

## **Cultural Sustainability and Samosa Colonialism: A Decolonizing Thinking Practice**

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### **Abstract**

*The Tarai region of Nepal was well renowned for its epistemic diversity of Mithila art-based cultures. It included poetry, theatre, stories, proverbs, metaphors, jokes, songs, folklore, dance, and music, as well as dialogue, myths, local proverbs, photographs, and drawings. Cultural sustainability can be defined as the ability to uphold or enhance beliefs and perspectives in the face of outside influences, such as colonial practices. The Samosa trade has been found to have promoted colonial practice in some Terai places, bringing significant changes in the indigenous lifestyle and culture. It seems that this is because of the well-known culture-based cartoons from South India known as Motu Patlu. In this context, this study aims to explore the relevance of indigenous thinking, practice, and social responsibility in a contextualized local education system. For that, we conducted a qualitative study using purposive expert group discussions and follow-up tele-interviews to investigate epistemic plurality within the constructivist framework. The study showed that local agricultural productivity has decreased, which has hurt the ecosystem and biodiversity. Similarly, everyone developed a spending habit as a result of the market shopping tradition. Therefore, the revolution of evolution is the need of the moment to inculcate correct indigenous values and practices through the educational system.*

**Keywords:** indigenous knowledge, colonial thought, cultural practices, decolonization

### **Introduction**

In April 2023, the first author (I) agreed with a Tarai-located Municipality's persistent requests to support the development a local curriculum. Fortunately, and unfortunately, I've never been there before. So, I started exploring this municipality and discovered that it is one of the municipalities in the Madhesh Province and is linked to the Nepal-India border. As I read information from websites, I was delighted that I had the

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opportunity to work in the Terai region. This region is home to several ethnic groups, including the Yadavs, Brahmins, Kyastha, Tharu, Musahar, Rajput, and Chetris. The municipality was named in honor of Janak, who was historically known as the most liberal and democratic ruler. It pleased me to work there as a Sanskrit educator and a member of a religious family. This is an ancient state from the epic age that the king first ruled before switching to the republican government under Karal Janak. I was quite taken aback by Mithila Art, which is produced by Maithili women and is well-known throughout the world. My excitement finally served as a stronger motivator for me.

As a Sanskrit scholar, I began corresponding with Vedic experts. They claim that Videha, also known as Gargi's homeland, is the epicenter of an indigenous educational and cultural system. According to Khatun and Ahmed (2018), Gargi was an ancient Vedic female sage, philosopher, and Brahmavadini who practiced ancient praxis, such as the Vedic and Upanishadic eras. She participated in the Brahmajajna as well as a philosophical discussion headed by King Janaka. It is known as an action for knowing Brahma Vidya. She asked the guru Yajnavalkya complex queries about the atman (soul). Because I think indigenous practices, knowledge, and voices can be incorporated into the school curricula through culturally responsive teaching practices, I have therefore set goals to ensure that I could help this municipality in developing a local curriculum with the decolonized thinking of education and connecting real-life learning. I've also decided that this is an opportunity for me.

Upon arriving at the workspace, I discovered that the circumstances were not what I had imagined or read. It seemed that it was quite disappointing to engage with poetry, drama, stories, proverbs, metaphors, jokes, songs, folklore, dance, and music. In place of the hospitality extended at home, I received invitations to market stores. It was familiar that offering a cup of tea at the closest market was a new trend. So, a lot of individuals invited me to have tea in the nearest shop. During this process, I learned that *Samosa* had altered customs in the area. It was seen as having a significant impact on kids. This is due to the popular South Indian culturally-based cartoons called *Motu Patlu*. Kids were enjoying their imaginative abstractions. He was used to the customs and traditions of different nations and societies. I saw this as *Samosa* colonialism and employed decolonizing thinking practice as the focal point of the local curriculum.

Preserving, advancing, and incorporating indigenous knowledge and skills into the national curriculum is the most recent development in curriculum development (Demssie et al., 2020). Motivating local stakeholders in the development and execution of the appropriate curriculum is essential when deciding on the objective of further

empowering the local identity and practice. In Nepal, the practice of providing and receiving education according to the local community's needs is not new. Nevertheless, in times gone by, it was eclipsed by the popularity of the colonial education system (Parajuli, 2012). While addressing this issue, education based on local needs has received substantial attention and a special position in Nepal's national curricular framework (NCF, 2019). The delivery of education based on local requirements serves as a guiding principle for curriculum development and implementation, as mandated by the National Curriculum Framework of School Education, 2077. Accepting the aforementioned fundamental idea, the basic education curriculum for grades 1-3, 4-5, and 6-8 is being progressively implemented starting in the academic year 2076. Thus, local curriculum development appears to indicate that pertinent action is also taking place.

