well as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

Some scholars make argument on the authority of NHRIs to monitor the rights violation cases in the extraterritorial jurisdiction. Renshaw and Fitzpatrick (2021) argues that robust and independent human rights institutions in the states are the most effective defense mechanisms on rights violations. To claim this, they have investigated the role played by the Asia Pacific Forum of NHRIs (regional network of NHRIs in the Asia Pacific Region) for the promotion of international human rights standards and norms across the Asia Pacific region. Through the extensive fieldwork in Fiji, Samoa, New Zeland, Nepal, India, including other NHRIs of the region, they have concluded that in the region that still lacks on overarching human rights institutions. The network of NHRIs is a unique and inspired response to mitigate the challenges of human rights governance in this century.

ERDEM TÜRKELLİ, Krajewski and Vandenhole (2022) reviews the 'human rights turn' with regard to regulation of transnational migration. This also examines how international refugee law and human rights litigation have shaped early responses to transnational migration control. The author highlights the historical significance of extraterritorial obligations (ETOs) in migration contexts, particularly as international human rights institutions face mounting political pressure to adopt more restrictive stances on refugee and migrant cases. Given these challenges, the author suggests that practitioners and scholars advocating for ETO protection of migrants and refugees should critically reassess their current strategies. The article specifically argues for holding sponsoring states accountable for their role in human rights violations committed by partner states. The conclusion presents two complementary approaches designed to reframe and redirect extraterritorial human rights claims within transnational migration control frameworks, offering new pathways for protecting migrant and refugee rights despite increasing institutional resistance.

Regarding migrant workers' rights, Kämpf (2018) analyses the National Human Rights Institutions' work on human rights of migrants. The result of this study confirms that NHRIs effectively bridge gaps between national and international levels, as well as between individual and structural human rights protection. The research reveals that most NHRIs recognize potential for improving their work on migrants' rights, particularly through enhanced collaboration and information sharing among themselves and with regional/international organizations. They prioritize joint monitoring of cross-border situations and cooperative approaches to individual cases. The analysis draws from a global NHRI survey conducted in summer 2018, encompassing all world regions represented in GANHRI's regional networks: Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe. While all these regions include countries serving as migrant origins, transit points, and destinations, the proportional mix of these roles varies significantly across different regions, reflecting diverse migration patterns and challenges worldwide.

Chubb and Roberts Lyer (2024) analyses the transnational human rights violation and proposes a new local mechanism that directly address the rights violation. This article analyzes how digital-age surveillance, coercion, and censorship combine and reinforce each other across borders. It proposes that states create Transnational Rights Protection Offices (TRPOs) to help victims file complaints, receive support, monitor violations, and develop evidence-based policy recommendations to fulfill their protective obligations. The authors propose necessary arrangement of transnational rights protection office to address this. They also provide their views that TRPO should be established as a specialized unit as a part of the formal mandate of each country's NHRI.

Giri (2022) states the protectional and promotional role of NHRC Nepal. The article aims to anslyse the mandate and contribution of the NHRCN for the protection and promotion of human rights. This also assesses the constitutional and legal mandates including inquiring and investigating based on complaints as well as the labour exploitation of foreign migrant workers. The author (p. 150) has employed both the analytical and descriptive research approaches. Secondary data were collected form the different publications of NHRCN.

Similarly, (NHRCN, 2022), analyses the rights situation of Nepali migrant workers. This report examines widespread violations of migrant workers' rights in foreign employment, evaluating their current situation and advocating for better protection and promotion of these rights. It analyzes migration patterns, levels, and trends for overseas work, while identifying recruitment irregularities, governance issues, justice barriers, women's migration restrictions, and international migration's effects on children. The study highlights key areas where migrant workers face rights violations and calls for improved safeguards (NHRCN, 2022). This report analyzes primary and secondary data from 2019-2022, serving as an essential reference that encompasses historical data, events, narratives, decisions, laws, and policies from earlier periods.

NHRIs can play a crucial role in safeguarding the rights of migrant workers in the domestic arena as well as in the destination countries even through international collaboration. Within their own jurisdictions, NHRIs monitor compliance with human rights standards and investigate violations. Similarly, they advocate for policy reforms for the protection of migrant workers from exploitation, discrimination, and abuse. Their significance is amplified through collaborative partnerships with NHRIs in destination countries, creating a transnational network of protection that spans the entire migration journey. Thus, the research focuses on cross-border collaboration that enables the sharing of information, best practices, and coordinated responses to human rights violations through the conclusion of bilateral agreements and creating complaint monitoring mechanisms. By working together, NHRIs in origin, transit and destination countries can address issues such as wage theft, forced labor, and denial of basic services and can ensure migrant workers receive constant protection.

Trends and Patterns

Kämpf (2018) claims that most of the NHRIs considered working on migrants' rights is a part of their mandate. NHRIs frequently collaborate with each other at both regional and global levels to strengthen human rights protection and promotion. This collaboration takes various forms, including sharing best practices, coordinating efforts in specific thematic areas, and engaging in joint advocacy and capacity building initiatives. NHRIs should actively collaborate with Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Global Alliance of NHRIs, regional networks, other NHRIs, and both international and national

NGOs and civil society groups when participating in the international human rights framework to maximize their effectiveness and impact (GANHRI, 2018).

The Paris Principles require national human rights institutions to collaborate with UN bodies, other UN system organizations, regional institutions, and national human rights institutions from other countries in promoting and protecting human rights. This establishes a framework for international cooperation among human rights institutions at various levels. The principles require the NHRIs to collaborate with the cross country NHRIs for the protection and promotion of human rights (UN General Assembly, 1993).

Inter-NHRIs Collaboration Initiatives by NHRC Nepal

NHRC Nepal has taken initiatives to inter NHRIs collaboration by concluding the "Memorandum of Understanding" on the rights of Migrant workers between the NHRC Nepal and Korea on 27th December, 2010 (NHRCN, 2012).

Similarly, the NHRCN and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia also called SUHAKAM have a Memorandum of Understanding focused on protecting the migrant workers' rights. This MoU, initially signed in 2019 extended for a year and renewed in 2022, facilitates collaboration between the two commissions to address issues faced by Nepali migrant workers in Malaysia and vice versa.

History of Formal Collaboration Between NHRIs Nepal and Qatar

The National Human Rights Commission of Nepal established a formal relationship with NHRC Qatar on 16 November, 2015 by signing the MoU to enhance the protection of the rights of Nepali migrant workers. Both the NHRCN later developed the plan to activate the MoU and signed on 18 December, 2016 in Kathmandu-Nepal (NHRC Qatar, 2020). This MoU aimed at protecting the Nepali migrant workers in Qatar. The MoU was focused on the exchange of mutual assistance to protect the rights of Nepali migrant workers. The tenure was four years and could be renewed through mutual consent (CESLAM, 2015).

This MoU focuses on working in preventing trafficking in persons and forced labour in Qatar and Nepal. The tools for preventions are educating workers, diplomatic missions, immigration officials and relevant ministries to identify and address forced labour and trafficking within labour migration. The NHRIs also make effort for rescue, repatriation, redress and restitution in both countries (NHRCQ, 2015).

To execute this MoU, the activation plan was also signed in 2016 and was the period of the newly introduced labour law in Qatar. The plan includes the 11-points and consists of assigning a focal person in both human rights' institutions for the exchange of information, providing training to foreign employment agencies and providing legal support to the Nepali workers in Qatar and handling the grievances of the Nepali workers in Qatar (NHRCN & NHRCQ, 2016).

Moreover, the activation plan includes building capacity among officials from Qatar's Labour and Interior Ministries and Nepal's relevant ministry. This cooperation focuses on researching Nepali migrant worker issues related to professional security and health, while also enabling employee facilitation for the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and other related initiatives (NHRCN & NHRCQ, 2016). This MoU and activation plan were expired in November 2019.

Similarly, another MoU has been signed second time between the NHRCN and the NHRCQ for better protection of rights of migrant workers on 8th June, 2023 at Kathmandu. This also opened up the avenue to file a complaint in the Committee in case of violation of rights of Nepali workers working in Qatar. Key components of the MoU include enhanced cross-country cooperation, information exchange on migrant worker complaints, and support for grievance hearings. The MoU also outlines the provisions for training on migrant worker rights, legal assistance, and cooperation on issues of human rights violations (NHRCN & NHRCQ, 2023).

If the rights of Nepali workers are violated in Qatar, complaints can be launched in Nepali language and for this Nepali desk is set up at NHRCQ. The Committee has arranged monitoring the various companies where Nepali workers are there. This also aims to safeguard the rights of Nepali people in Qatar and to seek solution to the problems of the workers by informing the Qatar government.

Transnational Advocacy Network Theory

Transnational Advocacy Network Theory provides a framework for understanding how non-state actors like Non-Governmental Organizations or oversighting agency like NHRIs collaborate across borders to promote and protect the rights of migrant workers. Transnational Advocacy Network Theory was conceptualized by Keck and Sikkink (1998). According to them, transnational advocacy networks are collective action groups that operate internationally, mobilizing resources and information to advance principled causes like labor's human rights.

This theory describes a network of activists primarily united and motivated by shared principles or values (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). These networks blur the traditional boundaries between domestic and international politics by forging ties among state, CSOs, and intergovernmental agencies. This theory also enables new actors to access international resources, multiply advocacy, and foster the union of social and cultural norms necessary for regional and global integration (Keck & Sikkink, 1999).

Baek (2011) explores the role of NHRIs and Regional Human Rights Institutions in the Asian human rights context. According to him Transnational Advocacy Networks facilitate dialogue, amplify marginalized voices, and pressure governments to comply with international human rights standards for migrant workers. Schmitz (2018) argues that networks build coalitions between NHRIs for promoting coordinated and sustained campaigns for promotion and protection of labor rights. The process does not disrupt state sovereignty but also democratizes access to global governance, enabling grassroots actors to shape international norms and policy outcomes.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, involving the rigorous review of literature to critically examine the transnational collaboration among the NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar in the protection of rights of Nepali migrant workers. The research is primarily based on secondary sources, using both documentary review and content analysis to gather relevant information.

The study systematically reviews official websites of the NHRCN and NHRCQ along with their policy documents, published reports and other relevant materials. Similarly, Key documents such as the signed MoUs, activation plan, annual and thematic reports, press releases, speech delivered by the Chairperson and Commissioners as well as the official communications from both the NHRIs are studied and analyzed.

In addition to this, reports and guidelines from the United Nations, GANHRIs, and other international organizations working on labor migration and human rights are also consulted. Relevant academic literature and examples from NHRIs are reviewed to provide comparative insights. The Paris Principles, 1993, the Constitution of Nepal and the NHRCN Act, 2012, the Decree Law No. (38) of 2002 of Qatar were also reviewed and analyzed.

The study uses thematic analysis to identify patterns, successes, gaps, and lessons learned from the collaborative efforts. Thematic codes are developed inductively from the data, enabling a nuanced understanding of both institutional practices and transnational cooperation. Data triangulation is employed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings by cross-verifying information from multiple sources. This triangulation includes cross checking between international guidelines, institutional reports, and legal documents to ensure consistency and credibility.

Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis identified the following patterns, successes, gaps, and lessons learned through the collaborative efforts based on the MoU between the NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar. The findings are discussed below with reference to institutional collaboration, accountability mechanisms, and the protection of migrant workers' rights.

Mandates of the NHRC Qatar and NHRC Nepal

National Human Rights Committee, Qatar was established as a statutory body and was reorganized by Decree Law No. (17) of 2010 (NHRC Qatar, 2025). The Decree Law defines the objectives and powers of the Committee. The Committee can receive and investigates the complaints from individuals and groups. Similarly, it coordinates with the competent authorities to take necessary actions and recommend suitable means to deal with such violation (NHRC Qatar, 2025). Furthermore, the Committee also works to prevent such rights violation through monitoring rights situation, prepares and submits reports to the council of ministers.

Similarly, Nepal's Rights Commission, established as an independent statutory body in 2000, has been elevated to a constitutional body in 2007. Article 249 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015) mandates the Commission to ensure protection and promotion of human rights. The Constitution and the NHRCN Act provides the Commission to ensure the respect, promotion and protection of human rights. The Commission is competent to launch inquiries and investigations into alleged human rights violations, and can recommend legal or departmental action against human rights violators (Government of Nepal, 2012).

Both the NHRCQ and NHRCN were established following a 1991 United Nations-facilitated assembly of national institution representatives in Paris. The meeting formulated the Paris Principles–a comprehensive framework governing the status, mandate, and functioning of national human rights bodies. These principles were subsequently formally recognized by the international community through two landmark United Nations resolutions (UN General Assembly, 1993), and have since served as the foundational benchmark for the creation and operation of National Human Rights Institutions worldwide. Reflecting their adherence to these internationally recognized standards, both the NHRCQ and NHRCN have demonstrated full compliance with the Paris Principles and have been "A" status accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (UN General Assembly, 1993).

Scope of the Memorandum of Understanding

Both the MoU concluded in 2015 and 2023 have similar scope. This provides the areas of exchange of information concerning complaints procedure, (NHRCN & NHRCQ, 2023) mutual invitation to the conferences, meetings, symposium, identification of victims of human trafficking and forced labour (NHRCN & NHRCQ, 2016) for the protection of human rights of Nepali workers. The MoU mentions that complaint and grievance hearing will be supported for the protection of migrant workers. It also states that both countries will exchange mutual information and cooperate on issues of human rights violation and freedom of their citizens. This also include conducting training for workers, employers and managers, (NHRCQ, 2015) labour unions and diplomatic missions on migrant workers' rights, existing laws, international treaties and ILO labour conventions as well as providing legal assistance to migrant workers (NHRCN, 2023).

Key Achievements

The discussion further exemplifies the key achievements of MoU for establishing the community offices and setting complaints handling mechanism. The achievements are elaborated below in detail.

Establishment of Community Office

The National Human Rights Committee of Qatar has established new community offices at its headquarters specifically dedicated to serving Nepali communities and other migrant worker populations (NHRC Qatar, n.d.) This initiative represents a significant step forward in the NHRCQ's commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, with particular emphasis on workers' rights and the unique challenges faced by foreign laborers in Qatar.

The office opened after the MoU is designed to serve as a vital communication link between the NHRCQ and migrant communities, facilitating better access to human rights services and support. The office aims to address common barriers that prevent workers from accessing available services, including working hour constraints, transportation costs, language difficulties, legal fees, and fear of filing complaints (NHRC Qatar, n.d.). By establishing a permanent physical presence, the NHRCQ seeks to create a more accessible pathway for workers to report concerns, seek assistance, and receive follow-up on their cases.

The community offices are functioning through a system of volunteer representatives who have been nominated by embassies and community organizations. These representatives serve as communication channels between their respective communities and the NHRCQ, helping to identify problems faced by community members and proposing practical solutions (NHRC Qatar, 2015). The offices are intended to raise awareness about human rights within Qatar's diverse migrant worker population and ensure that the voices of these communities are heard and addressed effectively (NHRC Qatar, 2015).

This initiative covers multiple nationalities including Nepal, India, Egypt, and the Philippines, with plans for expansion to include additional communities in the future (Committee, 2015). For the Nepali community specifically, this development is particularly significant given that approximately 400,000 Nepali workers are working in Qatar. The office represents a commitment to ongoing engagement with migrant communities and reflects the NHRCQ's recognition of the important contributions these workers make to Qatar's development (NHRC Qatar, 2015)

Complaint Mechanism and Situation Monitoring

The Committee is responsible for receiving complaints and petitions from citizens and residents that include potential human rights violations and abuses. The statistics for 2024 show that the number of complaints reached 1,853, including those related to workers and domestic workers, which the Committee investigated, verified, and coordinated with relevant authorities for their resolution (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

There are support services provided by the Committee in exercising the complaint handling mandate, including receiving reports and urgent calls through the Committee's hotlines in five languages (Arabic, English, Urdu - which covers Indian, Nepali, and Sri Lankan languages - in addition to Filipino and Swahili), regarding violations at workplaces or companies (NHRC Qatar, 2025). This also includes dispatching monitoring staff to assess situations, verify their validity, investigate their causes and circumstances, and submit detailed reports with appropriate recommendations to relevant authorities for their resolution.

Similarly, the Committee is also providing free legal consultation and advocacy for some cases of vulnerable groups, including workers, before the competent courts, through law firms collaborating with the Committee. It also provides financial support to some complainants and petitioners with limited income, including workers and vulnerable groups, in coordination with charitable associations (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

Nepali workers can file complaints at the Human Rights Committee of Qatar regarding human rights violations in Nepali language, which will be addressed by the committee. NHRIs can collaborate and refer cases to other NHRIs, either within their region or internationally, based on jurisdictional and expertise considerations. The cases can also be launched at NHRCN in relation to rights violation in Qatar and are referred to the NHRCQ for the monitoring and investigation of the cases (NHRC Qatar, 2019).

As a permanent and structured mechanism for receiving and dealing with citizens and residents' complaints, the Committee created a 24/7 hotline to receive complaints in several languages. In addition to receiving the complainants at the Committee's headquarters and providing free legal advice and opening files to document and deal with cases, the Committee concluded an agreement with a group of 30 lawyers to provide free consultations and legal representation before the competent court for labor cases. (NHRC Qatar, 2019). To make it accessible to all stakeholder groups, the Committee has been providing adequate support for the people facing particular barriers to access the remedial mechanisms. the Committee has also launched offices for the African, Indian, Pakistani, Indonesian and Nepali communities to enable further access. For this, it has a clear procedure with specified timeframe for each stage. It would take one week to take action with regard to a complaint, and as for follow-up with government bodies, it would not take more than one month (NHRC Qatar, 2019).

In addition to this, the Committee has formed a permanent working group to promote a culture of human rights, it is mandated to make recommendations to the state to implement international agreements and review relevant legislation. Moreover, Legal Department constitutes the backbone of the Committee, given its pivotal role in reviewing legal texts and handling complaints (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

Qatar government has undertaken major reforms to protect and promote workers' rights. The National Human Rights Committee has important role in providing recommendations to relevant state authorities. Receiving workers' petitions, assisting them in finding solutions in collaboration with relevant authorities, and raising workers' awareness of their rights through campaigns, training courses, and other awareness-raising activities are significant functions of the Committee (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

NHRC Qatar (2025) illustrates that the Committee has established the Labour Dispute Settlement Committee, which is responsible for resolving individual disputes arising from the application of the Labour Law or the employment contract. The Committee reduced the burden of the courts, improved the right to litigation, and strengthened for the protection of workers' rights (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

Similarly, Qatar has established Workers' Support and Insurance Fund. This fund provides the necessary protection for workers and enabled them to receive their financial dues without having to wait for their employers in the event of payment difficulties. The Committee also monitors this. In addition, the Committee provides free legal advices to workers through cooperation with approximately 30 law firms in Qatar (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

The Committee generally categorized the complaints launched at NHRCQ as legal opinion, provision of financial assistance, provision of legal assistance, rights of most vulnerable groups, civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights including the labour rights (NHRC Qatar, n.d.). The following table shows the numbers of complaints submitted to the National Human Rights Committee Qatar from 2015 to 2024 by Nepali people.

Table 1

Complaints Registered at NHRCQ by Nepali Citizens

S.N.	Year	Total No. of Complaints Received	Complaints Received from Nepali Citizens
1.	2015	1609	61
2.	2016	3231	249
3.	2017	6409	197
4.	2018	2118	118
5.	2019	2808	509
6.	2020	2815	345
7.	2021	2427	213
8.	2022	2320	1
9.	2023	1944	18
10.	2024	1853	165

Source: Report on the Human Rights Situation in the State of Qatar 2015 to 2024 by NHRCQ.

Analysis of the data from the NHRCQ, there are notable patterns in complaints filed by Nepali nationals over the decade from 2015-2024. The most striking trend is the dramatic peak in 2019, when complaints from Nepali nationals reached 509 cases - representing approximately 18% of all complaints that year, which was the highest proportion throughout the entire period. The years immediately surrounding this peak (2018-2021) consistently showed elevated complaint levels, with 118, 509, 345, and 213 complaints respectively.

However, the data reveals a concerning downfall in reported complaints from Nepali nationals in recent years, dropping precipitously from 213 in 2021 to just 1 complaint in 2022 and 18 in 2023. This dramatic decrease is mysterious given that the total volume of complaints to NHRCQ remained relatively stable during this period (around 1,800-2,400 annually). This disproportionate decline shows the need of pre-departure orientation for Nepali workers, more effective grievance mechanisms through Nepali diplomatic channels, or conversely, removing potential barriers preventing Nepali workers from accessing the NHRCQ complaint system.

The establishment of a complaints receiving mechanism at the National Human Rights Committee Qatar represents a significant development in providing Nepali migrant workers with formal channels to voice their grievances, seek redress and a critical step in addressing labor rights violations–the unevenness in complaint numbers suggests several underlying dynamics worth examining. This irregularity could reflect various factors: fluctuations in worker awareness about the mechanism's existence, fear of retaliation, variations in the intensity of labor rights violations across different time periods or sectors, or simply gaps in outreach efforts to inform workers of their rights. The uneven complaint pattern may also indicate that many workers remain reluctant to come forward due to concerns about job security, deportation, or lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the redress process. Despite these challenges, the mere existence of such a mechanism marks progress from previous situations where workers had no formal avenue for complaints. Moving forward, addressing the unevenness in complaints will require sustained efforts in worker education, ensuring confidentiality and protection for complainants, and demonstrating tangible outcomes that build trust in the system among the Nepali migrant worker community.

Case Settlement through Reconciliation

Within the NHRCQ, the Department of Legal Affairs is mandated to receive petitions and complaints related to rights violation. NHRC Qatar (2016) mentions that the NHRCQ also conducts 2 annual campaigns to spread the culture of human rights in all areas including health, education and workers' rights. People can file complaints through Fax, hotline, e-mail or by physically presenting in communities' offices for the African, Indian, Nepali, Filipino which facilitate means of communication between the NHRCQ and petitioners (NHRC Qatar, 2016).

The Legal Department contains the Reception and Registration Department, noting that this department is concerned with receiving cases with the Committee to fill out the form related to the case but refer it to the competent legal officer in the Investigations

Department to study the matter and take the necessary action in it. In addition to the community offices (Nepali, Finnish, Indian and African) that provide assistance to case owners in filling out the application form and fulfilling the application requirements, as well as providing translation work for cases (NHRC Qatar, 2018).

In addition to the Investigations and Legal Consultations Department verifies cases and ascertains the extent to which the applicant has been harmed in his legally guaranteed rights. This then takes the necessary action in terms of summoning the other party and interrogating him in the matter. The department also seeks possibility of settlement and reconciliation between the two parties. Communicating with the competent authority whether reconciliation is possible or not, this can refer to the competent court, or provide legal assistance, or carries out field visit by the Investigations and Consultations Section (NHRC Qatar, 2018).

Exchange of Information

The MoU ensures that the NHRCN and the NHRCQ will exchange information related to complaints, legislative procedures, and other relevant information concerning migrant workers.

The NHRCQ holds consultative meetings with the coordinators of its community offices. In 2025 February, NHRCQ held a consultative meeting representing the African, Indian, Nepali, and Filipino communities. The meeting entitled "Qatar's Work Environment: A Review of 2024 and Outlook for 2025," was held at the NHRC headquarters (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

During the discussion, community office coordinators highlighted the significant progress in Qatar's work environment throughout 2024. They commended the comprehensive legislative reforms that have enhanced labor rights, ensured better worker protection, and improved productivity. These reforms included updates to labor laws, the introduction of flexible work systems in the public sector, and the implementation of effective regulations in the private sector (NHRC Qatar, 2025).

Nepali Desk at NHRC Qatar

The NHRC of Qatar has established a dedicated desk to handle complaints related to Nepali workers in Qatar, and complaints can be filed in the Nepali language. In 2020 April, the NHRCQ launched a dedicated hotline (8002222) as part of its precautionary measures to combat the spread of corona virus (COVID-19), offering integrated and continuous support services. The hotline is accessible in five languages such as Arabic, English, Urdu, Filipino, and Swahili catering to a diverse population, including Indian, Nepali, and Sri Lankan communities, ensuring wide-reaching support during the pandemic (NHRC Qatar, 2020).

Workers' Rights Education

The MoU also includes provisions for training programs for workers, employers, and relevant stakeholders on migrant workers' rights, relevant laws, and international conventions. Similarly, the National Human Rights Committee in Qatar aiming to promote and protect the rights of workers has published a comprehensive workers' rights handbook in simple Nepali language. This book is one of the most important publications of the Committee in raising awareness of the rights and duties of the workers. It was first published in 2009 in seven languages: Arabic, English, Nepali, Filipino, Indonesian, Urdu and Tamil (NHRC Qatar, 2018). The book is divided in 13 chapters and outlines the legal framework governing labor rights in Qatar, including recruitment procedures, rights and obligations of workers, occupational health and safety, social welfare, work places injuries and compensation, access to justice, complaint procedure of the NHRC Qatar and legal recourse in cases of labor rights violations. Key issues addressed include trafficking, forced labor, termination during vacations, and the processes for handling complaints and grievances (NHRC Qatar, 2018).

In addition to this, the book seeks to enhance the Nepali workers knowledge of what contributes to improving all conditions associated with works. Thus, this book addresses legal questions about living and working in Qatar in simple, accessible language, free from complex terminology. It provides all essential information covering both pre-departure preparation and post-arrival guidance, helping readers navigate residency and employment matters with clarity and confidence (NHRC Qatar, 2018).

An Educational Symposium

The NHRCQ, in October 2020, in coordination with the NHRC Nepal, organized a remote educational symposium on the then legislative developments for the benefit of the Nepali community. The symposium particularly focused on the revisions related to Law No. (17) of 2020 setting the minimum wages for employees and domestic workers. In addition to Decree-Law No. (19) of 2020 amending the provisions of Law No. (21) of 2015 "Regulating the Entry, Exit and Residence of Expatriates" with the aim of raising awareness of the right and protection of the Nepali community (NHRC Qatar, 2020). The program sought to clarify the worker-employer contractual relationship in response to recent legal changes, particularly concerning minimum wage. It aimed to highlight the key benefits of the legislative amendments while raising awareness of the objectives outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding between the NHRC Qatar and NHRC Nepal (NHRC Qatar, 2020).

Conclusion

The NHRCN and NHRCQ have a strong collaborative relationship, particularly focused on protecting the rights of Nepali migrant workers in Qatar. This collaboration is formalized through MoU and activation plan. The functions involve complaints handling, legal aid to Nepali workers, exchange of information, joint initiatives, and efforts to address migrant worker rights. The signing of MoU was a significant step to formalize the relationship between two NHRIs of Asia Pacific Region. NHRCN signed MoU with NHRCQ for the first time in November 2015 aiming to protect the rights of Nepali migrant workers. If the human rights of Nepali workers in Qatar are violated, now complaints can be filed in Nepali language and a Nepali desk is also set up there. Since the 2015, the Committee has registered 1,853 Complaints on the rights violation of Nepali people. This is the noteworthy achievement. The Committee also monitors the companies to ensure the human rights of Nepalis in Qatar and provides suggestions to the Qatar government.

As provided by the Transnational Advocacy Network Theoretical framework, the oversight agencies can contribute to safeguard the rights of migrant workers. The similar situation is found in the case of NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar. The collaboration among the NHRIs of Nepal and Qatar, particularly through the signing of a MoU has contributed significantly to ensure safeguarding the rights of Nepali migrant workers. The MoU creates a direct complaint mechanism that allows violations of Nepali workers' human rights in Qatar to be reported in Nepali language and addressed through official channels. Under this agreement, complaints are being filed directly with the NHRCQ regarding any violations of human rights experienced by Nepali workers. This represents a significant advancement from previous informal or indirect reporting. NHRIs do not have legal enforcement power across borders, but they do have functional role as provided by the Paris Principles. They do not, however, grant NHRIs explicit transborder jurisdiction. An NHRI's primary mandate is national, though they are anticipated to cooperate internationally, such as monitoring situation and referring cases through collaboration with the NHRIs of destination countries.

NHRCQ has also worked for the promotion of human rights. A Nepali-language booklet has been published outlining Qatar's latest labor laws, updated regulations, and implementation procedures. Designed to empower migrant workers, it provides clear guidance on legal protections and rights, helping them safeguard themselves against violations and remain fully protected under Qatar's legal framework. The NHRCQ also aims the book be a companion and handy for the Nepali workers.

This institutional partnership between the two NHRIs establishes a systematic approach to monitoring, investigating, and addressing human rights violations, promoting human rights culture that transcend national boundaries. The MoU enables both countries' human rights institutions to work collaboratively in ensuring that fundamental rights and labor rights protections are upheld for Nepali workers throughout their employment in Qatar, from recruitment through repatriation.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author

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Political Engagement and Conflict: A Study of Youth Migrant Returnees in Kaski District, Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines the political engagement of youth migrant returnees and emergence of conflict during their political reintegration in Nepal. This paper focuses specifically on political engagement and conflict dynamics among youth migrant returnees in Kaski District. The study investigates whether political conflict emerges primarily from the assertive participation of returnees or from resistance by established political actors. Using qualitative approach that includes 15 key informant interviews and a structured survey of 200 returnees, the study finds that although migrant returnees are highly motivated to participate in local politics and actively seek entry, established local structures frequently oppose their inclusion, leading to rivalry and conflict. Reintegration into Nepal's hierarchical and patronage-driven political structures is still difficult, even though many returnees report having moderate-to-high political awareness, international experiences, and exposure to leading role and management in their workplaces. Study finds that both reasons coexist as causes for conflict- migrant returnees actively seeking entry into local politics *and existing political parties resisting their political participation which can be seen in the form of ideological gaps, generational divides, and power rivalries rather than direct hostility. Overall, this study includes reinterpretations of international theories of political engagement and conflict, including relative deprivation, political socialization, and social capital. It emphasizes on the structured reintegration and participatory governance reforms as ways to reduce conflict and promote inclusive democracy, and it argues for governmental acknowledgement of returnees as socio-political actors rather than passive economic agents.*

Introduction

Youth political engagement is a key factor in social change and democratic renewal. Involving young people in politics promotes intergenerational representation in governance in addition to creativity and accountability. However, in developing nations like Nepal, the youth, who are best suited to spearhead reform, are also the most mobile. With remittances accounting for over 28% of the country's GDP, labour migration has changed Nepal's socioeconomic structure during the last ten years (World Bank, 2023). A paradoxical social dynamic has been created within this process by the outmigration of productive youth and the return of politically conscious, socially exposed individuals. Although returnees bring new perspectives and skills to the table, their reintegration into traditional political systems is frequently tense.

Gandaki Province's Kaski District serves as an example. Since the early 2000s, Kaski, which is well-known as a political center and one of the districts that sends the most labour to Nepal, has seen a significant influx of young people. According to the International Organization for Migration,11.6% of Gandaki Province’s total population resides abroad, with Kaski contributing the largest share (23.2%), followed by Nawalparasi East (15.6%), Tanahun (13.0%), and Syangja (12.3%) (IOM, 2024). After labour contracts expired, significant number have returned (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security [MoLESS], 2022). These returnees' growing presence in public settings, including as ward meetings and local party offices, has spurred discussions about their political role and possible points of contention.

Human history has been marked by migration. Ravenstein (1885) framed the “Laws of Migration” based on analysis of the 1881 British census, providing one of the initial systematic attempts to explain migration patterns. His work identified key regularities, including the importance of distance, the predominance of short-distance migration, rural-to-urban movement, and gender differences, with women more likely to migrate over shorter distances. Ravenstein highlighted that economic factors, particularly the search for better employment opportunities, were the primary drivers of migration, while improvements in transport and communication facilitated movement. Although essentially descriptive, his laws laid the empirical foundation for later theoretical expansions in migration studies. Stouffer (1960) introduced the concept of intervening opportunities, highlighting that migration decisions are shaped not only by origin and destination factors but also by the opportunities and constraints encountered along the way. This perspective complements the push–pull framework later formalized by Lee (1966), which highlights the role of origin conditions, destination attractions, intervening obstacles, and individual characteristics. These foundational theories continue to inform migration studies and have been further contextualized in the Nepali setting by scholars such as Khatiwada (2014).

In response to persistent domestic unemployment and the need to generate remittance inflow, the state actively promotes overseas work, making labour migration from Nepal as a key economic strategy (Sijapati et al., 2017; MoLESS, 2022). As a result, labour migration in Nepal extends beyond individual economic choice and reflects a structurally mediated process shaped by state policy and global labour demand. In this sense, the relationship between migration and politics in Nepal cannot be explained solely by theories of international conflict. Although models such as Gurr's (2010) relative deprivation theory explain irritation resulting from expectations that are not satisfied, they fail to take into account how Nepal's state policy externalizes labour. In a similar vein, broken local political trust networks influenced more by kinship-based mobilization and party patronage than by civic voluntarism must be used to interpret social capital theory (Putnam, 2000). In order to understand how the experience of migration influences participation and conflict upon return, the study places itself inside a hybrid analytical model that integrates perspectives on social capital, political socialization, and structural dependency (Easton & Dennis, 1967).

This article argues that political conflict involving migrant returnees in Nepal is not produced solely by returnees' political ambition nor exclusively by societal resistance. Rather, conflict emerges from a reciprocal interaction between reform-oriented aspirations of returnees and the established gatekeeping practices of established political actors. The current study addresses a fundamental conceptual ambiguity that whether society opposition to their political engagement cause conflict, or migrant returnees themselves create conflict by pursuing political participation. Field data indicates that the two processes are connected. While local political elites view returnees' reformist inclinations and outside exposure as challenges to the current power structure, their attempts to engage frequently undermine long-standing patronage arrangements. This tension shows up not only in leadership competitions but also in cultural misinterpretations of assertiveness as arrogance, selective mobilization during election seasons, and subtle exclusion from decision-making.

It is found that the political reintegration of returnees in Nepal is still little understood, despite large remittance inflows and the symbolic valuation of migrant labour. Returnees are rarely praised as political participants in the national discourse, rather they are frequently praised as economic contributors only. The reintegration of young returnees in Kaski District has brought up both opportunities and conflicts. Many provide managerial and leading abilities as well as exposure to governance in other countries, but their involvement is restricted by established hierarchies and inflexible networks. Sometimes, this friction shows itself in micro-level conflicts, such as disagreements over local party nominations, development budgets, or ward-level leadership. At the same time, the absence of institutional pathways for engagement often compels returnees to operate through informal or digital spaces, creating a fragmented kind of activism. In this context, this study aims to address the knowledge gaps identified in understanding the political engagement of youth migrant returnees and conflict dynamics in Nepal, with a focus on Kaski District. To achieve the research aim, this paper examines the dynamics and determinants of political engagement among youth migrant returnees; attempts to identify barriers, motivations, and sources of conflict in local political contexts and analyzes how returnees' prior political experience and international exposure shape their political engagement.

Review of Literature

Individual agency, socio-political systems, and foreign exposures combine to impact the political engagement of young migrant returnees. Various types of political engagement have been identified by studies on the subject, ranging from conventional practices like voting and party membership and unconventional ones like petitions, protests, and online activism (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Given that returnees may be influenced by political practices they have experienced elsewhere, this distinction is especially relevant to them.

Migration and return are processes of political reorientation and identity transformation in addition to economic movements. Labour migration is a state-managed coping strategy for unemployment and budget deficits in the majority of emerging nations (ILO, 2022). This dynamic is especially noticeable in Nepal, where labour export is institutionalised by the government as a way to maintain macroeconomic stability through remittances (MoLESS, 2022). As a result, migrant return is an integral aspect of Nepal's political and economic system.

The range of actions people do to participate in political processes, from voting, attending meetings, and joining parties to advocacy and social activism, is referred to as political engagement (Verba et al., 1995). The experience of governance overseas, exposure to democratic or authoritarian systems, individual socioeconomic standing, and the responsiveness of local institutions upon return are some of the overlapping aspects that impact this participation for returnees (Karki & Sijapati, 2018). However, reintegrating politically conscious returnees can become controversial in places like Nepal where networks of kinship, patronage, and factional loyalty play a significant role in mediating political participation. Their foreign-learned standards of accountability, efficiency, and transparency frequently conflict with informal and hierarchical local organizations. The core of the conflict between institutional conservatism and returnee reformism is this disagreement.

