

Development as Power: A Postmodern Critique of Post-1990 Nepal

Kamal Bahadur Khatri¹

Abstract

This study examines the politics of power and practices embedded in Nepal's post-1990 development, employing a postmodern framework and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The discourse adopts a postmodern perspective to critique mainstream development practices. The paper critically analyzes the modernity perspective of development through emic and etic lenses, drawing on Derrida's deconstruction, Escobar's development critique, Ziai's, Lyotard's, and Sapkota's contributions, and Foucault's discourse theory. It portrays how the identity of Nepal is being reshaped by MDGs/SDGs, foreign aid, and NGOs, marginalizing the indigenous knowledge and practices thereby promoting mainstream development agenda. It highlights the development discourses, practices that institutions promote particular subjects, realities, and hierarchies, leaving out local voices and practices. Drawing on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the paper demonstrates how the local and global elites naturalize the market-driven paradigm to secure social control. The study concludes with a note where equitable development is advocated to represent, magnify, and nurture the various cultural, social, and ecological diversities of Nepal.

Keywords: hegemony, critical discourse analysis, postmodern, power, deconstruction

Introduction

Traditional development, rooted in modernization theory, views poverty alleviation and economic growth as linear progress, measured by GDP and human development indices (Rostow, 1960). Since the 1950s, Nepal's planning has embraced this approach, intensifying liberalization and foreign aid post-1990 to join global markets (World Bank, 2024). However, this perspective overlooks socio-political impacts, treating development as neutral. Postmodern critiques challenge this, framing development as a power discourse that shapes identities, governance, and resource allocation to serve specific interests (Escobar, 1995). The 1990 People's Movement, the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006), the 2006 peace agreement, and the 2015 federal constitution highlight how development manages inequalities and reinforces state authority. Social movements, particularly ethnic groups, resist state-centric policies, advocating for inclusive, pro-poor alternatives (Sapkota, 2014).

¹ Faculty Member, Nesfield International College, Lagankhel, Lalitpur. Email: kamal2010ku@gmail.com

As a researcher, I see development as a contested field where global agendas clash with local needs. I propagate a radically different viewpoint against the mainstream development practices that strongly advocate for global agendas like MDGs and SDGs, by which indigenous knowledge and rural voices are marginalized (Adhikari & Shrestha, 2024). This study uses postmodern lenses to reveal power dynamics, promoting equitable development that empowers Nepal's diverse communities and challenges elite dominance. The motivation behind this research is my perspective as the insider who can help challenge and break down the global hegemony and thus make possible the advocacy for equitable development that truly respects the diversified voices of Nepalese communities and empowers them to construct their futures independently.

Methods

This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how the language of development has influenced power relations in Nepal after 1990. CDA looks at how the choice of words like “underdeveloped” in World Bank reports and SDG plans encourages market-driven policies, for example, privatization or projects like Melamchi, and at the same time, it discourages local practices (Fairclough, 1992). Foucault's power/knowledge gives an example of how such words allow donors to create a picture of Nepal as a country that needs help, and thus, they can be the only ones that provide the solution (Foucault, 1980). CDA provides the direct correlation of global narratives, like MDGs, with local outcomes, and it is quite illustrative of urban bias in the distribution of aid (Sapkota, 2023a). NGO reports, such as those of Oxfam, can be considered the ones that are most enthusiastic about the agenda of the donors, having often nothing to do with the rural areas' needs (Ziai, 2016). CDA draws connections between narratives at the global level and the results on the ground, exposing urban-gear bias in aid distribution such that 5% of funds make it to rural areas (BTI, 2024).

The Discourse of Development Perspectives of Nepal Post-1990

According to the World Bank (2024), Nepal's post-1990 development initiated by MDGs and SDGs has certainly transformed its historical, cultural, social, geographical, and ecological landscapes. However, such development has benefited urban elites disproportionately as compared to rural Nepalese, who constitute more than 90% of the population. After the 1990 People's Movement, the government of Nepal introduced neoliberal reforms that privatized enterprises and thus deepened rural poverty (Sapkota, 2023c, 2014).