### **Methodology and Results**

The study was conceptualized based on an in-depth review of the available material, which included books, journals, and research papers that were all relevant to the topic. To locate pertinent documents, a search engine called Google Scholar was utilized. Empirical papers and several scholarly publications have been reviewed and studied. We also used purposive expert group discussions and follow-up tele-interviews through a narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019) for this study. Listening, observing, living alongside one another, and writing and interpreting texts were key methods for that.

To identify needs and promote stakeholder participation, the first two-day workshop was organized on April 2023, and the second workshop on June 2023 with 30 various stakeholders at the local level at the seminar hall of the Municipality. The purposive expert group, which included five women representing the education committee and the municipality, was formed during the first phase of the workshop. The group included five ward presidents, the municipal mayor, and the female deputy mayor. Furthermore, it involved three employees, and the other participants were two principals and some local teachers. We had two days of intensive discussions with them. Every day from nine in the morning until five in the afternoon, discussions took place. Starting on the day before the workshop day, local practice information gathering and local-level observation visits were carried out in coordination with the focal person. During breaks and lunches, information was confirmed and recorded with the teacher. A follow-up tele-interview was held with the focal person every fifteen days. A second workshop was held in June with the participation of local academics, instructors, municipal leaders, staff members, and other stakeholders in this municipality to ensure

local participants participated more frequently, with a similar number in the first phase. It helped the trustworthiness of the study.

The basis of the constructivist framework in this regard was how stakeholders explained the meanings of economic, educational, and cultural behaviors in their personal (e.g., family) and professional (e.g., school) contexts. During this workshop, we realized that the aforementioned context exposed Nepal's past educational history, but despite the stakeholders' interest—including the local people's representative teachers—in it, they lacked a relevant understanding. As per our experiences, not only in this municipality, as well as Nepal's educational system, was also influenced by colonized mindsets, migration with their cultural damage, and the brain drain for jobs abroad. Similarly, analyzing the post-democratic era of political independence, we came up with the idea to decolonize education by incorporating local/indigenous knowledge at the local level. It can be a light but tight start.

The second author is the mentor of the first author. The second author provided insights into the entire research journey and supported the finalization of the draft. The second author contributed to the methodological and philosophical part while shaping the paper.

### ***Shattered Glorious Past and Exhausted Voices***

We believe that a successful method of curriculum localization is the development and implementation of a local curriculum. The material, elements, participation, decision-making process, people's expectations, etc., cannot be covered by the centrally developed curricula. Many historical events, locations, works of art (such as, Mithila Chitra Kala), and other cultural elements that future generations would find important were not generally described by local stakeholders during the expert group discussions and follow-up tele-interviews. Still, they were interested in including them in the local curriculum with exhausted voices against racism (Denzin & Giardina, 2022). A critique of racism as an oppressive and exploitative system that investigates how race is constructed and expressed in our society today, with a focus on how these issues are expressed in schools, is what is known as critical race studies in education. To develop a thorough analysis of race and racism as a social, political, and economic system of benefits and burdens given to social groups based on their skin color and status in a clearly defined racial hierarchy (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 282), critical race studies in education—like critical pedagogy—uses a variety of methods and borrows from diverse traditions in the law, sociology, ethnic studies, and other fields.

As a result, we concentrated on these subjects during the workshops. Knowing more about this municipality reveals that it has a distinctive artistic and cultural identity, which the local level needs and wishes to employ, protect, sustain, and develop. I had the idea that the locals were becoming more and more conscious of various facets of their religious and cultural heritages, which would later be the subject of workshops. According to my observations, local stakeholders have also begun looking into their past and traditional ways. The Western values of contemporary schooling might cover it. So I did my best to find out about this.

I promoted female participation in the workshop by using critical thinking in my actions and becoming a change agent, as Davies and Nyland (2022) highlighted self-directed learning and critical thinking for educational change. I felt that the gaps between their participation and educational background and Gargi's example of academic success were comparable. I presented an example of the logical disagreement between Yajnavalkya and Gargi concerning Brahma (the world of the imperishable). Then, it was concluded from the discussion of the participants that the atmosphere in which Gargi and Yajnavalkya debated, as well as the lack of active female participation in this workshop, created issues for the purportedly mature, educated, and intelligent society. Then, I believed that decolonial thought could be incorporated into local curricula with the aid of this reflective awareness. The critical reflective approach can be useful for practicing critical thinking to welcome inclusive educational practices in the education system (Pant et al., 2023b). I brought up the Rajasuya Yagna that King Janaka conducted for months with the participation of many sages, foreign kings, and princesses. Sandalwood, ghee, and barley were used in large quantities to feed the Yagna fire, which helped to produce a sanctified spiritual atmosphere and perfume. Participants looked pleased after hearing about this event. At the same time, I questioned the state of poverty in the region today, where 1,000 cows were donated, each with 10 grams of gold hanging from its horns in the past. So, local stakeholders were motivated for local to be vocal. I was interested not just in Nepal's educational history but also in its glorious past. Finally, I was preserving the pieces of history that colonial education, beliefs, and practices had shattered.