Research on return migration in Nepal has mostly concentrated on economic reintegration, including skills transfer, entrepreneurship, and remittance use (Sijapati et al., 2017). Political reintegration, which defines how returnees regain civic agency and voice within their communities, has received less attention. According to research from Ghana (Kleist, 2008), the Philippines (Aguilar, 2014), and Sri Lanka (Perera, 2018), returnees can serve as "development brokers," bridging local customs with global concepts. Nepal's situation is different, though, as many of its returnees are from low-wage labour sectors rather than professional diasporas. Therefore, social legitimacy, the way the local community recognizes and embraces their new worldviews, has a greater influence on their reintegration than institutional capital.

This study recontextualizes four key theoretical frameworks to suit the socio-political setting of Nepal. According to Easton and Dennis' 1967 political socialization theory, political socialization is the process by which people pick up political beliefs and values from peers, institutions, and life events. Migration is one of these life-changing experiences. Youth from Nepal who migrate for work are frequently exposed to models of civic engagement, legal responsibility, and structured governance that they believe are lacking in their home country. These encounters result in altered expectations and behaviours upon return. However, these recently learnt principles are frequently disregarded or mistrusted in a system where patronage politics predominate (Wright, 1975). Therefore, while the theory explains how exposure overseas raises consciousness, it does not explain how institutional institutions at home limit its expression.

According to Gurr's (2010) relative deprivation theory, people become frustrated and conflicted when they believe that their expectations and the real world are not aligned.

This disparity shows up for returnees as they reintegrate. They contrast opaque domestic governance with transparent systems overseas. In Kaski, a large number of respondents expressed disenchantment with local power monopolies and resource allocation. The ensuing annoyance frequently results in assertive reformist behaviour, which elder leaders mistakenly perceive as arrogance, rather than violence. In this sense, Gurr's paradigm aids in the explanation of the psychological underpinnings of dissatisfaction that motivate returnees to engage in political activism or conflict.

According to Putnam's (2000) social capital theory, social capital, such as networks, trust, and norms that promote cooperation, is essential to political participation. Collaborative participation is more likely in settings where there is a high degree of trust. Nonetheless, relatives, ethnicity, and party allegiance are thought to be the main pillars of Nepal's social capital, which is strongly bonding (Dahal, 2019). Cross-culturally exposed returnees are more likely to support bridging capital, which encourages inclusivity and merit-based decision-making. However, Nepal's traditional systems frequently undervalue this type of capital, which leads to a gap between local political traditions and international civic standards. As a result, social capital theory clarifies the reasons why returnees find it difficult to integrate into exclusionary networks while also explaining the possibility of cooperation.

In contrast to many other nations where migration is a personal decision, Nepal's government actively encourages labour export as a means of ensuring the country's economic sustainability. The structural dependency concept, which holds that developing nations continue to rely on international labour markets to support local consumption, is consistent with this pattern (Castles & Miller, 2009). Remittance inflow takes precedence over political reintegration when the state externalises its labour. As a result, the Nepali situation cannot be well explained by notions of international conflict or reconciliation. Conflict here is more about systemic neglect brought about by the state's inability to provide returnees with political spaces that go beyond economic narratives than it is about intergroup violence.

Research conducted in Asia and Africa shows that when migrants return home, they usually try to change local governance. For instance, Malik (2017) noted that Pakistani returnees encountered opposition from established elites, while Rahman (2019) discovered that returnees in Bangladesh frequently eschew traditional party systems in order to participate in civic organisations. Although they were frequently viewed with suspicion, Perera (2018) observed how migration in Sri Lanka turned returnees into agents of localized reform.

Similar processes are being investigated in Nepali studies. According to Karki & Sijapati (2018), migrants who are exposed to democratic cultures abroad show greater political consciousness, but they also encounter obstacles such institutional access, skepticism, and exclusion. According to Thapa (2017), patronage still dominates Nepal's youth political scene, deterring independent entry. Furthermore, Sijapati et al. (2017) noted that labour migration elevates economic remitters while marginalising them politically, reshaping social hierarchies.

The lack of structural critique in earlier works is a significant gap. Although community-based reintegration is emphasized by international researchers, the Nepali context necessitates an examination of how state policy itself generates conflictual circumstances. Productive young are externalised rather than empowered locally as a result of the government's persistent preference for remittance income over labour welfare (MoLESS, 2022).

Three outcomes result from this remittance governance. They are ideological mismatch, fragmentation of civic engagement, and depoliticisation of migration (Adhikari, 2021). The fragmentation of civic engagement indicates that local institutions rely heavily on patron-client relationships, leaving little room for reform-minded returnees; depoliticisation of migration values migrants for their income rather than their political opinions; and ideological mismatch maintains that exposure to the outside world cultivates liberal-democratic values that are at odds with Nepal's factional political environment. Consequently, institutional exclusion rather than individual behaviour is the primary cause of conflict.

This study attempts to close a significant conceptual and empirical gap. Although earlier Nepali studies like Karki & Sijapati, (2018) and Thapa, (2017) have examined youth migration from an economic perspective, the political aspect was mainly unknown. This study adds to a grounded understanding of the returnees who want to enter politics and the structural and psychological elements that discourage them in the process, inviting conflict in the course of their attempt to engage in politics.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative design to comprehensively examine the political engagement of youth migrant returnees in Kaski District. The Gandaki Province's Kaski District was specifically chosen due to its active local political scene and high proportion of young migrant returnees. Kaski offers a pertinent background for examining the advantages and disadvantages of returnee political participation because it is a semi-urban district with a variety of political actors. The qualitative design provided in-depth insights into motivations, lived experiences, conflict dynamics and perceived challenges. In order to find recurrent patterns, explanatory elements and qualitative data were transcribed, coded thematically, and then examined. Data sets were integrated to guarantee coherence and thoroughness of interpretation. This article is substantially revised and updated version of the author's MPhil thesis submitted in 2024 to the Department of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

The study employed a multi-stage purposive sampling strategy. First, Kaski District was selected purposively because of its high rate of labour migration and active local political environment. Within the district, respondents were identified from major municipalities and rural municipalities including Pokhara Metropolitan City. All samples were treated as a whole for the district. The study sample consisted of 200 returnees aged 20–40 years, of whom 68% were male and 32% female. Of those surveyed, roughly 64% had finished secondary school, 21% had degrees from higher education, and 15% had only up to a secondary education. 18% percent had relocated to East Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan, 20% had been in Europe or North America, and the majority (62%) had worked in Malaysia and Gulf states like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The average length of time spent abroad was between two to six years. 60% had no previous political connection, whereas 40% had participated in unofficial political activity before migration, such as youth groups or student unions. As a result, responses reflected the diversity of the returnee population, which included both very educated people with prior political exposure and politically unexperienced workers. Stronger inclinations for post-return engagement were demonstrated by the latter group, indicating that political socialization starts prior to migration and develops during cross-border experiences.

This paper acknowledges several limitations. First, the use of purposive and snowball sampling limits the generalizability of the findings beyond Kaski District. Second, the study relies partly on self-reported perceptions of political participation, which may involve recall bias. Third, the relatively modest sample size restricts the application of more advanced statistical modelling. Despite these limitations, this study focuses specifically on youth migrant returnees aged 20–40 years in Kaski District and does not include migrants who have permanently settled abroad or returnees older than 40 years. The research also focuses on local political engagement rather than national-level political participation. These delimitations were adopted to maintain analytical focus on youth reintegration within local governance structures.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the main conclusions of the study on the political participation and conflict dynamics of young migrant returnees in Nepal's Kaski District. The findings from four focus group discussions (FGDs) with returnees, local political authorities, and civil society actors, as well as 15 key informant interviews (KIIs), provide context and support for the in-depth qualitative results of the survey of 200 returnees. The findings and discussion are presented under following themes that emerged from the study: (1) Motivations for political engagement (2) political engagement levels and forms; (3) sociocultural and structural constraints; (4) conflict and mediation patterns; and (5) the impact of pre-migration political tendencies.

Motivations for Political Engagement

The migration encouraged increased political consciousness and action by exposing people to a variety of political systems and practices elsewhere. According to survey results, 71% of returnees were inspired to get involved in politics through party affiliation, social action, or involvement in neighborhood associations. The survey participants firmly agreed that the main motivators were the influence of foreign experience (50%) and the need for social change (55%), as well as discontent with government (60%). The disparity between perceived inefficiency at home and effective governance systems elsewhere was frequently highlighted by FGD participants. A 32 year-old returnee from South Korea noted:

> *During my stay in South Korea, I saw that people are part of the whole system. The system guided everything rather than political structure. When you observe how well systems function abroad, you come to the conclusion that our local leaders lack discipline and honesty rather than resources. I wanted to change that but I realized that, in Nepal, without being a part of politics, nothing can be done solely. So, I decided to get involved in politics.*

Such statements demonstrate how returnees' views towards public accountability are reoriented by political socialization during migration, exposure to functioning bureaucracy, civic engagement, and respect for the law. Another recurring theme was community expectation. About 40% of respondents claimed that their exposure and perceived "global perspective" were the reasons why their communities pushed them to get involved in local politics. The idea that returnees possess symbolic capital even in cases when their material reintegration is still lacking is supported by this type of moral pressure.

But there were other reasons besides altruism. Pragmatic motivations like networking, influence, and entrepreneurship were uncovered via FGDs and KIIs. As one respondent said:

> *I noticed that people abroad are less concerned by politics, but here in Nepal, it seems to be at the center of everything. I feel that everywhere there is politics. Connection with political leaders is important to get even a simple work done. It is difficult to even register a business firm without political connections. Politics is about access as much as it is about change.*

This shows that one looks at political engagement as necessary part to get work done which is the pragmatic part of society different from the ideological aspect that sees society as a whole functions by the rule. This combination of pragmatism and idealism supports the findings of previous international studies by Aguilar (2014) and Perera (2018), which revealed that returnee participation is a mixed pursuit of resources and recognition which they feel can be received with the political connections.

Levels and Forms of Political Engagement

From the study, returnees were found to have engaged in politics in a variety of ways, from leadership to symbolic actions. The distribution across the five categories is summed up in the following table.

Table 1

Levels of Political Engagement among Youth Migrant Returnees (N = 200)

Category of Engagement	Frequency	Percentage	Description
Voting in Elections	185	92.5%	Nearly all respondents participated in at least one local or national election.
Attending Political Rallies	150	75%	Active involvement in collective political expression.
Campaign Participation	120	60%	Returnees assisted in election campaigns or party mobilization.
Holding Leadership Roles	42	21%	Only a small number held formal positions like ward committees, cooperatives.
Online Political Activism	95	47.5%	Social media used for expressing opinions, sharing political content, or criticizing governance.

Source: Field Survey (2024).

The largest involvement rate was seen in voting, indicating that returnees saw it as a civic obligation. But there was still little representation in leadership. KIIs from party leaders acknowledged that new entrants are encouraged during elections but sidelined in real decisions, since only one-fifth of respondents had decision-making responsibilities. This research lends credence to the claim that, despite their motivation and awareness, returnees experience structural exclusion. Furthermore, clear gender differences were observed. Only 8% of female respondents had formal political positions, with reasons including lack of party mentorship, patriarchal norms, and time constraints. Approximately 38% of returnees indicated an intention in getting involved in politics, according to empirical data from Kaski (field survey, 2024), however just 20% had any official political position. This disparity is a reflection of society's reluctance to accept migrant-led leadership as well as the lack of access points. Exposure to foreign governance raises political consciousness, but it also causes alienation when returnees run into inflexible party structures.

The study also found that the destination countries had a major impact on the level of participation. While those returning from restrictive labour destinations such as the Gulf States tended to stay observers, those coming from democratic systems such as South Korea and Japan were more likely to take part in local governance initiatives. This variance supports the idea that experiential learning overseas shapes political behavior, which is in line with the political socialization theory of Easton and Dennis (1967).

Structural and Cultural Barriers to Political Engagement

The study showed that returnees encounter a complex range of barriers preventing them from engaging in politics for the long term, despite their eagerness. According to survey results, 85% of participants mentioned being excluded from political organizations, 90% mentioned having trouble reintegrating, and 55% mentioned prejudice or discrimination from established players. Three interconnected factors are found to be the cause of these obstacles. First, Nepal's political system is dominated by patronage and institutional gatekeeping through kinship, seniority, and loyalty networks. Returnees are frequently recruited as campaign mobilisers by local party leaders, but they are not allowed to hold leadership positions. The "wait-your-turn" approach deters younger participants and perpetuates generational disparity. During interviews, one ward committee member acknowledged that "Returnees are energetic, but we cannot give them positions immediately; they must be loyal to the party doctrines first." It embodies the idea of bonding social capital, which Putnam (2000) defined as close-knit, inward-looking networks that are resistant to newcomers.

Second, cultural misunderstandings of assertiveness occur because, as FGDs revealed, returnees' communication styles which are influenced by their experience to the workplace overseas, can occasionally be interpreted as haughtiness. A local elder reportedly warned one of the respondent, "Don't talk like you're still in Qatar; this is Nepal." These interactions show that, even with good intentions, cultural dissonance between formal foreign workplace culture and informal local politics often shows up as interpersonal conflict. Third, many returnees are burdened by psychological and financial limitations; they return with debt and are unable to participate in patronage-based politics. Psychological disengagement is the outcome of both financial constraints and disappointment at being excluded. These challenges confirm Gurr’s (2010) relative deprivation theory which states that the discrepancy between expectations of inclusion and recognition and outcomes in the form of exclusion and dependency leads to frustration and, in some cases, confrontation.

Pre-Migration Political Inclination and Post-Return Adjustment

According to the survey, 40% had previously been exposed to politics, mostly through family ties, youth organizations, or student unions. Of these, 62% returned to politics, while only 31% of those who had never been involved in politics did so. This suggests that political inclination prior to migration is a reliable indicator of engagement after returning. But it also connects with friction: those who had previously been involved in partisan politics were more inclined to go back and report conflicts with local elites. KIIs with local party leaders corroborated this tension:

> *Those who were politically involved prior to their trip overseas return with expectations. They seek positions or recognitions right away. Friction results from that. Some who have engaged in student politics, youth organizations, or community-level activism, they often anticipate recognition of their past contributions and expect to be integrated into decision-making positions upon return. This expectation is further reinforced by their exposure to different governance practices abroad.*

This statement highlights the significant role of pre-migration political behaviour that make them seek the role in political engagement processes among migrant returnees. Individuals who were previously engaged in political activities such as student politics, youth organizations, or community activism are more likely to return with previous political identities and expectations of recognition and inclusion. Such sense of continuity in political participation leads them to anticipate integration into local decision-making structures. This expectation is further increased by their exposure to governance practices abroad, which often enhances their political awareness, confidence, and perceived competence.

However, these expectations seem to frequently confront with the realities of local political systems governed by rigid hierarchy and networks. As a result, returnees with prior political experience are found to be more likely to experience adjustment challenges and friction, particularly when their claims for leadership or recognition are not immediately acknowledged. This dynamic illustrates a wider mismatch between individual political agency shaped through past experience and migration exposure, and structurally controlled opportunities for participation in the local context.

Conflict Dynamics between Reform and Resistance

There were two primary types of conflict recorded involving returnees in Kaski. They are competition for leadership positions and resources, as well as ideological and generational conflicts with older political actors. According to survey results, 55% of participants had ideological conflicts with local leaders, frequently centered on issues like budgetary allocation, transparency, and the place of young people in politics. According to FGDs, returnees' demands for responsibility and meritocracy put traditional patron-client relationships to the test. A 33-year-old returnee explained:

> *I asked that the budget details be posted online by the ward office so that people could easily access information and there would be more transparency. However, the local leaders dismissed my idea, saying that politics doesn't work like that here. From what I had seen overseas, such practices were normal and helped build accountability between the government and the public. They told me I was displaying foreign customs.*

This dynamic exemplifies a form of ideational and institutional conflict, where competing understandings of "appropriate" political practice lead to tension between actors. This shows how locally rooted practices and globally educated expectations collide, which is a theme that is congruent with research conducted in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2019) and Pakistan (Malik, 2017), where returnees were viewed with mistrust for questioning opaque governance systems. Much of the friction is also rooted in generational relations. Younger returnees value innovation and transparency, while older leaders rely on loyalty and seniority. Senior leaders deliberately silence younger voices, according to 61% of respondents. This generational divide is consistent with Thapa's (2017) observation that Nepal's political culture discourages young people from innovating since it values seniority over merit.

Resource and Leadership Competition

The study showed that competition for leadership positions was cited by almost 40% of respondents as a direct cause of political strife. Local elites frequently saw returnees who had been exposed overseas as threats. During cooperative elections or ward committee nominations, this rivalry occasionally turned into a factional rivalry. Not every returnee, though, made contributions to disagreement. About 24% of respondents said they had used their foreign-learned negotiating abilities to mediate disputes in their communities, especially for those who worked in multicultural environments. For example, one returnee from Qatar said:

> *In a company I served as a manager, I handled conflicts between employees from various countries whenever the conflict arose. This has developed within me the ability to mediate and resolve the issues. Now I am using this ability to deal in local social setting and I think I can play very active role to contribute to the society through involvement in politics.*

This statement reveals that returnees have developed confidence through their roles during their service overseas. Due to this, returnees can be positioned as hybrid actors in local politics both as a challengers and a mediators. This means they represent the risk of conflict brought on by resistance as well as the possibility of reform.

Integrating Findings with Theory

The study finds that the conflict among returnees is not uni-causal. It results from both (a) their aggressive desire for involvement and change and (b) institutional and societal isolation. One of these two forces amplifies the other through dialectic interaction. As predicted by Easton and Dennis's (1967) political socialization theory, migration serves as a political classroom where exposure to foreign governance systems increases political efficacy and awareness. However, upon returning home, these values encounter a "re-socialization shock" in which pre-existing norms discourage innovation. In other words, migration socializes youth into global civic norms while reintegration dissocializes them into local patronage. The study demonstrates that unfulfilled expectations for transparency, meritocracy, and inclusion cause psychological tension, which, in contrast to violent rebellion, manifests as reformist agitation through demands for accountability, online criticism, or community mobilization. Gurr's (2010) framework effectively explains why dissatisfaction turns into activism or confrontation.

According to Putnam (2000), the study demonstrates that while bonding social capital based on uniqueness prolongs exclusion, bridging social capital based on openness and trust promotes participation. In Kaski, local politics still found to be dominated by bonding ties that keep returnees from taking advantage of their transnational experience, which leads to the political underutilization of a potentially reformist group. Nepal's state-led labour export policy, which externalizes its most productive youth and fails to reintegrate them politically, demonstrates the broader systemic dimension that is lacking in Western models. This creates a vicious cycle in which returnees continue to contribute economically but remain outsiders in society, meaning that conflict arises from policy neglect rather than just interpersonal friction.

Taking into account all available data, the study sees two different interpretations of conflict: society-driven conflict resulting from gatekeeping, generational dominance, and institutional resistance, and returnee-driven conflict resulting from assertive reformism, impatience with inefficiency, and expectations influenced by global exposure. Returnees strive for reform, while institutions fight back to maintain hierarchy, resulting in a reciprocal resistance loop. The low leadership conversion and high participation are explained by this cyclical tension. Importantly, the data show that returnees with more education, previous political exposure, and experience in democratic countries had higher levels of friction and stronger reformist aspirations. Those with less education or experience in the Gulf region, meanwhile, continue to be more obedient but less powerful. However, in the long run, such interplay of reformist aspirations and ambition for strong political engagement be viewed as a negotiation between agency, acceptance, and adaptation rather than as a straight line.

Conclusion

This study examined the political engagement and conflict dynamics among youth migrant returnees in Kaski District, Nepal. In the question of whether conflict is fueled by societal exclusion or by forceful political ambition on the part of returnees, the results demonstrate that both forces are at work at the same time, interacting in a cycle of reformist assertion and institutional resistance. Experiences overseas, education, and social expectations all contribute to their political consciousness. However, structural and cultural obstacles that impede true participation, such as generational dominance, and patronage-based politics reduce their enthusiasm.

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that when long-standing customs of hierarchy and informal decision-making collide with returnees' aspirations of accountability and meritocracy, conflict results. However, instead of only causing division, returnees also use their intercultural and negotiating abilities learnt abroad to mediate conflicts within the community. They can be positioned as hybrid agents of reconciliation and reform in Nepal's changing political terrain. It is clear from comparing the results to the goals of the study that both structural limitations and individual ambition influence the dynamics of political participation among returnees. Opportunities and challenges coexist. Returnees impact local conflict patterns as mediators as well as players, illustrating the interaction between local adaptability and global exposure.

Disclosure Statement

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Non-Western International Relations as Historical Rejuvenation and Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

Non-Western International Relations represent as a historical rejuvenation and theoritical framework. Amidst the longstanding of Western scholarhip, the paper investigtes how non-Western perspectives reconstruct global political analysis by drawing upon diverse cultural, philosphical and historical ontologies. The Western frameworks like Realism and Liberalism are limited to adequately address global complexities due to their parochial origins. The non-Western theories offer normative alternatives emphasizing harmony, communalism, and ethical statecraft. The analysis reveals that integrating these traditions challenges the Westphalian status quo and enriches global governance models. The objective is to evaluate the capacity of these rejuvenated traditions to reshape the disciplinary architecture of International Relations and reconfigure understandings of global power dynamics. Employing a qualitative methodology centered on comparative analysis and critical literature review, the study interrogates whether contemporary non-Western theories represent novel paradigmatic shifts or the revitalization of indigenous wisdom. This paper finds *that non-Western International Relations functions as a distinct theoretical framework wherein historical rejuvenation informs contemporary application, blending ancient statecraft with modern geopolitical realities. This dual constitution challenges Western narratives, advocating for an epistemically pluralistic discipline that integrates reclaimed historical insights into the core of International Relations theory. The integration of non-Western IR theories advances a more inclusive and globally grounded conceptualization of international dynamics.*

Introduction

International Relations (IR) is an interdisciplinary field that constitutes a scholarly discipline dedicated to interrogating the complex constellations of power and association among states, nations, intergovernmental organizations, non-state actors, and multinational corporations within the global polity (Baylis et al., 2017). While historically centered on high politics such as war, peace and diplomatic statecraft, the discipline of IR has evolved to interrogate a broader spectrum of transnational challenges including climate change, global health security, mass migration, cyber warfare and cultural identity formation (Buzan, 2007; Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). The discipline focuses on understanding the dynamics of power, cooperation, and conflict that drive these relationships, as well as examining how such interactions shape and are shaped by international institutions, norms, and legal frameworks (Keohane, 1984).

According to Dunne et al. (2010), IR theory offers interpretive tools for analyzing the complex interplay between material capabilities, ideational structures, and normative commitments in world politics. IR must incorporate diverse epistemological perspectives and historical experiences. This approach challenges the field to move beyond state-centric and promoting a more pluralistic understanding of global political life (Acharya, 2014; Tickner, 2003).

The term 'non-Western' is often used to denote cultures and societies. However, it is important to recognize that this categorization is problematic, as it oversimplifies the diversity of these cultures (Spivak, 1988). For instance, instead of using non-Western terms, it might use terms like global south and Postcolonial (Edward, 1978).

Rejuvenation is the process of revitalizing something to bring it back to its original, youthful state. It may allude to emotional, mental, or physical rejuvenation (Oxford, n.d.). Rejuvenation comprises a wide range of approaches to revitalization, from beauty items promising youthful skin to spiritual activities aimed at inner calm.

A theoretical framework is the structured set of concepts, assumptions and establihsed theories designed to explain, predict and analyze a research phenomenon (Gerring, 2017; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). It serves as the theoretical background that justifies the study's rationale by linking the research problem with existing theories (Swanson, 2013).

The discipline of IR traces its intellectual ancestry to ancient philosophical reflections on war, peace, and order among autonomous political communities, as evidenced in the strategic statecraft of Kautilya's Arthashastra, the ethical-political synthesis of Confucian thought, and the realist-pragmatic insights of Thucydides and Machiavelli (Boesche, 2002). The peace of Westphalia, 1648 is regarded as the foundational moment of modern IR, establishing the structural framework of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and diplomatic protocol that continues to define the international system (Krasner, 1993; Osiander, 2001). In this rerefernce, IR between states afterward expanded the scope of suject in complex yet simpler manner, independence yet inter-dependence, separateness yet closeness, nationalism yet internationalism (Baylis et al., 2017).

However, IR emerged as a formal academic field in the aftermath of the First World War, driven by the urgent impertive to systematically understand the causes of war and establish conditons for lasting peace (Schmidt, 1998). In the United Kingdom, the discipline's early development was significantly shaped by Liberal Idealism, drawing upon Woodrow Wilson's normative vision of collective security and institutional cooperation (Acharya & Buzan, 2019). The post-Second World War era marked a decisive scientific turn, wherein behavioralism, systems theory, game theory, and structural realism sought to rationalize international politics through positivist methodologies and parsimonious theoretical models, epitomized by Kenneth Waltz's neorealist framework (Waltz, 1979; Kaplan, 1957).

The 1980s marked a critical turning point as scholars challenged the "neo-neo" consensus, reintegrating history to expose the shortcomings of ahistorical scientific approaches (Cox, 1981; Walker, 1993; Leira & de Carvalho, 2016). This intellectual opening allowed historical analysis to flourish within both mainstream and critical traditions, including constructivism and historical sociology (Ruggie, 1986; Kratochwil, 1986). The post-1989 geopolitical landscape characterized by the breakdown of bipolarity and the emergence of Global South powers necessitated a return to historical consciousness to understand an increasingly multipolar and uncertain world order (Bertelson, 2020). Consequently, history has regained prominence as essential for constructing inclusive, globally representative theories of IR.

IR is a Western field of study (Acharya & Buzan, 2007). Since the issues raised and potential remedies are thought to be Western-oriented, Western academics and institutions are predominantly responsible for producing academic work. Theories of realism and liberalism, which originated with the writings of Western philosophers like Hobbes and Kant, have evolved into the accepted methods of IR. However, this conventional wisdom has come under scrutiny. Revisionists claim that the history of Westphalia is a historical myth that serves as a historical foundation for specific realist or conventional social theories (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). The conventional perspective generalizes the fundamental rules that all states must abide by while exalting Western values (Hobson, 2004). Western centrism creates parochialism because it cannot address the issues of the entire world, especially the non-Western world.

Likewise, it is anticipated that scholars will analyze their problems using Western theories. The Teaching, Research, and International Politics Project (TRIp) survey offers the most comprehensive database of data on the field of IR, revealing research and teaching methodologies as well as perspectives on foreign policy concerns among IR scholars. According to Eun (2019), 66.98% of IR researchers from 32 Western and 13 non-Western countries who participated in the 2014 TRIp poll agreed or strongly agreed that IR is a discipline developed by the West and North America. The Western IR scholars are recognized as the most significant researchers in the discipline. According to Tickner (2001) and Eun (2019), non-Western scholars are for theory testing, whereas Western scholars are thought to be knowledge producers. Tickner (2003) argued that the conventional IR theories are insufficient for understanding world politics, suggesting developing non-Western International Relations theories and incorporating local history, culture, or dynamics.

This paper explored non-Western IR traditions, thereby enricing the theoritical landscape and fostering a more pluralisitc understanding of global dynamics. It posits that the discipline has long been dominated by Eurocentric frameworks, neglecting the rich and diverse intellectual traditions of other cultures. Ultimately, this work seeks to revitalize the field of IR by incorporating a broader range of epistemological and ontological assumptions.

Review of Literature

According to Said (1978), the idea of the Orient is a Western invention that acts as a counterpoint to clarify and strengthen Western identity. This Orientalism has been crucial in defending colonial dominance and is present in a number of academic fields, including politics, literature, and history. On the other hand, berates the Orient and downplays the diversity and intricacies found inside Eastern nations. Nevertheless, Orientalism is nevertheless a major component of postcolonial studies and has a lasting impact on discussions concerning representation, power, and knowledge (Chen, 2011).

Spivak (1988) explains the ability of intellectuals, especially those from wealthy backgrounds, to represent the experiences of marginalized groups, specifically women in the Global South. The author highlights the structural barriers preventing these voices from being heard. Nevertheless, Tickner (2001) has also come under fire for being overly negative and for possibly silencing the people it aims to represent. However, continues to be a vital starting point for conversations about power, representation, and the creation of knowledge.

Rangarajan (1992) explores the Contemporary IR theories remains entrenched in an epistemic hegemony that marginalizes non-Western ontologies as derivative regional cases, often misinterpreting Kautilyan statecraft. This reductionism obscures critical theoretical divergences: where Western Realism accepts anarchy, Matsyanyaya posits order as a moral imperative; where Western alliance theory is static, Rajamandala offers dynamic relationality; and where Western thought dichotomizes power and ethics, Dharmic Realism integrates them internally. Additionally, Saptanga theory challenges the Western domestic-international divide by linking internal stability to external power. Ultimately, integrating these non-Western concepts is not merely an exercise in historical recovery but a necessary methodological intervention to decolonize IR, offering holistic frameworks for understanding state construction, ethical power, and relational geopolitics that Western paradigms fail to capture.

Chatterjee (1993) highlights the consideration of colonialism's lasting effects on India and, by extension, the broader non-Western world. The author also delves in to the notion that traditional civilization evolved linearly into contemporary ones, contending that colonialism produced a hybrid that still influences postcolonial experiences. The basis for comprehending the ways in which colonial power structures have impacted the evolution and the challenges of navigating a world order.

Tickner (2003) demonstrates how Latin American scholar has been systematically marginalized in mainstream IR. The author argues that incorporating these voices reveals blind spots in Western theories regarding inequality, imperialism, and peripheral agency. It provides empirical evidence that Western IR is incomplete without non-Western input. Use this to argue that concepts from the Global South offer explanatory power for issues like global inequality that Western Liberalism often overlooks.

Jordan et al. (2009) analyzed that Teaching, Research and International Policy (TRIP) Project survey of IR faculty across ten countries provides critical empirical evidence challenging the assumption of a monolithic, American-dominated discipline. The study reveals significant epistemological divergence: while 65% of U.S. scholars identify as positivists, majorities in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa describe their work as non- or post-positivist, suggesting a deep methodological fault line within the field contrary to claims of Western theoretical hegemony, the survey finds that realism, liberalism, and constructivism are represented albeit in varying proportions across all national contexts, with no single paradigm achieving global dominance. These findings are particularly relevant for non-Western IR research, as they empirically substantiate calls for epistemic pluralism: the discipline is already more diverse than often portrayed, yet structural biases in publication, citation, and curriculum may still marginalize non-Western ontologies.

Shilliam (2015) explores a profound critique of the territorial and state-centric assumptions underpinning mainstream Western IR. By centering Black and Indigenous political thought from the Pacific region, Shilliam illuminates relational, oceanic, and diasporic ontologies that fundamentally disrupt Westphalian categories such as fixed borders, sovereign territory, and the nation-state. This scholarship demonstrates that non-Western theories are not merely additive but possess the capacity to reconstruct IR's core conceptual architecture. Consequently, integrating Shilliam's insights reveals the limitations of Eurocentric frameworks, arguing that a truly global discipline must accommodate these alternative spatial and political imaginaries to accurately understand transnational solidarity and post-colonial security dynamics.

Acharya and Buzan (2019) explain a comprehensive re-examination of the predominance of Western centric IR theories. By tracing the evolution of IR from its colonial origins to the contemporary period, they highlight the marginalization of non-Western perspectives. The authors illustrate how the Confucian values of harmony, hierarchy, and human-centered administration have influenced regional order by looking at the East Asian region. The study challenges the Westphalian assumptions that underlie most of the subject and offers an alternative normative framework, which makes a substantial contribution to the increasing body of research on non-Western IR.

Hall (2020) examines the development and status of China-focused IR research. In order to obtain a more thorough knowledge of China's involvement in international politics, he calls for a paradigm change that takes into account both its own intellectual traditions and geopolitical strategies. This assessment emphasises how crucial it is to incorporate many points of view in order to fully understand China's expanding influence and the consequences it will have for IR.

Demirer (2020) analyzes of Qing China and the Ottoman Empire reframes the perceived silence of non-Western IR theory not as an epistemic absence, but as a strategic camouflage born from the trauma of imperial decline and colonial subjugation. This intervention challenges the disciplinary tendency to equate theoretical invisibility with theoretical non-existence, arguing instead that marginalized societies often encode their strategic thought within historical, literary, or diplomatic practices that Western IR fails to recognize as theory. By centering the experiences of two pivotal non-Western empires, Demirer contributes to the decolonial critique advanced by scholars like Acharya and Bilgin, demonstrating that recovering these silenced voices is essential for understanding how power, resistance, and order are conceptualized beyond the Westphalian canon.

Buzan and Acharya (2021) analyze traditional Western-centric IR theories. The authors also argue for a more inclusive strategy that takes non-Western viewpoints into account. They investigate the ways in which incorporating varied local perspectives, particularly those from China, India, and the Islamic world can deepen and broaden our comprehension of world politics. The book makes the case for reimagining the IR framework in order to provide a more thorough and nuanced understanding of IR by recognizing and incorporating the philosophical, historical, and cultural contributions of non-Western traditions.

According to K.C. (2024), there is a growing interest in non-Western (IR) studies, which is often presented as a cutting-edge academic endeavor. This viewpoint undervalues non-Western intellectuals' significant historical and theoretical contributions to the study of diplomacy, power, and international order. The non-Western IR is by no means a new phenomenon; rather, it is, in many respects, the discipline's founding heritage. As historical evidence demonstrates, centuries prior to the Western disciplinary canon coalescing, scholars such as Sun Tzu, Kautilya, and Ibn Khaldun had already established complex theories of warfare, diplomacy, and governance. The intricate problems of power, balance, and alliance building, which laid the foundation for many of the ideas that are now considered fundamental to IR.

Safi et al. (2025), provides a crucial empirical intervention in non-Western IR scholarship by centering Afghan historical experiences, tribal governance structures, and regional geopolitical logics often marginalized in mainstream analyses. Their work challenges the application of universalized Western frameworks such as liberal state-building or democratic peace theory to complex post-colonial contexts, demonstrating how local ontologies of power, legitimacy, and conflict resolution offer more nuanced explanatory power. By foregrounding Afghan agency and indigenous political thought, the authors contribute to the broader decolonial project in IR, illustrating that non-Western perspectives are not merely cases to be theorized but essential sources of theory themselves, capable of reshaping core disciplinary assumptions about sovereignty, intervention, and order in fragile states.

Research Methodology

Methodology is concerned with the logic of scientific inquiry, in particular with investigating the potentialities and limitations of particular techniques or procedures. Research methods are the techniques or procedures used to collate and analyze data. It further discusses the data collection tools and finally provides the method of analysis adopted in the thesis. The nature of this research is descriptive and analytical, as the information originates from various sources that have been synchronized and analyzed properly.

This study employs a qualitative methodology that integrates critical discourse analysis. This work critically examines prevailing Western IR theories. The methodology involves a document analysis of scholarly literature, historical texts to highligt the limitation of mainstream IR theories. This research aims to critique the predominance of Western perspectives in IR, identify the limitations of applying Western theories to non-Western contexts.

The secondary data sources are used for the justification of the study that provides a discussion on the research approach, methods and process adopted in the study. The analysis part is an important part of study under which the data is presented and analyzed in useful format. Under this part the data is analyzed to achieve the desired objective of the paper.

Findings and Discussion

The theoretical architecture of non-Western IR has been constructed through the cumulative interventions of scholars across regions. Foundational figures like Acharya and Buzan (2010) established the critique of epistemic hegemony, while regional specialists Chen (2011) in Asia, Grovogui (2006) in Africa, and Escudé (1995) in Latin America articulated context-specific alternatives. Therefore, scholars demonstrate that non-Western IR is not a monolithic project but a pluralistic endeavor encompassing relational ontologies (Qin, 2018), decolonial methodologies (Bilgin, 2016), and indigenous cosmologies (Murithi, 2006).