From another point of view, global narratives have been eroding our traditions, and the focus on English in SDG 4 has sidelined languages like Tamang, thus weakening the

rural identity influence (Sharma, 2018). Socially, development has been exacerbating gender and caste disparities, and with state policies allocating only 5% of funds to rural welfare, these disparities are not being addressed well (BTI, 2024). The effect of such urban-centric geographic projects, like Arun III hydropower, is to marginalize rural regions and disrupt local resource systems. On the other hand, activities like Melamchi are not only using the watersheds irresponsibly, but they are also causing biodiversity to be in ecological trouble.

Rationale of the Emic Perspective

The post-development critique of Escobar (2012) argues that these policies are only in line with international markets, not with Nepal's pluralistic history. I want to call into question these powerful narratives by showing the CDA as proof of how it denies the voices of the indigenous groups, such as the Tharu, who are fighting against the land-displacing initiatives in the Tarai. Such initiatives often prioritize large-scale land management over smallholder and indigenous practices, disrupting local systems and livelihoods (Zhang & Guo, 2024). My insider perspective as a scholar urges development that is respectful of our diverse cultures and uses the analysis of ethnic resistance to promote fair resource distribution.

In my opinion, development is a contested field in which Nepal's diverse voices are frequently obscured by international agendas rather than a clear path to progress. As I grew up in the mountainous region of the country, I personally witnessed how post-1990 development policies prioritized urban centers, such as Kathmandu, resulting in the struggles of rural communities. This study is essential for understanding the ways in which international frameworks like the MDGs and SDGs continue to change Nepal's identity via the suppression of local knowledge systems that provide support to 90% of our rural population from a postmodern perspective (Sapkota, 2022). The emic perspective that has been shaped by the village's dark realities is what drives me to challenge these power structures and be an advocate for inclusive growth.

I have also noticed farmers in rural areas employing traditional irrigation methods; however, aid-driven initiatives necessitated commercial farming, which reversed these customs. I am now able to see more clearly how Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge framework affects the usage of words like "underdeveloped" in donor reports and attempts to justify the external control of Nepal by portraying it as a dependent country, while the examples of community forestry that provide more than 1 million households with 45% of the forests are completely ignored. The study primarily focuses on the potential it holds to empower the marginalized. I can tell that the value of local

languages was undermined by the Western-centric educational policies of SDG 4 in villages throughout my observations.

Historical Development Perspective

The 1990 People's Movement changed Nepal into a multi-party democracy, thus making Nepal a part of the global development frameworks. Neoliberal reforms that were implemented by the World Bank and IMF have resulted in the privatization of more than 80 state-owned enterprises, which in turn limited rural access to healthcare and education for 90% of the Nepalese. Escobar (2012) suggests that the "underdeveloped" tag provides a justification for the ensuing external control, which is in line with the global markets. The Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) was a struggle against these policies that brought to the fore the rural poverty issue and called for a just distribution of resources. Although the 2006 peace agreement and 2015 federal constitution were aimed at decentralizing power, 80% of the funds are still with the elites of Kathmandu, thereby keeping rural communities as the marginalized ones (Yadav et al., 2024). Identity-based movements contest state-driven development, and they desire local governance and cultural recognition (Sapkota, 2014). Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge perspective illustrates how MDGs and SDGs depict Nepal as a needy country while they completely overlook traditional farming systems (Ziai, 2016). Using Gramsci's (1971) hegemony theory, this study shows how the elites are able to create a condition where neoliberalism appears normal, and thus they are able to deny the presence of local agency. Being a newcomer in research, I find that the urban bias worsens power imbalances and unequal distribution of resources.

Cultural Development Perspective

Post-1990 development has transformed social inequalities in Nepal that were created by global agendas like MDGs and SDGs through prioritizing urban elites over rural peoples, who are the majority of the population driving communal systems (World Bank, 2024). Dalit families in my village experienced exclusion from aid-driven programs, which led to widening caste gaps. Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge framework points out that "underdeveloped" people and stigma are the main reasons for justifying interventions that only result in social divisions being foremost. Lyotard's (1984) mini-narratives tell local stories, like the one of Tharu women's cooperatives in Bardiya, which is the source of unity against neoliberal pressures. Escobar's (2012) critique directs our attention to the fact that export-oriented agriculture can cause the disintegration of labor sharing, which is harmful to social bonds. Government policies that provide only 5% of mainland funds to rural welfare make gender and caste disparities worse (Sapkota, 2023b). Ethnic movements advocating for inclusion in governance, such as the Rai community, refuse to

go along with urban-centric projects like hydropower (Rai, 2024). At the same time, only 15% of leadership roles include marginalized groups, reflecting elite control (Adhikari et al., 2023). I remember how, when we were young, the women in my village all pulled together to keep the communal kitchens going, without giving in to the market-driven models.