### ***Societal Transformation and Bear Witness***

As per our experiences, local stakeholders share their expectations that is characterized by reciprocal moral support. Thus, they desire to take the lead and share in the common energy as well as support themselves when worn out through political or social grouping after practicing individualized resources for several decades. Concerns from stakeholders include:

*we compromised our foundational education. At that time, we were instructed to renounce our traditions and culture. Without our education and culture, we also lost an economy when there was none, and because of this, we are now behind. It made as a bear witness.*

Bear witness is defined as showing that something exists or is true (Jacob, 2009). The colonized practice is demonstrated in the local context by the negligence of health. Sales of samosas are increasing, proving to bear witness to their popularity. They are currently equally concerned and interested in the development of mass education. In this regard, one parent said.

*"My children are currently attending school here in the remote areas of this district. Some people are enrolled in the city's prestigious schools. It's clear that being in Kathmandu, your kids will get a chance to enroll in America and Europe after their schooling when our kids hardly get a chance to go to Kathmandu. So, how do our young people become well-educated persons ?"*

Synthesizing the context, we can make a sense that stakeholders have concerns about education and social cohesion. As Meshcheryakova and Vasilenko (2023) argued Durkheim's functionalism, the social tendencies from a widely held perspective, is an important school of thought. As the municipality's stakeholders drew attention, Durkheim contended that Europe's extensive nation-state operations contributed to the global expansion of colonial thought. Because of their industries and urbanization, the Europeans needed a universal organization that could communicate their core values to all people. To address this type of demand, they are utilizing educational institutions and industries now. From a positive perspective, the municipality's active cultural continuity, social norms that support instilling moral discipline and a sense of responsibility for society, and professional competencies were good scenarios for me. So, we can contextualize that public education and teachers—as representatives of a wider, moral society—will fulfill these essential roles in a drastic transition in the municipality, as Durkheim advocated in a different society. we can now uphold Durkheim's rule from the rules of the sociological method, which states that education's specific goal is to create a social being. Because of this, we see it as more than merely creating a new curriculum; rather, it's the start of a societal transformation.

### ***Issues of Validity***

The workshop representatives became more familiar in the second phase and shared their arguments in a more comfortable way.

*"Because unemployment is rising, we need skills. Without gaining the skills, we won't receive anything. Our kids go to school and college to acquire employment, but they are not able to have such opportunities after completing school and college. What do we receive? In our locality, it seems that the teacher does not instruct effectively. They are untrained. The book itself is likewise outdated."*

Experts and politicians were blamed for the mentioned scenario. In this context, according to my observations, maintaining balance in local communities is extremely difficult due to the dominance of national political parties and their interests as Karl Marx, a German political theorist and revolutionary, saw public education as a means of dominant ideology and patriarchy with supremacy (Brookfield, 2004) imposed by powerful groups. It is a similar idea to Ferrare and Phillippo (2023), in which they argued a framework for understanding contemporary struggles over education policy. This viewpoint and setting saw education as perpetuating a division of labor or allowing various status groups to take control of organizations and affect the distribution of valuable resources rather than fostering social cohesiveness in the municipality's context. I conducted need identification and content validation workshops with participation from appropriate stakeholders after identifying this issue, focusing on academic skills only. Academic skills are a specific asset, according to the German sociologist Max Weber, because they serve as a type of cultural capital that can typically maintain the status system while enabling upward mobility for some members of society. This idea helped me a lot during the curriculum development process.

The main ideas of Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938), *Democracy in Education* (1903), and progressive education, which critiqued theories for ignoring organized subject matter in favor of simple exercise for their students, as Taylor (2023) noted, guided me as I wrote the draft version of the municipality's curriculum. Nevertheless, I think that, if it is used wisely, progressive education might influence young people's experiences such that, rather than reinforcing bad habits, good ones would develop. For this, one should be aware of different reflective practices and strategies for being transformative learners (Pant, 2017). As a result, the future society will, as Dewey predicted, be an improvement on its own. Nevertheless, we think that, if used wisely, progressive education might influence young people's experiences such that, rather than reinforcing bad habits, good ones would develop. As a result, the future adult society will, as Dewey predicted, be an improvement on its own. The contextualized pedagogical practices are intended to use the classroom as a workshop with the help of local experts and incorporate tangible and hands-on instruction through students' usage

of didactic materials, and the focus is on innovative student-centered pedagogy. It helped to ensure the validity of the municipality's curriculum.