The discipline of IR has historically been structured in distinct ontological and epistemological assumptions about global politics. Realism, grounded in the works of Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979), posits an anarchic international system where sovereign states act as unitary, rational agents prioritizing survival and power accumulation, thereby normalizing conflict as an inevitable condition of statehood. In contrast, Liberalism emphasizes the mitigating potential of international institutions and economic interdependence (Keohane, 1984), alongside democratic governance structures (Russett, 1993), to foster cooperation amidst anarchy. Later, Constructivism challenged these materialist foundations by arguing that international structures are socially constructed through intersubjective ideas, norms, and identities rather than fixed material forces (Wendt, 1992). Consequently, understanding these dominant frameworks is essential not only for grasping the discipline's status quo but also for identifying the epistemic gaps that non-Western theories seek to address through pluralistic rejuvenation.

The emergence of non-Western IR theories invites a constructive re-evaluation of established Western narratives, offering complementary perspectives grounded in diverse historical and cultural contexts. The rise of non-Western nations like China, India, and Brazil has also made a substantial contribution and posed a challenge to the global order that is dominated by the West. Non-Western IR theories also introduce alternative concepts (K.C., 2024). The Ubuntu concept of Africa emphasizes interconnectedness and communalism. In contrast to the Western emphasis on legalistic and adversarial ways to resolve, Ubuntu promotes restorative justice and community-oriented initiatives (Said, 1978). By focusing on justice, the well-being of the ummah (community), and Shariya (Islamic law), Islamic IR theories challenge Western liberal principles. They are based on Sharia law and Islamic ethical teachings (Buzan & Acharya, 2021).

Buzan and Acharya (2021) highlight the strategic thought of Kautilya's Arthashastra approach to statecraft, which emphasizes real poitik, diplomacy and intelligence, compared with the more significant power centric theories dominant in Western IR. The concept of Dharma is also pivotal in Indian thought, integrating ethical challenges into governance and IR through prioritizing power and competition over morality. Another part of the Chinese concept of Tianxia envisions a hierarchical and moral world order, which contrasts with the Westphalian notion of sovereign equality. The authors also explore the Sun Tzu's superior strategies such as indirect approaches, psychological strategies and the importance of adaptability into Western military engagement.

The inceasing prominence of non-Western IR theories encourages a more inclusive understanding of historical narratives, enriching Western frameworks. Said (1978) illustrates how Western scholarship has historically marginalized and misrepresented non-Western societies. So far, the critique of Western epistemology highlights how knowledge production has often excluded or distorted non-Western perspectives (Spivak, 1988). The concept of the subaltern underscores the need to recognize and incorporate the voices and experiences of marginalized groups into the discourse of IR.

The non-Western IR theories critically interrogate the foundational assumptions of Western IR, particularly the state-centric and power-orientated perspectives predominant in Realism and Liberalism. Realist theories, as articulated by scholars like Mearsheimer (2001), emphasize power politics and state competition, assuming that states are primarily motivated by national interests and power accumulation. In contrast, Chinese IR theory, influenced by Confucian thought, challenges this paradigm by prioritizing moral leadership, harmony, and ethical governance (Chen, 2011). The Western IR theories arenot fully integrated with the variety of global political experiences without borader engagement of non-Western perspectives.

The critical arguments presented by non-Western IR theories have significant implications for contemporary IR. It argues that the rise of non-Western perspectives contributes to the formation of a more multi-polar world order, where diverse cultural and philosophical traditions influence global governance (Buzan & Acharya, 2021). This shift challenges the Western-centric model of global politics and promotes a more balanced and inclusive approach to IR (K.C., 2024). Moreover, the incorporation of non-Western perspectives into IR theory has practically been applied. The emphasis on communalism and restorative justice in Ubuntu philosophy can inform approaches to post-conflict reconciliation and peace building, offering alternatives to Western-dominated frameworks that often focus on punitive measures and state-centric solutions (Chatterjee, 1993). Similarly, Islamic IR theories provide alternative approaches to economic development and international law, which can lead to more diverse and equitable global policies (Said, 1978).

The non-Western IR theories rejuvenate historical ideas to address today's global issues by reinterpreting traditional concepts through contemporary lenses. This rejuvenation process is critical as it not only challenges the Western centric theories but also integrates diverse historical and philosophical traditions into global discourse. The non-Western IR theories engage in a process of reinterpretation where historical ideas are revived and adapted to address contemporary global issues. The non-Western theories rejuvenate historical concepts by integrating them with modern issues, such as global governance and security (K.C., 2024). The Indian IR theory, which draws on classical texts like the Arthashastra, reinvigorates ancient strategic ideas to address contemporary security dilemmas, challenging the Western realist focus on power politics opposing Western ideals of secular and individualistic ways, and reimagining the Islamic philosophy of government through the concepts of justice and communal solidarity (Buzan and Acharya, 2021).

The non-Western IR theories also rejuvenate historical ideas by integrating cultural and philosophical traditions into contemporary analyses. Chen's work on Chinese IR theory illustrates how Confucian principles, such as the emphasis on harmony and moral leadership, are revived to address modern global issues (Chen, 2011). Hobson (2012) advocates for recognizing the contributions of the integration of eastern philosophical ideas, such as the Chinese concept of harmony and relations in non-Western societies, to global political thought. The Asian intellectuals, including figures like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Liang Qichao, resisted Western imperialism and sought to integrate their own cultural and philosophical traditions into the global discourse (Mishra, 2012). The rejuvenation of historical ideas is also evident in the revival of non-Western epistemologies, which offer alternative ways of understanding and analyzing IR. The re-evaluation of historical knowledge, production, and highlighting of non-Western epistemology can offer valuable insight into global issues that are often overlooked by Western theory (K.C., 2024). Hall (2020) argues that this overlooks the profound influence of historical Chinese thought, particularly Confucianism and Taoism, on its foreign policy. The origins of realism and other dominant IR theories in a specific historical and cultural context post World War II Western academia, thereby revealing the limitations of these theories in addressing global issues from a non-Western perspective (Guilhot, 2011).

The non-Western IR theories' revitalization of antiquated concepts has important ramifications for international governance and policy. An alternate strategy for resolving disputes and promoting peace is provided by the Ubuntu concept, which places an emphasis on communalism and interconnection (Chatterjee, 1993). Furthermore, based on Islamic values of justice and equity, Islamic IR theories provide substitute frameworks for IR and economic development (Said, 1978). Western IR theories, including constructivism, liberalism, and realism, have their roots in particular cultural contexts, mainly in Western Europe and North America. The implications of the growing influence of non-Western states like China and India on the international scene (Said, 1978). The emerging trends in non-Western IR theories reflect a dynamic shift towards integrating diverse cultural, historical, and philosophical perspectives into the analysis of global politics. This trend is characterized by a critical engagement with Western-centric frameworks, the revival of historical concepts, and the introduction of alternative epistemologies that challenge established norms.

The non-Western IR theories, such as those rooted in Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islamic thought, offer alternative frameworks that challenge Western assumptions about power, governance, and international order (Acharya, 2014). The Confucian principles of harmony and moral leadership are applied in Western IR theory (Chen, 2011). The inclusion of non-Western perspectives can lead to more inclusive and effective global governance structures in Western IR theory (Andrew, 2012). The integration of diverse perspectives in IR is not just a theoretical exercise but a practical necessity for understanding and addressing the complexities of the contemporary global landscape. Embracing a multiplicity of worldviews and acknowledging that there is no single, universally applicable theory of IR (Buzan & Acharya, 2021). The concept of balance of power, a central tenet of realist theory, can be re-examined through the lens of non-Western histories, where different forms of balancing and power dynamics have played out (K.C., 2024). The critical engagement involves questioning and rethinking Western-centric assumptions about IR. The non-Western theories offer valuable critiques of Western paradigms, highlighting their limitations and proposing alternative approaches (Dunne & Kurki, 2010). Western IR theories have historically marginalized non-Western contributions, perpetuating a skewed understanding of global dynamics (Hobson, 2012).

Discussion

The advent of non-Western intercultural relations (IR) theories has fundamentally altered the academic terrain by upending conventional Western paradigms, revitalising ancient epistemologies, and bringing out fresh trends. Because they were primarily created in a Eurocentric framework, Western IR theories frequently ignore or marginalise non-Western viewpoints and experiences (K.C., 2024). The knowledge of world politics has historically been restricted by Western theories to a limited, Western-centric perspective, thereby ignoring the important contributions and insights from non-Western traditions (Hobson, 2012). There is a need for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the different contributions of non-Western researchers because the lack of non-Western ideas in IR has resulted in a skewed depiction of global dynamics (Chen, 2011). The non-Western IR theories' revitalization of historical concepts provides a thorough reevaluation of conventional wisdom in modern settings. Alternative viewpoints on strategy, diplomacy, and government that challenge Western-centric approaches are offered by the resurgence of strategic insights from books like Sun Tzu's The Art of War and Kautilya's Arthashastra (Hall, 2020). The historical experiences and epistemologies of non-Western countries shed light on how historical settings influence current international dynamics, thus advancing our understanding of global politics (Mishra, 2012). The revitalization of historical conceptions allows non-Western IR to tackle contemporary problems with viewpoints based on a variety of intellectual traditions, adding depth and diversity to the discipline.

A rising emphasis on integrating multiple viewpoints and questioning established paradigms is seen in the emerging tendencies in non-Western IR theories. The revision of IR theory to challenge the predominance of Western theory and take non-Western perspectives into account (Said, 1978). Traditional ideas are incorporated into non-Western philosophies to meet modern problems like fostering harmony and maintaining power balance (Buzan & Acharya, 2021). As evidenced by Hobson's criticism of Eurocentric theories and Chen's demand for a more inclusive strategy, this tendency also involves a critical engagement with Western paradigms (Hobson, 2012; Chen, 2011). The non-Western IR theories pose a challenge to Western narratives by acknowledging the shortcomings and prejudices of conventional frameworks, revitalizing historical concepts to offer alternative viewpoints on global issues, and reflecting new trends that incorporate varied perspectives and challenge established paradigms. It adds to a more complex and comprehensive understanding of IR by embracing ideas from eminent academics and historical documents.

Conclusion

International Relations has been historically influenced by Western epistemological frameworks, which have often positioned non-Western intellectual traditions at the periphery of mainstream discourse. This study interrogates the structural biases within IR theory, positing that the emergence of non-Western perspectives signifies not merely a contemporary trend but a substantive rejuvenation of historical ontologies. Employing a qualitative methodology based on critical discourse analysis of scholarly literature and historical texts, the study indicate that while the foundational frameworks such as Realism, Liberalism and Construtivism offer foundational analytical tools for understanding interstate dynamics, their derivation from Western historical experiences may limit their applicability to diverse global complexities. Specifically, the paper advocates for a decolonized IR discipline where non-Western histories are recognized as foundational rather than peripheral. By revitalizing indigenous epistemologies, the study contributes to the construction of Global IR, fostering epistemic pluralism and enhancing the discipline's capacity to explain contemporary multipolar dynamics.

The non-Western IR theories offer insightful perspectives that improve the study and application of global politics. These theories serve two main purposes: revive historical ideas and provide modern theoretical frameworks. This dual role is significant because it shows that these theories do not just introduce new concepts; they also update ancient wisdom to address contemporary challenges. In this way, Non-Western IR theories contribute to a more inclusive understanding of International Relations.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author

Author Introduction

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Nepal's Economic Diplomacy with India: Trends, Constraints and Strategic Directions

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Abstract

Nepal's relation with India is multidimensional and it is shaped by geographical proximity, open border, culture, religion and people-to-people ties. India has been the largest trade partner of Nepal, major source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), major development assistance partner, a large source of tourism and a significant labor destination for seasonal migrant workers. In the 1990s, after Nepal liberalized its economy, Nepal has prioritized economic diplomacy as a central pillar of its foreign policy. For Nepal, a Landlocked Least Developed Country (LLDC), economic diplomacy is important as it acts as a bridge connecting foreign policy and economic interests of the nation through bilateral, regional and multilateral platforms and helps in the sustainable economic development of the country. This study employs a qualitative approach to study the main dimensions of Nepal-India economic relations-trade, aid, investment, tourism and employment and highlights the persistent challenges in these areas. These include structural limitations, inadequate infrastructure, lack of diversification of transit routes, bureaucratic inefficiencies, donor-centric aid *priorities, untapped tourism potential and labor issues, while also focusing on the solutions for the effective economic diplomacy between Nepal and India. The results revealed the asymmetric power dynamics, politicization of economic issues, structural vulnerabilities and less proactive role of Nepal in economic diplomacy. This study concludes that Nepal has prioritized political dimensions over economic ones when conducting bilateral engagements with India. Depoliticization of economic issues at the domestic and bilateral level, along with the structural improvements with focus on proactive economic diplomacy will lead to balanced and sustainable economic relations.*

Introduction

Diplomacy is a tool to protect national interests by managing aspects of international relations with the foreign actors through negotiation and formally practiced by ambassadors and envoys. As defined by Ernest Satow, it is the "application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independence states, the conduct of business between states by peaceful means" (Roberts, 2012 p. 3).

After the Second World War, frameworks like the Marshall Plan, European reconstruction and the European Economic Communities became pivotal for the realization of the economic interests of countries. While the Cold War is largely noted for its ideological contestations, inter-state relations post that were further solidified on the basis of economic interests. There was a greater focus on aid and trade in 1950s and 1960s and investment in the 1980s and 1990s (Thapa, 2012).

It is due to globalization, liberalization, privatization, rise of interdependence and connectivity among the people and states in the world, that economic issues have now firmly been intertwined with political issues (Acharya, 2024). Economic diplomacy then becomes an instrument to implement the state's economic policy to achieve the economic interest of the government, through communicating and negotiations with home and foreign institutions, business and international organizations, that are central to the state's priorities. Objectives of economic diplomacy can be wide-ranged, including utilizing diplomatic instruments to promote international trade, tourism, foreign employment, attract foreign direct investment, mobilize resources for development, mobilizing the diaspora, among others (HLTF, 2018).

In Nepal, "economic diplomacy" was first used in 1996's High-Level Foreign Policy Task Force (HLTF) report (HLTF, 2018). It framed the idea that economic diplomacy was an important part of Nepal's foreign policy and that trade, investment, foreign employment and tourism were its pillars, with development cooperation being a later addition (Acharya, 2024; Khanal, 2025). Since then, there were other attempts, with economic diplomacy becoming an essential component of Nepal's foreign policy. One such being the Policy, Planning and Economic Analysis division, established under the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in 2050 B.S., with the institute allocating budget for economic diplomacy programs (HLTF, 2018). Articles 50 and 51(d) of the Constitution of Nepal, also, outline economic objectives, directive principles and policies relating to economy, industry and commerce (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Likewise, Foreign Policy of Nepal has prioritized development assistance mobilization, foreign investment, international trade and tourism promotion among others as the key components of its economic diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MoFA], 2020).

As a country seeking to graduate as a Middle-Income Country status from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) status by 2030 (Acharya, 2019), Nepal needs to promote her economic interests effectively to the outside world. India remains an important neighbor while looking at how important economic associations are seen with India.

Several publications on economic diplomacy, have looked into aspects of Nepal's potential and challenges, but not many have exclusively explained Nepal's economic diplomacy with India. The effectiveness of Nepal's diplomatic missions in India and their approaches adopted for economic diplomacy remain unclear. In this study, the researcher has tried to examine the facets of Nepal's economic diplomacy with India, looking into the key constraints, gaps identified in the literatures, and identifying the strategic directions required to move forward.

This research focuses on the main dimensions of Nepal-India economic relations trade, aid, investment, tourism and employment and examines the constraints affecting Nepal's economic diplomacy with India. Building on this, this research aims to identify the strategic directions that support to strengthen the bilateral economic cooperation between Nepal and India in future.

Review of Literature

Economic diplomacy denotes the formulation and advancement of policies relating to production, movement, exchange of goods, services, labor and investment in other countries (Pokharel, 2011). Economic diplomacy has been understood primarily as a "process of decision making and negotiation in international economic relations focused on core issues such as trade, investment and finance" (Woolcock, 2013, p. 209). Economic diplomacy facilitates trade and investment by negotiating market access, rules, or agreed norms and standards.

Woolcock builds an analytical toolkit to help understand decision-making and negotiation in international economic relations, listing variables that can influence economic diplomacy, which include economic power, international institutions or regimes, markets, as well as the individual state interests. Digital diplomacy, regional and multilateral economic cooperation, sustainable development and climate change financing, public-private partnership and economic sanctions to that end have emerged as new trends within economic diplomacy (Paudel, 2023).

Bayne, moreover, adds to this and defines economic diplomacy as the "method by which states conduct their external economic relations. It embraces how they make decisions domestically, how they negotiate internationally and how the two processes interact" (Phlipot, 2012, p. 187). Economic diplomacy is "the process through which a country tackles the outside world to maximize their national gain in all field of activities including trade, investment and other forms of economically beneficial exchange where they enjoy competitive advantages' (Rana, 2011).

Hamal (2014) describes that "economic diplomacy is a part of diplomacy that promotes economic interests of a nation in its interactions with other nations and international and regional organizations" (Hamal, 2014. p. 93). Hamal focused on the idea that there are different types of diplomacy like military, cultural, public, sports and so on. So, economic diplomacy focuses on the economic interests of a country while interacting with international actors, while keeping the other factors in the state's overall consideration.

Nepal: Potential, Challenges and Opportunities

Concluding that economic diplomacy should be a major component of Nepal's foreign policy to serve the country's economic interests, Sahana Pradhan, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, said MoFA had moved towards organizational reform to promote economic diplomacy. Under her leadership, the Multilateral Economic Affairs Division was created within the Ministry (Pradhan, 2008). Gyan Chandra Acharya, the then Foreign Secretary (2008) of Nepal focused on "trade, transfer of technology, investment, finance, tourism, labor and development cooperation," as the "natural areas" of Nepal's "economic engagement with the rest of the world" (Acharya, 2008).

Located between two rising economies - India and China - Nepal has huge potential of reaping economic benefit. It has been believed that Nepal can get the benefit from the economic rise of the India and China, by focusing "on connectivity and integration with neighboring countries" (Acharya, 2020, p. 39). For that, Acharya claims Nepal needs to "take certain strategic decisions in its economic policies, economic diplomacy and development cooperation" (Acharya, 2020, p. 39). He further explains that "connectivity with the neighboring countries, transformation of Nepal's landlocked economy to a 'land-link', development of north-south economic corridors, sustainability of external sources of income such as remittances, Nepal's transformation to a Middle-Income Country and setting red-lines in development cooperation as well as gradually reducing dependence upon foreign aid and focusing on more sustainable sources of financing development" (Acharya, 2020, p. 39).

It has further been noted that Nepal's economic diplomacy can be more effective, by setting "annual targets for activities with objective indicators, country-specific annual plans, a program budget to each mission abroad every year, direct monitoring and supervision of activities by the High-Levels Committee under the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Secretary Level committee, and Multilateral Economic Diplomacy Division of MoFA, close coordination and cooperation with the line ministries, private sector, and other relevant stakeholders" (Hamal, 2014, p. 98).

The Three-Year Interim Plan (2010/11-2012/13), considered economic diplomacy to be an important dimension of Nepal's foreign policy and emphasized the importance of MoFA in making missions abroad more active in "areas of export, tourism, foreign investment, and foreign employment. It had the policy of providing additional financial and human resources to Nepal's diplomatic missions" (Hamal, 2014, p. 98).

Nepal and India: Emerging Dynamics

India has, in present times, emerged as the fourth-largest economy in the world, primed to become a global economic powerhouse (Government of India, 2025). Nepal comes within the top ten export destinations for India with the total exports to these two countries amounting to over $16 billion (Shringla, 2024, p. 86-87). Delhi's footprints in Nepal can be noted in terms of the routes connecting them, the development assistance, and it serving as a major destination for migrant workers.

Stressing on Nepal's importance to India, Nayak (2014) has noted that "Nepal is only one country whose citizen are given national treatment in India" (Nayak 2014, p. 44). On the other hand, India is important for Nepal because India is the largest investor and trade partner of Nepal. Around 60 % of Nepal external trade and 32.2% of Nepal Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) comes from India (NRB, 2025). For uninterrupted economic growth and trade with other countries, India has opened 22 transit routes with Nepal, across the open border (Consulate General of India, 2025). Though India's traditional influence in Nepal has been challenged by China, US, EU and other countries leading to mistrust and suspicion between Nepal and India (Sharma, 2024).

India has been providing assistance to Nepal since 1951. Its assistance for Nepal's development projects in 2010/11 alone amounted to NRs. 6.3 crores (Nayak, 2014, p. 57). Investments have been especially visible in sectors like infrastructure, health and education. It has also been a prime destination for skilled and unskilled migrant workers ranking second in the remittance contributor countries/destinations. There are, moreover, around 40,000 Gorkhas serving in the Indian Army and another 5000 in the paramilitary forces of India, alongside 150,000 pensioners, including their dependents (Nayak, 2014, p. 58).

Nepal finds a large and accessible market in India for its finished industrial goods, where it locates cheap raw materials as well. And while it stays as the largest trade partner for Nepal with business amounting to $2 billion, China's presence is unmistakable, along with the anti-Indian sentiment in the country (Nayak, 2014, p. 58). There have been issues in the hydro sector, with delay concerns with projects like the 6000 MW Pancheshwar dam. Political instability is also an issue. In the past, in spite of initiatives like Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA), Indian companies were wary of investments, owing to opposition from the Maoists (Nayak, 2014, p 59). India though, in recent years, has been backing connectivity projects and trade infrastructure in Nepal to remove the constrictions in trade flow. Integrated Checks Posts, as well as cross-border connectivity projects (road and rail) has been undertaken (Mehta et. al., 2024, p.88).

Nepal stands as India's 14^{th} largest export market in 2024-25, and is also a major location for Indian investors (Embassy of India, 2025). More than 30 percent of FDI stock is accounted for by India firms, measuring almost $600 million, and around 150 Indian companies operate in sectors of power, manufacturing, services, among others (Shringla, 2024). There have been attempts at reforms till date by Nepal to improve the business climate in Nepal, and potential areas for Indian investors could "include vehicle assembly, hydropower, medicinal and aromatic plants and pharmaceuticals" (Shringla, 2024, p. 87).

The theory of economic diplomacy explains how states use economic instruments such as trade, investment, finance, foreign aid and sanctions to achieve their foreign policy objectives and national interests. Realism is an important theory in international relations that explains how state use economic tools to increase their power and influence in international system. Realist believes that the international system is anarchic and sovereign states are the principal actors in the international politics (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013). According to realist theory, states are rational and unitary actors that pursue their own national interests. National security and survival are the most important priorities of each state. In pursuit of national security, states struggle to increase national power. National power and capabilities determine the relations among states. National interest, defined in terms of national power, guides the actions of the states in international relations (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013). Realist argue that national interest and power are primary important and economic relations can be used strategically. Strong states dominate economic negotiations. Economic sanctions, trade restrictions and strategic investment are the instrument for realist to achieve national interests of the country.

Similarly, liberalism is another important theory in international relations which believes in cooperations among states. Liberal scholar argue that countries cooperate economically because trade and interdependence create mutual benefits and reduce conflict. Liberalist assumptions are trade promotes peace and stability, economic cooperation leads to prosperity for all parties and international institutions facilitate economic diplomacy (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013). Economic diplomacy theory explains how states employ economic instruments such as trade, investment, aid, finance and sanctions to pursue foreign policy goals, enhance national power, and shape international economic relations (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013).

Research Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research design, utilizing an analytical approach towards the examination of the major constraints and future pathways to study aspects of Nepal-India economic diplomacy. It studied avenues for strategic cooperation between the countries, the role of missions when actualizing the goal, and the overall bilateral dynamics. Also, analysis of policy documents, academic publications and sector-specific reports such as Constitution of Nepal, reports of high-level foreign policy taskforce reports, Foreign Policy of Nepal and trade-related bilateral agreements were systematically reviewed.

The research has also analyzed data related to bilateral trade, policy documents, reports, academic journals, books, relevant institutional documents that look into industry-specific strategies and trends as secondary sources of information. The data focusing on constraints and apparent opportunities will later be considered in the final evaluation of the pathways Nepal can explore when pursuing the tools of economic diplomacy when engaging with India. All reports and data are mentioned with proper citation.

Findings and Discussion

Nepal’s economic relations with India have a long historical foundation. As Nepal’s immediate neighbor and one of the world’s rapidly growing economies, India remains a highly significant partner in Nepal’s economic development. This section examines the current status, opportunities and challenges of Nepal's economic relations with India. In particular, Nepal's economic diplomacy with India is analyzed through key dimensions, including Nepal-India trade relations, Indian foreign direct investment in Nepal, India's development assistance to Nepal, the flow of Indian tourists to Nepal, and foreign employment opportunities for Nepali workers in India.

Trade

Kautilya has mentioned that Nepal used to be a major exporter of wool to India during ancient times although the trade relations were informal, based on good faith and customary practices, without any customs barriers (Bhandari, 2010). Nepal was known for handicrafts products, and it facilitated trade between India and Tibet during 16^{th} to 18^{th} centuries (Shaha, 2001; Regmi, 1971, as cited in Khanal, 2023).

Nepal and British India first signed their official trade agreement in 1792 amidst the political tension (Khanal, 2023). The Sugauli Treaty (1816) further eased the entry of Indian goods into the Nepali market. Nepal was able to maintain a positive trade balance with India throughout the 1800s (Bhandari, 2010). For example, from 1899-1900, Nepal exported goods worth NRs. 25 million to India while it imported goods worth NRs. 15.8 million from India (Bhandari, 2010). Trade regulation between Nepal and India was marked by the Nepal-Britain Treaty of 1923. This treaty negatively impacted Nepalese local industries, though intended to facilitate imports in Nepal. The exemption of customs duty on imports to Nepal caused flooding of cheaper goods from India and other countries. As a result, the earlier positive trade balance began to decline. The trade relationship between Nepal and India was formalized by the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which allowed citizens of both countries to engage in economic activities in either country without discrimination (Vashisht, 2024). Furthermore, the 1950 Treaty of Trade and Commerce was protectionist in nature, favoring Indian industries. First, Nepal had to add customs duties to the imported goods from other countries at a rate not lower than that applied in India to prevent the cheap re-export of goods to India. Second, Nepal was required to add an export duty high enough to prevent the sale of Nepalese products at prices lower than those made in India (Bhandari, 2010). Nepal-India Treaty of Trade and Agreement of Cooperation to Control Unauthorized Trade (2009) governed trade between two countries (Embassy of India, 2025). Nepal has unilateral duty-free access to the Indian market through the treaty.

Being the Nepal's largest export destination, India comprises about 63.01% of the total trade worth $8.02 billion in FY 2023/24 Major exports of Nepal to India are cardamom, rolled iron sheets, edible oil, juices, plywood and jute whereas Nepal imports petroleum products, iron, steel, automobiles, machinery and cereals.

Nepal and India, which share a porous border, has unequal trade treaties. The 1950 treaty of trade and commerce has been an infringement on the economic sovereignty of Nepal. The imports from India are so high that it amounts to 16% of Nepal's GDP (Embassy of India, 2025).

The total trade volume between Nepal and India amounted to $8.54 billion (Nepali FY 2023-24) (Embassy of India, 2025). Of the total trade amount, Nepal exported goods worth $1.20 billion while it imported goods worth $7.33 billion, resulting $6.13 billion trade deficit for Nepal in the Indian FY 2024/25 (Embassy of India, 2025). The trade deficit is lowered by 1.23% than the previous year. The trade data between Nepal and India from 2000 onwards reveal an unbalanced trade relationship. Nepal's imports from India increased significantly from $575.65 million in 2000 to $3.25 billion in 2010. The import reached to $4.01billion in 2015 and $6.26 billion in 2020. This highlights Nepal's increasing demands of Indian goods. On the other hand, Nepal's exports to India showed mixed trends. Exports reached $317.79 million in 2000, which increased to $570.59 million in 2010. The exports in 2015 decreased to $419.09 million and further increased to $6.23 million in 2020 (World Bank & United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2020). This trade data from 2000 to 2020 reveals trade imbalance between Nepal and India continues. It reflects Nepal's structural weakness, limited export diversification and heavy dependence on Indian imports. More importantly, it exposes the lack of economic diplomacy to reduce ballooning trade deficit.

Nepal has not been able to increase its exports despite having duty-free access to the Indian market (Vashisht, 2024). Nepal's export potential to India is $17 million, while India's export potential to Nepal is $3.71 billion. This stark difference reducing trade deficit with India remains a herculean task (Taneja et al., 2020). Nepal has not been able to utilize the quota given in acrylic yarn and copper products (Vashisht, 2024). This indicates that a limitation exists in the domestic production and export capacity rather than the trade policies. Despite the reciprocal duty provisions of the 2009 treaty, Nepal applies a 5-9% agriculture reform fee on certain agricultural products from India, which indicates policy inconsistencies (Vashisht, 2024; Taneja et al., 2020). Out of 27, most land customs stations (LCS) between Nepal and India lack modern facilities- warehouses, cold storage, testing labs, electronic data exchange systems (Vashisht, 2024; Taneja et al., 2020).

According to Paudel (2023), "trade agreements increase trade engagements**...**open up foreign markets to domestic exporters" (Paudel, 2023, p. 100). However, this statement doesn't fit in Nepal's context. Nepal diversified its economic relations after its liberalization in 1990. That increased trade volume but more trade engagements did not increase Nepal's export. Likewise, Vashisht (2024) explains that the trade deficit with India is not due to the tariff-rate quotas or discriminatory trade policies; instead, it is a part of Nepal's structural problem, as it has a trade deficit with all major trade partners. He points out factors like remittance-generated/ driven imports, farmland being abandoned, declining agricultural productivity, gaps between demand and supply, and limited export potential.

Contrastingly, Timalsina (2023) offers an alternate viewpoint, stating that Nepal's trade and transit problems are due to unequal treaty provisions with India. He blames India's micromanagement in Nepal's administrative and political affairs. Non-tariff Measures (NTMs) is another issue. Nepal applies higher NTMs in chemicals in Indian exports, whereas India applies more Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) measures on Nepal's exports (Vashisht, 2024). Moreover, India has strict standards on restrictions of certain chemicals, detailed labelling, and pre-shipment certification which are not met by Nepal's existing standards and testing facilities (Vashisht, 2024).

In this context, taking regressive protectionist policies will not remove the persisting trade challenges and improve the trade performance of Nepal. Harmonized standards and regulations, quality infrastructure, digitalized and integrated systems, joint mechanisms, high potential land customs stations should be prioritized to address the ongoing operational bottlenecks (Vashisht, 2024; Sidana & Tiwari, 2025; Choudhary & Ghosh, 2014).

Nepal-India transit treaty should include conflict resolution mechanisms in the provision to ensure smooth supply of goods even at politically tensed situation between the countries (Sidana &Tiwari, 2025). Nepal needs to explore more opportunities for corridor through China and Bangladesh to diversify trade. Doing the same isn't easy as there's lack of direct connectivity which makes trade costlier. The manual customs procedure delays cross-border trade. For an example, digitization and India's one-stop solution to monitor the location and movement of Nepalese imports and exports can ease the trade (Sidana &Tiwari, 2025). Harmonized customs standards should be implemented to facilitate pre-clearance of goods and reduce bottlenecks at transit points. Customs reforms improve trade performance as well as increase investors' confidence creating more predictable and stable business environment (Sidana &Tiwari, 2025).

The export of goods, services, and intellectual properties contributes significantly to the national economy of LDCs like Nepal. Nepal has adopted an open, liberal and market-oriented economy after 1990. The revised Trade Policy 2015 recognizes trade promotion as an important component of economic diplomacy, it has provisions for free trade agreements with countries and regional organizations that have relatively high trade potential to increase international market access, make agreements for alternative trade and transit routes with neighboring countries to decrease the costs, mobilize diplomatic missions abroad for trade promotion, investment facilitation, and market studies (Ministry of Commerce and Supplies [MoCS], 2015).

The trade sector is also gaining importance in periodic plans. National Trade Integration Strategy (NTIS), 2072 has a provision of linking exports with products having comparative advantage, increase export capacity, and improving trade facilitation (NTIS, 2072). Being a member to WTO, SAFTA, BIMSTEC, BBIN has also helped Nepal to strengthen trade relations at the regional level. Nepal needs to identify markets where Nepali products can gain comparative advantage, maintain healthy labor relations, develop trade-related physical infrastructure, strengthen coordination among institutions, implement policy reforms and invest in regional connectivity, improving overall competitiveness (MoFA, 2018).

India's Foreign Investment in Nepal: Trends and Patterns

India remains a major source of FDI in Nepal (KC & Nepal, 2025; Adhikari, 2013; Taneja et al., 2020). Until 1980s, India was the only investor in Nepal, with the total FDI inflows worth \$0.5 million annually (Vashisht, 2024). The investment turned to be negative in some years as they withdrew investment (Taneja et al., 2020; Vashisht, 2024). The formal investment by India dates back to 1951-1952 with the establishment of Nepal Commercial Cooperation as a joint venture (Mukherji 2011, as cited in Vashisht, 2024). The investment was mostly from the Indian state-owned enterprises till the 1980s. The Industrial Enterprises Act and the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act (FITTA) of 1992 opened new avenues for private investors, further encouraging the trade-investment linkage under bilateral trade agreements (Nayak & Rai, 2024; Taneja et al., 2020; Vashisht, 2024). Foreign Investment Policy (2015), FITTA (2019), Public-Private Partnership and Investment Act (2019), Special Economic Zone Act (2018), and supporting legislations like Labour Act, Industrial Enterprise Act, Electronic Transaction Act aimed for progressive liberalization and competitive investment environment in Nepal (Taneja et al., 2020; Nayak & Rai, 2024).

Despite several policy reforms Nepal still struggles to attract FDI (Nayak & Rai, 2024; Vashisht, 2024). The total FDI committed to Nepal was NRs. 60.61 billion, while the total recorded foreign investment was NRs. 11.20 billion (Department of Industry, 2025). India had been the largest source of FDI in Nepal till FY 2022/23 with a share of 35% in

Nepal's total FDI stock (Nepal Rastra Bank [NRB], 2024). While India's share decreased, China's share increased from 12% in FY2022/23 to 44.77% in FY2024/25 (NRB, 2024; Department of Industry, 2025). The amount of FDI inflow from India to Nepal increased from NRs. 2.73 billion in FY 2023/24 to NRs. 4.49 billion in FY 2024/45. However, India's share of Nepal's total FDI decreased from 21.54% in FY 2023/2024 to 19.55% in FY 2024/25. This reflects a highly competitive FDI landscape of Nepal with increasing interest of investors from other countries and a relatively decreasing India's share. FDI in Nepal from India including paid-up capital, reserves, and loans, amounted to NRs. 27.3 billion in FY 2015/16 (NRB, 2019). The Indian FDI increased significantly to NRs. 75.81 billion in FY 2020/21(NRB, 2022, p. 14) and further to NRs. 103.45 billion in FY 2022/23 (NRB, 2024). This indicates the rising importance of Nepal as a destination for Indian investment.

India's investment isn't consistent. The investment is dominated by state-owned hydropower projects rather than private investors (Nayak & Rai, 2024). During the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), Indian companies were targeted mainly, affecting about 47 firms in 2004 (Nayak & Rai, 2024). In 1990s, leftist groups opposed privatization and deregulation, which further exacerbated policy uncertainty (Shrestha, 2022). Frequent government changes, policy shifts, increasing anti-Indian sentiments, and unresolved bilateral issues weakened Indian investors' confidence (Nayak & Rai, 2024; Vashisht, 2024).

Due to absence of formal protection mechanism Indians were hesitant to invest in Nepal until Nepal ratified the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) and Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement in 2011 (Taneja et al., 2020; Nayak & Rai, 2024). Still, Indian investors are facing policy related and operational challenges. Lack of coordination among FDI-governing agencies, complicated land acquisition, trade union activities and politically motivated strikes, lack of tax rebates on reinvested profits, insufficient protection of intellectual property rights (copyright, trademark, and patent infringements), complex and lengthy process for profit repatriation and foreign-exchange conversion procedures and lengthy process though "one-window" system of Investment Board, rampant corruption and unreliable infrastructure remain as major challenges. (Taneja et al., 2020; Vashisht, 2024; Nayak & Rai, 2024; Acharya, 2024; KC & Nepal, 2025). Citing administrative difficulties some Indian companies withdrew investments Vashisht (2024). Although Nepal has huge potential to generate clean energy, actual investment remains low (Acharya, 2024; Vashisht, 2024).