Social Development Perspective

After 1990, a reshaped development in Nepal had a profound impact on social structures that deepened inequalities through global agendas such as MDGs and SDGs. These frameworks, which are led by the World Bank, focus on urban elites while ignoring 90% of rural Nepalese, who are mostly dependent on communal systems. Foucault's power/knowledge framework thus reveals that the "underdeveloped" labels in donor reports serve as a facade for organizations implementing interventions that exacerbate social divides by promoting market-driven policies rather than addressing local needs (Foucault, 1980). Lyotard's mini-narratives are a playful way to question universal progress models and draw attention to local social stories, such as the women's cooperatives in Chitwan, which are said to be effective at community cohesion and are the safe space for the fight against neoliberal debt traps (Lyotard, 1984). Escobar, with his post-development approach, demonstrates that export-oriented agriculture does more to destroy the social network than to fulfill the need for labor-sharing practices (Escobar, 2012). State policies that set aside only 5% of the money for rural welfare are a cause for wider gender and caste disparities, with rural women and Dalits at the receiving end of the limited access to resources (Sapkota, 2023b). The marginalization of these groups cannot extinguish the energy generated by social movements, as they embody counter-hegemony. Various ethnic groups are at the forefront of their rights 'campaigns; hence, inclusive governance comes to the fore as they are part of the decision-making process so they can provide urban-centric projects, e.g., hydropower developments.

Geographical Development Perspective

After 1990, Nepal's development trajectory significantly altered its geographical diversity by focusing on urban areas while neglecting the rural parts of the hills, Terai, and mountains. Global performance goals, MDGs, and SDGs, pushed by the World Bank, are for the most part reflective of urban growth in Nepal. This, however, leads to the marginalization of 90% of rural Nepalese who are dependent on local resources (World Bank, 2024). Through Foucault's power/knowledge concept, one can understand how donor reports use "underdeveloped" labels to create myths of "need" and "lack," thus promoting the idea that rural areas are backward, while urban areas are positive and modern (Foucault, 1980). According to Lyotard's ideas of 'mini-narratives,' the general

universal progress models are challenged by the focus on local and specific examples of different regions. An example of one such region is the Terai area, whose population still uses communally managed irrigation that guarantees the continuity of the local livelihoods (Lyotard, 1984). Post-development theorist Escobar argues that the introduction of the hydropower project Arun III disrupts the natural life of the villages, and at the same time the energy produced here is diverted to the cities (Escobar, 2012). State policies have worsened the situation, as they allocate an inadequate 5% of the total budget for rural development, thus deepening the regional disparities and leaving the remote areas resource-starved.

Local resistance is a counter-hegemonic force. Community-led initiatives like hill cooperatives managing water resources are not only place-based systems but also constitute new and alternative economic relations, building local livelihoods that challenge the neoliberal agenda (Ziai, 2016). Nevertheless, the elite control of power limits the influence of local resistance, as urban elites dictate the allocation of 80% of federal funds. As a researcher from a hilly village in Nepal, I have observed global narratives that prioritize urban projects over rural ones.

Ecological Development Perspective

The development path taken by Nepal since the early 1990s has led to a highly intensive transformation of ecosystems, heavily skewed towards urban development and neglect towards rural sustainability. The World Bank itself is one of the major pushers of global frameworks like the MDGs and SDGs, supporting infrastructures that not only harm biodiversity but also the 90% of rural Nepalese that similarly depend on diverse natural resources (World Bank, 2024). Foucault's power/knowledge reveals how shifts in the donor reports' re-descriptions of the rural "underdeveloped" then open up the rural ecosystems concept for use. Lyotard's work breaks the grand narratives of 'progress' by focusing on the small-scale stories of local ecological practices, such as community seed banks, which serve as the primary sources of biodiversity. What Escobar refers to as post-development conflict over such initiatives is showcased in the Melamchi Water Supply project, which takes the rural watersheds for urban consumption and weakens traditional irrigation practices. Budgetary policies of the state, which appropriate no more than 5% of the total as such, are the leading cause of growing trends of degradation of soil in hilly areas (Sapkota, 2022). The local resistance is not only the voice of the "ecological pain," but it is also the counter-hegemony (Rijal et al., 2022).