### ***Self-Realization on Power Culture Practice***

From the perspective of power, education is the capacity to act, the capacity to decide and carry out those decisions. Thus, as Apple (2012) argues, one of the many sources of power in this environment is education. It seems that local communities need to promote local knowledge, arts, technology, and language that are frequently ignored or forgotten in the development of contemporary education. In this sense, we are also consumers of contemporary education. Fortunately, throughout this process of local curriculum development, I came to recognize the need for deliberate attempts to comprehend the scientific underpinnings of local knowledge and actions. However, I was not aware of hidden power (powerful people maintain their influence by deciding who participates in decision-making, and media coverage), invisible power (controls and shapes ideas and beliefs), or visible power (formal rules, structures, institutions, political parties, the process of decision-making, etc.). As a result, I knew that power is unequally distributed among individuals and groups that dominate and control ideas, behavior, actions, and practices. I tried to be a change agent, but it seems to be a Tokenism culture with the concept of empowering the empowered group and less priority in diversification.

At that time, I felt ashamed that, as a local curriculum expert working across the nation, I knew nothing about hunting and the use of indigenous agricultural tools and implements, traditional beliefs, soil fertility management, biodiversity and forest management, pest management, and water resource management. Using water resource management as an example, I concluded that since Rai-Limbu believe they originated from watersheds and Hindus cannot perform their rituals without the "Jala," indigenous ways of life offer invaluable knowledge and support the best use of natural resources for watersheds. It changed how I thought about education, from colonial (industrial capitalism) to post-colonial (brain drain). Now, according to my earlier thinking, even though it turned out that I was erroneous, I find pleasure in contributing to the transformational process with new diversified thinking.

### ***Bearer of Cultural Hegemony***

We believe that education leads to empowerment. Education encourages the connections between self-motivation and individual work performance, as O'Donoghue and van der Werff (2022) explored. Tragically, it seems that Nepali students' holistic viewpoint, as well as their socially responsible education and sustainable development,

are ignored due to disciplinary egocentrism (Pant et al., 2023a). Analyzing power from a domination perspective, the existing practices of developing local curriculum mirror the power of controlled groups, not oppressed groups, because according to Mäntysalo (2023), power is the ability to exert control over others to further the goals of a specific person or group. In Nepali society, political parties and social leaders are exercising power at the local level. I experienced that some leaders were used to exert control over others by fostering false consciousness, and they used to do so by fostering what Gramsci (1971) called cultural hegemony.

Conferring to what I've read, Tarai people prefer steamed foods like *chawal* to fried ones like samosa. Now, from *satwik* tastes like bread and *chana* to *rajas* and *tamas* tastes like *panipani* and *chatpate*, their tastes were altered. The latest trends range from songs that promote social responsibility to value-free cartoon songs and from traditional Mithila art to contemporary fine art. So, as Gramsci (1971) argued, people also maintain control over others through ideology in addition to political and economic compulsion. The prevailing ideologies are institutionalized in society, and the beliefs of the prevailing group are accepted as common knowledge or unquestionable. In essence, hegemony serves the interests of the elites because hegemony controls superstructures such as civil societies, schools, human thought, political institutions, and culture.

### ***Downcast with Damage***

According to Foucault's (1980) theory of power, language creates discourse, which is sustained by power. In the context of the Maithili language, our educational system is dominated by the power of the donor, and educational ideas and conceptions are formed by power. In this context, Robert Philipson's ideas of capacities (intrinsic), resources (extrinsic), and uses (functional) are very important. In this regard, people can think that the Nepali language has fewer opportunities, resources, and applications than the English language when linguistic power is considered at the local level, and the Maithili language has even fewer opportunities. It is a symbol of colonialism. As a result, similar to how the English language is currently dominant in Nepal, the Maithili language is in danger. In this sense, power creates discourses and truths that produce social structures and hierarchies, but discourses also shape human subjectivities. Our practice of local curriculum also has domination of imported ideas, expert and content domination, textbook-based, guided by one-size-fits-for-all concepts, colonial mindset, and so on as hegemony in education.

## Conclusion

Based on the study, local agricultural productivity has declined, which has hurt biodiversity and ecology. In a similar vein, the market purchasing habit led to everyone establishing a spending behavior. To build awareness, the educational system can play a vital role in adopting the evolutionary revolution to instill proper indigenous values and practices. Thus, we concluded that we need to have an open discussion about racism, industrial mindset, deep democracy, and the possibility to start decolonizing practices such as indigenous thinking, socially responsible education, and dialogical and dialectic practices. It argues for the evolution of the revolution. For that, the decolonization of education begins with being aware of colonial traditions and raising questions about hegemonic practices. This requires confronting colonization activities that still have an impact on education today and those that did in the past within the context of education and opposing them. In the past, the assimilation practices of the colonies have been implemented in schools. Colonialism is more covertly embedded in the forms of institutional structures, power relationships, and curricula. The local curriculum development process should use decolonial perspectives. As a result, everyone is better able to comprehend the histories, viewpoints, and modes of existence of one another.

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