To address these challenges, Nepal must simplify the investment approval and profit repatriation process, make a functional single-window system without procedural delays, rationalize royalties and taxes on export-oriented projects like hydropower, strengthen intellectual property protection, and ensure labor discipline and worker rights (Vashisht, 2024; Nayak & Rai, 2024; KC & Nepal, 2025). Full implementation of BIPPA, expansion of bilateral agreements to new promising sectors, and setting up joint public-private coordination platforms are further required to gain the trust of investors (Nayak & Rai, 2024; Acharya, 2024). Furthermore, infrastructure development in areas of power supply, cross-border connectivity, and industrial logistics is much needed, along with depoliticization on economic matters (KC & Nepal, 2025; Vashisht, 2024). Following these reforms will help Nepal gain better FDI inflows supporting sustainable economic growth through infrastructure development, industrialization, employment and revenue generation. The large-scale investments aimed at economic development in the least developed and developing economies require the transfer of technology and managerial skills along with capital inflow.

FITTA (2075) aims to promote foreign investment and technology transfer, while Company Act (2073) ensures ease and transparency in establishing, operating and monitoring the companies. Industrial Enterprise Act (2073) aims to streamline entry, operation and exit process of the businesses. The establishment of one stop service centre along with several policy and institutional reforms were introduced. In 2018, Nepal was ranked third in South Asia after India and Bhutan based on the Ease of Doing Business (World Bank, n.d.).

Nepal has high potential on capital intensive and labor-intensive investments based particularly on the natural resources. Water resources, transportation, agriculture, tourism, mining, and minerals, information and communication technology, productive industries, health, education, and financial sectors are attractive sectors for investment opportunities. Achieving sustainable and high economic growth requires coordinated action among key concerned institutions and private sector.

India Development Assistance to Nepal

India's first aid was used to build Kathmandu airport in 1951. Over the years, India has offered grants and lines of credit to Nepal for connectivity, irrigation, health, education, and heritage preservation. India committed $1billion aid for quake victims after 2015's earthquake, provided 100,000 doses of vaccine during corona crisis and offered $75 million when for Jajarkot earthquake victims (Embassy of India, 2025).

India views aid as "an instrument of gain political and economic influence" (Kragelund, 2011, p.594, as cited in Mukherjee, 2015). In the first three decades of bilateral aid from India to Nepal (1951-1972), nearly 53% of the total (Rs. 902 million) was for road building (Vohra, 1980, as cited in Mukherjee, 2015). India has assisted in the construction of highways in Nepal, cross-border rail links, integrated check posts (ICPs), cross-border petroleum pipeline (Embassy of Nepal, New Delhi, n.d.). While doing so, India prioritizes benefits to Indian firms, economic growth, and long-term trade linkages while giving aid. For example, India focused on roads only if they were connected to the Indian border (Mihaly, 1965, as cited in Mukherjee, 2015). This highlights that the development priorities were based on donor's strategic interests, not as per the receiver's needs. In the broader context, from 2005-2010, India allocated nearly 75% of the total $2 billion committed to developing countries in the strategic sectors like infrastructure (energy, water, transport, communications, and industry) (Tierney et al. 2011, as cited in Mukherjee, 2015). India provides aid to areas of its strategic significance. This reflects India's donor-centric approach where aid is given based on donor's strategic and economic interests rather than based on recipient's needs.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursement from India to Nepal was $50.73 million in FY 2010/11 (Ministry of Finance 2011). It declined to $35.77 million in FY 2015/16 (MoF, 2017) and then increased to $72.3 million in FY 2020/21 (MoF, 2021). In the FY 2022/23, the ODA disbursement increased to $99.8 million (MoF, 2025). In recent years, there seems to be an increase in the strategic significance of aid (development assistance as a strategic instrument of economic diplomacy). The data illustrates India's engagement is in the areas of infrastructure, connectivity and reconstruction projects of Nepal. Aid is less likely to create independence as compared to trade, foreign direct investment (Kapur & Suri, 2014 as cited in Mukherjee, 2015).

Changing its discourse on foreign aid India has started to refer "cooperation and partnership" in recent years from what it used to call "subsidies to neighbors" earlier (Mukherjee, 2015). India has the same objective as that of US in Nepal which is to limit China's influence (Mihaly, 1965, as cited in Mukherjee, 2015). India tends to increase its aid commitments to counter aid China or western countries. When India constructed airport in Kathmandu, the runway was built short so that Chinese airplanes couldn't land on it.

Indian Tourist in Nepal

Nepal-India holds enormous potential for cultural and religious tourism as both the countries share similar religion, culture and history (Choudhary & Ghosh, 2014). In Nepal, Pashupatinath is the greatest pilgrimage destination for Indian tourists. For Hindus, the Ramayana connects Nepal and India through Ram, Sita, and Valmiki. Likewise, for

Buddhists, Gautam Buddha connects Lumbini in Nepal (place of birth) and Bodh Gaya in India (place of enlightenment).

Nepal's natural beauty, architecture, rich history, culture, traditions, and spirituality make it an exceptional destination to promote tourism (Investment Board Nepal, 2024). There are plenty of investment opportunities in eco and adventure tourism. The rich biodiversity makes Nepal investment-friendly for agro-forestry industries along with potential in the traditional medicine and Ayurvedic sector (Vashisht, 2024). The bilateral cooperation between Nepal and India is required in this sector.

Tourism can contribute to economic diplomacy. But bureaucratic hurdles, centralized mindsets in promoting tourism, fragmented investments; lack of skilled human resources and poor connectivity as well as financial transaction are blocking flow of tourists (NTB, 2025). According to NTB (2022), the number of Indian tourists visiting Nepal in 2000 was 95,915; in 2005 was 96,434; with a rise to 120,898 in 2010. However, the flow of tourists declined to 74,814 in 2015 and to 40,336 in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of Indian tourists. In 2024, the Lonely Planet had ranked Nepal at eighth position among ten best countries to visit considering its natural, historical, religious, cultural and adventure aspects.

The Constitution of Nepal considers tourism as an important pillar of national economy. The Tourism Policy 2065 highlights the need for tourism promotion for economic transformation while the 15th Periodic Plan (2076-82) aims to develop Nepal as a safe, quality, tourism- friendly and attractive tourism destination; diversify tourism destinations and deliver the benefits the tourism sector equitably to the people. Since several global are related to tourism, Nepal should also consider tourism while formulating tourism related strategies.

With the expansion of the tourism sector, it is necessary to identify new trends such as eco-tourism, agri-tourism, educational tourism, health tourism, rural tourism, volunteer tourism, wedding tourism, adventure tourism, seminar tourism, sports tourism and so on and to specialize tourism related activities accordingly. While specializing, factors such as geography, local culture, availability of infrastructure, level of education and awareness, seasonal adaptability, collaboration with public, private, cooperative and community sectors should be considered.

Since the main means of promoting tourism is publicity, it is necessary to conduct regular, systematic, comprehensive and effective promotional programmes within and outside the country. In order to so, support of Nepali missions abroad, use of information and technology and collaboration with the Non-Resident Nepalis (NRNs) and private sectors are required. Similarly, information and communication can be encouraged with the help of media. Cultural programmes and tour of travel writers also promote tourism. Branding Nepal's tourism, increase flight services agreements, building trekking trails and promotion of famed climber help tourism.

The NTB has mentioned that Nepal's tourism has 12 unique qualities such as the Himalayas, Everest, Kathmandu, cultural diversity, rare flora and fauna, diversity in climate and ecology, potential for adventure tourism, unreached/undiscovered unknown places, spirituality and purification, friendliness, purity, and special dishes. Since these qualities are authentic/ original characteristics of Nepal, it is necessary to carry out tourism promotional activities keeping these elements in mind. Tourism is an important area for economic diplomacy.

Foreign Employment: Nepali Workers in India

Nepal's constitution envisages to acquire foreign currency, technology and skills through foreign employment. The ongoing national periodic plan mentions that "foreign employment" should be a choice - not an obligation - of Nepali citizens. The prevailing law to regulate Nepal's foreign employment regime is the Foreign Employment Act, 2007. Two aspects of foreign employment management are crucial: regulation and welfare. The regulator aspects of foreign employment are handled by the Department of Foreign Employment, and the welfare aspects are steered by the Foreign Employment Board (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security [MoLESS], 2024).

The history of labor migration can be traced back to the Sugauli Treaty in 1816, where the treaty had provision for recruiting Nepali Gurkhas in the East India Company. India becomes the second largest destination for Nepali migrant workers, comprising about 11%, after Middle Eastern countries (nearly 14%) (National Statistics Office, 2025). The Indian migrants in Nepal constitute more than 93% of the total migrants in seven censuses (1961-2021) (National Statistics Office, 2025). Out of the total Indian migrants, women migrants were more mainly because of the open border easing socio-cultural connection, i.e., marriage migration from India to Nepal, especially to the Terai area. About 45% of the immigration was due to marriage. The total Indian immigrants to Nepal in 1961 was 0.32 million, which increased to more than double, being 0.71 million in 2021. Indian immigrants constitute the largest number by nationality, i.e., 97% followed by China (1.4%). They are mostly reported in the Bagmati Province and Terai region (99.2%) of Nepal (National Statistics Office, 2025).

The major reason for migration is linked to economic reasons. The Nepal-India treaty of 1950, (articles 6 and 7) has a foundational role in shaping the migration pattern between these two countries. India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) allows Nepali migrants to have access to digital identity (Aadhaar) and digital financial transaction through unified payment interface (UPI). The study by Yerrapureddy et al. (n.d.) shows that despite DPI, Nepali workers face job insecurity, remain mostly in the informal economy due to poor integration. The open border additionally increases the risk of cross-border human trafficking and other forms of harassment. Moreover, there is high tendency of distortion of labor data as Nepali migrant workers are remain unseen in the official surveys, in both countries.

Nepal is at the forefront among small countries in terms of remittance size. However, it is challenging to manage the remittances from Nepali workers abroad sustainably by channeling them into Nepal through the banking sector and utilizing them in the productive sector. It is necessary to strategically manage returnee migrant workers and utilize their skills and experience in the country. In future, it seems necessary to create employment opportunities for youth within the country. However, since large number of young workforces is in foreign employment, it is compulsory to make it safe, organized, and dignified. In issues related to economic diplomacy, Nepal's diplomatic missions abroad should take diplomatic initiatives in collaboration with the relevant ministries to protect and promote Nepal's national interests.

Role of Missions: Grasping the Scope of Demand

Moving beyond traditional roles, Nepal's Embassy in India and the Consulate General Office in Kolkata, can play a proactive role in identifying and informing Nepali business community about valuable and highly demanding goods in India. These offices should also do timely researches and inform Nepali entrepreneurs regarding demand of Nepali products in India.

Despite several bilateral agreements signed between two countries aimed at to promoting free trade India often halts smooth supply of Nepali agricultural goods at the border points. To end long standing obstacles diplomatically Nepal government and Nepali diplomatic missions in India should act promptly to resolve hassles so that Nepali farmers could get benefit. By arranging periodic bilateral meetings between importers of India and Nepali entrepreneurs' diplomats from both the countries can ensure hassle-free trade.

Nepali entrepreneurs and famers are facing huge backlashes due to lack of timely information regarding Indian market policies. Nepali diplomatic missions in India stay updated regarding the changes of Indian economic policies and brief Nepali businessmen and other beneficiaries instantly to promote the country’s economic interests.

On FDI, Nepal has huge potential especially in the field of clean energy, herbal, technology and transpiration sectors. In recent years, India has emerged one of the largest countries investing abroad. Nepali diplomatic missions in India should give their utmost priority to potential investors regarding investment opportunities in Nepal. The mutual benefits in case of bilateral business promotion should be highlighted so that more investment could pour in the Himalayan nation. Some development projects initiated by Indian companies such as Upper Karnali, West Seti and Arun III are left unfinished despite years of wait. Given this context, Nepali missions should also facilitate proactively to complete those projects in time. That will bolster bilateral ties and more investors would agree to invest in Nepal.

Nepali diplomatic missions can play their role in tourism promotion in India by inviting top politicians, celebrities, travel vloggers and players. Indian premier Narendra Modi’s visit to Muktinath had significantly increased the number of Indian tourists in the region. Since millions of Hindu followers are interested to visit revered Pashupatinath, Muktinath and other Hindu shrines. Lumbuni, Swyambhunath and Boudhanath are other destination for Buddhist devotees.

Nepal’s efforts to connect religious and tourist destinations with the Indian cities have not been materialized fully. Even as Nepal built two international airports in Pokhra and Bhairahawa to promote tourism. These airports are not operated in full swing mainly after India refused to give its airspace for international aircrafts landing in Pokhara and Bhairahawa. Nor India has endorsed Nepali airlines companies’ plan to connect Indian citites with Pokhara and Lumbini. That has largely affected Nepal’s tourism. If Nepali diplomats in India success to give an amicable solution to this long-standing issue that could be a big respite for Nepal.

Millions of Nepalis migrant workers in India are unregistered and work informally. Their status often remain unclear and are facing a numerous challenges. Nepali diplomats can conduct surveys Indian labor market, categorize them as skilled and unskilled works and push for their social welfare. Diplomats in India should act inline to ensure human rights of Nepali workers.

Conclusion

Nepal's economic relations with India rests on several treaties, decades of cultural interactions and historical transactions within key sectors of value to both countries. The trends have shifted in recent years with newer sectors of engagements drawing interest from the regional power, and this coincides with India's rising economic potential. At the end of the considerations, the relations remain deeply asymmetric and Nepal's own interest calculation requires a much more focused approach that delves into its internal constraints as well as the persistent challenges in the bilateral associations when developing a coherent strategy for economic diplomacy with India. There are both opportunities and vulnerabilities that line such deliberations.

India's rapid growth has meant a rising energy demand and regional expansion seen in its connectivity agendas across South Asia, and beyond. Nepal is a part of it, but persisting political instability, along with a widening trade deficit, vulnerability to external shocks and an exclusive reliance on India's three ports has meant that its negotiating capacity is limited when looking at the leverage it actually holds in the relationship. Nepal can define and sharpen its focus when collecting market intelligence and facilitating bilateral stakeholder meetings when moving towards negotiating tables with practical arrangements regarding cooperation on issues of trade and transit, investment, tourism and foreign employment. Both internal reforms and coordination with missions are, however, required to generate actual impact, necessitating a convening of coherent field and policy insights on sector-specific engagements guiding the state interests and initiatives. It is important to stress here that while missions are important for economic diplomacy, they are a part of a wider system that requires clear directives, institutional stability and reform to realize state interests.

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Multilevel Analysis of US–India Strategic Alignment and Contestation: Implications for Nepal

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Abstract

The relations between the United States and India, which is characterized by both convergence and divergence across multiple sectors, has grown in significance amid a developing global power transfer. With a focus on the strategic ramifications for Nepal, this study explores the evolving dynamics of US-India relations within the broader framework of regional and global geopolitical changes. It highlights important points of agreement, like democratic ideals, counterbalancing China, and Indo-Pacific cooperation, as well as divisions based on strategic autonomy, multilateralism, and regional objectives. The study looks at how Nepal's geopolitical environment is impacted by structural and regional trends, which force it to confront challenging strategic demands. The study uses Role Theory to analyze Nepal's self-perceptions and the expectations that the US and India have of it, revealing perceptual gaps and conflicting role conceptions in this triangle interaction. Three levels of theme analysis descriptive, comparative, and contextual as well as Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) are part of the article's qualitative, *interpretive research methodology. The results highlight Nepal's difficult balancing act between cooperating with both powers and preserving strategic autonomy, and they shed light on the wider ramifications of great power competition for small South Asian states in a multipolar global system.*

Introduction

The relationship between the United States and India is at a turning point due to complicated South Asian geopolitics and a quickly shifting global order. Due mostly to common democratic values and worries over China's growing regional influence, bilateral cooperation has changed over the past few decades from cautious engagement to complete strategic partnership (Verma, 2025). But India's initiatives for hedging and strategic autonomy show how the next reality will change. The nature, extent, and operationalization of these convergences and divergences are largely dependent on India's resolute pursuit of strategic autonomy and sophisticated hedging in a multipolar environment, even though both nations have broad strategic interests, particularly in opposing China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. India carefully balances its relationship with the United States without becoming a formal ally or subordinate partner, as implied by its commitment to strategic autonomy. India prefers a "restricted alignment" or collaboration that guarantees its flexibility in foreign policy and security decisions, as contrast to the conventional alliance paradigm (Lalwani, 2025).

India's selective support of US-led initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), in which it participates in certain pillars while remaining an observer in others, demonstrates this strategy. India wants to avoid getting involved in great-power conflicts that could restrict its strategic options, which is why it is reluctant to fully support US-led security architectures like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) or larger Indo-Pacific military coalitions (Limaye & Nishiuwatoko, 2024). Geographically, India and the US have different strategic maps of the Indo-Pacific region, which reflects their different threat assessments and priorities both practically and symbolically (ORF, 2024). India's balanced approach to maintaining close bilateral ties with the United States while keeping lines of communication open with Russia and, to a lesser extent, China, is another example of its hedging strategy. India continues to buy large quantities of defense equipment from Russia despite US concerns about sanctions and geopolitical alignments. This limited involvement shows convergence and principled difference, as well as India's objective of utilizing economic cooperation while maintaining national policy space. This contrast highlights how important it is to comprehend that US-India strategic cooperation is a complicated relationship that strikes a balance between convergence and divergence. This dynamic illustrates how India maximizes autonomy and influence by managing its interactions with great powers.

As they negotiate the shifting geostrategic landscape, regional actors like Nepal and others in South Asia face both opportunities and challenges from this complex US-India dynamic, which is based on India's strategic autonomy. There is a dearth of systematic scholarly work that looks at the similarities and differences between the United States and India as well as the implications for Nepal in the context of the global power shift, despite the fact that current literature discusses U.S.-India strategic ties and Nepal's foreign policy separately. In-depth studies of Nepal's management of these changing dynamics are rare, especially when viewed through the prism of role theory. Additionally, there is a knowledge gap regarding how small countries like Nepal maintain strategic autonomy in the face of great power competition in a multipolar world because few studies have critically examined the triangle interplay of perceptions and expectations between the United States, India, and Nepal. This study firstly examines the key areas of convergence and divergence in U.S.–India relations within the broader context of global and regional geopolitical transformations in the evolving world order. Second, it measures the structural and regional dimensions that underpin U.S.–India strategic alignments and tensions, and analyzes how these dynamics are reflected in the Nepalese context. Finally, it analyzes Nepal's self-perceptions vis-à-vis the expectations of the United States and India, and maps the triangular dynamics of perception and expectation through the lens of Role Theory.

Review of Literature

The expanding strategic relationship between the United States and India has sparked significant scholarly interest, particularly in light of the altering global order typified by China's relative ascent and the move to multipolarity. Existing research highlights the developing strategic convergence between Washington and New Delhi, particularly since the early 2000s, while also recognizing continuing areas of divergence rooted in India's strategic autonomy. According to Tellis (2005), US-India ties have evolved into a "natural partnership" based on shared democratic values and aligned geopolitical objectives, particularly in balancing China's growth.

Similarly, Mohan (2012) discusses India's steady transition from non-alignment to multi-alignment, implying that its relationship with the US indicates pragmatic adaptation rather than alliance dependency. However, despite increasing convergence, researchers detect long-standing tensions. According to Cohen (2001) and Madan (2020), India's unwillingness to embrace formal alliances, combined with its historical commitment to strategic autonomy, typically limits the depth of alignment.

Divergences persist in areas like as economic policy, relations with Russia, and varying threat perceptions. For example, while the US focuses global strategic competition with China, India takes a more nuanced approach that includes competition with selective collaboration (Madan, 2020). At the systemic level, theoretical methods such as neorealism and strategic rivalry frameworks have been widely employed to analyze US-India relations. Kenneth Waltz (1979) proposes that states align to balance power in an anarchic international system, which helps explain the strategic convergence of the United States and India in response to China's development. Meanwhile, recent research on "competitive engagement" implies that major powers collaborate while still competing, resulting in complex patterns of alignment and contestation (Tellis & Tanner, 2012). These frameworks offer a solid foundation for examining the structural and geographical features of US-India relations.

Despite this extensive corpus of literature, research on smaller states, particularly Nepal, remains relatively neglected. Existing research on Nepal's foreign policy is mostly concerned with its balancing strategy with India and China (Baral, 2012; Muni, 2016). According to Muni (2016), Nepal has traditionally adopted a "equidistance" or "diversification" policy to protect sovereignty in the face of asymmetric power relations. Similarly, Baral and Pyakurel (2015) highlight Nepal's efforts to navigate geopolitical challenges through nonalignment and diplomatic flexibility. More recent research examines the United States' growing participation in Nepal, particularly through initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), SPP, Tibetan refugee issues, and high-level visits.

US intervention brings new dimensions to Nepal's classic India-China balancing act (Chand, 2021). However, these studies tend to examine US policy toward Nepal in isolation, failing to effectively connect it to broader US-India strategic relationships. A key gap in the literature is the lack of comprehensive, multilevel assessments that consider the global, regional, and domestic dimensions of US-India relations and their implications for Nepal. While existing research focuses on bilateral interactions between the United States and India, India and Nepal, or the United States and Nepal, it rarely examines the triangular interplay among these actors in depth.

This fragmentation hampers our knowledge of how systemic convergences and divergences influence regional results for smaller states. Holsti (1970) established role theory, which highlights the importance of national role ideas and external expectations in driving foreign policy behavior. Later academics, such as Stephen G. Walker and Cameron G. Thies extended this approach to examine how nations handle role conflicts and expectations in complex international situations. Despite its importance, role theory has been underutilized in studying Nepal's foreign policy actions, particularly in light of great power competition.

The few studies that use a perception-based method emphasize the contradictions between Nepal's self-perception as a sovereign, non-aligned state and external expectations from India and the United States. For example, India frequently views Nepal as part of its strategic sphere of influence, whereas the United States sees Nepal as a partner in supporting democratic governance and regional stability. These divergent expectations cause role conflicts in Nepal, hampering its efforts to sustain strategic autonomy (Gupta, 2023). Another notable gap is the dearth of empirical research into how small states manage strategic autonomy in a multipolar world. Existing theories of small state behavior, such as bandwagoning, balancing, and hedging, provide useful insights but do not fully account for the action of nations like Nepal in changing their external environment.

Recent research on hedging methods indicates that tiny nations might adopt flexible and multidirectional policies to maximize advantages while limiting risks (Kuik, 2016). However, these frameworks have yet to be consistently applied to Nepal's interactions with the United States and India. Furthermore, the triangle dynamics between the United States, India, and Nepal have received little scholarly attention. While some research recognize the growing relevance of trilateral interactions, they frequently lack a theoretical framework for investigating the interplay of perceptions and expectations among these actors. This difference is especially noticeable in the context of growing geopolitical initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Strategy, where US-India convergence may create both opportunities and restrictions for Nepal.

Despite these limitations, this study fills three significant gaps in the literature. First, it conducts a multilevel analysis of US-India strategic alignment and contestation, looking at both structural (global) and regional elements. Second, it examines how these dynamics play out in the Nepalese context, concentrating on the potential and challenges they present for Nepal's foreign policy. Third, it uses role theory to examine Nepal's self-perceptions in relation to external expectations, providing a new framework for understanding the triangle dynamics of US-India-Nepal interactions. By incorporating ideas from a thorough grasp of how global power shifts affect regional geopolitics and small-state agency. In doing so, it addresses the growing demand for nuanced analysis of South Asia's changing strategic terrain and the role of countries such as Nepal within it.

Research Methodology

This study examines the growing patterns of convergence and divergence in US-India relations in the context of changing regional and global geopolitical pressures using a qualitative, interpretive research design and a thematic analytical approach. The study examines Nepal's self-perceptions, the expectations of the US and India, and the perceptual conflicts that arise within this strategic triangle using Role Theory as a theoretical framework based on Foreign Policy Analysis. Examining how states see their roles and how these perceptions coincide or diverge with other actors' expectations is made easier with the help of role theory. Most of the information is gathered from secondary sources. These include scholarly books, policy documents, peer-reviewed academic journals, and official government publications including Indo-Pacific strategic frameworks, India's foreign policy statements, and the United States National Security Strategy. Further information is gathered from reputable international and regional media outlets that help contextualize current events and policy changes, as well as publications and policy briefs from well-known think tanks like CSIS, Carnegie India, ORF, Brookings, and Nepal's Institute of Foreign Affairs.

The selected texts are methodically coded and comprehended using a Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA). Three steps are included in thematic analysis: By using descriptive analysis, consistent themes and patterns about US-India relations and Nepal's strategic position can be found in official discourses, academic discussions, and policy narratives. Comparative analysis reveals both similarities and differences between US and Indian strategies and actions in areas such as regional diplomacy, economic engagement, and security cooperation. The US-China strategic rivalry, South Asian regional politics, and the expanding multipolar global order are some of the larger geopolitical frameworks that contextualize interactions between the US, India, and Nepal. This methodological approach offers policy-relevant insights on Nepal's strategic space and options as global power shifts take place, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the triangle interaction between the United States, India, and Nepal.

Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion explores the US-India strategic convergence and divergence at the global, regional and national levels with its impact on geopolitical conflicts influencing Nepal's foreign policy, security and strategic balancing.

Global Power Transitions: Evolving Nature of US-India Relations

From Nehru to Modi, US-Indian relations have changed from cautious engagement to strategic cooperation. In the midst of Cold War tensions, India adopted a non-alignment strategy and avoided contact with the US during Nehru's presidency, concentrating instead on its leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement (CFR, 2023). Due to India's close ties to the Soviet Union and the United States' backing of Pakistan, especially during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war, relations were often tense. After the end of the Cold War, the relationship greatly strengthened, especially after the Manmohan Singh administration signed a historic nuclear cooperation agreement. However, under Narendra Modi's premiership, which started in 2014, relations greatly improved. Modi established robust cooperation in the fields of technology, defense, and counterterrorism by leveraging India's expanding economic power and geopolitical goals. The "defining partnership" status of US-India relations was highlighted by his numerous encounters with US presidents, including historic tours and speeches to Congress (Pant and Joshi, 2017).

In recent decades, the international system has undergone significant changes, shifting from a unipolar world ruled by a single superpower to a multipolar global order characterized by several major countries. With its unparalleled economic, military, and cultural might on a global scale, the United States became the only hegemon after the end of the Cold War. According to Friedman (2010), as stated in IDEA Publishers Group (2021), the United States played a special role throughout this period in developing international conventions, maintaining global order, and directing the global agenda based on its own interests. However, the balance of power has gradually shifted away from unipolarity because to the rise of regional powers, especially China, Russia, and India (Studocu, 2024). The present shift from unipolarity to multipolarity is being driven by a number of factors, including increased economic and technological interdependence among states, the declining relative power of the United States, and the economic rise of China and other regional countries. New alliances are creating a more pluralistic global order, as seen by the establishment of institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and economic blocs like BRICS (Spinetimes, 2024). As a greater range of ideas and views emerges inside the global system, power is being redistributed both conceptually and tangibly (Global Times, 2025).

The struggle between the United States' desire to maintain a unipolar world under its leadership and India's desire to create a multipolar world order in which it leads the Global South is what sets apart the evolving global order. In frameworks like the Indo-Pacific

Strategy and the Quad, the long-standing hegemon, the United States, wants India to be aligned as a significant strategic partner to oppose China's expansion. In order to increase military interoperability and alignment against potential adversaries, Washington views India as a crucial ally in upholding a rules-based system centered by US strength (GIS Reports, 2025; Chatham House, 2025).

India, on the other hand, actively avoids legally binding alliances in order to preserve flexibility in a shifting multipolar world and instead pursues a nuanced foreign policy based on strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. India positions itself as a champion of Global South unity and an advocate for a more equitable international governance system by striking a balance between cooperation with the United States and ongoing ties with Russia, China, and regional organizations like BRICS (GIS Reports, 2025; BRICS Rewired, 2025). US-Indian relations become a complicated blend of strategic convergence and underlying antagonism as a result of this basic divide. Washington must take into account Indian interests within its broader Indo-Pacific framework since India's claim to leadership in the Global South offers distinct policy priorities that occasionally diverge from US global agendas (The Diplomat, 2025; ORF, 2024).

Because of this, the current US-India relationship is more of a balanced partnership that strikes a balance between autonomy and cooperation. India leverages this relationship to bolster its status as a legitimate global power that supports multipolarity, while the United States exploits India's global influence to maintain the unipolar aspects of the current order.

US-India Convergences and Divergences on Global Level

On a global scale, US-India relations show congruence in sustaining a rules-based international order, balancing China's ascent, boosting maritime security, and developing economic and technical collaboration. However, disagreements exist on matters such as Russia policy, trade disputes, climate obligations, and approaches to global governance, which reflect disparities in strategic autonomy and national interests.

Convergences on India–US Relations

Convergences in India-US relations are motivated by shared strategic goals in preserving a stable Indo-Pacific order, countering China's growing influence, enhancing defense and security cooperation, extending commercial and technical partnerships, and supporting democratic ideals. Both countries are increasingly collaborating at the bilateral, regional, and global levels to achieve common geopolitical, economic, and security goals.

Shared Interests in the Indo-Pacific (QUAD, Maritime Security, Connectivity)

The US-India strategic cooperation is shaped in large part by the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), which emphasizes India's importance in the Indo-Pacific area. By identifying India as a Major Defense Partner and highlighting its function as a regional provider of net security, the IPS hopes to improve defense relations with that country. Increased bilateral cooperation in cutting-edge technology, sales of weapons like armed drones, and agreements to jointly manufacture combat aircraft engines are all significant accomplishments that reflect the IPS's goal of integrated defense industrial bases (Freeman et al., 2024). The cooperative security approach is mainly meant to offset China's growing military and nuclear capabilities given the region's complex geopolitical dynamics (Pant & Mishra, 2023).

However, the US is still worried about India's enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) despite significant strategic collaboration. Due to persistent issues with intellectual property protection and enforcement, such as problems with patentability standards under Indian law, long delays in patent issuance, and inconsistent enforcement tactics, India was placed back on the US Trade Representative's "Priority Watch List" in 2025. Despite increased engagement and efforts to adhere to international intellectual property standards, the United States has acknowledged India's uneven progress in these areas. The general US-India trade and technological relationship is still significantly hampered by these intellectual property issues (Business Standard, 2025). Although IP policy is still a major problem that calls for greater convergence and cooperation for stronger bilateral ties, the US IPS highlights India as a vital partner, particularly for security cooperation and regional influence in the Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific agenda depends on a solid collaboration between the United States and India. Our security and commercial relations were greatly improved by the first 2+2 Dialogue in 2018. India has spent over $16 billion on American defense systems as a Major Defense Partner, and billions more are in the works. In order to promote defense cooperation, we signed a bilateral Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement in 2018. In November 2019, we intend to conduct Tiger Triumph, the first tri-service bilateral exercise (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

Promoting India's ongoing development and leadership in the region. We will continue to develop a strategic alliance between the United States and India, working together and through regional organizations to advance stability in South Asia, cooperate in new areas like health, space, and cyberspace, strengthen our economic and technological ties, and support an open and free Indo-Pacific. We acknowledge that India is a leader and like-minded partner in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, active in and connected to Southeast Asia, a catalyst for regional growth and development, and a driving force behind the Quad and other regional fora (IPS, 2022).

The United States, India, Japan, and Australia make up the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which has developed into a vital forum for accomplishing shared Indo-Pacific goals, especially in the areas of maritime security, connectivity, and economic resilience. The four democracies reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific at the 2025 Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington, focusing on collaboration in the fight against illegal maritime activities like drug trafficking, piracy, and illegal fishing through increased maritime law enforcement and cooperative training initiatives. Notably, their commitment to maintaining a rules-based maritime order and enhancing interoperability among their coast guards and navies is demonstrated by the launch of the first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission and the upcoming marine law negotiations (US Department of State, 2025).

As demonstrated by the introduction of the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative, which seeks to secure and diversify supply chains for essential minerals needed for emerging technologies and renewable energy, connectivity and economic security continue to be key components of the Quad's agenda. By reducing regional reliance and bolstering group resilience, this project aims to advance economic growth across the Indo-Pacific area. Additionally, the Quad's role in forming the Indo-Pacific economic architecture will be strengthened by the proposed Quad Ports of the Future Partnership, which will be inaugurated in Mumbai and show a dedication to building high-quality infrastructure that supports long-term growth and regional integration (ASEAN U.S. Mission, 2025).

The Quad nations have expanded their involvement in humanitarian relief and disaster response in addition to economic and security cooperation, utilizing their combined logistical capabilities to provide prompt and efficient aid during regional emergencies. In order to increase overall readiness, the next Marine Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) workshop will assess and enhance marine capabilities in cooperation with regional partners. The Quad's growing significance as a comprehensive framework that not only opposes coercive behavior but also advances Indo-Pacific security, connectivity, and prosperity is demonstrated by these diverse projects (Tribune India, 2025).

Defense Cooperation: Foundational Agreements, Military Exercises, and Arms Trade

As evidenced by significant agreements, military drills, and growing arms trade, India and the US have significantly expanded their defense cooperation in recent years, especially since the historic civil nuclear treaty. The defense alliance has developed into a "Major Defense Partnership," emphasizing Indo-Pacific strategic alignment, technology cooperation, and interoperability. Notable defense agreements include the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), and, more recently, the proposed Reciprocal Defense Procurement (RDP) agreement and the non-binding Security of Supplies Arrangement (SOSA). These agreements boost mutual trust and operational synergy by encouraging information sharing, faster defense sales, and co-production activities (MEA, 2025).

The number and complexity of military drills like Yudh Abhyas (army), Vajra Prahar (Special Forces), and Malabar (naval) have increased, strengthening tactical cooperation and interoperability between the two armed forces. Increased arms trade has also improved India's Indo-Pacific defense capabilities by giving it access to a wide range of US-origin equipment, including the C-130J, C-17, Apache helicopters, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, and MQ-9B Reapers (White House, 2025). This strong defense alliance integrates cutting-edge fields like space and artificial intelligence into defense cooperation while bolstering security in a free, open, and rules-based system, which is in line with both nations' Indo-Pacific goals (Quach Thi et al., 2024). All things considered, defense relations between the US and India have become a crucial basis for both technological cooperation and regional stability.

A collection of fundamental agreements that support interoperability, logistics, and intelligence sharing serve as the cornerstone for defense cooperation among Quad members Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, ultimately enhancing Indo-Pacific collective security. These agreements, which include reciprocal access agreements and logistics support arrangements, lay the legal and practical groundwork for cooperative military operations and the efficient deployment of forces among member states. To enhance joint airlift capability and prompt disaster response, for instance, the Quad nations want to conduct the first Indo-Pacific Logistics Network field training exercise, demonstrating a deepening of practical military cooperation (The Diplomat, 2024). Exercise Malabar is the most well-known and enduring example of the joint military drills that are an essential part of Quad defense cooperation.

Originally a trilateral naval exercise between the US, Japan, and India, it now commonly involves Australia and serves as a platform for improving crisis response skills, operational interoperability, and marine domain awareness. These exercises strengthen the Quad's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific by simulating difficult scenarios including as maritime interdiction, anti-submarine warfare, and humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission, founded in 2025, focuses on steps to increase maritime law enforcement collaboration and information sharing across the region in order to combat illicit activities such as illegal fishing and piracy.

By facilitating knowledge exchange, cooperative development, and supply chain diversification, arms trade and military sector cooperation enhance the Quad's strategic alliance. For instance, agreements that permit co-production and trade in vital defense technologies have recently strengthened defense industry ties between Australia and India. This is indicative of a broader trend among Quad members looking to lessen dependency on outside suppliers, especially in light of escalating regional tensions. Additionally, the Quad's diverse approach to defense cooperation that extends beyond conventional military domains is shown by U.S. legislation initiatives like the Quad Space Act of 2025, which aim to institutionalize collaboration in new sectors including space security (The Diplomat, 2023).