Postmodernism as a Framework for Understanding Development

Postmodernism presents Nepal's post-1990 development as a power struggle, which reflects a situation of a local challenging the global and universal narratives of progress. Foucault's (2002) discourse theory illustrates how language constructs power-laden realities, and Derrida's deconstruction investigation of "developed" vs. "underdeveloped" extends the argument. Escobar's (2012) post-development perspective is critical of the control exercised by the implementation of global agendas, and Gramsci's (1971) hegemony term is used to describe the process of the elites' normalization of neoliberalism. In my village, farmers resisting commercial crops to save the communal grazing are the best examples of Lyotard's (1984) mini-narratives. The MDGs and SDGs have put urban elites at the center and have therefore marginalized rural practices (Sapkota, 2023a). Ethnic movements such as Limbu's call for local governance are examples of their non-acceptance of the projects of the state (Rai, 2024). The development language has been framing my emic perspective as an undermining of local agency; therefore, I am advocating for systems that are equitable and that recognize and protect Nepal's diversity.

Development as Discursive Construction

After 1990, development discourse in Nepal used language to shape reality and made the country seem like it was aid-dependent. Foucault's (2002) discourse theory shows how words like "poor" or "underdeveloped" in World Bank and SDG reports create a story that makes donor control seem reasonable (Fairclough, 1992). Sapkota (2023b) says that state-led development leaves out ethnic voices by putting global goals like export-driven policies ahead of local systems like traditional land-sharing. For example, agricultural reforms based on the SDGs favor commercial crops, which hurt communal farming practices that rural communities value (Escobar, 2012). Derrida's (1997) deconstruction shows that the "developed" vs. "underdeveloped" binary is a way to keep Nepal from being independent and make it more dependent. I see that these kinds of labels confer power to global institutions while weakening the local knowledge systems. Sapkota (2014) portrays how ethnic groups are against these ideas and calls for fair distribution of resources. This dynamic shows how development rhetoric affects power relationships, ignoring Nepal's cultural diversity and local customs (Ziai, 2016).

Development and Identity Formation

Development alters Nepalese 'self-perception and makes them adopt global ideologies. According to Foucault's (1995) theory of disciplinary power, referring to Nepal as a "least developed country" makes people believe that they require outside assistance to

improve. 90% of Nepal's population are farmers, and Escobar (2012) explains that development forces them to grow crops for export rather than for local consumption, undermining village customs like land sharing (Sapkota, 2022). SDG programs, for instance, advise farmers to sell their produce abroad, which shatters ties within the community (Sharma, 2018). Children believe their culture is less significant because global plans like SDG 4 promote English education and devalue regional languages like Tamang or Newari (Sharma, 2018). According to Ziai (2015), this conceals global injustice, such as trade regulations that benefit wealthy nations. Instead of promoting its diverse cultures and sense of place, development makes Nepal appear weak and dependent, altering its identity to appeal to international markets (Sapkota, 2020).

The Alternative Development Concepts

Postmodern critics advocate local solutions over global development models. Buen Vivir, which emphasizes community well-being and harmony with nature, aligns with Nepal's traditional farming systems, which prioritize local needs over profit-driven crops (Escobar, 2012; Ziai, 2015). Ethnic-led development empowers marginalized groups to create self-sufficient systems rooted in cultural practices by challenging state policies that favor urban elites (Sapkota, 2018). Global frameworks like SDGs disrupt these alternatives by promoting commercial agriculture and microfinance debt. Local movements, embodying counter-hegemony, resist elite dominance, though limited by resource constraints (Gramsci, 1971). These indigenous systems foster equitable development that honors Nepal's diverse cultures (Sapkota, 2020). Strengthening federalism can amplify local governance, enabling communities to shape their own development paths and counter global pressures for inclusive, sustainable progress (Adhikari et al., 2023).