Counterterrorism Collaboration and Cyber Security Cooperation

As an essential part of their strategic alliance, India and the US have developed a solid partnership in cyber security and counterterrorism. In order to disrupt terrorist networks and stop attacks, this teamwork consists of cooperative working groups, frequent discussions, and information-sharing platforms. Both nations have placed a strong emphasis on enhanced cooperation in intelligence sharing, terrorist group designations, fighting terrorist financing, and combating violent extremism since the US-India Counterterrorism Designations Dialogue was established and the India-US Working Group on Counterterrorism met. In response to shared concerns about the threats posed by cross-border extremist groups, these efforts have been intensified through cooperative training programs and coordinated initiatives at the regional and international levels (US Embassy & Consulates in India, 2018).

At the same time, cyber security collaboration has grown in importance, with initiatives to safeguard critical infrastructure, boost resistance to cyber-attacks, and promote the development of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI). Research alliances and collaborative frameworks like the US-India TRUST initiative have improved cyber security capabilities and accelerated strategic technology development (Indian Embassy USA, 2025). By improving regional security and stability through multilateral engagement and technology-driven collaboration, this integrated approach to cyber security and counterterrorism supports their overarching Indo-Pacific policy (ORF America, 2025).

The G7 has placed a high priority on improving border security cooperation and expediting the exchange of electronic evidence in order to boost operational capabilities against terrorism while safeguarding human rights and the rule of law. Furthermore, international organizations such as the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) support frameworks for South-South and triangular cooperation, which strengthen traditional North-South cooperation while also fostering solidarity and mutual benefits by facilitating expertise exchange and joint initiatives among nations in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (UNOCT, 2022). To counteract the expanding dangers posed by cyber terrorism and terrorist groups' use of digital platforms, cyber security cooperation is an essential component of modern counterterrorism measures. To improve information sharing and operational coordination in cybercrime and terrorism, Interpol maintains a global network of member nations and collaborates with other international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Europol. In an increasingly interconnected digital environment, such global measures are critical for combating terrorist financing, preventing attacks, and safeguarding critical infrastructure (Interpol, 2023).

Technology and Economic Partnerships: Semiconductors, Digital Economy, Clean Energy

India and the United States have greatly enhanced economic and technological collaboration, particularly in the clean energy, digital economy, and semiconductor industries. This demonstrates strategic alignment to improve supply chains and innovation. The U.S.-India TRUST (Transforming the Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology) initiative was launched in February 2025 to build reliable and robust supply chains for semiconductors and critical minerals, ushering in a new era of semiconductor supply chain cooperation (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). In order to evaluate and improve India's semiconductor ecosystem, including its workforce, infrastructure, and regulatory frameworks, the US Department of State collaborates with India's Semiconductor Mission under the CHIPS Act of 2022 (US State Department, 2024). Notably, investments like Tata Electronics' $10.44 billion fab in Gujarat and Micron Technology's $2.75 billion chip assembly plant show how India is becoming a global center for semiconductor manufacturing, which is anticipated to generate a large number of jobs and lessen dependency on imports (Orbit Skyline, 2025).

Driven by shared goals in innovation, sustainability, and economic growth, the India-US connection has grown beyond semiconductors to include the digital economy and renewable energy sectors. In order to address global concerns like the scarcity of semiconductors and the transition to sustainable technologies, the alliance fosters cooperative research, investment promotion, and supply chain resilience. Additionally, the alliance aligns with larger international frameworks like the Quad, which focuses on developing critical and emerging technologies and safeguarding semiconductor supply chains (The Tribune, 2024). This all-encompassing partnership not only strengthens bilateral relations but also contributes to the development of a more secure, sustainable, and competitive global technology landscape, positioning the US and India as key participants in the development of future technical and economic paradigms.

Through strategic technical and economic partnerships focused on semiconductors, the digital economy, and clean energy, the United States is aggressively bolstering India to counterbalance China. The Indo-US partnership to create a robust and varied semiconductor supply chain is a prime example. Both nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to encourage private sector cooperation, research and development, talent cultivation, and infrastructure enhancement with the aim of reducing reliance on China and Taiwan in this crucial industry. This agreement is supported by US initiatives like the CHIPS and Science Act and India's Semiconductor Mission (The Print, 2023). The International Technology Security and Innovation Fund supports this partnership, which also tackles supply chain logistics and regulatory frameworks to create a safe global environment (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

In addition to semiconductors, the US-India collaboration encompasses cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, supercomputing, and 5G telecommunications that are expressly designed to rival China's technological aspirations (New York Times, 2023). With combined efforts to accelerate innovation and deployment of sustainable energy technology, India is a preferred partner for the United States in creating a more diverse digital economy and enhancing clean energy projects due to its growing industrial base and tech skill pool (Circuit Digest, 2023). When taken as a whole, these actions not only strengthen India's economic and scientific capabilities but also support a common goal of an Indo-Pacific region that is technologically advanced, free, and able to resist Chinese hegemony (Foreign Policy, 2024).

Divergences on India–US Relations

Divergences between India and the US continue on issues of strategic autonomy, relations with Russia, trade divergences, regional security priorities and positions on China, providing grounds for both cooperation as well as friction at the global and South Asian regional levels.

India’s Strategic Autonomy vs. US Alliance-Centric Approach

India's strategic autonomy demonstrates its long-standing commitment to making independent judgments in military, economic growth, and foreign policy, enabling it to safeguard national interests without unduly depending on a single global power. In order to lessen reliance and bolster domestic military and technological capabilities, such as advancements in fighter planes, ballistic missiles, and space technology, India seeks economic diversification through programs like "Make in India" and free trade agreements (Valdai Club, 2025). This strategy balances India's ties to major powers like the US, Russia, and China while preserving its adaptability in a multipolar world by enabling it to engage pragmatically with a number of international organizations, including the QUAD, BRICS, and SCO (Rajeev, 2025).

The US alliance-centric approach, on the other hand, emphasizes solid bilateral and multilateral ties based on shared strategic interests, often pushing partner nations to closely align with US geopolitical objectives. India's strategic autonomy causes it to steer clear of exclusive alliances in favor of a multi-alignment strategy that enables it to interact with various powers independently, while the US uses frameworks like the QUAD and bilateral defense agreements to strengthen ties, especially in the Indo-Pacific region (RSIS, 2025). India's ability to maintain a balanced foreign policy that maximizes strategic space without being overly dependent on any one bloc is demonstrated by its continued engagement with Russia in spite of criticism from the West (Rajeev, 2025).

This discrepancy highlights India's growing importance as a crucial actor managing great power rivalry in the twenty-first century and highlights the challenge of balancing India's independent posture with the US preference for alliance-based security architectures (Insights on India, 2025). Due to their respective historical contexts and geopolitical objectives, India and the US have seen both convergence and divergence in their ties; India's pursuit of strategic autonomy contrasts with the US's emphasis on alliances. During the Cold War, when India adopted a non-alignment strategy and the United States collaborated with Pakistan and other regional nations, the partnership which was formally founded in 1947 began with mutual suspicion.

However, a thaw was made possible by India's economic liberalization in the 1990s and changing geopolitical conditions, leading to innovations like the 2008 Civil Nuclear Agreement, which showed a deepening strategic alliance beyond economic relations (Drishti IAS, 2024). Similar worries about terrorism, China's rise, and international security are examples of convergences that have brought India and the US closer together through defense agreements like BECA, joint military drills, intelligence sharing, and greater trade in high-tech and renewable energy industries. The United States' objective to create an Indo-Pacific alliance architecture that leverages India's strategic location and growing capabilities as a balancing regional force is reflected in these initiatives (CFR, 2023). This convergence is demonstrated by recent defense cooperation, such as joint production of fighter jet engines and drone purchases.

India is nonetheless wary about maintaining its strategic independence, though, and steers clear of official military alliances that would trap it in conflicts between superpowers or restrict its diplomatic options. In contrast to the US's preference for more alliance-centric commitments, India's foreign policy nevertheless places a strong emphasis on independent decision-making, multi-alignment, and engagement with all major powers, including Russia. As India balances its security aims without fully absorbing US strategic objectives, this disparity may lead to conflict or restrict the depth of defense integration (Brookings, 2017). The relationship between the US and India is essentially a combination of calibrated divergence based on India's quest for strategic autonomy and growing convergence based on shared interests. This balance has an impact on regional geopolitics by establishing India as a key, but non-aligned, partner in a larger US-led endeavor to construct a free, open Indo-Pacific order.

Contrary Perspectives on Russia, Amidst the Ukraine War

India and the United States have markedly divergent attitudes on Russia, particularly in light of the continuing Ukraine war. India has a strategic cooperation with both the United States and Russia, but has refrained from overtly denouncing Russia despite Western pressure. Instead, India promotes a balanced diplomatic approach focused on resolving conflict via conversation and negotiation, reflecting its goal to maintain strategic autonomy while benefiting from its connections with both nations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly advocated for peace and vowed to assist diplomatic efforts, relying on India's standing as a big buyer of Russian armaments and energy to support a resolution (ERI, 2025).

In contrast, the United States has adopted a robust posture in support of Ukraine, offering significant military and financial aid to help Ukraine fight Russian aggression until a positive deal can be reached. The US policy includes direct support for Ukraine's defense capabilities as well as diplomatic pressure on Russia, including as concerted sanctions and international attempts to isolate Moscow (State Department, 2025). This gap is further demonstrated by India's withdrawal from important United Nations votes denouncing

Russia, which contrasts with the United States' outspoken opposition to Russian actions. India's position is guided by the notion of strategic autonomy and a desire for multilateral engagement, whereas the United States stresses alliance-centric measures to resist Russia's military advancements (India Today, 2025). These differing stances underscore the complexity of India-U.S. relations amid the Ukraine crisis, balancing geopolitical interests with divergent diplomatic philosophies.

While the United States emphasizes a closer, more operational partnership, as evidenced by initiatives such as the US-India COMPACT and defense frameworks that propose significant technology sharing and interoperability, India carefully calibrates its cooperation to maintain autonomy, avoiding commitments that could limit its independent diplomatic posture (White House, 2025). The US administration, particularly under President Trump's sovereigntist attitude, prefers transactional and flexible alliances that correspond with India's pragmatic diplomacy, but due to these differences, it does not give India a formal treaty alliance (The 19FortyFive, 2025). India's attitude restricts the extent to which the US can compel it to choose definitively between Washington and its traditional allies, Russia and China. Instead, India remains a critical but non-aligned state, strengthening bilateral connections with the United States to meet similar concerns while maintaining strategic autonomy through diplomatic hedging and diverse partnerships (Drishti IAS, 2025). This dynamic results in a nuanced US-India partnership that is similar in shared interests but dissimilar in alliance aspirations.

Trade Frictions, Protectionist Tendencies, and Market Access Disputes

India and the United States have had substantial trade frictions, typified by protectionist inclinations and conflicts over market access, particularly in industries such as autos, steel, and agriculture. The United States slapped a 25% safeguard duty on Indian passenger vehicles, light trucks, and some automobile parts beginning in May 2025, which India has challenged as a violation of WTO norms. In response, India filed retaliatory duties on specific US imports at the World Trade Organization, heightening tensions amid ongoing trade talks (Times of India, 2025). These tariffs damage billions of dollars in bilateral trade and hamper efforts to negotiate a mutually beneficial agreement before the US administration's July 9, 2025 deadline (Reuters, 2025).

The main concerns are India's reluctance to considerably decrease tariffs on U.S. agricultural products such as corn, soybeans, wheat, and ethanol, owing to the sector's importance in rural employment and political sensitivities. Meanwhile, the United States seeks increased market access for agriculture goods, dairy, automobiles, medicines, and alcoholic beverages, as well as reductions in non-tariff barriers (Reuters, 2025). Indian business players also advocate for the gradual liberalization of protected sectors in order to protect domestic producers from abrupt competition. Despite its willingness to engage, India stresses that any trade pact prioritize national interests over forced timelines, emphasizing a balanced, win-win strategy (Al Jazeera, 2025). The ongoing stalemate reflects broader challenges in reconciling India’s protectionist policies with the U.S.’s alliance-driven trade agenda, underscoring the complexity of this critical bilateral economic relationship.

Human Rights, Democracy Promotion, and Occasional Normative Disagreements

While India and the United States are both democracies, their ideas on human rights and democracy development differ, and there are occasional difficulties. India strongly emphasizes its strategic autonomy, rejecting what it sees as external judgment on its domestic human rights issues. Indian officials have emphasized that discussions on human rights with the United States should be conducted on the basis of equality and partnership, rejecting "judgmental pronouncements" and emphasizing that, like all societies, India faces challenges but also has a vibrant civil society that addresses these issues (Business Standard, 2016). Despite India's constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights, Human Rights Watch and other organizations have documented concerns about discrimination against minorities, politically motivated prosecutions, and dissent restrictions, which contrast with India's historical role as a global human rights advocate and its current alignment with authoritarian states in some multilateral forums to stymie certain human rights initiatives (The Diplomat, 2025).

The United States, on the other hand, actively promotes human rights and democratic standards as essential pillars of its foreign policy, frequently raising concerns about India's human rights record at bilateral and multilateral levels. While the United States recognizes India's democratic vibrancy and strategic relevance, it also emphasizes minority rights violations, limits on free expression, and the treatment of refugees and marginalized people (Freedom House, 2025). This normative emphasis occasionally causes conflict, as India regards such criticisms as politically motivated or prejudiced, particularly when they emanate from US government reports or international agencies viewed as Western-centric (Reuters, 2024). Nonetheless, both countries continue to engage in high-level conversations highlighting shared democratic ideals and people-to-people collaboration, while dealing with normative issues pragmatically and prioritizing their broader strategic alliance (MEA, 2025). This dynamic reflects a complex balancing act where India defends its sovereignty and development model, and the U.S. advocates for universal human rights standards within the framework of their evolving bilateral relationship.

The problem of human rights, democracy promotion, and normative disputes has been a constant but carefully handled part of the US-India bilateral relationship. U.S. legislators and ambassadors frequently express concern about human rights issues in India, particularly the treatment of minorities, freedom of expression, and the employment of legislation believed to restrict civil society and opposition. For example, recent US State Department reports and Congressional summaries have highlighted persistent issues like as discrimination against Muslims and Dalits, internet shutdowns, and claims of excessive force by security officers (HRW, 2025). Similarly, US officials have condemned India's use of strict rules and visa denials for critics as eroding democratic liberties (State Department, 2025).

In response, India has routinely criticized these studies as "deeply biased" and internal concerns including misunderstanding or selective criticism of India's complex social and security challenges (Reuters, 2024). Indian officials emphasize strong constitutional safeguards of fundamental rights and claim that law enforcement activities are required to ensure domestic security and prevent terrorism (Drishti IAS, 2025). During high-level dialogues, including Modi's travels to Washington, India emphasizes mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference, encouraging the US not to politicize human rights problems at the price of broader strategic partnership (MEA Joint Statement, 2025). Despite periodic normative disagreements, both countries maintain a pragmatic alliance that recognizes shared democratic values while resolving issues through diplomatic engagement. The United States, for its part, strikes a balance between human rights promotion and geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific region, emphasizing cooperation in counterterrorism, trade and technology. Meanwhile, India continues to promote democratic government while emphasizing the importance of contextual and sovereign approaches to human rights (Drishti IAS, 2025). Thus, while there are occasional disagreements about human rights and democracy development, they do not substantially undermine the growing India-US relationship.

Convergences and Divergences in Regional Level

Similar to the global level, the United States and India share numerous significant areas of convergence in South Asia, which are motivated by similar strategic goals, economic engagement, and regional security concerns. One key point of agreement is their joint strategic and security cooperation, which is primarily intended to offset China's growing influence in South Asia and the larger Indo-Pacific area. The US regards India as a major defense partner in South Asia, emphasizing capacity building, defense industry partnership, and coordinated military exercises in all domains (land, sea, air, space, and cyber). Both countries have agreed to strengthen information sharing, logistics assistance, and coordinated operations, such as the "Tiger Triumph" tri-service exercise, which increases interoperability and regional security cooperation (United States-India Joint Leaders' Statement, 2025).

Economically, the United States and India are actively strengthening trade and investment ties, with the declared objective of more than tripling bilateral trade to $500 billion by 2030 under the "Mission 500" initiative. Both countries also collaborate to secure supply chains, particularly in fields where reliance on China is a national security risk, such as critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, and advanced technologies (The Diplomat, 2025). On the regional governance and multilateral front, the United States and India agree to pursue rules-based regional connectivity and cooperation frameworks. Both support for long-term regional infrastructure development, cross-border energy trade, and digital economy frameworks that promote South Asian connectivity and economic progress.

Initiatives supported by BIMSTEC and other regional platforms promote inclusive and transparent regional economic integration (South Asia Snapshot, 2025). In the realm of technology and innovation, US-India collaboration promotes cooperation in space technologies, artificial intelligence, and autonomous system development. NASA-ISRO collaborative initiatives and industry partnerships, such as those between Anduril Industries and the Mahindra Group, demonstrate their commitment to advancing cutting-edge scientific research and defense-related technology transfer in order to consolidate regional technological leadership (United States-India Joint Leaders' Statement, 2025). Both countries also support the advancement of democratic ideals, good governance, and counterterrorism activities in South Asia. The US-India dialogue focuses on improving democratic institutions, combating corruption, and protecting human rights, all of which contribute indirectly to South Asian political stability. Their mutual denunciation of terrorism and commitment to bringing offenders to justice highlights a common agenda that promotes regional security and development (South Asia Snapshot, 2025).

Despite their developing strategic alliance, their approaches to South Asia differ significantly on a regional level. These disparities have an impact on their policies toward China, Pakistan, and smaller South Asian countries, as well as their trade strategy and frameworks for security cooperation. India has a strategic hedging stance toward China that balances cautious engagement with robust defense preparedness, especially given their ongoing border disputes and regional competition. New Delhi avoids outright containment methods and maintains several channels of engagement, including economic relations and diplomatic dialogue. In contrast, the United States has adopted a containment strategy aimed at limiting China's growing influence in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region as a whole. This fundamental disparity puts India's calibrated autonomy at variance with US ambitions for a more confrontational approach (ORF, 2024).

Another noteworthy difference between India and the United States is their stance toward Pakistan. The United States employs a tactical engagement policy, balancing security concerns with pragmatic counterterrorism collaboration, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 and in Afghanistan. America maintains a working relationship with Pakistan to promote peace in Afghanistan and restrict terrorist networks. India, on the other hand, takes a strong containment approach toward Pakistan, typified by tight diplomatic disengagement and international pressure to isolate Islamabad as a result of cross-border terrorism and the Kashmir conflict. This disparity implies that the US attempts to balance relations between the two nations, frequently disappointing India's expectations for a more uncompromising US posture on Pakistan (The Atlantic Council, 2025).

The United States and India have different approaches to their smaller South Asian neighbors. India's neighborhood-first policy prioritizes direct political, economic, and security interaction with neighboring countries, seeing them as critical to its regional influence. In contrast, the United States promotes selective bilateralism, engaging particular countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka while prioritizing governance changes, economic liberalization, and international connectivity. For example, the US-backed Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) investment in Nepal takes a more transactional approach than India's wide strategic relationships. Furthermore, both countries respond to crises differently, with India taking a cautious, interest-based approach and the US emphasizing democratic transitions and human rights (Aspen Institute, 2023; DW, 2025).

While India's neighborhood-first approach asserts leadership and secure influence over neighbors such as Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Maldives, the United States pursues a more bilateral and selective strategy, aiming to expand its footprint through targeted aid, diplomatic presence, and security arrangements. This competitive dynamic creates overlaps and conflicts in influence, with Nepal stuck between strong Indian cultural links and US strategic reach. The United States' expanding engagement in countries such as the Maldives through defense treaties undermines India's historic regional dominance (Aspen Institute, 2023; Kathmandu Post, 2025). India's pursuit of strategic autonomy, hedging, and neighborhood-first strategy contrasts with the United States' containment of China, balanced engagement with Pakistan, and broader alliance development. These distinctions demand cautious management as the two powers seek to maximize collaboration while moderating competitive tendencies, with regional states such as Nepal and Bangladesh at the heart of their geopolitical interplay.

Understanding the Effects of US-India Convergences and Divergences in Nepalese Context

The convergence between the United States and India has important ramifications for Nepal, potentially undermining its non-alignment stance and strategic autonomy. Nepal may experience greater pressure to identify with the Indo-US bloc or with China. The US-India cooperation, particularly through security frameworks such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), limits Nepal's options for a balanced foreign policy (CESIF Nepal, 2025). This convergence reduces Nepal's ability to operate neutrally between big countries, forcing it to traverse an increasingly limited diplomatic space. The US-India alignment diminishes Nepal's bargaining power in bilateral and regional situations. As the United States and India collaborate, Nepal's bargaining position dwindles, particularly in negotiations over funding and infrastructure projects. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a US-backed initiative with strong Indian support, exemplifies this dynamic in which Nepal feels politically and strategically pressured to accept assistance on terms that spark domestic controversies and sovereignty concerns (National Interest, 2024). This convergence could force Nepal into conditions that do not fully accord with its developmental priorities or political consensus.

Furthermore, Nepal risks marginalization in regional multilateral forums due to increasing United States–India convergence in shaping regional architecture. For example, India-led platforms such as BIMSTEC and US-backed Indo-Pacific discussions may marginalize countries like Nepal if their interests do not entirely fit with the US-India strategy. Furthermore, the immobility of SAARC, which is frequently affected by India's strained relations with Pakistan and implicit US backing for that posture, inhibits Nepal's potential to act as a bridge-builder in South Asian regionalism (Kathmandu Post, 2025). This regional marginalization reduces Nepal's diplomatic leverage and alternatives. The strategic cooperation between the United States and India complicates Nepal's security and geopolitical situation. The two countries' military and intelligence collaboration might hasten militarization in South Asia, making Nepal a potential site for strategic competition.

Nepal may become more visible on the US tactical radar (My Republica, 2024). Furthermore, intelligence sharing and surveillance collaboration between the United States and India can strengthen India's influence over US Nepal policy. Controversial programs backed by major countries, particularly the MCC, create domestic arguments over foreign meddling and national interest, splintering consensus on foreign policy strategy. Including contentious problems allow external actors, including as the United States, India, and China, to increase their influence over Nepal's political parties and institutions, stoking instability and undermining democratic governance (ORF, 2025). Nepal may run the risk of being reliant on strategic narratives propagated by the US-India alliance. This entails using diplomatic jargon like the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" slogan, which may not be consistent with Nepal's own interests or developmental goals. Prioritizing security and strategic cooperation among Nepal, the United States, and India risks overshadowing critical socioeconomic issues such as climate change, employment, infrastructure, and poverty reduction, resulting in a misallocation of Nepal's limited resources and attention (The Annapurna Express, 2024).

Close alignment with the Indo-US alliance in efforts to oppose China may result in diplomatic and economic reprisal from Beijing, which remains Nepal's principal development partner. Nepal is stuck between opposing visions: China's Belt and Road Initiative and the US-India-led Indo-Pacific Strategy (The Annapurna Express, 2024). However, the growing convergence between the United States and India offers Nepal with both challenges and opportunities. The democratic and governance spheres stand to benefit from US and Indian support for building democratic institutions and encouraging good governance practices. Both countries prioritize democracy, transparency, the rule of law, and human rights in their foreign policy agendas, which may translate into aid for Nepal's civil society, media, election processes, and anti-corruption initiatives, hence strengthening Nepal's democratic consolidation (ORF, 2025). Similarly, regional stability is an important asset, since the US-India collaboration focuses counterterrorism cooperation and diplomatic engagement to address volatility in neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan. This focus indirectly improves Nepal's security situation. Furthermore, their advocacy for a rules-based system promotes Nepal's sovereignty within a more stable and predictable South Asian setting, lowering the likelihood of unchecked regional wars (The Annapurna Express, 2024).

Nonetheless, biopolarity in the global system has always been beneficial to Nepal, even as the United States and India diverge in regional and Nepal issues. These contrasts create a multipolar environment in which Nepal can successfully navigate to maximize its national interests. The strategic divergences between the United States and India give Nepal more strategic autonomy and balancing room. Unlike a united front, which forces smaller countries to choose sides, Nepal's multipolarity allows it to avoid slipping into the orbit of a single power. Nepal may follow a pragmatic "smart balancing" policy by engaging Washington and New Delhi selectively while protecting its cherished sovereignty and long-standing non-alignment values (Bhattarai, 2020). This flexibility is especially crucial as Nepal deals with complex regional rivalries, allowing the country to retain an independent foreign policy that suits its national interests rather than being tied to a single hegemon.

The continuous diverging interests between the United States and India frequently result in increased aid and infrastructure investment pledges for Nepal, as King Mahendra capitalized on the world system's bipolarity. Similarly, the US-backed Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) award benefits Nepal's infrastructure and electricity transmission sectors, while India continues to provide lines of credit and lead vital connectivity activities (ORF, 2025; National Interest, 2024). This rivalry for influence enables Nepal to choose benefit from both actors while avoiding over-reliance on a single donor, so improving its growth prospects and economic resilience. Third, Nepal enjoys significant policy autonomy in international affairs as a result of disparities in how the United States and India address regional security issues. Disagreements between the two countries over matters like as policy toward Pakistan and China allow Nepal to act freely, devising nuanced diplomatic answers rather than ideologically or militarily joining with one side (Kathmandu Post, 2025). This strengthens Kathmandu's ability to pursue regional diplomacy on its own terms, leveraging strategic ambiguity to protect its interests in the face of conflicting great power agendas.

Furthermore, Nepal might use US-India divergences to strengthen its diplomatic negotiating clout. When the two countries take opposing stances or priorities, Nepal can strategically play its cards to gain better terms in economic, military, or strategic cooperation agreements. The competition itself becomes a weapon for Nepal to negotiate greater assistance packages or security assurances, maximizing the outcomes of each collaboration (Bhattarai, 2020). The divergences also protect Nepal from binary strategic constraints, which generally compel smaller countries into tight alliances, similar to Cold War dynamics. For example, India's reluctance to fully support US-led security blocs such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) or broader Indo-Pacific security frameworks means Nepal is under less coercive pressure to choose sides (The Annapurna Express, 2024). This independence promotes Nepal's multisector diplomacy, which involves maintaining productive connections with different nations while avoiding alienation or entanglement in exclusive security agreements. Nepal gains economically and strategically from multipolar integration within multiple regional frameworks. It can participate in Indian-led initiatives such as BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic

Cooperation) and BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal), as well as US-influenced Indo-Pacific economic and governance discussions. This diverse engagement broadens Nepal's trade, investment, and diplomatic opportunities, reducing reliance on a single regional initiative and fostering a more balanced economic geography (ORF, 2025).

Furthermore, moments of strategic divergence between the United States and India provide opportunities for Nepal to take on regional leadership duties as a neutral facilitator or bridge builder. With its acknowledged non-aligned past and legacy of peace diplomacy, Nepal may offer itself as a forum for conversation, conflict resolution, and regional stability. This potential raises Nepal's prominence and influence above its size, allowing it to contribute positively to South Asian and Indo-Pacific diplomacy (Kathmandu Post, 2025). Finally, these divergences assist Nepal avoid overdependence on one power, shielding it from the overwhelming geopolitical pressures and conditions that are sometimes associated with single donor or strategic partner relationships. By capitalizing on the competitiveness and policy differences between the United States and India, Nepal can maintain a more independent policymaking process, lowering the possibility of external overreach or political meddling.

Understanding the Narratives United States Nepal via India’s Eyes

The United States has always backed Nepal's efforts to maintain its autonomous character, which has persisted throughout its history (Pandey, 2015). The United States strongly supported Nepal's admission to the United Nations on December 14, 1955. Nepal's relationship with the United States and membership in the United Nations were essential in establishing the country's claim to be truly free (Brown, 1971). During the Cold War, the US viewed India as a counterbalance to communist expansion in South Asia. Thus, India's participation in US-Nepal strategy is important. The convergence of philosophies between the United States and India, as well as the Tibetan refugee problem, have influenced US Nepal policy. During the construction of the Kodari Highway connecting Nepal and China, the United States and India expressed concern over the potential spread of communism in South Asia via Nepal. As a result, both countries supported Nepal's autocratic monarchy as a protection against growing communist influence in the country. Despite Nepal's non-aligned stance, the US recognized its neutrality and attempted to engage with the country through diplomatic and economic channels in order to promote Western ideas while opposing Soviet and Chinese pressures (Smith & Khanal, 2019).

A substantial number of Tibetan refugees settled in Nepal and Dharamshala. This factor also influences US-Nepal policy. During Jimmy Carter's presidency, Nepal felt

India's influence on US Nepal policy. Thus, King Birendra argued at the time that America is a superpower that must maintain ties with other nations on its own terms; neighbors are not eyes (Bhandari, 2014). However, when Ronald Reagan became president and King Birendra paid a state visit to America from December 5 to 13, 1983, a new era in Nepal-US relations began. Despite India's concerns, President Reagan understands Nepal's sensitivity and priorities. After seven years, the US supported Nepal's demand for a peace zone. However, the strategy could not be sustained under President Bill Clinton. According to then-ambassador Bhek Bahadur Thapa, the US president was immensely fond of India, and his administration used to prioritize India." He said that India and Nepal had signed a treaty in 1950 (Paudyal and Dhungana, 2022).

Since King Mahendra, Nepal has criticized US-Nepal policies through India's eyes. When the United States reestablished relations with China in order to undercut the Sino-Soviet bloc. During the 1972 Ping Pong diplomacy, the United States did not perceive China as a competitor or a communist danger. Since then, the connection between Nepal and the United States has waned due to India's dominance. Thus, Nepal has demanded that America better comprehend its own lengthy history and autonomous identity (Pandey, 2020). Thus, "Don't look at us from another's point of view, don't condemn us by listening to another's remarks, consider us as a different nation, and have your own viewpoint. And, as a great country, do not subject us to humiliating conditions when providing financial assistance" (Shrestha, 1988).

Nonetheless, Washington maintained direct bilateral relations with Kathmandu, trying to prevent Nepal from becoming unduly reliant on New Delhi. In 2045-046, India imposed an economic blockade on Nepal, depleting the United States' compassion and support. At the time, Stephen Solarz, chairman of the prominent Asia Pacific Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs of the United States Congress, was posted to Nepal to lend political support. Similarly, in 1975, US President Gerald Ford met with Chinese officials to discuss Nepal's security situation and how the United States and China could help Nepal deal with India's purchase of Sikkim (US Department of State, 2008).

Similarly, after seven years of Reagan's presidency, the US supported Nepal's peace zone concept. Following then, several European and Latin American countries showed their support, raising the total to 130 (IFA, 2019). The Maoist insurgency, which began in 1996, was the primary driving force behind the US' post-Cold War policy toward Nepal. The United States linked the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to its War on Terror agenda (Lawoti & Pahari, 2010). During that time, the United States maintained close ties with Nepal's other allies, most notably India and Britain. Christina Rocca's appointment as Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia in April 2001 signaled the start of the US' active military intervention policy in Nepal. According to this view, the Rocca period (2001-4) would witness tight collaboration between US action in Nepal and the then-BJP Indian government. Though the 1950 agreement prohibited Nepal from seeking military assistance from other countries, expanding US-Indian military cooperation took precedence. Saran claimed at the end of 2003 that India and the United States were "on the same wavelength" (Mage, 2007). Gyanendra formed an armed forces government in February 2005, which included royalist ministers who were personally devoted to the king. Christine Rocca, the Assistant Secretary for South Asia, visited Nepal on May 10, 2005. It was her fourth visit to Nepal, and she made five policy recommendations for the country. Taking power on January 19th without consulting with India is wrong. Maoists also pose a threat to India, hence Nepal should establish good relations with India right away (Pandey, 2015).

Despite the fact that the Nepal-India 1950 Treaty restricts foreign military and defense cooperation, the BJP and Congress regimes supported the United States. After 2004, Congress, the US government, and India signed a defense cooperation and civil nuclear pact, allowing them to collaborate on Nepal issues (Nayak, 2008). In reaction to Gyanendra's 2005 measures, both Delhi and Washington suspended their support for Nepal's army (Norris 2005). Gyanendra then sought arms from China, which had refrained to condemn the February 2005 coup, describing it as a "internal affair." China responded warmly, much to the consternation of Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, who appears to have subsequently appraised the situation differently. In June 2005, five armored personnel carriers arrived in Nepal from China. The US did not want to overtly break ranks with India or the European Union on the issue of military assistance to the increasingly isolated royal regime, so it went to its Israeli alternative.

The rising difference between Indian and US policies came to pass. The US position was clear: democracy should not be destroyed, and Maoist terror should not succeed. However, the label "terrorist" has faded from Indian officials' vocabulary; within a year, it was announced that the Maoists "are not terrorists" (Mage, 2007). By late July 2005, local parliamentary party activists had openly collaborated with Maoists in the countryside. The Indian government cooperated, and successful negotiations between revolutionaries and political parties on a unified insurgency strategy concluded in November 2005 (the "12 Point Agreement").

When Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Sharan called the American ambassador in New Delhi to ask for assistance, he was told that "Washington is not ready to encourage terrorists." The US openly endorsed the Palace's rejection of the pact, stating that the Maoists were "illegitimate" and not appropriate partners in a settlement (Miklian, 2008). The United States was opposed to negotiating an agreement with the terrorists, but the emphasis was on the monarch not delaying growth, which was about to take a difficult turn. During the 12-point agreement, India urged the US to assist with this initiative; however, the US declined because President Bush's position was either with us or with terror.

As a result, the United States opposed the agreement struck by the Maoists and political parties. Despite the people's movement's success and the comprehensive peace agreement, the US changes its attitude toward India. However, it maintained Maoists on the terror list for an extended period (Kreuttner, 2009). The United States and India agree on the Maoist insurgency and King Gyanendra's actions. Both the US and India expressed concern about the Maoist insurgency and the King's actions. The United States launched military operations against the Maoist insurgency with the support of India's BJP government. However, U.S. and Indian policy diverged when the term "terrorist" was removed from Indian officials' lexicon and the Indian government attempted to reach the 12 Point Agreement. The US position was clear: King and democratic forces should collaborate.

During the post-monarchy period, Washington gave indirect support for the peace process without directly threatening India's power. The US saw India as a regional leader capable of managing Nepal's transition to republic (Adhikari, 2024). However, the adoption of the Indo-Pacific policy at this time introduces regional factors into US-Nepal ties. Similarly, rather than viewing Nepal through Indian eyes, the United States stepped up its interaction with the country on its terms. During this time, Nepal's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific Strategy, agreement on the MCC, SPP, increased regular high-level visits, concerns about Tibetan refugee rights, and transparency in Chinese investments have all had a significant impact on US policy toward Nepal. The MCC, SPP, Tibetan refugee issues, religious report and regular trips reflect the US's determination to examine Nepal objectively. However, in the MCC, India became a third party and kept silent throughout the intense dispute between the US and China over the MCC.

Mapping the Nepal's Perception and India-US Expectations through Role Theory

The use of Role Theory to understand Nepal's foreign policy reveals critical insights into Nepal's self-perception as a sovereign, non-aligned, and balancing actor in South Asia, as contrasted with external expectations from India and the United States, as well as frequent misperceptions from India about Nepal's strategic intentions and independence. Role Theory, which investigates how states perceive their identity, expected behaviors, and interactions within a regional and international system, provides a useful framework for understanding the complex dynamics in the US-India-Nepal triangle, as well as the implications for Nepal's diplomatic posture and maneuvering space. Nepal sees itself as a neutral and autonomous state committed to non-alignment and pursuing an independent foreign policy.

This self-definition originates from Nepal's historical emphasis on preserving sovereignty in the face of pressure from its two large neighbors, India and China, while also collaborating with global powers to meet its development needs. Kathmandu sees itself as a bridge and balancing actor in regional power dynamics, attempting to balance conflicting forces rather than becoming an extension or puppet of any larger power bloc. Nepal's strategic autonomy is important to its self-conception, with the goal of leveraging its geographical location for economic connectivity and growth while safeguarding national interests from external influence (Khadka, 2017, Nepal News, 2025).

Contrary to Nepal's self-perception, India's expectations of Nepal are more paternalistic and frequently based on historical and cultural ties. Nepal is largely regarded as part of India's historic area of influence, and the two countries anticipate to work together on regional security, commerce, and political concerns. New Delhi expects Nepal to be a credible partner in addressing India's strategic concerns, particularly China's ascent and cross-border security issues. Since the Neharu era, India has viewed the Himalayas as a security frontier and Nepal as a buffer zone. However, India's expectations frequently ignore Nepal's desire for sovereign decision-making, with China occasionally causing mistrust and frustration when Kathmandu pursues autonomous policies such as the Trade and Transit Agreement, participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, and other connectivity.

India frequently misinterprets Nepal's diversification of foreign contacts as strategic hostility or ingratitude, ignoring Nepal's subtle hedging strategy aimed at protecting its independence un the face of competing powers (ORF, 2024; The National Interest, 2024). According to the US, Nepal is a potential strategic partner and gateway for larger Indo-Pacific engagement based on democratic government, economic development, and counterbalancing

China's influence. Washington expects Nepal to align with US strategic goals in the region, frequently encouraging collaboration on infrastructure projects (such as those funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation), democratic institution-building, and regional connectivity initiatives that are consistent with a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision.

The US MCC Compact, State Partnership, Tibetan refugee issues, and their regular travels and pronouncements all suggest this. Nepal sees itself primarily as a neutral, autonomous state committed to non-alignment and peaceful coexistence with its neighbors, particularly India and China (based on historical and regional identity) (Holsti, 1970). On the other hand, as a global hegemon, the United States may expect Nepal to more clearly align with US strategic interests in South Asia, such as resisting Chinese or Indian influence, fostering democracy, or engaging in regional security frameworks (Harnisch, 2013). The discrepancy in perceptions and expectations emerges because Nepal's national role conception does not always entail becoming a frontline state in US geopolitical ambitions, and Nepal prefers not to antagonize its powerful neighbors.

The disparity between Nepal's self-defined role and US role expectations might cause diplomatic conflicts or disappointed expectations, hurting aid, military cooperation, and political talks (Thies, 2010).

On the other hand, US involvement with Nepal is frequently regulated with sensitivity to India's regional considerations and a desire to avoid open clashes with New Delhi's objectives. Thus, while the US regards Nepal as a small but strategically significant actor with the potential for multilateral engagement, its expectations frequently collide with India's more controlling stance, posing diplomatic challenges for Nepal's role negotiation (National Interest, 2024; Asia Society, 2025). In contrast, the United States' sympathies and support were drained when India imposed an economic blockade on Nepal in 2045-046. At the time, Stephen Solarz, chairman of the prominent Asia Pacific Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs of the United States Congress, was dispatched to Nepal to lend political support. Similarly, in 1975, US President Gerald Ford met with Chinese officials to discuss Nepal's security situation and how the US and China could help Nepal deal with India's annexation of Sikkim (US Department of State Archive 2008). Similarly, after seven years of Reagan's presidency, the US supported Nepal's peace zone concept. Following then, several European and Latin American countries showed their support, raising the total to 130 (IFA, 2019).

Furthermore, the United States did not agree on India's initiations during the 12-point agreement with Nepal's political parties. Similarly, when Nepal's new constitution was promulgated in 2015, India conducted an unofficial blockade, although the US stated that it was a milestone for democracy. Misperceptions stem mostly from India's attribution of malevolent external forces and ignorance of Nepal's sovereign foreign policy decisions. India sometimes sees Nepal's increased engagement with the United States and China as an attempt to challenge Indian regional primacy or destabilize previously tight bilateral ties. Such perceptions are fostered by situations such as the 2015 blockade and ongoing border tensions, which have exacerbated distrust narratives.

India's assessment of Nepal diminishes its agency, presenting its diversification as disruptive rather than sensible hedging in a multipolar regional order. Meanwhile, Nepal's leaders prioritize sovereignty and national interest over ideological adherence in their balancing act, which involves managing dangers and opportunities rather than aligning with India (Khadka, 2017, ORF, 2024). In consequence, Nepal is navigating a difficult triadic role negotiation to affirm its autonomous non-aligned identity among India's paternalistic expectations and US strategic overtures. Nepal's role conception urges it to behave as a diplomatic mediator and balanced actor, maximizing developmental gains while maintaining autonomy. However, India's misperceptions and the United States' security-related expectations can limit Nepal's maneuverability, resulting in domestic political instability and diplomatic problems. Finally, Role Theory demonstrates how Nepal is actively establishing and protecting its national role identity in the face of foreign pressures and competing expectations.

Conclusion

The developing global power transfer, principally determined by China's ascent and the recalibration of US global leadership, has had a substantial impact on the United States-India strategic cooperation. Their agreement on democracy promotion, Indo-Pacific security, counterterrorism, and China containment demonstrates a common vision for regional order and global governance. At the same time, their differences such as India's strategic autonomy, opposing views on Russia, and trade protectionism show limits to their alliance. These global and regional convergences and divergences have a significant impact on smaller states such as Nepal, which is situated at the crossroads between India's traditional sphere of influence and expanding American strategic interests. In Nepal, US-India convergences frequently appear as shared demands or expectations for alignment on democratic values, regional connectivity, and combating China's expanding influence, notably in infrastructure and digital space. However, disagreements between the two such as on Nepal's internal political affairs, refugee difficulties (e.g., Tibetans), and India's unease with direct US intervention in South Asia occasionally give Nepal with strategic breathing room. Nepal uses these fault lines to maintain a hedging strategy, aiming to preserve autonomy while benefiting from both powers.

Nepal's self-perception is founded on its historical narrative of sovereign independence, strategic neutrality, and non-alignment. This impression frequently contrasts with the expectations placed on it by both the United States and India. The United States increasingly views Nepal through the lens of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, expecting it to embrace a liberal international system and support American-led frameworks. Meanwhile, India expects Nepal to share its vision for regional leadership and security, particularly in terms of border security and political stability. This misalignment has resulted in triangle perceptual conflicts. Nepal frequently regards itself as a sovereign player pursuing balanced diplomacy, whereas India sees Nepal's hedging as strategic drift or unreliability. Simultaneously, the United States may see Nepal's cautious approach as unwillingness or vulnerability to Chinese influence. These misaligned perspectives cause friction and misunderstandings, making Nepal's navigation of US-India strategic expectations more complicated.

Finally, the US-India equation during the global power transition poses both opportunities and restrictions for Nepal. While their similarities may jeopardize Nepal's autonomy, their differences may provide diplomatic opportunities. The challenge for Nepal is to manage this triangle dynamic through strategic clarity, agile diplomacy, and recalibrated expectations, all based on a realistic assessment of its capabilities and weaknesses in a more competitive geopolitical context.

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From Sustainability to Regeneration: A Paradigm Shift in Tourism Development

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Abstract

This study explores the conceptual foundations of regenerative tourism by tracing its development from principles of sustainable and regenerative practices. It highlights the shift from sustainability to regeneration, emphasizing how regenerative approaches aim to restore and enhance ecosystems and communities beyond merely minimizing impacts. The paper follows a qualitative and exploratory approach, relying on the review of literature based on the issues of the study. The sources reviewed include scholarly articles, books, policy documents, and related reports. Through careful reading, comparison, and thematic synthesis, the research identifies the key theoretical concepts and principles that form the basis of regenerative tourism, emphasizing its holistic nature. This study focuses on the popular concepts such as social-ecological systems, ecological worldview, tourism living systems and investment in people, places and nature in a long-term perspective for transformation. The major thrust of this study is to raise a question- how regenerative tourism came into existence in the field of tourism academia. It equally helps to understand

theconceptual roots of regenerative tourism. This study is organized into several sections, including the introduction, literature review, methodology, and thematic discussions presented under different subheadings. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the major insights and overall findings.

Introduction

This paper examines the conceptual foundations of regenerative tourism by exploring the concepts of regeneration and restoration. It forms the basis for understanding regenerative tourism as a whole. Majority of the scholars (Mang & Reed, 2012; Plaut et al., 2012; Hussain & Haley, 2022; Dredge, 2022; Della Lucia & Trunfio, 2018; Morseletto, 2020; Dias, 2018; Rhodes, 2017; Pollock, 2019a; Dziakiewicz et al., 2024) have described the origin of restoration emerged before regeneration when discussing these concepts. These concepts have evolved over many centuries and across various languages. The (Latin) prefix "re" indicates repetition. Restoration is from (re)staurare, meaning to repair/give back/build up again. Regeneration is from *generare*, which means to give birth/generate (Morseletto, 2020, p.764). The nouns restoration and regeneration are used to describe the concepts, while the adjectives "restorative" and "regenerative" are used as modifiers that ascribe attributes to specific things (Morseletto, 2020).

If restoration means "to make something well again," regeneration, for some authors, means "to make it better" than a (supposed) origin condition. Advocates of regeneration approaches in the 1990s tended to focus on a vision that may have reflected an optimistic view of social change prevalent during that period (Ferguson, 2002; Park, Conca, & Finger, 2008; in Morseletto, 2020, p.765). The multiplicity of definitions of the concept of "regeneration" echoed the cacophony of frameworks surrounding the idea (Mang & Reed, 2012; Morseletto, 2020). The concept of regeneration can be seen as an advanced form of restoration, because life evolves and is not static, we can never restore a living system to its original condition (Dias, 2018, p.316). According to Kellert (2004; in Mang & Reed, 2012, p.487), restorative re-establishes the self-organizing and evolving capability of natural systems.

In order to understand the meaning of regeneration, it is essential to understand the meaning of generation. A synonym of generative is having the power or function of generating, originating, producing, or reproducing. In biology, the term relates to the production of offspring vegetative and generative plant growth the generative organs of mammals (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/generative). It simply denotes that it is the production. The word 'regenerative' means the capacity to bring into existence again; hence, if an item or system is regenerative, it has the inherent capacity to bring itself into existence once more. A perfect example of a completely sustainable/regenerative system is a forest, in which there is no waste, and the detritus from one year becomes the soil from which the new life of the following year is brought forth (Rhodes, 2017, p.103).

Regeneration is not just about not making the existing situation worse, but about improving it (Dziadkiewicz et al., 2024, p.203). Regeneration is about creating the fertile conditions conducive for life to thrive based on the knowledge that life and living systems, unlike machines, self-organize, and are not static but, through living, are constantly adapting, changing, evolving (Holliday, 2016; in Pollock, 2019a, p.3). It's inherently a revitalizing activity that results in enhanced generative capacities. As a consequence, it has an inspirational dimension based on the meaning of the verb "to inspire" as to breathe life back into. The adjectives used most frequently to describe a regenerative state are flourishing or thriving (Pollock, 2019a).

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, as cited by Mang and Reed (2012), regenerate means:

- To give new life or energy; to revitalize; to bring or come into renewed existence; to impart new and more vigorous life
- To form, construct, or create a new, especially in an improved state; to restore to a better, higher or more worthy state; refreshed or renewed
- To reform spiritually or morally; to improve moral condition; to invest with a new and higher spiritual nature
- To improve a place or system, especially by making it more active or successful (Day et al., 2022).

As cited by Kunwar and Phuyal (2025, p.105), the simple meaning of 'regenerate' is to renew, reinvigorate, or replenish (Dredge, 2022, p.270). The meaning of regenerative is "to give new life, strength, or vigour" (Plaut et al., 2012, p.113). Hutchins and Storm (2019) as cited by Hussain (2021) have stated the meaning of 'regenerative' as 'creating the conditions for life to continuously renew itself, to transcend into new forms, and to flourish amid ever-changing life conditions' (p.5). Rhodes (2017, pp. 103-104; Hussain & Haley, 2022) goes on to argue that 'regenerative' means 'the capacity to bring into existence again'; hence, if an item or the system is regenerative, it has the inherent capacity to bring itself into existence once more".Regeneration simply means making a favorable condition for life on earth to thrive equally (Pollock, 2019b; Ajoon & Rao, 2020, pp. 2-3).

Regeneration has been defined as the transformation of a place that has shown symptoms of marginalization or whose previous development models are in crisis (Impact 08, 2007; in Della Lucia & Trunfio, 2018, p.2).

Many scholars focused on the concept of degenerative/degeneration in course of studying regenerative development and design including regenerative agriculture and regenerative tourism (Du Plessis & Cole, 2011; Mang & Reed, 2012, p.484; Plaut et al., 2012; Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014; Wahl, 2016; Fullerton, 2015, p.43; Bellato et al., 2022b, p.559; Bellato & Pollock, 2023, p.313; Dziadkiewicz et al., 2024, p.203; Kunwar & Phuyal, 2025, p.105). Among those authors, Dziadkiewicz et al. (2024) focused on the real difference in terminology lies in their meaning, but in attitude and intension.Similarly, the dictionary meaning of 'degeneration' is the process of declining from a higher to a lower level of effective power or vitality or essential quality (Vocabulary.com). Butcher (2021), Dwyer (2021), Vogler (2021), as cited by Liburd and Duedahl (2025, p.6), have interpreted degeneration as de-growth. The opposite term of regenerative is degenerative which means 'to decline in value or worth' (Plaut et al., 2012). The life on earth is diminished and threatened by degenerative practices and technologies are no longer a matter of dispute (Lyle, 1994, p.11).

Review of Literature

The research is entirely based on the review of existing literatures and therefore follows a non-empirical design grounded in a narrative literature review to examine the conceptual shift from sustainability to regeneration in tourism development. The researchers thoroughly reviewed the major literatures to trace out the related concepts. It draws on a wide range of scholarly works (Mang & Reed, 2012; Reed, 2007; Owen, 2007; Pollock, 2012, 2015; Du Plessis, 2008; Du Plessis & Cole, 2011; Du Plessis, 2012; Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014; Gibbons, 2020; Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2025; Tao & Wall, 2009; Hussain, 2019; Hussain & Haley, 2022; Bellato et al., 2022; Haklay et al., 2019; Rhodes, 2017; Kates et al., 2001) to trace the diverse conceptual roots of regenerative tourism, including regenerative development and design, permaculture, regenerative agriculture, social-ecological systems, sustainability and sustainable development, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable tourism, sustainability science, citizen science, tourism as a living system, as well as the sustainable and regenerative paradigms. All these concepts are elaborated with the help of neighboring literatures. By synthesizing these interconnected bodies of knowledge, the study presents regenerative tourism as an integrative and system-oriented approach that goes beyond minimizing impacts to actively restoring and enhancing ecosystems and communities.

This review enhanced the researchers to introduce regenerative tourism in a nutshell. The review further contextualizes this emerging paradigm within Nepal, particularly in relation to Panauti, where the concept of regenerative tourism was first coined by Kunwar and Phuyal (2025), thereby contributing to its theoretical and contextual advancement.

Regenerative Development and Design

Mang and Reed (2012) defined the terms regenerative development and regenerative design which is quintessential for this study. According to Mang and Reed (2012), regenerative approaches view development and design as to distinct yet synergistic processes, both of which play an essential role in ensuring the greater scope, neither of which is sufficient without the other. The concepts of regenerative development and design have been studied by several scholars- regenerative developments (Mang & Reed, 2012; Bellato et al., 2023; Aquino et al., 2024), regenerative design (Lyle, 1994; Owen, 2007; Mang & Reed, 2012; Aquino et al., 2024).

Regenerative development, as defined by Reed (2007) implies a holistic approach that brings together social and ecological components as part of a "co-evolutionary relationship" and within a mindset of collaboration, stewardship and environmental ethics (Dwyer, 2018; Gerhards & Greenwood, 2021; in Becken & Kaur, 2021, p.57). It is equally important to understand regenerative development as defined by Mang and Reed (2012), although it is relatively based on technologies and strategies.

Zerim and Jenkins (2009; in Mang & Reed, 2012, p.318; Dias, 2018, p.318), in their study, “Rethinking the Built Environment,” write that “regenerative development… investigates how humans can participate in ecosystems through development, to create optimum health for both human communities (physically, psychologically, socially, culturally and economically) and other living organisms and systems”.This concept was proposed in 1995 by the *Regenesis* Group a North American collaborative, composed of a multidisciplinary team. The practice process of Regenerative Development is based on the *Living System School of Thought* originally developed by Charles Krone in 1980 to enable thinking about organizations as living systems – what organizes and orders them, how they are structured, how they evolve. It uses systemic frameworks and developmental processes to consciously improve the capacity to apply systems thinking to the evolution of human or social and natural living systems (Mang & Reed, 2012; Dias, 2018; Hussain & Haley, 2022).

In 1994 John Tillman Lyle introduce the term “regenerative design” as an approach to the design of urban landscapes which enables them to regenerate lost ecosystems (Doyon & Hes, 2014; in Dias, 2018). Mang and Reed (2012) explain regenerative design as a system of technologies and strategies, based on an understanding of the inner working of ecosystems that generates designs to regenerate rather than deplete underlying life support systems and resources. Regenerative design also includes social systems such as food, economic, and governance systems (Mang & Reed, 2012; Benne & Mang, 2015; in Gibbons, 2020).

While regenerative development provides the framework to identify life-giving patterns and actions in a living system, regenerative design is an integral part of the process of giving form to patterns and actions (Mang & Reed, 2012; Gibbons, 2020). Regenerative design technologies in the built environment that majorly focuses on facilitating healthy processes and flows within one focal scale of system without catalyzing change at larger scales (Lyle, 1994; Mang & Reed, 2012; Gibbons, Cloutier, Coseo, & Barakat, 2018 in Gibbons, 2020), ecological design and planning (Van der Ryn & Cowan, 2002; in Gibbons, 2020), biophilic design (Kellert, Heerwagen, & Mador, 2008; in Gibbon, 2020), the Living Building and Living Community Challenges (International Living Future Institute, 2020; in Gibbons, 2020), biomimicry (Benyus, 1997; in Gibbons, 2020), permaculture (Holmgren, 2002; in Gibbons, 2020), and ecovillages (Christian, 2003; Litfin, 2014; in Gibbons, 2020).

As Hagaard, Reed, and Mang (2006; in Mang & Reed, 2012) write, “learning how to apply a regenerative approach begins not with a change of techniques but rather with a change of mind- a new way of thinking about how we plan, design, construct and operate our built environment” (p.491).

Permaculture

In the absence of studying permaculture, no study of regenerative tourism will be addressed properly. Therefore, an effort has been made to highlight on the role of permaculture as an important practice associated with transforming to regenerative agriculture to regenerative tourism. Permaculture has been studied by Mang and Reed (2012) and Rhodes (2017) which deals with minimizing human dependence, waste, and incorporate energy and other resources as man-made ecosystems for maximal benefits between design elements to achieve a high level of holistic integrity and resilience.

In 1978 Bill Mollison, an Australian ecologist, and one of his students, David Holm Gren coined the word permaculture from a contraction of permanent agriculture or permanent culture. They developed a field of permaculture as an ecological design system to promote design of human habitats and a food production systems based on the relationships and processes found in natural ecological communities. Much of its inspiration was drawn from the relationships and adaptations of indigenous people to their ecosystems (Mollison, 1988;

in Mang & Reed, 2012). Bill Mollison's in his book entitled *Permaculture: A designers' Manual,* published in 1988 introduced a hierarchy of investment (regenerative, generative and degenerative) as framework for assessing the value of potential actions for building regenerative capacity in a system (Mang & Reed, 2012, pp. 431-432). Permaculture designs are 'organic' and evolve over time according to the interplay of these relationships and elements and can become extremely complex systems, able to produce a high density of food and materials with minimal input (Rhodes, 2017, p.109).

As a working and practical definition, permaculture (Rhodes, 2012, Mollison & Jeeves, 1988; Holmgren, 2011; in Rhodes, 2017, p.108) may be described as a low impact method which uses perennial cultivation methods to produce food crops, working via principles that are in harmony with nature. The term permaculture (Mollison & Jeeves, 1988; Holmgren, 2011; in Rhodes, 2017) (a portmanteau word derived from permanent agriculture, or culture) was coined by Bill Mollison (1928–2016) and David Holmgren in the mid-1970s, to describe an "integrated, evolving system of perennial or self-perpetuating plant and animal species useful to man." According to Holmgren, "A more current definition of permaculture (Mollison & Jeeves, 1988; in Rhodes, 2017) is 'Consciously designed landscapes which mimic the patterns and relationships found in nature, while yielding an abundance of food, fiber and energy for provision of local needs.' People and their buildings, and the ways they organize themselves, are central to permaculture. Thus the permaculture vision of permanent (sustainable) agriculture has evolved to one of permanent (sustainable) culture" (Rhodes, 2017).

According to Rhodes (2017), permaculture is based on three core ethics such as 1) Earth Care, 2) People Care and 3) Fair Share. Earth Care (take care of the Earth): provision for all life systems to continue and multiply. This is the first principle, because without a healthy Earth, humans cannot flourish. Secondly, it is people care (take care of the people): provision for people to access those resources necessary for their existence. And finally, fair shares (share the surplus): healthy natural systems use outputs from each element to nourish others. Humans can do the same; by taking control of our own needs, we can set resources aside to further the above principles.

Bill Mollison came to Nepal for providing training on permaculture and this has been studied by some scholars like Evans (2017) and Yadav et al. (2023). In 1986, the Institute for Sustainable Agriculture Nepal (INSAN) collaborated with Agricultural Project Services (APROSC) and Win Rock International to organize the first permaculture design course training facilitated by Bill Mollison in Kathmandu (Yadav et al., 2023).

Regenerative Agriculture

Various scholars such as Dias (2018), Hutchins and Storm (2019), Morseletto (2020), Hussain and Haley (2022), Day et al. (2022), Pung et al. (2024) have credited regenerative agriculture as a root for the development of regenerative tourism. If regenerative agriculture is a source for regenerative tourism, the scholars have noted down regarding the origin and the development of how regenerative agriculture including permaculture came into existence and became popular. They are Rhodes (2017), Giller et al. (2021) who have carried out their studies and highlighted on the importance of regenerative agriculture which consequently enhanced other scholars to enter into the field regenerative tourism studies.

The term regenerative has been associated with 'agriculture' or 'farming' since the 1970s (Gabel, 1979; in Hussain & Haley, 2022). However, the term 'regenerative agriculture' and 'regenerative farming' became part of mainstream research in the early 1980s (Giller et al., 2021; Hussain & Haley, 2022). The term has gained popularity amongst activists and civil society organizations to revitalize the global food supply chain (Duncan, Carolan, &Wiskerke, 2021; in Giller et al., 2021; Hussain & Haley, 2022). Like sustainability, the term 'regenerative' was also borrowed from natural sciences (Hussain & Haley, 2022).

The concept of regenerative tourism is derived from the agricultural, forestry, urban design and architecture fields (Dredge, 2022; in Pung et al., 2024). Specifically, regenerative agriculture refers to managing and enhancing condition for the ongoing renewal of life and living systems (Hutchins & Storm, 2019; Morseletto, 2020; Hussain & Haley, 2022; Pung et al., 2024). As such, regenerative tourism adopts principles from agriculture as well as regenerative economic models and designs (Day et al., 2021; Pung et al., 2024); it requires 'long-term, systemic thinking rejects the idea that tourism is separated from the rest of the community and constantly engages the community in decision making' (Sheldon, 2022, p.205; Pung et al., 2024).

Rodale (1983; in Hussain & Haley, 2022) defined regenerative agriculture as one that has a high level of built-in economic and biological stability. It has minimal to no impact on the environment beyond the farm or field boundaries and produces foodstuffs free from biocides. In regenerative agriculture, it is the soil that is the foundation of growth for the farming system (Hutchins & Storm, 2019; in Hussain & Haley, 2022). Regenerative Agriculture is for the improvement to soil health and for the broader environment, human health and economic prosperity (Schreefel et al., 2020; in Giller et al., 2021). It isan approach to farming that uses soil conservation as the entry point to regenerate and contribute to multiple provisioning, regulating and supporting ecosystem services. It has the objectivestoenhance the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable food production (Giller et al., 2021).

It is Kimmerer (2011) who has developed a concept known as restoration and reciprocity. The idea of reciprocity with land is fundamental to many indigenous belief systems. Reciprocal restoration encompasses repair of both ecosystem and cultural services while fostering renewed relationships of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. All flourishing is mutual. Reciprocal restoration is grounded in the positive feedback relationship between cultural revitalization and land restoration (Egan, 1988; Oeschlager, 1996; Kimmerer 2000; Martinez, Salmon, & Nelson 2008; in Kimmerer, 2011, p.257).

Social-Ecological Systems

While studying aboutsocial-ecological systems, the scholars have focused on the concept of worldview derived from the term 'world' and the term world itself is very important (Du Plessis, 2008; Du Plessis & Cole, 2011; Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014) for making clear understanding of social-ecological systems. Informed by these shifts, the ecological worldview can be understood as built around the following precepts:

> The world is "a complex, interconnected and finite system" (Meadows, 1982, p.101; in Du Plessis, 2008) within which humans exist as part of larger social-ecological systems (Walker et al., 2002; Anderies et al., 2004; in Du Plessis, 2008). The world as cited by Du Plessis (2008) is an adaptive and self-organising 'living' system, which to be 'sustainable' has to be healthy and viable (Sterling, 2003), and resilient (Brock et al., 2002; Gunderson & Holling, 2002).

Kearney (1984, p.41; in Du Plessis & Cole, 2011) described worldview as a collection of concepts, theorems and assumptions that provides a coherent (but not necessarily accurate) way of looking at and thinking about the world. As cited by Du Plessis (2008, p.10), there are two types of worldview (mechanistic worldview and ecological worldview). The mechanistic worldview operates on an assumption that the properties of the whole can be reduced to and deduced from the sum of the properties of the parts (as is possible with mechanical and other complicated cybernetic systems). The ecological worldview, by contrast, holds that the properties (and behavior) of the whole more than some of, and not deducible from, the properties of the parts, i.e. holistic (as found in complex and living systems) (Capra, 1997; Rees, 1999; Sterling, 2003; in Du Plessis & Cole, 2011). The ecological worldview sees humans as an integral part of, and co-evolving with, nature. Therefore, in order to understand what the term 'social-ecological systems' describes, it is also necessary to understand what it is that differentiates the role of humans from that of other species-to such an extent that SESs are seen as markedly different from ecological systems without humans (Du Plessis, 2008, p.18).

Du Plessis and Brandon (2014) have classified ecological worldview into three main themes: wholeness, relationship, and change which provide a framework for discussing the implications of this regenerative sustainability paradigm for the production of the built environment – for how it is created, the technologies used, and how it is evaluated (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014).

In course of studying living systems thinking as a school of thought, it is noteworthy to mention about what system is. The dictionary of Etymology argue that Systems is a word that came from the Greek word "systema", that means an organized whole (Dia, 2018, p.316), a whole compounded of parts (Hussain & Haley, 2022).

Humans have a positive role to play in nature in order to create sustained ecological health; human must evolve a conscious and integral interrelationship where humans and nature are in a mutually beneficial being and becoming relationship-one that is always aware of evolutionary potential. Here comes the evolution of planetary systems. This begins with lithogenesis (formation of the lithosphere or matter), to biogenesis (the formation of the biosphere or life), to noogenesis (the formation of the sphere of mind or the noosphere)-with "life only emerging where matter is favorable and mind only emerging where life is favorable" (Wilber, 2000b; in Du Plessis, 2008, p.22). While in Vernadsky's initial scheme, the lithosphere (sphere of stones) refers to the top geological layers that form the planet's outer crust, the sphere of matter has been subsequently expanded to include the hydrosphere (sphere of water) and the atmosphere (sphere of gases), and is referred to instead as a geosphere. There are two main aspects of geosphere: first one is physical geology and geography of the planet and the second aspect of the geosphere as the source of the basic elements that make up all biotic and abiotic aspects of the universe, including the bodies of humans. Without the geosphere there would be no biosphere, as all organisms are made up of elements found in the geosphere (Du Plessis, 2008). The above mentioned SESs are made up of three distinct spheres or domains of existence in planetary systems: the geosphere (matter), the biosphere (life), and noosphere (mind). The correlation between matter, life, and mind focused on life that requires matter in order to exist, mind requires life to function and matter for its own existence (Du Plessis, 2008).

It is noteworthy to understand what social-ecological systems (SESs) are and why SESs become popular in the study of regenerative development and sustainability. Anderies et al. (2004; in Du Plessis, 2008, p.19) present an anthropocentric worldview by describing SESs alternatively as systems of humans affecting nature or as nature providing a service to humans. The authors suggest that SESs can be seen as a 'natural' (as oppose to manmade or 'artificial'). The authors later suggest that the term 'social-ecological system' refers to "…the subset of social systems in which some of the interdependent relationships among humans are mediated through interactions with biophysical and non-human biological units" (Anderies et al., 2004, p.3; in Du Plessis, 2008, p.19).

In the context of understanding social-ecological systems (SESs) as a theory, C.S. Holling is acknowledged to be a pioneer in conceptualizing and establishing in the field of academia who introduces ecological resilience in 1973, which becomes the foundation for SESs. Manyani et al. (2024) analysis show a rapid growth in SESs research, since the term 'social-ecological systems' was used in 1998 to conceptualize interlinked nature of social-ecological systems (Berkes & Folke, 1998; inManyani et al., 2024), becoming a lively, productive scientific field, this growth is reflected in the size of the co-authorship network, from only eight authors in 1999 to over 11,000 authors in 2019. Accompanying this growth, we see a shift in the terminology used, notably around the year 2000, when the term social ecological system 'increases rapidly and becomes dominant in relation to other terms describing nature-society relations, as well as in relation to variance of the term SESs (Guo et al., 2011; in Manyani et al., 2024). In the similar vein, two institutions-the Resilience Alliance (RA, 1999) and the Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC, 2007) have played a pivotal role in the development of the SESs field (Manyani et al., 2024).

Haberl et al. (2006; in Du Plessis, 2008, p.19) used the term 'social-ecological system' as synonymous with terms such as coupled human environment systems, and regard society-nature interaction as a dynamic process in which two autopoiesis systems-society and nature-interact. From this point of view, example of SESs would include agriculture, human settlements and an extractive industry such as mining, which result in anthropogenic "disturbances to otherwise properly functioning ecosystems" (Clark et al., 2004; Haberl et al., 2006, p.2; in Du Plessis, 2008).

The term 'autopoiesis' as mentioned above is a word coined by biologists Maturana and Varela (1980; in Du Plessis, 2008) from the words 'auto', meaning by one self/itself and 'poiesis', meaning production, creation and formation to describe the nature of living systems (Du Plessis, 2008, p.34, fn.2). The opposite term of 'autopoiesis' is 'sympoiesis' as forwarded by Donna Haraway which does not agree with the concept of autopoiesis. The meaning of sympoiesis is to learn how to live well with each other, 'making-with' because '[n]othing makes itself; or self-organizing' (Haraway, 2016, p.58; in Habersang, 2025, p.334).

Tourism sustainability remains contested, with critics arguing that current models sustain growth rather than drive systemic change (Fletcher, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010; Lupini et al., 2024; Sharpley, 2020; in Ridanpää, 2025). Recently, the notion of regenerative tourism has gained interest among tourism researchers and practitioners as a possible way forward (Bellato et al., 2022b; Boluk& Panse, 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020; in Ridanpää, 2025). Regenerative approaches take us beyond mere 'sustaining' and seek to improve the capacities of interconnected socio-ecological systems (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014; Duarte et al., 2024, p.5; Dziadkiewicz et al., 2024; Ridanpää, 2025). Furthermore, the regenerative paradigm is not detached from sustainability; indeed, it represents an evolution in sustainability thinking, a shift from mechanistic worldviews to living systems thinking (Benne & Mang, 2015; Gibbons, 2020; in Ridanpää, 2025). Living systems thinking posits that humans and social systems are nested in the wider ecology, thereby framing our responsibilities within the living world (Capra, 2002; in Ridanpää, 2025).

Although regenerative tourism holds much promise as a remedy for destructive capitalistic practices (Nieuwland, 2024; in Paddison & Hall, 2024), it is largely hindered by contemporary system logics (Mathisen et al., 2022). From a regenerative tourism perspective, the purpose of tourism is to benefit socio-ecological systems by partnering with place and other stakeholders (Bellato, 2024).

Although the terms 'worldview' and 'paradigm' are frequently used as fully interchangeable notions, a shift in worldview is prerequisite to a paradigm shift. A paradigm can be defined as the shared values, concepts and practices of a community as shaped by the particular view of the world by that community (Kuhn, 1996, p.42; Capra, 1997, p.6; Wilber, 2000a, p.282; in Du Plessis & Cole, 2011, pp. 436-437). Although originally used to describe the practices of a scientific community (a scientific paradigm), the term is also used to refer to the practices of society (a social paradigm). A paradigm has to do with how we pursue knowledge: what we are able to perceive, the ways we acquire knowledge, especially in science, and what we consider to be reliable knowledge (the study of which is formally known as epistemology) (Sanford, 2019).

A worldview, on the other hand, is a cosmological framing of how things work. It is based on societal values and beliefs and has mainly to do with how we ought to live. Within disciplines or fields of endeavor, it is worldviews that describe origins and provide coherence (Sanford, 2019).

Sustainability Paradigm

The term sustainability was borrowed from natural and applied sciences to business, as is 'ecosystem', but often without understanding the complexities of these terms in natural environment (Hussain & Haley, 2022). The values and theory of action of the ecological worldview defines a sustainability paradigm that aligns human development efforts with the creative efforts of nature. This paradigm has the potential to create a future where the damage done to the biosphere and to our social systems has been restored, and people can live in mutually supportive symbiosis with their social and biophysical environment (their whole ecological system) be the one nurturing and growing the potential of the other.

It is, in principle, "the reconnection of human aspirations and activities with the evolution of natural systems essentially co-evolution" (Mang & Reed, 2012, p.6; Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014). In addition, a new scientific paradigm with a specific focus on the problems of sustainability is emerging from this worldview. This transdisciplinary 'sustainability science' (Kates et al., 2001; Burns et al., 2008; in Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014) introduces new ways of thinking, new ways of modeling, new ways of assessment, the new methods of analysis, and new ways of dealing with the integration and dependency between the mini factors which make up this complex topic (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014).

Reed (2007) suggests that this new sustainability paradigm goes beyond current notions of increased resource efficiency and reduced impact while meeting basic needs, to being based on the idea of whole or living-systems thinking, in which the "purpose of sustainability is sustaining life-enhancing conditions" (p.675). He proposes the following trajectory of increasingly whole approaches:

- restorative approaches that "restore the capacity of local natural systems to a healthy state of self-organization";
- reconciliatory approaches which "acknowledge "that humans are an integral part of nature and that human and natural systems are one"; and
- regenerative approaches that engage and focus "on the evolution of the whole of the system of which we are part" (p.677).

Regenerative Paradigm

This view changes how sustainability is understood in three fundamental ways. Firstly, it introduces the understanding that to be sustainable, it is necessary to move towards a developmental model that aligns human development efforts with the creative efforts of nature. This means following a development approach based on how nature works, not on how humans would like the world to work. Secondly, the idea of the world as an ever-changing, impermanent and inherently unpredictable set of processes is shifting the interpretation of how sustainability should be defined. Thirdly, the notion that humans and nature are not two separate interacting systems, but rather one autopoietic system where members of the species Homo sapiens participate in the production, trans-formation and evolution of the ecosystem in which they find themselves. This introduces the idea that humans are not only to be responsible for consequences of their actions (reducing impact), but for the general health and well-being of the whole system of which they are part. These three insights form the basis of the regenerative paradigm (Du Plessis, 2012).

Importantly, a regenerative paradigm recognizes the importance of different types of knowledge and perceiving (Gibbons, 2020), including indigenous, spiritual and experiential ways of knowing -all of which can be drawn on a complement scientific understanding in a transdisciplinary approach, or one that is paradigm- transcending (Meadows, 1999; in Becken & Kaur, 2021).

Core to the regenerative paradigm is living systems thinking as a bedrock to build the capacity of humans to align and co-evolve with life systems (Mang and Reed, 2012). Initially developed by Charles Krone in the 1960s, living systems thinking gained traction with Capra's *The Turning Point* in 1982 and *The Wave of Life* in 1997 (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014). Capra suggested that humanity's problem should be seen as a crisis of perception due to a failure to align human ways of seeing and thinking with how nature worked.