Development Institutions and Exercise of Power. Since 1990, Foucault's (2002) discourse theory, Derrida's (1997) deconstruction, and Escobar's (2012) post-development critique have all been part of a postmodern framework that reveals how development institutions have changed the power balance in Nepal. Nepal receives 10% of its money from the World Bank and IMF via aid (World Bank, 2024). In return, they implement neoliberal policies that prioritize urban elites, resulting in the marginalization of rural populations. Foucault's (1995) theory of governmentality is a great way to show that the institutions in question are still striving to privatize the rural sector, which only makes matters worse for the people who live there. For instance, rural health posts receive 20 percent less money than hospitals as compared to the urban areas in Nepal (BTI, 2024).

Navigating from a theoretical lens, Derrida says that if we accept the terms "developed" and "underdeveloped," the people of Nepal would lose their freedom and become nothing more than puppets of the neocolonial rulers (Ziai, 2016). Gramsci's (1971) counter-hegemony portrays a situation in which ethnic opposition seeks to stop projects that collect \$1.8 billion in aid each year by utilizing the few resources they have (Sapkota, 2014). The impact is still minor, however. The 1990 People's Movement, the 2006 peace deal, and the 2015 federal constitution are all contemporary instances of the continuing power struggles. Enhancing federalism can empower local communities, respecting Nepal's diversity while countering global dominance (Yadav et al., 2024). As a researcher, I think we should enhance federalism so that local communities have more power, development that involves everyone may happen, and Nepal's cultural diversity is respected while fighting against global dominance.

Discourse of Development and Power Effect

After 1990, the development discourses that were shaped by initiatives like MDGs and SDGs are the ones that define the progress of Nepal, which is a prioritization of the urban elites and not the rural communities (McEwan, 2018). Foucault's power/knowledge metaphor illustrates the process whereby "underdeveloped" categorizations in the World Bank's issues create unspoken assumptions that lead to interventions masked as aid, while the imagination of Nepal as the dependent is hence established (Foucault, 1980). These aid flows of \$1.8 billion annually are the main forces in the promulgation of these narratives that envisage the rural Nepalese as the agenda for export-oriented agricultural development is quite disturbing to them. Such projects are seeking to solve problems with technology, and by doing this, technology is prioritizing cities over rural areas (Escobar, 2012). The privatization policies that the state is implementing are increasing the inequalities beyond what was imagined. Communities are therefore receiving less and less support. Gramsci's theory of hegemony shows how the wealthy classes and the agents of the state's power make common cause and create a consensus situation in which many projects of the elite (Gramsci, 1971), such as hydropower that benefits only cities, are presented as those that solve the problems of rural areas. The NGOs additionally implement this by concentrating on English to the detriment of regional languages and cultures (Sharma, 2018).

Development as a Contested Discourse

Nepal's growth is a clear example of differing local and global perspectives on progress. Communities want cooperative farming, while global organizations and the government support the MDG and SDG plans, which are export-driven agriculture (Ziai, 2016). For example, the emphasis of SDG 2 on rice export will cause food prices to go up for

villagers, and thus, local systems will be weakened (Sharma, 2018). Local women's cooperatives in Chitwan have become the primary source of food for thousands, enabling them to maintain cultural traditions and achieve self-reliance; however, elite control is a significant barrier that can hinder their progress. Foucault's discourse theory reveals a battle over who re-establishes the main concept of development, with resourceful donors usually winning the game (Foucault, 2002). Local initiatives contest global narratives, pointing out community-led models as an alternative (Sapkota, 2020). In this context, I recognize that global narratives often marginalize these doers, but the CDA technique enables me to comprehend their potential. I, as a researcher, advocate for a development approach that prioritizes local voices to shape equitable futures that honor cultural heritage, counter elite dominance, and foster inclusive progress despite global pressures.

Binary of Un/Developed

Labelling Nepal is an "underdeveloped country" in global development narratives, implying that it is lagging behind countries like the USA, which are considered "developed" (Escobar, 2012). This characterization depicts Nepal that necessitates outside intervention. For example, teaching English in the SDGs, including in Goal 4 (Sharma, 2018), comes at the expense of local languages such as Bhojpuri and Maithili. Children from rural backgrounds feel pressured to conform to the dominant culture, leading them to believe that their own culture is unimportant, and declines their self-esteem (Sapkota, 2020). The urbanization obsession in foreign aid projects, such as the Melamchi Water Supply Project, results in the displacement of already existing livelihood practices in rural areas simply because they are still rural (Groß & Nowak-Lehmann Danzinger, 2022). Furthermore, global development initiatives are pushing Nepal towards agriculture-based exports, which negatively impact the indigenous food systems that rural communities rely on (Hickel, 2020). These policies conceal Nepal's assets, for example, traditional agriculture and community forestry, which can underpin sustainable development (Sapkota, 2023a).