The regenerative paradigm is not detached from sustainability; indeed, it represents an evolution in sustainability thinking a shift from mechanistic worldviews to living systems thinking (Benne & Mang, 2015; Gibbons, 2020; Ridanpää, 2025, p.2). Living systems thinking posits that humans and the social systems are nested in the wider ecology, thereby framing our responsibilities within the living world (Capra, 2002; in Ridanpää, 2025). Living systems is a key element that elevates regenerative tourism beyond sustainability (Bellato et al., 2022b; Bellato & Pollock, 2025; Ridanpää, 2025, p.3).

Tourism Living System

Living system is defined as a self-organized whole (Dias, 2018). However,Mang and Reed (2012) argue – From a regenerative perspective "…natural systems and human systems, …are all living systems" (Dias, 2018; Hes & Du Plessis, 2014; Hussain & Haley, 2022). In the field of systems thinking, James Grier Miller defines living systems as a special subset of concrete systems such as moneres, protists, fungi, plants, animals, groups, organizations, societies, and supranational systems (Dias, 2018; Hussain & Haley, 2022; Bellato et al., 2024).

To understand the complexity of tourism, Leiper (1979; in Hussain & Haley, 2022) came up with a partially industrialized phenomenon of tourism where the elements of the tourism industry are discussed in terms of the degree of industrialization. Leiper's Tourism System comprises of the tourist, geographical features (departing travelers, tourist transition region, returning travelers) and tourism industry (Leiper, 1979; in Hussain & Haley, 2022). Tourism is becoming increasingly recognized as an 'interrelated system within the larger ecological living system' (Jamrozy, 2007, p.125; Paddison & Hall, 2024, p.6), with living systems thinking being applied to tourism within the context of regenerative development (Bellato et al., 2022a; in Paddison & Hall, 2024). Tourism as a living system advocates for a transformation of theory and practice by developing knowledge concerning the interconnections and interrelationships between human and non-human stakeholders (Bellato et al., 2022b; in Paddison & Hall, 2024).

When tourism is planned with this living system mindset, care and respect for residents, visitors and the land are prioritized (Sheldon, 2025).

Sustainable Development and Sustainability

In an academic context, the difference between sustainable and sustainability is one of function: "Sustainable" is an adjective describing a characteristic, while "sustainability" is a noun refereeing to the overarching concept or goal (Google AI Overview). It is quintessential to understand development before explaining the term sustainable development. Throughout history, development has predominantly carried economic connotations and its practice has tended to implement neoliberal and modernization approaches to address the problem of global poverty (Mowforth, 2014; in Vodden et al., 2023, p.45). The basic understanding of development as a field of policy and practice relates to the idea of improving, building up, and advancing the well-being and quality of life of people at various scales, including communities of place (Tombazos & Miller, 2006; in Vodden et al., 2023).

The term 'development' has evolved considerably over the last half-century and is now a multi-dimensional concept which is defined variously throughout the literature (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015; in Rahman et al., 2018). One of the most prominent 'thought leaders' in the study of development, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1999, p.3; Rahman et al., 2018) defines development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy" and extends the definition beyond core economic (growth) criteria like industrialization or technological change emphasized by the neo-classical growth theorists. Such an orientation of development concept signifies the 'alternative growth' paradigm (Telfer, 2015; in Rahman et al., 2018), which is featured by people-centered and bottom-up principle with an increasing focus on socio-cultural and environmental aspects.Development is an interdisciplinary subject, which has no single broadly accepted definition, but it incorporates social, economic, political and human dimensions of society (Davies & Hossain, 1997; in Hussain, 2019, p.10). According to Edwards (1993; in Hussain, 2019), development is specifically about the enrichment of the livelihoods of people in community. Todaro and Smith (2012; in Hussain, 2019) agreed with Edwards (1993; in Hussain, 2019) and suggested that development is a multidimensional process which involves recognition and reorientation of entire economic and social systems. Such systems are based on raising living standards, ensuring growth through social, political, economic and institutional systems, and increasing freedom of choice through variety of goods and services (Todaro & Smith, 2012; in Hussain, 2019).

Sustainable development concept initiated under the purview of alternative growth in the late 1980s following the publication of "Our Common Future" (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development [UNWCED], 1987), which is widely referred to the 'Brundtland Report'. Brundtland (1987, p.292; in Rahman et al., 2018) introduced and positioned the concept of sustainable development with a core criterion of "meeting the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs".

Sustainable development is a global socio-political model for changing practices and institutions in order to achieve more equitable opportunities within and between generations while taking into account limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. Promoting sustainable development therefore necessitates overcoming narrow preoccupations and compartmentalized concerns by involving people from civil society, the private sector and public agencies as actors in participatory deliberation and decision making. Thus sustainable development is a way to conceive the common good as the basic principle of public legislation in a complex world. Agenda 21, a program of the UN, is a comprehensive blueprint of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally (Pohl & Hadorn, 2008, p.431; in Du Plessis, 2012).

The study of sustainable development and sustainability begin with assembling a huge database of scientific publications in English written between 1974 and 2010 that contain the words "sustainability" and/or "sustainable development". The base contains about 20,000 papers, authored by about 37,000 authors found in 174 countries and in 2,200 cities (Science Staff, 2011; in Kates, 2011). The international community embraced sustainable development at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, incorporating it into both the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 (Benson & Craig, 2014, p.778).

The 2015 report of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide a sobering reflection on the enormity of the challenges facing the world community as it strives to implement the newly established Sustainable Development Goals: about 800 million people still suffer from extreme poverty and hunger; because of malnourishment, more than 160 million children under age five have inadequate height for their age; 57 million children of primary school age do not go to school; about 16,000 children under five die each day; the maternal mortality ratio in developing countries is fourteen times higher than in the developed countries; just fifty percent of pregnant women in developing countries receive the recommended minimum of four antenatal care visits; in 2013 about 36 percent of the 31.5 million people living with HIV in developing countries were receiving ART; almost half of workers globally still work in vulnerable conditions; 2.4 billion people still use unimproved sanitation facilities in 2015; and over 880 million people in the developing world are still living in slum-like conditions (2015 MDGs Report; in Nanda, 2016, p.397).

The concept of sustainable development is so pervasive that almost every sector of an economy embraces the triple bottom-line principle of sustainable development. Accordingly, United Nations (UN) transformed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to represent the post-2015 development agenda both at global and local level. SDGs set 17 goals containing 169 sub-targets in total (United Nations, 2018; in Rahman et al., 2018; Shelley, Nov.1, 2022). The goals and targets are developed to achieve within a 15-year time frame from 2015 to 2030. The agenda acknowledges that different issues such as poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, environmental degradation, among others, are intertwined and can therefore only be addressed together. Implementing the SDGs as an 'indivisible whole' represents the actual litmus test for the success of the 2030 Agenda (Shelley, Nov.1, 2022). It has been argued by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that tourism can contribute directly and indirectly to all the goals set by the UN although it has been expressly included as targets in goals 8, 12, and 14 (UNWTO, 2015; in Rahman et al., 2018). These goals are focused on inclusive and sustainable economic growth through employment creation, sustainable consumption and production (SCP) of resources, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources (Rahman et al., 2018).

A larger example of sustainable development goals (SDG) includes the issue of ecological modernization and green economy and the belief that economic development, technology and economic welfare will all contribute to the more ecologically benign products and technologies (WCED 1987; UNEP 2011; in Kopnina, 2015). In fact, one of the central concepts outlined is ‘sustained and inclusive economic growth’ (UN, 2015; in Kopnina, 2015). Supposedly, part of this ‘sustainable growth’ would address sustainability itself – also concrete sustainability challenges, including climate change (Kopnina, 2015).

Academics and practitioners have more recently expressed the notion of sustainable development in terms of triple bottom-line approach to human well-being: economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion (Sachs, 2012; in Rahman et al., 2018). John Elkington (1994, 1997; in Joshi & Kunwar, 2018), the sustainability thought leader who coined the term “triple-bottom-line (people, planet and profit),” amplifies the sentiment that “doing less harm” is not enough and now advocates for adopting a regenerative approach to sustainability (Elkington, 2020; in Day et al., 2022).

The concept of sustainability dates back to early UN conferences in the 1970s and has become increasingly difficult to disentangle from sustainable development, although the two concepts are not necessarily the same. In general, ‘‘sustainability’’ refers to the long-term ability to continue to engage in a particular activity, process, or use of natural resources (16 U.S.C., ××, 1801–1884; in Benson & Craig, 2014, p.778). Sustainability is an approach of stewardship where well-being is maintained over a long period by bequeathed resources, quality of the environment, and capital to future generations (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; in Acharya & Halpeny, 2017, p.3). Many dimensions of sustainability are discussed by different authors, of which a three pillars tradition is a popular approach in tourism studies that includes economy, society and environment. Along with three, some other dimensions such as cultural, political and technological are also considered in some studies (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Gibson, Hassan, Holtz, Tansey & Whitelaw, 2013; Park & Yoon, 2011; in Acharya & Halpeny, 2017). Sustainability is becoming a very ambiguous term. An article revealed that until 2007 there were an estimated three hundred definitions of ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ exist broadly within the domain of environmental management and the associated disciplines which link with it, either directly or indirectly (Johnston et al., 2007; Dias, 2018, p.315).

Ray C. Anderson was inspired from the book written by Paul Hawken, The Ecology of Commerce published in 1993 and developed a concept which is known as climbing mount sustainability. In this study, Anderson focuses on the climb of “seven faces” of mount sustainability. All seven climbs, although it is tough to climb means that achieving true sustainability is harder than the toughest physical challenge on earth. It signifies that it requires rethinking the entire industrial model, which is much harder than simply changing a few products (Anderson, 2004). The Seven fronts sustainability are: 1) Eliminating Waste, 2) Benign Emissions, 3) Renewable Energy, 4) Closing The Loop, 5) Resource Efficient Transportation, 6)Sensitizing Stakeholders and 7) Redesign.

Anderson (1998) describes sustainability as a “mountain to climb,” referring to the journey as “Mount Sustainability.” It refers to the monumental challenge of transforming a traditional, linear, and polluting industrial business into a fully sustainable, circular, and zero-environmental-footprint company.

- "A mountain to climb": The concept of a “mountain to climb” illustrates that achieving sustainability is a difficult and demanding process. It emphasizes that sustainability is not a quick or simple goal, but a long term effort requiring significant changes and commitment (Anderson, 1998, p.59).
- "Higher than Everest and infinitely more difficult": This metaphor emphasizes that achieving true sustainability is harder than the toughest physical challenge on earth. It signifies that it requires rethinking the entire industrial model, which is much harder than simply changing a few products. According to Anderson (1998, p.9), higher than Everest “…means creating and adopting the technologies of the future-kinder, gentler technologies that emulate nature”.
- "Mount Sustainability": The name for this journey to zero negative impact ("Mission Zero") (Anderson, 1998).
- The Goal: The goal at the summit is to operate in a way that does no harm to the planet, using renewable energy and, in the case of manufacturing, closing the loop on material flows to create a truly circular economy (Anderson, 1998, p.92).

By definition, sustainability assumes that there are desirable states of being for social-ecological systems (SESs) that humans can maintain (within a certain range of variability) indefinitely. In practice, sustainability-based goals proved difficult to achieve in many SESs even before climate change impacts became noticeable (Benson & Criag, 2014, p.779).

Edwards (2005, p.5; in Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014, p.1) describes sustainability as “a revolution with a new value system, consciousness and worldview”. Orr (2005, p.xiv; in Du Plessis & Brandon, 2014) further describes this ‘sustainability revolution’ as “… nothing less than are thinking and remaking of our role in the natural world. It is a recalibration of human intentions to coincide with the way the biophysical world works”.

While redefining sustainability, sustainable development and design Orr (1992; Van der Ryn & Cownan, 1996; in Mang & Reed, 2012) have been described as falling broadly into two streams- one primarily technical and engineering based (technological sustainability) and the other based in ecology and living systems principles (ecological sustainability). Mang and Reed (2012) focus on ecological sustainability and built environment. The philosophical and technical foundations for regenerative development and design as a distinctive field within ecological sustainability were laid in the 1990s. In the same line, Gibbons (2020) explained three streams of sustainability- 1) conventional sustainability, 2) contemporary sustainability, and 3) regenerative sustainability that have emerged, their context, and their main characteristics.

Contemporary sustainability advances conventional sustainability by adding considerations of ecosystem viability, social justice, social–ecological and social–ecological–technical systems, satisfying livelihoods, and normativity (Miller et al., 2014; Wiek, 2015; in Gibbons, 2020). "Regenerative sustainability" has been called the next wave of sustainability (Lovinset al., 2018), and it represents a necessary worldview and paradigm shift for sustainability (Du Plessis, 2012; Gonźalez-Marquez & Toledo, 2020; Gibbons, 2020, p.3). It includes and transcends conventional and contemporary sustainability, adopting a holistic worldview (Gibbons et al., 2018; Du Plessis & Cole, 2011; Gibbons, 2020).

Regenerative Sustainability

Regenerative development is based on ecological principles and an ecological worldview that consciously adopts a whole living systems approach and works towards regenerative sustainability (Benne & Mang, 2015; in Gibbons et al., 2018, p.5). Regenerative sustainability focuses on strengthening "the health, adaptive capacity, and evolutionary potential of the fully integrated global social-ecological system so that it can continue regenerating itself, thereby creating the conditions for a thriving and abundant future–not only for the human species, but for all life" (Du Plessis, 2012). Regenerative development translates regenerative sustainability principles and values of wholeness, change, and interrelationship into design and development frameworks and technologies that create and manifest designs, plans, and capacities in social-ecological systems. In social-ecological systems, humans are seen as an integral part of nature and partners in the processes of co-creation and co-evolution instead of being merely users or clients of various ecosystem services (Du Plessis, 2012).

The key elements of regenerative sustainability paradigm as per Du Plessis and Brandon (2014) can be summarized as follows:

- The objective of sustainability is to uphold relationships that sustain the ability of the global social-ecological system to provide not just life-supporting but also life-enhancing conditions for the global community of life. To achieve this, it would be necessary to maintain the wholeness of both local and global systems (i.e. their critical structures, functional integrity, overall health and well-being, and capacity for regeneration and evolution), and for human efforts to participate positively in processes of creation, evolution and regeneration.
- Sustainability is about learning how to respond and adapt to, and evolve with, change and surprise, while avoiding changes threatening the life-supporting and life-enhancing capacity of global and local social-ecological systems.
- Sustainability is based on a value system which holds that both people and nature should be treated with respect and in a spirit of fellowship and mutuality, and actions should focus not only on the well-being of humans, but on the well-being of the entire social-ecological system. This means that humans have a duty of care that requires them to support the well-being and evolution of the social-ecological systems of which they are part, and take responsibility for the consequences of their actions.
- Decision-making for sustainability is a reflective process that guides decisions about proposed actions, not by measuring these actions against pre-determined and negotiated criteria and indicators, but by questioning whether the proposed actions uphold the values of the ecological worldview and how it expresses these values, as well as what the possible consequences of an intended action would be across system scales and levels.
- Sustainability initiatives are not goal-driven, but rather reflective responses that allow systems to adapt to changing circumstances, new knowledge and surprise; learning from experience in order to build adaptive capacity and healthy resilience and regenerate themselves by evolving towards more abundant, complex and diverse states.

Sustainable Livelihood

"Livelihood" is a more concrete concept than "development" and easier to discuss, observe, describe and even quantify (Tao & Wall, 2009). A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base (Tao & Wall, 2009). Tao and Wall (2009) introduces and applies a Sustainable Livelihood Approach (hereafter SLA).

SLA is a people-centered paradigm which emphasizes people's inherent capacities and knowledge and is focused on community level actions (Chambers, 1986; UNDP &Wanmali, 1999; in Tao & Wall, 2009). With an emphasis on livelihood security, it recognizes that it is necessary to begin by focusing on people, with the resources that they currently control, and the knowledge and skills that they already have (Chambers, 1988). According to Chambers and Conway (1992; Scoones, 1998, p.5; in Tao & Wall, 2009):

If a community decides to incorporate tourism as one of their livelihood strategies in order to achieve SL, tourism will be a form of livelihood diversification. Ellis (1998, p.5; Hussein & Nelson, 1998, p.4; in Tao & Wall, 2009) defined livelihood diversification as ''the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living.'' Such diversification can have many advantages and tourism can become:

- a means to enable accumulation (e.g., income) for consumption and investment
- a means to help spread risk;
- an adaptive response to longer-term declines in income or entitlements, due to serious economic or environmental changes beyond local control; and/or
- a means to take pressure off fragile lands and increase household incomes. Appropriate involvement in tourism, which is often desired by local people, will bring changes in uses and values of resources and activities (Tao & Wall, 2009).

In this kind of study, it is noteworthy to mention that Rahman, Simmons, Shone, & Ratna (2021) have developed a concept of 'Capitals Co-management for Sustainable Livelihood Framework (CCSLF)' which has six elements: livelihood capitals, formal institutional arrangements, co-management frameworks and processes, vulnerability context, and livelihood outcomes. Importantly, all of these elements must be addressed within the local tourism and destination context (Plummer et al., 2006; in Rahman et al., 2021). They further elaborate the significance of CCSLF, quality of life (QoL), and community well-being is gaining attention in the sustainable tourism literature (Cakir et al., 2018; Moscardo, 2014; Rahman, 2019; Shen et al., 2008; Tao & Wall, 2009; in Rahman et al., 2021). Community resources contributing to sustainable livelihoods have been coined by numerous terms in the literature and include ‘livelihood assets’ (Ashley, 2000; DFID., 1999), ‘community capitals’ (Flora et al., 2004; Stone & Nyaupane, 2018), and ‘rural capitals’ (Bosworth & Turner, 2018; Castle, 1998; in Rahman et al., 2021).

Community capital is highly been focused by the scholars such as Flora and Flora who introduced the Community Capital Frameworks (CCF) to understand systems relating to poverty, natural resource management, and social equity (Flora & Flora, 2013; in Kline et al., 2019). The SLA tracks five capitals: human, social, natural, physical, and financial. A total of seven capitals are included in Flora’s model, which adds built and political capitals to the SLA model. The community capitals of the CCF are defined as follows:

- Natural capital: air, water, soil, living things, and weather
- Cultural capital: values, perceptions, symbols, and reward systems
- Human capital: individual potential determined by nature (genetics) and nurture (social interaction and the environment)
- Social capital: mutual trust, reciprocity, collective identity, working together, and a sense of a shared future
- Political capital: the ability of a community or group to turn norms and values into standards
- Financial capital: savings, income, fees, loans and credit, gifts and philanthropy, taxes, and tax exemptions
- Built capital: human-constructed infrastructure (Flora & Flora, 2013; in Kline et al., 2019).

This model emerged from the practice and application of the SLA as well as other participatory strategies (Gutierrez-Montes, Emery, & Fernandez-Baca, 2009; in Kline et al., 2019). The SLA was developed with the belief that livelihoods are sustainable when individuals or households can recover from shocks while maintaining their stocks of capitals, including natural resources.

Sustainable Tourism

A couple of decades ago, sustainable tourism was proposed as an alternative practice that would help solve some of the predominant issues with traditional mass tourism (Krippendorf, 1987; Corral-Gonźalez et al., 2023). The first document that specifically relates tourism to sustainability is the 1994 Osaka Declaration on Tourism (OMT-UNWTO, 2016; in Izquierdo-Gascoin & Rubio-Gil, 2022).

Sustainable tourism was first mentioned in the scientific literature in 1993 and grew rapidly to peak at 2932 papers published in 2021, declining to 2620 papers published on the subject in 2022. The 2005 guidelines of the World Tourism Organization and Environmental Program of the UN recommended sustainable tourism to strive at (1) making optimal use of environmental sources, maintaining essential ecological progresses and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity; (2) respecting the socio-culture authenticity of host communities and contributing to inter-culture understanding and tolerance; and ensuring viable, fair, long-term socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders (United Nation Environment Program & World Tourism Organization, 2005). However, by 2019, only 11% of nations had implemented sustainable tourism (Hussain, 2021; in Duarte et al., 2024).

According to Butler (1999), sustainable tourism is "tourism which meets the needs of present tourist and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future" (p.10; in Chassagne & Everingham, 2019, p.1). Sustainable tourism also refers to tourism and its related infrastructure that function within the limits of natural systems, ensuring the ongoing regeneration and long-term productivity of natural resources. It acknowledges the vital role of local people, communities, and their customs and lifestyles in shaping the tourism experience. Furthermore, it emphasizes that these communities should receive a fair and equitable share of the economic benefits generated from tourism in their host areas (Eber, 1992; in Butler, 1999).

20 years ago, Jost Krippendorf, one of the founding fathers of sustainable tourism has stressed on the need to come to action and to measurable action, in the field of sustainable tourism which should be practical and simple with five to six indicators with which those responsible could be measured annually and reflect the progress made in the fields of lower energy consumption in developing tourism infrastructure (Krippendorf, 1993, p.58; in Gössling & Peeters, 2015). This reveals that Krippendorf highlights on the significance of sustainable tourism in lowering carbon emission.According to Bellato et al. (2022b, p.11), sustainable tourism derived from sustainable development by academics and industry and the term first documented in 1975 and formally recognized by tourism academics in 1993.

According to Ball (2024; in Jones 2024), 'sustainable tourism' was giving way to 'regenerative tourism.' Sustainable tourism and regenerative tourism have been described as 'different stages on the same continuum' (The Tourism Collective 2023; in Jones 2024).

Sustainability Science

Sustainability science is a new "discipline" in an academia as mentioned by Swart et al. (2004; in Komiyama & Takeuchi, 2006, p.3). Academia has prominently responded through the initiation of a new field of research, namely, sustainability science, since the late 1990s (Kates et al., 2001; Clark & Dickson, 2003; Swart et al., 2004; Komiyama & Takeuchi, 2006; Martens, 2006; Jerneck et al., 2011; Wiek et al., 2011, 2012; in Lang et al., 2012).When sustainability science came out in 2001, this has been studied by several other scholars such as Kates et al. (2001); Kates (2010); Kates (2011a); Kates (2011b); Komiyama & Takeuchi (2006); Clark (2007); Du Plessis (2008, p.9, 13); Miller (2012); Lang et al. (2012); Clark and Harley (2020); Gonźalez-Marquez and Toledo (2020). Sustainability science is a broad interdisciplinary applied science field aiming to address sustainable development (Clark & Harley, 2020; Pollock et al., 2024, p.1174).

It was found to be an evolving approach relevant to regenerative tourism. Sustainability science draws from great varieties of perspectives, including tacit (traditional and practical) knowledge, ecology and economics, engineering and medicine, political science and law, and a multitude of others (Clark & Harley, 2020, p.5) such as agroecology, ecological economy, political ecology, environmental education, and environmental history (Gonźalez-Marquez & Toledo, 2020) These multiple perspectives are generally a source of strength, bringing potentially complementary bodies of theory, data, and methods to bear on the challenges of sustainable development (Ostrom, 2011; in Clark & Harley, 2020).

According to Gibbons (2020, p.2; Lang et al., 2012), sustainability science is the science of sustainable development. Sustainability science focuses specifically on understanding the dynamic interactions between nature and society (Kates et al., 2001; Du Plessis, 2008, p.9). Sustainability science, as described by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) website, is "... an emerging field of research dealing with the interactions between natural and social systems, and with how those interactions affect the challenge of sustainability: meeting the needs of present and future generations while substantially reducing poverty and conserving the planet's life support systems" (Kates, 2011a; Hussain & Haley, 2022).

Analyzing 43 definitions of SS, Gonźalez-Marquez and Toledo (2020) identified two key elements: Understanding human–environment interactions and linking knowledge to action. These authors concluded that SS is a use-inspired, basic science of SD, which focuses on understanding human–environment interactions and linking understanding to actions by promoting a site-specific, multi-scale, and transdisciplinary approach (Gonźalez-Marquez & Toledo, 2020).

Sustainability science, like agricultural science or health science, is an applied science defined by the practical problems it addresses–specifically, the problem of sustainable development (Kates, 2011; Clark & Harley, 2020, p.332). That problem was defined a generation ago by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) in a prescient statement that merits careful rereading today:

> "Environment" is where we all live; and "development" is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable... Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable: to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (pp. ix, 8; in Clark & Harley, 2020, p.332).

As a problem-and solution-oriented field, as cited by Lang et al. (2020) sustainability science is inter alia inspired by concepts of post-normal, mode-2, triple helix, and other science paradigms or "new type of science" (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993; Gibbons et al., 1994; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Gonźalez-Marquez & Toledo, 2020; in Kunwar & Ulak, 2023, 2024, 2025) that employ corresponding research practices, such as transdisciplinary, community-based, interactive, or participatory approaches (Kasemir et al., 2003; Savan & Sider, 2003; Becker, 2006; Robinson & Tansey, 2006; Hirsch Hadorn et al., 2006; Jahn, 2008; Scholz et al., 2006; Scholz, 2011; in Lang et al., 2012). These practices have in common that they focus on research collaborations among scientists from different disciplines and non-academic stakeholders from business, government, and the civil society in order to address sustainability challenges and develop solution options. In the ground-breaking article on sustainability science by Kates et al. (2001), it reads accordingly that "participatory procedures involving scientists, stakeholders, advocates, active citizens, and users of knowledge are critically needed" (p.641; Lang et al., 2012).

Bettencourt and Kaur (2011) sought direct evidence that SS has created a new community of practice and a new synthesis in terms of concepts and methods. Hence it is a hybrid discipline as mentioned by (Gonźalez-Marquez & Toledo, 2020). These hybrid disciplines, emerging in practically all the fields of social or applied sciences (agronomy, education, and urbanism), consider that the study of each human dimension (the social, economic, political, historical, and cultural dimensions, among others) cannot be separated from the study of nature (Toledo, 1999; in Gonźalez-Marquez & Toledo, 2020).

Citizen Science

A specific research design can be selected based on the specifics of a particular research issue in different disciplines. This approach is close to the following concepts such as citizen science, case study, cooperative education, critical thinking, design thinking, sustainable development, indigenous knowledge, knowledge transfer, learning in transformation, participatory action research, performative knowledge, real-world lab, research integrity, research-based education, science communication and so on (Sharia & Sitchinava, 2023, p.2). Transdisciplinary approaches are recognized as effective methods of studying complex issues in modern scientific and educational fields. One of the key objectives of the transdisciplinary research is to integrate scientific and experiential knowledge, which is based on the concept "science with society". Transdisciplinary research has some characteristics; first of all it focuses on socially relevant issues, as well as integration of disciplinary paradigms that should be carried out by joint research. It can be said, that the main emphasis is made on the unity of knowledge existing in different disciplines, which as mentioned above should be focused on solving the problems which exists in society (Khokhobaia, 2018; see in detail Kunwar & Ulak, 2025). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the different perspectives and development scenarios, involving academic and non-academic subjects which requires interconnections of different types of knowledge and focus on problems and the ways to solve them. As for integration, it is a rather complex process, which in turn implies merging of scientific and experience-based knowledge, which exists both in academic and non-academic actors (Khokhobaia, 2018). The neighboring discipline of sustainability science is recently innovated as citizen science which makes comfortable understanding the role of the non-academic actors along with the scientists in the field of research.

Citizen Science is the collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists (Butler et al., 2023). The prevalence and popularity of Citizen Science (hereafter CS) has unquestionably grown, and as Bonney et al. (2016, p.13; in Butler et al., 2023) suggest, 'what was once a novel idea–lay people engaging in the scientific enterprise–is becoming mainstream'. In the first place, CS tries to find a way through the usual monolithic representations of 'science' and the 'public'. Both the 'public understanding of science' and the 'scientific understanding of the public' will, therefore, be considered (Irwin, 1995, p.ix).

The term CS was coined in 1989 by R. Kerson (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2023). The term appeared in an issue of the MIT Technology Review (Haklay et al., 2021). The term CS originates from Anglo-American contexts and generally describes the procedure of involving citizens who are not institutionally anchored in academia as active participants in a scientific research process (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2023).

According to US Citizen Science Association, CS is the involvement of the public in scientific research whether community-driven research or global investigations (Haklay et al., 2019; Haklay et al., 2021). In the academia of all sciences, CS has been repeatedly used. Haklay has collected 34 different definitions defined by different countries and other respected international organizations. Scholars have also named as "community science" or "participative science" (Haklay et al., 2019; Jaeger-Erben et al., 2023). The core issue of ‘who is a scientist’ is left deliberately blurred. This is because it is easier to identify professional scientists as those that are employed to carry out scientific work or investigation. With unpaid scientists, the situation is more complex–many will not define or identify themselves as scientists even if they are carrying out significant work within the scientific frameworks (Haklay, 2013). It is important for practitioners and policymakers to understand these differences so that they can navigate and support the full breadth of opportunities available in and through citizen science (Haklay et al., 2021).

Schaffer and Tham (2019; in Butler et al., 2023) have broadly categorized CS approaches into four themes in contemporary discourse: 1) enhancing scientific knowledge and public understanding; 2) reducing project costs; 3) the personal growth of participants; and 4) the development of social capital.Enhancing scientific knowledge and public understanding are perhaps the most observed–or anticipated–benefits. Indeed, CS data can have a significant impact on scientific discovery, especially in studies involving biodiversity, climate change, and environmental science (de Sherbinin et al., 2021; Ries & Oberhauser, 2015; in Butler et al., 2023).

They are Mieras et al., (2017; in Jaeger-Erben et al., 2023), who have identified 18 CS and synthesized into five common themes: participation design, diversity, training and education, evaluation and dissemination, partnership and collaboration (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2023). It is found that tourism scholars have applied CS in different tourism studies and there are 5700 papers published (Mieras et al., 2017; in Jaeger-Erben et al., 2023).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and exploratory research design to examine the emerging concept of regenerative tourism, situating it within the broader paradigm shift from sustainability to regeneration in tourism development. As the concept is relatively new and continuously evolving, an interpretive approach has been considered appropriate to explore its conceptual foundations and theoretical origins. The study was conducted over a period of nine months as a non-funded academic work, during which various secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy documents, and institutional reports related to regenerative development and sustainable tourism were examined. These materials were selected purposively based on their relevance, conceptual contribution, and ability to explain the evolution of regenerative thinking. The process of data collection and analysis was iterative and interpretive in nature, where literature was continuously read, compared, organized and discussed into thematic categories to identify recurring ideas, key principles, and theoretical linkages. Particular attention was given to tracing the origin of the regeneration concept and understanding how it has influenced and shaped the discourse of regenerative tourism. Through this continuous process, the study has synthesized major concepts and presented an integrated understanding of the theoretical foundations of regenerative tourism. As the study is conceptual in nature, it does not separate discussion into different section; instead, analysis and interpretation are presented together in a unified narrative to ensure coherence and continuity of ideas.

Regenerative Economy

While studying regenerative agriculture and regenerative tourism, scholars such as Fullerton (2015, pp. 8–9, p. 43), Cave and Dredge (2020, pp. 3–4), Day et al. (2022, p. 28), and Coll-Barneto and Fusté-Forné (2023, pp. 241–244) have engaged with the concept of the regenerative economy. This concept is recognised as a powerful tool for regenerative tourism, derived from plural knowledges–also referred to as the pluriverse–and from diverse economic alternatives. These alternatives are connected to the post-extractive economy (Hussain, 2019, 2021; Pollock, 2019b), post-capitalist economy (Mathisen et al., 2022, p. 232; Cave & Dredge, 2020), circular economy (Day et al., 2022; Morseletto, 2020), the eight principles of regenerative economy (Fullerton, 2015, pp. 8–9; Day et al., 2022, p. 28; Sheldon, 2022), and post-development theory (Bellato, 2025; Demaria et al., 2023; Demaria & Kothari, 2022).

Post-development, as Bellato (2025) writes, is a theoretical perspective articulated by Demaria et al. (2023), Ziai (2023), and Steele and Rickards (2021). It at least partially aligns with regenerative (tourism) development discourse, which draws from the lineage of regenerative development (Bellato et al., 2023; Mang & Reed, 2012; Pollock, 2019; cited in Bellato, 2025, p. 962) in several ways.

New economy ideas also referred to as “nowtopia” (Carlsson & Manning, 2010) include concepts such as natural capitalism, sustainable capitalism, conscious capitalism, doughnut economics, circular economy, sharing economy, and steady-state economy, among others (Fullerton, 2015). The regenerative economy has also been conceptualised through post-extractivism (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019,

p. 8; Escobar, 2021) and capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham, 2002, pp. 36, 56; Gibson-Graham, 2014; 2020, pp. 480–481).

To reach a post-extractive economy, however, society requires concrete economic alternatives (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019). The pursuit of such alternatives–which may lead to a post-extractive economy by degrowing socially and environmentally damaging sectors–is part of the practical implementation of Buen Vivir (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019).

Since the emergence of mercantile capital, and later capitalist industrial enterprise, strongly capitalocentric theories of economic reorganisation have dominated understandings of economic change. Capitalocentrism refers to the positioning of all economic identities in relation to capitalism as "fundamentally the same as (or modelled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism's space or orbit" (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 6; cited in Gibson-Graham, 2014, p. S148). Capitalocentric dynamics are those understood as strengthening or bringing capitalist relations into being. Such dynamics include the enclosure of common property, proletarianisation, marketisation, commodification, capital accumulation, and the neoliberal privatisation of state resources (Gibson, Cahill, & McKay, 2010; cited in Gibson-Graham, 2014). All the above-mentioned theoretical constructs and ideas have contributed to a significant paradigm shift and emerged as powerful tools in the fields of regenerative development, regenerative economy, and regenerative tourism.

Regenerative Tourism

The concept of regenerative tourism shall be under shadow if one fails tounderstand the concept of cultural creatives and conscious travel. The idea of conscious travel (Conscious Travel, 2020; in Ajoon & Rao, 2020, p.3) emerged from conscious consumers (Bemporad & Baranowski, 2007; in Ajoon & Rao, 2020) and conscious capitalists (conscious capitalism, 2020; in Ajoon & Rao, 2020). The concept of cultural creatives was put forward in 2000 by the sociologists Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson (2000) and they are defined as individuals who acquire "new ways of looking at, and new ways of being in the world (Ateljevic et al., 2016, p.12; Phillips, 2019, p.70). Cultural creatives are inner-directed, embrace globalism, positivist human values, and relationships, spirituality and authentic experiences, altruism and social activism and lifestyles that are reflective of these values (Ateljevic et al., 2016; Ray & Anderson, 2000; in Phillips, 2019).

The concept of the silent revolution of cultural creatives comes from the historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), an English historian and philosopher, who analyzed the rise and fall of 23 civilizations in world history. Ray and Anderson (2000; in Ateljevic, 2013, 2008) applied this concept in 13 years of research and discovered labeled this new subculture as the 'Cultural Creatives', who deeply care about ecology and saving the planet, about relationships, peace, social justice, self-actualization, spirituality and self-expression. These trans-modern cultural creatives are activists and volunteers who care about ecology and saving the planet, about relationships, peace, social justice, self-actualization, spirituality and self-expression. They are both inner-directed and socially concerned. They are activists, volunteers and contributors to good causes more so than other Americans.

Observing and researching new travel trends, Ateljevic (2020) argued they are indicators manifesting the emerging global shift in human consciousness rather than just 'special interest' market segments. This values-led, humanist perspective that strives for the transformation of our way of seeing, being, doing and relating in tourism worlds, called for the creation of a less unequal, more sustainable planet through action-oriented and participant-driven learnings and acts.Consciousness refers to the awareness of the system, "embodied-self-world-others,"all of which (and aspects and parts of which) are intuitive, that is, presentable;...(Giorgi, 1997, p.238). For Husserl, intentionality the essential feature of consciousness, and it refers to the fact that consciousness is always directed to an object that is not itself consciousness, although it could be as in reflective act (Giorgi, 1997, p.237).

Anna Pollock, with more than 40 years of experience as Tourism researcher, planner, strategist and change agent is the founder of Conscious Travel emphasizing of Regenerative Tourism (Pollock, 2013; in Ajoon& Rao, 2020) which is a new business model of perceiving and practicing tourism that can become a movement. Pollock (2015) uses the term 'conscious travel' which assists this transformation towards a life-affirming, place-based regenerative economy in which all stakeholders and all living forms can thrive and flourish. She has coined the concept of 'conscious traveler', on the basis of this growing body of general market research on 'The Conscious Consumer' (Živoder et al., 2015, p.5). Pollock, as cited by Živoder et al. (2015), claims that conscious travelers are re-inventing themselves and their world; they value what is slow, small and simple and aim for self-reliance; they are connected and communicative; they care about the places they visit; they seek meaningful experiences that help them to develop; they require their host/producers of tourism experience to think globally but to act locally. In promoting this, she advises destination marketing and management organizations (particularly at the national level) to work on conscious tourism practice as a catalyst of peace, hope and healing of tired and exhausted people (guests and residents) and places (p.5).

The urgency of the many environmental and social crises demands a more transformative approach, and the regenerative tourism model holds promise to bring about that transformation. Sheldon (2025) deals with rethinking tourism systems which is a process of re-evaluating the values by which tourism policies, investments and business decisions are made. In this context,tourism is uniquely placed to contribute to the value shift on a more global scale. Wahl (2019) suggests that tourism is"…possibly the only industry with enough global reach and local trans-sectoral impact and power of influence to effect such an immense transition in a catalytic way…(p.1; in Sheldon, 2025)". This is a powerful statement, and one that tourism can and must respond to. There comes another theory which is known as seeing tourism as proposed by (Bellato & Pollock, 2023; Dredge,2022; Sheldon, 2022, 2025). The authors express that seeing tourism as a seeing tourism as a holistic, living system rather than simply a separate industry with economic benefits is the profound change that is needed (Bellato & Pollock, 2023; Dredge, 2022; Sheldon, 2022, 2025).

Tourism has a potential to become a vital force for regeneration in communities enabling everyone to flourish and thrive only if there is an interaction, interconnection, interdependence, collaborative network, community engagement, purpose, passion and commitment such situations can only be achieved when tourism is considered as a system rather than a industry (Ajoon & Rao, 2020, p.2).

Regenerative tourism is not a type of tourism; it is an understanding of the tourism system that prioritizes local people, places and practices in planning and development (Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2025). It acknowledges that tourism is deeply connected with everything in the destination system; its food systems, health systems, technology systems, natural resources etc. In this sense, it functions as a living system similar to the forest, where all elements are interdependent and involve together in a system (Toerisme Vlaanderen, 2019; in Sheldon, 2025). Regenerative tourism emphasizes tourism management and marketing that value and strengthen relationships between humans and non-humans, to foster conscious and responsible visitor experiences (Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2025).

A universal definition of regenerative tourism has not yet been developed or adopted (Dziadkiewicz, 2024). Regenerative tourism discourse lacks a universally accepted definition and remains vague from both a theoretical and practitioner perspective (Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022; Rojas et al., 2024; Sharma & Tham, 2023). Bellato et al. (2022a, p.11; 2022b, p.9) propose a working definition that describes regenerative tourism as a 'transformational approach' that enables destinations to 'flourish' through creating 'net positive effects' by 'increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems.' The concept of a 'net-positive' impact is very important, which is popular in regenerative tourism and hospitality. They are Inversini et al. (2025) who have conceptualized the meaning that businesses contribute more to the environment and society than they take.

Although authors generally agree on the goals of regenerative tourism,but its operationalization is less clear, and authors have focused on different aspects. Regenerative tourism is an emerging, evolving and dynamic concept that emphasizes man's relationship with himself, with others and with the earth. Bill Reed (ReGenesis) prioritizes new relationships between humans and nature, "Regeneration is about restoring and then regenerating the capability to live in a new relationship in an ongoing way" (Reed in Galena, 2021). From this perspective, the visitor is called to visit a place by slowing down their rhythm to leave an experience that activates deep and positive connections between themselves (tourist), with the local community (residence), the place (destination) and the systems that sustain life in that territory, which must be lived with the rhythms of nature (Teruel, 2018; in Rodrigues et al., 2024, p.80). Paul Hawken (Project Drawdown) calls for a new humanity: "Regenerative tourism has two components: the need to regenerate life on earth and the need to develop a new generation of humanity wanting to save the planet" (www.regenerative travel.org; in Sheldon, 2022).

80 years ago, two visionary scholars, Walter Hunziker and Kurt Krapf, from the Swiss Universities of St. Gallen and Bern respectively, realized the transformative and regenerative nature of tourism, particularly in the aftermath of the catastrophic period of the Second World War. They proposed that tourism could serve as a powerful catalyst for transformative and regenerative development, fostering peace by rebuilding a war-torn and deeply divided Europe (Buhalis, 2025). Perceiving a destination as a regenerative system replaces production-oriented thinking, profit maximization, separation, individualism and marketization with the notion of interdependence (Dredge, 2022).

From 2005-2013, the term "regenerative tourism" was coined by Owen (2007, 2008) in the context of architectural design for ecotourism facilities. Regenerative tourism derived from the regenerative development approach by practitioners; 2007 term first coined recognized by tourism academics in 2020 (Bellato et al., 2022b, p.11). In 2011, Anna Pollock introduced the “conscious travel” approach, aligning tourism with an “ecological worldview” (Du Plessis, 2012). By 2012, regenerative development gained acknowledgement in peer-reviewed literature. The subsequent years, spanning from 2014-2021, witnessed further expansion and development of regenerative tourism. Since 2015, numerous practitioners and scholars outside of tourism have introduced regenerative concepts to tourism businesses. Notable authors include Giles Hutchins, Michelle Holliday, Dainel Wahl and others cited in various books and papers such as Major and Clark (2021). The term regenerative tourism was first published by a tourism practitioner in 2017 (Araneda, 2017; in Bellato et al., 2022b) before gaining wider use by practitioners.

Though regenerative tourism first appeared in the peer-review literature in 2007,it grew slowly as a research topic until 2021 when a large increase was evident, with 244 papers published on the concept in 2022 (Duarte et al., 2024, p.4). Idawada and Lee (2025, p.22) highlight 350 papers are published on regenerative tourism based on its context conceptualization. Though regenerative tourism is a novel concept, the published articles in the peer-reviewed journals reveal that regenerative tourism is gaining popularity in academia.

Though there are many definitions of regenerative tourism defined by many scholars of different disciplines. Among those various definitions, the authors have selected only definitions of Owen (2007), describes regenerative tourism as critically engaging Sheller (2021), Bellato (2022) and Cave and Dredge (2020) to delimit this study. Owen (2007) describes regenerative tourism as critically engaging with place, making a positive impact, seeing people as part of nature, and linking ecology to socio-political processes. Sheller (2021) describes regenerative tourism as embracing “alternative non-capitalist forms of ownership, non-monetary exchange and beneficial community-based development” (p.2) and calls for a departure from colonization, racial inequity, and extractive neoliberal development towards an alter-native collective future. Cave and Dredge (2020) similarly envision regenerative tourism incorporating alternative economic practices to mediate global and local values and create ‘wealth’ (as defined by Māori of New Zealand), thus a more holistic view of well-being. Well-being can be understood through being, belonging and becoming, where being reflects who the individual is, belonging entails individuals’ relations with environments and becoming involves what individuals do to achieve their goals and aspirations (Wang et al., 2006, p.53; in Mathisen et al., 2022).

In tourism academia, regenerative tourism has emerged as an extension of sustainable tourism (Becken & Kaur, 2021; Liburd & Duedahl, 2025). Regenerative tourism departs from sustainability's "do no harm" principle by proactively enhancing destinations, ensuring they are in a better condition than when they were discovered (Radić & Dragičević, 2025, p.7). Dredge (2022) further argues that this shift requires a fundamental mindset change, viewing tourism as an activity embedded in ecological systems and recognizing humans' interconnectedness with nature.

Tourism academics are now focusing on alternative ways of travel and concepts such as 'regenerative tourism' are gaining popularity. Designing regenerative tourism is not easy because it is a new and complex concept and requires a fundamental paradigm shift. The first publication found to relate to regenerative tourism was "Creating place identity through heritage interpretation" written by David L. Uzzell (1996; in Corral-Gonźalez et al., 2023; Uzzell, 1998). A Google scholar search (December 15, 2021) of 'regenerative tourism' between '2020-2021' showed 5140 results in 'one year'. The preposition of regenerative tourism is an opportunity for the recovering tourism industry to mitigate the impact of global shocks such as global pandemic (Day et al., 2021; Hussain, 2021; Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2021b; in Hussain & Haley, 2022, p.6).

Travel is recuperation and regeneration (Krippendorf, 1987, p.24). Regenerative tourism is primarily concerned with promoting healthy living systems (Pollock, 2019; Paddison & Hall, 2024) where emergent, evolutionary, dynamic, and interconnected relationships exist between people, place and nature. Regenerative tourism is about how social-ecological systemsand processes can improve and transform tourism through embedding local cultural and natural patterns within destination development approaches (Bellato & Cheer, 2021; Duxbury et al., 2020; Hes & Coenen, 2018; in Paddison & Hall, 2024). Rather than focusing on managing the social-ecological impacts of tourism activity, regenerative tourism interventions are concerned with building the capacity of whole systems for restoration and regeneration (Becken & Kaur, 2021; Paddison & Hall, 2024) that produce net-positive effects (Mang & Haggard, 2016; in Paddison & Hall, 2024).

Regenerative tourism replenishes, revitalizes and contributes to the long-term flourishing of destination communities and environments. It is based in the principles of regenerative agriculture and regenerative economics such as: long term thinking; respect for human values and nature's laws; and the ability for self renewal in ever changing conditions (Sheldon, 2022).

Bellato et al. (2022b, p.17; Paddison & Hall, 2024, p.5) developed a conceptual framework for practice-led regenerative tourism where 'regeneration occurs mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, culturally, socially, environmentally, and economically'.

This framework identifies seven conceptual principles which recognize tourism as a living system that facilitates encounters, creates connections and develops reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships.These include: 1) Drawing from an ecological worldview; 2) Using living systems thinking; 3) Discovering the unique potential of a regenerative tourism place; 4) Leveraging the capability of tourism living systems to catalyze transformations; 5) Adopting healing approaches that promote cultural revival, returning lands, and privileging of the perspectives, knowledge and practices of Indigenous and marginalized peoples; 6) Creating regenerative places and communities; and 7) Collaborating to evolve and enact regenerative tourism approaches. These stakeholder characteristics are fundamental for a tourism living system to work as a holistic ecological system (Bellato et al., 2022a, 2022b; Paddison & Hall, 2024). This necessitates the active engagement of all destination stakeholders, across public, private and third sector, to enable innovative solutions and regenerative approaches to be identified that prioritize the interests of destination communities (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2017; Paddison & Hall, 2024).

The future of sustainability lies in regeneration: seeking to restore and replenish what we have lost, to build economies and communities that thrive, and that allow the planet to thrive too" (Stafford, Tilley, Britton, 2018, p.2; in Day et al., 2022, p.26).Perceiving a destination this way replaces production- oriented thinking, profit maximization, separation individualism and marketization with the notion of interdependence (Dredge, 2022).

"Epistemological decolonization" "demonstrates how a decolonial perspective can enable us to envisage other ways of thinking, being and knowing about tourism", thus supporting paradigm shifts sought by regenerative tourism proponents (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015, p.4; in Bellato et al., 2024, p.1172). Rather than employing Western science methodologies and approaches derived from Western paradigms, a decolonial approach requires place-sourced, context-relevant and transdisciplinary ways of designing and implementing research projects, critiquing the dominant tourism paradigm and producing pluriversal knowledges.

Sustainable tourism understands tourism to be an industry. By comparison, regenerative tourism sees tourism as a living system aligned with the ecological worldview and regenerative paradigm. Regenerative tourism's core purpose is to build the capacity of human and non-human ecosystems to restore, renew, and evolve (Gillbanks, September 20, 2022). "As we cultivate a different mindset, we can begin to develop a different worldview that understands everyone (human and more-than-human) is interconnected in interdependent living systems" (Clark, 2022, p.11). According to Haywood (2022, p.6;

in Gillbanks, 2022) and Sarkar (2022, p.8; in Gillbanks, 2022) ‘regenerative tourism’- ‘tourism that leaves a place better than it was before’.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the conceptual roots of regenerative tourism, highlighting its emergence from sustainable and regenerative development paradigms. In the wake of unprecedented global challenges, the field of tourism stands at a crossroads, teetering on the precipice of transformation as it grapples with the converging pressures of over tourism, the pandemic, climate change and an array of socioeconomic crises. Although sustainable tourism has made strides, it falls short in delivering the radical shift in values and mindsets that is essential for all stakeholders (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; in Omma, 2024). The concept of rethinking is an essential term that needs to be addressed for a paradigm shift which is required to achieve an alternative form of tourism that is sensitive to all spheres of society and nature (Dwyer, 2018). One proposed possibility is that of regenerative tourism, a holistic system change that defines growth and success differently than capitalistic models (Pollock, 2019b; in Omma, 2024). Travel is recuperation and regeneration (Krippendorf, 1987, p.24). In tourism academe, regenerative tourism has emerged as an extension of sustainable tourism (Becken & Kaur, 2021; Liburd & Duedahl, 2025).

The regenerative approach aims to invest in people, places and nature in a long-term perspective for thriving social and ecological systems (Dredge, 2022). Sheller (2021; in Dziadkiewicz, 2024, p.202) described regenerative tourism as embracing 'alternative, non-capitalist forms of ownership, non-monetary exchange, and beneficial community-based development, calling for a shift away from colonization, racial inequality, and extractive neoliberal development towards an alternative collective future. Cave and Dredge (2020) look at regenerative tourism as one that encompasses alternative economic practices to mediate between global and local values and create 'wellbeing', and thus the authors what considers a view of regenerative tourism as a holistic view of wellbeing.The outcome of the study demonstrates that regenerative tourism goes beyond traditional sustainability approaches by emphasizing restoration, enhancement, and co-creation of value for social, ecological, and cultural systems. It integrates holistic, systems-oriented thinking, drawing insights from diverse disciplines to promote practices that actively contribute to community well-being and environmental resilience. By synthesizing these conceptual perspectives, the study offers a framework for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to understand and implement regenerative tourism strategies in the future. Ultimately, regenerative tourism represents a transformative approach that aligns tourism development with ecological integrity, cultural preservation, and sustainable livelihoods (Bellato, 2022b).

This study concludes that regenerative tourism has evolved from the foundational principles of sustainable and regenerative development, marking a significant paradigm shift in tourism development. It demonstrates that moving from sustainability to regeneration requires a transition from impact minimization to actively restoring and enhancing ecosystems and communities. Thus, regenerative tourism emerges as a transformative framework that redefines tourism's role toward long-term resilience and co-evolution within social-ecological systems. This study will be important for scholars, policy makers, government bodies, tourism researchers and other students of different disciplines. Therefore, further study is very important.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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Argumentation as Scholarly Inquiry: An Emerging Paradigm in Academic Writing

Research Note

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Abstract

This article reconceptualizes academic writing as an epistemic practice of scholarly inquiry, in which argumentation functions not merely as persuasion but as a reflexive mechanism for knowledge construction. It examines the integration of three emerging paradigms: problematization, Rogerian argument and Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI) within the broader framework of scholarly argumentation. Drawing on qualitative conceptual synthesis of interdisciplinary literature, the study analyses how these paradigms collectively enhance analytical rigor, foster dialogic engagement and expand the epistemic scope of knowledge production. The synthesis integrates insights from rhetoric and composition studies, educational theory and Himalayan socio-ecological research to demonstrate how argumentation operates within situated and context-dependent knowledge systems. Findings indicate that this integrated approach destabilizes universalizing epistemic models by embracing multiple ontological and epistemological standpoints, thereby promoting pluralistic modes of reasoning. The study further argues that embedding

problematization, Rogerian argument and ABI in academic pedagogy and research practice can strengthen critical thinking, ethical reflexivity and collaborative knowledge construction. Overall, this paper positions argumentation as a dynamic epistemic and methodological framework that advances more inclusive, reflexive and context-sensitive scholarly knowledge production in higher education.

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of higher education and research, academic writing has transcended its traditional instrumental role as a medium for information dissemination. It now functions as a central epistemic practice through which knowledge is produced, validated, circulated and contested. Academic writing is commonly conceptualized as a structured, evidence-based and discipline-specific mode of expression that enables the articulation and critical evaluation of knowledge claims (Graff & Birkenstein, 2018; Gabi, 2022). At its core lies argumentation, defined as the systematic formulation of claims supported by evidence, logical reasoning and engagement with alternative perspectives (Toulmin, 2003; Bean, 2011). From this perspective, scholarly inquiry is not merely the accumulation of information but an iterative and reflexive process of interpretation, critique and knowledge construction embedded within disciplinary, cultural and socio-political contexts (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Together, these concepts position academic writing as a dynamic and dialogic epistemic practice grounded in inquiry rather than mechanical skill.

The evolving terrain of academic writing is increasingly shaped by globalization, digital transformation, interdisciplinary collaboration and growing demands for epistemic justice. Within this context, problematization and Rogerian argument have emerged as complementary paradigms that reorient how argumentation is conceptualized and practiced while Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI) serves as a pedagogical bridge linking theory with inquiry-driven learning. Problematization requires scholars to move beyond surface-level problem identification and to interrogate the underlying assumptions embedded in research questions, theoretical constructs and dominant epistemic discourses (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). This shift holds particular significance in contexts where hegemonic knowledge systems marginalize indigenous, experiential and culturally embedded ways of knowing.

Indigenous and pragmatic epistemic reorientation is particularly evident in interdisciplinary socio-ecological systems research. In this field, sustainability is examined through context-sensitive narratives, indigenous epistemologies and institutional practices

(Cruickshank, 2005; Berkes, 2012; Campbell, 2013; Folke, 2016; Childs et al., 2021; Poudel, 2024a, 2024b). Such approaches illustrate that argumentation functions not merely as a persuasive device but as an inquiry-driven epistemic process through which situated knowledge is constructed, contested and refined. In Himalayan contexts, for example, scholars critically reinterpret human-environment relationships and environmental change by drawing on local narratives, traditional governance systems and lived ecological experiences, thereby challenging universalized models and advancing epistemic pluralism (Ostrom, 2009; Poudel, 2018; Shrestha, 2023; Gurung, 2024).

In contrast, Rogerian argument emphasizes empathetic engagement, mutual recognition and collaborative synthesis rather than adversarial confrontation (Ramage et al., 2018). Grounded in humanistic psychology, it encourages scholars to represent diverse perspectives fairly, identify shared conceptual ground and construct integrative responses to complex academic and policy challenges. In increasingly polarized domains such as environmental governance and education, this paradigm fosters inclusive discourse and mitigates epistemic exclusion. Complementing these approaches, ABI extends argumentation into structured learning environments, demonstrating that inquiry-based engagement with argument significantly enhances analytical reasoning, conceptual clarity and academic performance (Memiş & Ergün, 2023).

Recent scholarship reinforces the view of academic writing as both an epistemic and pedagogical practice. Chauhan (2022) conceptualizes it as an art, science and craft requiring iterative refinement and reflexivity while Gabi (2022) emphasizes its ethical, evidence-based and balanced nature. Similarly, Neupane (2021, 2023) highlights structured literature engagement and academic integrity as central to scholarly inquiry. Collectively, these contributions underline the need for methodologically rigorous, ethically grounded and epistemologically plural approaches to academic argumentation. In addition, studies in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly in the Global South, continue to reveal persistent challenges including difficulties in structuring arguments, maintaining coherence and navigating disciplinary conventions, challenges often exacerbated by limited institutional support and uneven supervisory practices (Pandit, 2025).

Despite these advances, a significant gap persists, argumentation is still largely conceptualized either as a rhetorical structure or a pedagogical skill with limited attention given to its integrated epistemic role across diverse contexts. Moreover, the interrelationship between problematization, Rogerian argument and ABI remains under-theorized as a unified framework for inquiry-driven knowledge construction.

This article examines how these three paradigms collectively reconfigure academic writing as an inquiry-driven epistemic practice. Specifically, it aims to analyze their individual and intersecting contributions to scholarly argumentation and develop an integrated conceptual framework that positions argumentation as a reflexive, dialogic and context-sensitive process of knowledge construction. The significance of this study lies in strengthening theoretical coherence in argumentation studies, enhancing pedagogical practices in academic writing and advancing epistemic inclusivity. By integrating insights from Himalayan socio-ecological research, the study contributes to more pluralistic, reflexive and culturally responsive approaches to knowledge production in the global academic landscape.

Review of Literature

Research on academic writing has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from prescriptive, skills-based models toward rhetorically and epistemologically grounded perspectives that position argumentation as a central mechanism of scholarly inquiry and knowledge construction (Graff & Birkenstein, 2018). Earlier approaches emphasized technical proficiency in grammar, structure and citation practices (Bean, 2011), whereas contemporary perspectives conceptualize writing as a dialogic, reflexive and socially situated practice embedded within constructivist and critical epistemologies (Gabi, 2022).

Recent studies increasingly conceptualize academic writing not merely as a technical or persuasive skill but as a form of knowledge production. Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) assert that writing itself functions as a method of inquiry through which researchers construct and interpret knowledge. Similarly, Carter and Kumar (2022) argue that doctoral and scholarly writing constitutes a core epistemic practice involving the negotiation of knowledge claims, reflexive engagement and the construction of new understandings. These perspectives reinforce the shift toward viewing argumentation as a central epistemic process rather than a purely rhetorical tool.

Toulmin’s (2003) model of argumentation, comprising claims, data, warrants, backing, qualifiers and rebuttals remains foundational in structuring logically coherent academic reasoning. Complementing this framework, Walton (2004) emphasizes the importance of relevance in argumentation, highlighting how arguers must assess the relevance of evidence, reasoning and claims within specific contexts. Fisher (2013) further strengthens this foundation by underscoring the role of critical thinking in evaluating arguments, identifying assumptions and constructing reasoned judgments.

However, contemporary theorists have moved beyond formalist logic toward more reflexive, dialogic and context-sensitive approaches that recognize the situated and negotiated nature of knowledge production (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018; Carter & Kumar, 2022). This shift foregrounds argumentation not only as structure but also as a mode of inquiry embedded within broader epistemological frameworks.

Problematization represents a key advancement in this evolution. Grounded in post-structuralist and critical traditions, it encourages researchers to interrogate assumptions embedded in existing literature rather than merely identifying research gaps (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). The authors further propose problematization as a systematic methodology involving the identification and challenging of in-house, paradigm, ideological and field assumptions to generate more influential research questions. By questioning how problems are framed, whose perspectives are privileged and which epistemologies are marginalized, problematization enables deeper theoretical innovation and reflexive critique. Its relevance is particularly evident in socio-ecological systems research where dominant sustainability narratives are increasingly re-examined through indigenous and context-sensitive perspectives. In Himalayan contexts, scholars reinterpret human–environment relationships through local narratives, traditional governance systems and lived ecological experiences, thereby challenging universalized models and advancing epistemic pluralism (Gagné, 2018; Chakraborty et al., 2021; Poudel, 2025).

Complementing this perspective, Rogerian argument offers a dialogic alternative to adversarial reasoning. Developed by Young et al. (1970) and refined by Ramage et al. (2018), it promotes empathetic engagement, mutual recognition and integrative synthesis in academic discourse. Rather than privileging opposition, Rogerian argument emphasizes fair representation of diverse viewpoints, identification of common ground and co-construction of knowledge. This approach is particularly valuable in polarized academic and policy domains, where it fosters intellectual empathy and supports inclusive scholarly dialogue (Facione, 2011; Gabi, 2022).

Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI) extends these theoretical orientations into pedagogical and empirical domains by embedding argumentation within inquiry-driven learning processes. ABI conceptualizes arguments as iterative cycles of claim formulation, evidence evaluation and conceptual refinement, thereby operationalizing argument as an active process of knowledge construction. Empirical studies demonstrate that ABI significantly enhances higher-order cognitive skills, including analysis, synthesis and evaluation, while improving academic performance and engagement (Memiş & Ergün, 2023; Lin et al., 2024). Thus, ABI serves as a bridge between theoretical models of argumentation and their practical application in educational settings.

Recent literature further contextualizes these ideas within broader academic practices. Chauhan (2022) conceptualizes academic writing as an iterative process involving drafting, revision and audience negotiation, particularly highlighting challenges faced by multilingual scholars. Gabi (2022) defines academic writing as a structured, evidence-based and ethically grounded mode of knowledge expression. Neupane (2021) advances the literature review as an epistemological mapping process that supports conceptual framing and problematization, while Neupane (2023) examines plagiarism through conceptual and ethical lenses, reinforcing academic integrity as foundational to scholarly credibility. Research in Nepalese and broader Global South contexts further reveals that academic writing is often constrained by linguistic limitations and insufficient emphasis on argumentation as a process of inquiry (Pandit, 2025).

These developments converge with growing concerns over epistemic injustice in knowledge production. Fricker (2007) highlights how systemic biases can silence or discredit certain knowers and knowledge systems, while Bhakuni and Abimbola (2021) extend this critique to global academic practices, underscoring the marginalization of voices from the Global South. In Himalayan socio-ecological scholarship, these intersections are particularly visible, as researchers integrate local knowledge systems and indigenous epistemologies to challenge dominant Western-centric models of sustainability and environmental governance (Chakraborty et al., 2021).

Despite these advances, a critical gap persists: existing literature largely treats problematization, Rogerian argument and ABI as discrete paradigms with limited attention to their integrative potential as a unified epistemic framework for academic writing. Furthermore, their combined application remains underexplored in Global South contexts, where epistemic plurality and decolonial perspectives are especially significant. Addressing this gap, the present study advances an integrated conceptual synthesis that positions argumentation not merely as a rhetorical or pedagogical tool, but as a reflexive, pluralistic and inquiry-driven epistemic practice of knowledge construction.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual synthesis approach to examine how problematization, Rogerian argument and Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI) collectively reconceptualize academic writing as an epistemic and inquiry-driven process. Grounded in a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, the study views knowledge as socially situated and co-constructed through scholarly interpretation and dialogue (Gabi, 2022; Neupane, 2021). Accordingly, it prioritizes theoretical integration and conceptual refinement over empirical generalization.

Data were drawn from a wide range of interdisciplinary literature spanning rhetoric and composition studies, qualitative methodology, educational theory and socio-ecological research. The analytical corpus included both foundational and contemporary works. Sources were identified through purposive, theory-driven searches in Scopus, JSTOR and Google Scholar using keywords such as "argumentation as inquiry," "problematization," "Rogerian argument," "argumentation-based inquiry," and "epistemic writing." Inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed articles, influential books and conceptually significant book chapters published between 2010 and 2025 while purely descriptive, technical or non-theoretical studies were excluded.

The analysis followed an iterative thematic synthesis process consisting of three main stages: (i) identification of core constructs such as reflexivity, assumption interrogation, dialogic engagement and epistemic pluralism; (ii) examination of cross-paradigmatic relationships, tensions and intersections; and (iii) synthesis and integration into a coherent conceptual framework. Analytical rigor was maintained through continuous researcher reflexivity, constant comparison of sources and careful attention to diverse epistemic perspectives, particularly those emerging from Global South scholarship. Although this study is not empirically driven, the qualitative conceptual synthesis methodology is especially well-suited for theory-building and advancing integrative scholarship in the emerging domain of argumentation as scholarly inquiry.

Findings and Discussion

The synthesis demonstrates that when academic argumentation is reconceptualized as scholarly inquiry, it operates as a dynamic and multidimensional epistemic practice. The integration of problematization, Rogerian argument, and Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI) significantly enriches this practice by enhancing analytical rigor, reflexivity, ethical awareness and epistemic inclusivity. Collectively, these paradigms transform argumentation from a collection of discrete rhetorical or pedagogical tools into a cohesive, inquiry-driven process through which knowledge is critically generated, negotiated and refined across diverse epistemological contexts. This understanding directly builds upon the reconceptualization of academic writing presented in the introduction and the theoretical foundations established in the review of literature.

Argumentation as Structured and Reflexive Epistemic Practice

The analysis confirms that scholarly argumentation remains foundational to academic inquiry, requiring clearly articulated claims supported by evidence, logical coherence, and transparent reasoning (Graff & Birkenstein, 2018). Toulmin's (2003) model continues to offer a robust structural foundation for linking claims, data, warrants, and rebuttals, thereby situating arguments within broader scholarly dialogues. However, consistent with contemporary perspectives, argumentation extends beyond structural form toward a reflexive orientation in which knowledge claims are continuously interrogated and reconstructed (Bean, 2011; Gabi, 2022). In this sense, academic writing emerges as an evolving epistemic practice that balances objectivity with interpretive reflexivity and methodological transparency. This aligns closely with the reconceptualization of writing as inquiry articulated in the introduction and the epistemological shifts discussed in the review of literature.

Problematization as Epistemic Disruption and Inquiry Reorientation

A central finding of this study is that problematization functions as a powerful epistemic mechanism that disrupts taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in dominant scholarly discourses (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Rather than engaging in conventional "gap-spotting," problematization generates more generative research questions by interrogating in-house, root-metaphor, and ideological assumptions. This approach enables deeper theoretical innovation and reflexive critique.

In socio-ecological research, this function is particularly evident. In Himalayan scholarship, dominant climate and sustainability narratives are critically reframed through localized and experiential perspectives. For instance, in his work on "Changing Weather-Worlds," Poudel (2025) illustrates how environmental knowledge can be reinterpreted as relational and culturally embedded rather than universally quantifiable. Similarly, Childs et al. (2021) have documented the interactions between religion, disaster and lived experiences in the context of the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Such applications demonstrate that problematization not only enhances analytical depth but also advances epistemic justice by foregrounding marginalized knowledge systems (Shrestha, 2023; Gurung, 2024).

Rogerian Argument as Dialogic and Integrative Reasoning

Complementing problematization's critical orientation, Rogerian argument shifts academic reasoning from adversarial confrontation toward dialogic engagement. This paradigm emphasizes fair representation of diverse viewpoints, identification of common ground and the construction of integrative solutions rather than winning debates (Ramage et al., 2018). By fostering empathy and inclusivity, Rogerian argument reduces epistemic fragmentation and enhances the communicative and ethical dimensions of scholarly inquiry (Facione, 2011; Gabi, 2022).

This dialogic orientation proves especially valuable in polarized academic and policy domains. In pedagogical contexts, it supports collaborative learning by encouraging open dialogue and reducing defensive reasoning, thereby reinforcing academic writing as a socially situated and participatory practice.

Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI) as Operational Integration

While problematization and Rogerian argument provide critical and dialogic foundations, ABI operationalizes these principles within structured inquiry processes. The synthesis shows that ABI embeds argumentation in iterative cycles of claim formulation, evidence evaluation and conceptual refinement. Empirical evidence indicates that ABI significantly enhances higher-order cognitive skills, including analysis, synthesis and evaluation while improving academic performance and engagement (Memiş & Ergün, 2023).

Importantly, ABI bridges theory and practice by translating the critical questioning of problematization and the empathetic engagement of Rogerian argument into concrete pedagogical strategies. This integration addresses a key gap identified in the Literature Review by offering an applied framework for enacting argumentation in educational settings.

The Integrated Epistemic Argumentation Framework

The most significant contribution of this study is the Integrated Epistemic Argumentation Framework (IEAF). This framework brings together three paradigms as interdependent and mutually reinforcing dimensions of scholarly inquiry:

- Problematization acts as the critical engine by disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions and generating more generative and theoretically interesting research questions.
- Rogerian argument provides the relational foundation through empathetic engagement, fair representation of diverse viewpoints, and collaborative synthesis.
- Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI) supplies the operational structure through iterative cycles of claim formulation, evidence evaluation, and conceptual refinement.

In Himalayan socio-ecological contexts, the IEAF demonstrates strong practical potential. Traditional institutions such as *thiti* can be critically problematized, dialogically engaged with modern scientific frameworks and systematically refined through ABI cycles (Poudel, 2024a). This integrated process enables scholars to produce knowledge that is both academically rigorous and deeply culturally grounded, thereby advancing epistemic inclusivity.

Pedagogical, Epistemic and Contextual Implications

The proposed framework carries important implications for both pedagogy and research. In higher education, integrating problematization, Rogerian dialogue and ABI transform academic writing from a product-oriented task into a process-oriented inquiry practice. Specific strategies such as assumption-challenging exercises, dialogic role-playing and structured argumentation cycles can enhance critical thinking, analytical reasoning and collaborative learning (Chauhan, 2022; Memiş & Ergün, 2023).

Beyond pedagogy, the framework contributes to ongoing debates on epistemic justice and decolonial knowledge production. It addresses documented challenges in ESL/EFL and Global South academic writing contexts where students often struggle with argument construction and critical engagement due to limited exposure to inquiry-driven approaches (Pandit, 2025). By legitimizing diverse ways of knowing and challenging Western-centric epistemologies, the IEAF supports more pluralistic and inclusive scholarly practices (Neupane, 2021; Ghanbari & Salari, 2022).

Critical Reflections and Future Directions

Despite its strengths, the application of this integrated approach is not without challenges. Shifting from adversarial to dialogic and reflexive argumentation may encounter resistance in traditional academic cultures and implementing ABI-based pedagogies requires significant time and skilled facilitation. Nevertheless, the framework's interdisciplinary applicability strengthens both interpretive depth in qualitative research and analytical rigor in empirical studies.

In an era marked by digital transformation and generative artificial intelligence, these paradigms gain renewed relevance. They offer critical tools for evaluating knowledge claims, maintaining reflexivity and ensuring ethical engagement in AI-mediated scholarly environments. Future research should empirically test the IEAF across diverse disciplinary, linguistic, and technological contexts to validate and refine its applicability.

Overall, the findings confirm that argumentation, when reconceptualized through the integration of problematization, Rogerian argument and ABI evolves into a reflexive, dialogic and context-sensitive epistemic practice. This approach expands academic writing beyond mere persuasion toward more inclusive and collaborative forms of knowledge construction thereby advancing equitable and pluralistic global academic discourse.

Conclusion

This study reconceptualizes academic writing as an epistemic and inquiry-driven practice in which argumentation functions not merely as rhetorical persuasion but as a reflexive process of knowledge construction. By integrating problematization, Rogerian argument and Argumentation-Based Inquiry (ABI), the study proposes a unified conceptual framework-the Integrated Epistemic Argumentation Framework (IEAF) that repositions scholarly writing as a dynamic, dialogic and context-sensitive mode of inquiry. This integration challenges conventional understandings of argumentation as linear or adversarial, instead emphasizing its role in fostering epistemic pluralism, critical reflexivity and collaborative knowledge production.

The findings demonstrate that problematization enables the interrogation of implicit assumptions within dominant knowledge systems, Rogerian argument facilitates empathetic and inclusive scholarly dialogue and ABI operationalizes these orientations through structured cycles of inquiry and evidence-based reasoning. Together, these paradigms expand both the analytical and pedagogical boundaries of academic writing by effectively bridging theoretical critique with applied inquiry processes. Their relevance is particularly pronounced in addressing Western-centric biases in knowledge production, especially when applied to Global South contexts such as Himalayan socio-ecological research.

Theoretically, the study builds upon and extends key traditions in argumentation and knowledge construction, including Toulmin's (2003) model of structured argument, problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), dialogic reasoning in Rogerian approaches (Ramage et al., 2018) and ABI as a pedagogical framework (Memiş & Ergün, 2023). This integrated perspective illustrates how scholarly argumentation can evolve toward more inclusive, reflexive and context-sensitive forms of knowledge production thereby contributing to an emerging epistemic paradigm in academic writing.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its reliance on conceptual synthesis rather than empirical validation. Future research should therefore empirically test the proposed Integrated Epistemic Argumentation Framework (IEAF) across diverse disciplinary, linguistic and technological contexts, including artificial intelligence mediated academic writing environments. Overall, the study underscores the importance of reimagining argumentation as an integrated epistemic practice that supports a more inclusive, reflexive and collaborative global academic discourse.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author

Author Introduction

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