This local resistance is influenced by Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony, which contests such neoliberal policies in pursuit of a fair distribution of resources and the recognition of local systems (Gramsci, 1971). As a scholar, I think that Nepal is capable of pursuing a developmental path that encourages the power of local collectives, respects local cultures, and is not constrained by the forces of global power.

Development Practices and Power Relations

Post-1990, Nepal's development is very much influenced by the possession of resources, money, and land, which is most probably carried out in a manner that benefits only the

urban elites and not the rural communities. Drawing on postmodern theories, development practices entrench power imbalances through global and state-driven agendas (Escobar, 2012; Foucault, 1995; Gramsci, 1971). Projects like the Melamchi Water Supply prioritize Kathmandu and displace rural farmers, serving as examples of elite bias. This section of the article reveals the presence of foreign aid, NGOs, and state domination as well as local resistance to the dynamics of these subjects.

Foreign Aid and Its Impact

Foreign aid accounts for 10% of the income of Nepal, and it also contributes to the promotion of privatization, which harms rural people whose livelihoods become disrupted. The donors attribute an "underdeveloped" label to Nepal; thus, the country is presented as very needy, and this, in turn, becomes the basis for interventions that are biased towards urban projects. The ethnic resistance opposes these policies because it fights for fair treatment of resources; however, market-focused plans push local voices aside, making communities more dependent. I, as a researcher, consider that aid is not supporting but rather hindering the community-led models, and therefore, the establishment of policies that prioritize cultural and economic equity is very essential.

Elite and State Dominance

As Ziai (2016) argues, INGOs such as Oxfam, 70 percent of whose funding comes from donors, foster market-led development through SDG stories, which tend to neglect the needs of the rural for the sake of promoting urban-oriented agendas. Nepal has tried to achieve decentralization of power and empower local bodies through federalism, but Yadav et al. (2024) urged that 80 percent of development resources remain in the hands of Kathmandu's elite, who promote their own interests. This elite dominance, this veneer of development, institutionalizes systemic inequalities by depriving rural people of the resources necessary for their development (Adhikari, 2021). Critics of global influences are fighting back by calling for fair sharing of resources and recognition of local traditions, using Gramsci's idea of counter-hegemony. By focusing on the local collective and the sustainable community forestry system, Nepal can establish a path for development that counters global neoliberal domination and empowers rural people.

Alternative to Development Rather than Alternative Development

According to critics from the postmodernist camp, they are in favor of decentralized solutions, such as Buen Vivir, which resonates with the communal farming systems of Nepal. These systems prioritize the well-being of people and nature, whereas profit is a lower priority (Ziai, 2015). The resistance that Magar farmers in my village put up against the microfinance debt was the main reason for preserving it. Aid from

development agencies like the World Bank and IMF, which provide 10% of Nepal's income through aid, mandates the implementation of neoliberal policies that benefit the urban elites. According to Foucault's (1995) concept of governmentality, privatization literally exacerbates those inequalities, such as rural schools receiving 20% less funding than urban ones. In my village, projects relying on aid were completely disconnected from the local water-sharing systems of the Newari people. Derrida's (1997) deconstruction of "underdeveloped" terms, which form the basis of the neocolonialism argument, is very relevant here (Ziai, 2016). The Rai ethnic group's protest against the construction of dams on the Koshi River represent counter-hegemony. However, the elite's dominance limited the impact of resistance (Yadav et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Rethinking development in Nepal requires transformation of global and aid-centric models to local, community-based practices. The post-1990s movement towards democracy and federalism provides opportunities to challenge Western paradigms of development. Postmodern concepts emphasize local resistance against global dominance and call on Nepal to value its indigenous institutions over market-driven reforms. Reducing conditions on aid can divert resources to rural economies, and strengthening federalism prevents elite domination. Inclusive development should give power to marginalized communities to make sure their voices are heard in policymaking. I envision a Nepal where development enables every community to thrive by blending local traditions with practical action thereby empowering women and other marginalized groups to enhance their progress and prosperity. My critique advocates community-driven approaches that honor the diversity of Nepal, address poverty, and resist global hegemony. Communities make true progress when they determine how to move forward together as one, despite some differences, towards an inclusive future.

References

- Adhikari, B., Nepal, S., & Bhattachan, R. (2023). *Seven Years into Federalism: Is Nepal's Glass Half Empty or Half Full?* (published online by The Asia Foundation):
<https://sngp.org/2023/05/03/seven-years-into-federalism-is-nepals-glass-half-empty-or-half-full/>
- Adhikari, J., Shrestha, M., & Paudel, D. (2021). Nepal's growing dependency on food imports: A threat to national sovereignty and ways forward. *Nepal Public Policy Review*, 1, 68–86. <https://doi.org/10.3126/nppr.v1i1.43429>
- Derrida, J. (1997). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)

- Escobar, A. (2012). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World* (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9781400839926>
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975)
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The archaeology of knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1969)
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers.
- Groß, E., & Nowak-Lehmann Danzinger, F. (2022). What effect does development aid have on productivity in recipient countries? *Review of Development Economics*, 26(3), 1438–1465. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rode.12889>
- Hickel, J. (2020). What does degrowth mean? A few points of clarification. *Globalizations, September*, 1–7.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1812222>
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Manchester University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1777018>
- McEwan, C. (2018). *Postcolonialism, decoloniality and development* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315178363>
- Rai, J. (2024). *Identity politics in light of celebrating sakela Festival among the Rai-Kirats in Kathmandu valley*. *Journal of Nepalese Studies*, 16(1), 200–214. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jns.v16i1.71795>
- Rijal, S., Gentle, P., Khanal, U., Wilson, C., & Rimal, B. (2022). A systematic review of Nepalese farmers’ climate change adaptation strategies. *Climate Policy*, 22(1), 132–146. 10.1080/14693062.2021.1977600
- Rostow, W. W. (1960). *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625824>
- Sapkota, M. (2014). Emerging ethnic movements and contested rural development in Nepal. In S. R. Sharma, B. R. Upreti, P. Manandhar, & M. Sapkota (Eds.), *Contested development in Nepal: Experiences and reflections* (pp. 171–196). School of Arts, Kathmandu University; Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research.

- Sapkota, M. (2020). Changing nature of power and leadership: How do they matter in rural Nepal? *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 14, 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.3126/dsaj.v14i0.30545>
- Sapkota, M. (2022). Going beyond the material well-being: A Buddhist perspective of development. *Nepalese Journal of Development and Rural Studies*, 19(1), 14–26. <https://doi.org/10.3126/njdrs.v19i01.51914>
- Sapkota, M. (2023a). Dialectics of opportunities and challenges in disciplinary shifting of rural development into development studies. *Sudurpaschim Spectrum*, 1(1), 22–35. <https://doi.org/10.3126/sudurpaschim.v1i1.63385>
- Sapkota, M. (2023b). Political leadership of women in Nepal: A critical observation from the local elections 2022. *Journal of Political Science*, 24(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v24i1.62850>
- Sapkota, M. (2023c). Conceptual and methodological questions on the changing paradigms of governance. *Journey for Sustainable Development and Peace Journal*, 1(2), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v1i02.58260>
- Sharma, S. (2018). Language and power: The impact of global education policies in Nepal. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 48(5), 703–719. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1377073>
- World Bank. (2024). *Nepal development update: October 2024*. World Bank Group. <https://url-shortener.me/2GWV>
- Yadav, R., Shrestha, K., & Thapa, S. (2024). Federalism and resource allocation in Nepal. *Federal Governance*, 21(1), 34–50. <https://doi.org/10.24908/fg.v21i1.16532>
- Zhang, H., & Guo, X. (2024). Farmland Rental Market, Outsourcing Services Market and Agricultural Green Productivity: Implications for Multiple Forms of Large-Scale Management. *Land*, 13(5), 676. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land13050676>
- Ziai, A. (2015). *Development discourse and global history: From colonialism to the sustainable development goals*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315753782>
- Ziai, A. (2016). Post-development and the critique of neoliberal hegemony. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(8), 1456–1472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1383853>