

Trekking in Nepal: Cross-cultural Behavior of the Hosts and Guests

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Abstract



This paper discusses some of the trekking processes in Nepal. It has focused on the cross-cultural behavior of the guests, the hosts and the agents in various situations during the trekking in Nepal. The hosts, guests and the agents are culturally different and thus heterogeneity is ever present in their encounters. But their encounter in the trekking is not simply determined by their cultural differences; there is a heavy influence of power. The cross-cultural behavior

of the guests, the hosts, and the agents are dependent upon the exercise of power and authority during the period of trekking in Nepal.

Keywords: Tourism, trekking, anthropology, power, acculturation, guests, hosts, agents, cross-culture

Introduction

This paper is about the interaction of tourists within tourists themselves and with Nepali staff in the process of trekking in Nepal. The paper analyzes the ways of interaction among tourists, trekking leaders, trekking guides and other staff during the period of trekking. The paper also highlights on trekking culture, cross-cultural behavior, communication, and miscommunication between the guests and the hosts during trekking in Nepal. This study excludes the individual trekker and backpacker tourists because the application of power can better be understood in interaction with group activities rather than in individual activities.

The article aims at locating the situation of the tourists and their interactions and interrelationship with fellow tourists in trekking. This interaction is not a simple encounter among the tourists but is based on the power relations of various levels which influence and determine the relationships and behavior pattern of the people involved in the trekking. It focuses on the tourists' behavior and the ways of constructing knowledge about the people, place and objects.

Trekking is simply walking on the trails for four to eight hours in a day. Slow but

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gradual walk, taking photographs, having a meal in the allocated time, rest time and reaching to the destination is basic nature of trekking in Nepal. But these activities are guided and influenced by both trekking leader and trekking guide. The trekking leader and the trekking guide exercise their power on tourists in many cases and events and vice-versa. Hence, in group trekking freedom of individual and decisions are restricted in most of the cases.

When people talk about tourism in Nepal, they simply involve on the socio-economic interaction between the tourists and the locals. Even the academicians analyze both positive and negative impacts of tourism on local culture and communities. But tourism is not limited within these spheres of society and culture, and interaction is not limited within the guests and the hosts. There are guests to guests' interaction along with hosts to hosts' interaction in the tourism destinations.

The paper is theoretically framed by 'anthropology of power', fundamentally based on the Foucauldian approach of power and knowledge. Power is omnipresent in human society and tourism is not an exception. The exercise of power and authority by the trekking leader and the trekking guide determines the activities and behavior of other tourists in the group trekking. The trekking leader and the trekking guide not only apply their power onto other tourists but also help to construct the knowledge of tourists about people, places, and objects. Hence, knowledge of the tourists is constructed by their surroundings such as the trekking leader, the trekking guides, other staff, travel books and so on.

The general perception of people is that the tourists are rich and powerful and have a greater influence on others in the trekking. Dependency theorists argue about the unequal exchange of power and economy between the 'First' and the 'Third World' in which the 'Third World' is made dependent towards the 'First' (Lea, 1988). But I argue that the tourists of the 'First World' are made dependent on the leader and guide of the Third World, with heavy influence on their day to day activities during the period of group trekking in Nepal.

This is anthropological research on tourism in which I have applied ethnographic research method. Ethnographers usually use more than one method, given the advantage of multi-dimensional data (Mason, 2002) which includes participant observation, interviews and a diary of personal reflections.

A primary field study was conducted in Khumbu and Mustang from August 2013 and continued till October 2017. I have participated in trekking in both Khumbu and Mustang with European tourists. I have interacted with trekking leaders (both foreigners and Nepalese), trekking guides and trekking company owners who are major parts of trekking in Nepal for in-depth interviews to obtain the information.

Anthropology of power in tourism study

The guest-host relationship and their behavior can best be understood through the lens of power in tourism studies. Although power has various meanings and forms in the different fields of human life; it is the ability of a person or social unit to influence the conduct and decision-making of another through the control over energetic forms in the latter's environment (Adams, 1977: 388). In the trekking, the conduct and decision of the guest, the host, and the agent are influenced by the exercise of power and authority. So, the behavior of the concerned segments should be analyzed in the frame of the power structure and power dynamics in tourism study.

Anthropologists are basically interested in micro-level power circulation rather than a total politics of a nation. However, historically, anthropologists were interested in the issues of acculturation between dominant and subordinate culture focusing on the changes in native, indigenous or subordinate culture (Lett and Nunez, 1989). The early writing in the anthropology of tourism was focused on the negative consequences of tourism on local culture such as 'Culture by Pound; Tourism as cultural commoditization' by Greenwood (1989) and 'Tourism as a form of Imperialism' by Nash (1989). At the same time anthropologist like Graburn (1989) was interested in exploring culturally defined meaning in the interaction between the guests and the hosts. It shows that anthropology uses multiple lenses to study tourism.

In tourism study, power approaches can be useful to examine the strong linkage between economic and political interests because "power inheres in social relationships and relations of power are aspects of social relationship" (Cohen, 1976:23). Of talking about the application of power theory to study in tourism, Hall (2010) has focused on the elements of culture such as production and reproduction along with the direct exercise of power by individuals and in the shaping of institutions. Hall further states:

This is regarded as being significant for the inter-relationships between tourism, culture, and power, because of the exercise of power is witnessed not just in the production and reproduction of elements of culture, but also in the very direct exercise of power by individuals and in the shaping of institutions and the rules of the game. (p.199)

In tourism study tourist is at the center of power whose visit keeps not only economic power but also social power in the Third World countries. The decision of the tourist determines others' role and relations in the destination. However, the situation cannot be generalized in all time and place because the decision is based on the knowledge of the tourists i.e., how tourist is informed. The

knowledge and level of information depend on the agents such as guides, travel books and so on.

Nader (1977) states that “feeling of powerlessness is closely allied with a sense of injustice, with what people think they can do and what they do when they believe themselves to have been wronged” (p, 309). The concept of power is understood in relation to one’s awareness with regard to power. If one has an idea of power, one would have a sense of powerlessness. Foucault’s concept of power was minutely analyzed by Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, (1994). Foucault (1980) takes power as a cultural construct and tries to relate it with the knowledge. Foucault (as cited in Dirks, Eley and Ortner, 1994:4) states:

All the relations of everyday life bear a certain stamp of power. People acting like men and women, parents and children, teachers, and students, doctors and patients, priests and penitents, can no longer be regarded simply as performing functionally defined roles, rather these terms define relations in which the parties, whether else they may do are constantly negotiating questions of power, authority and the control of definition of reality.

Here, I argue that the guests, the hosts, and the agents are inter-related to each other in their everyday life in the tourist destinations. These people and institutions also bear a certain stamp of power as stated by Foucault. The concerned segments in the trekking are not simply performing their functionally defined roles but they are negotiating the questions of power, authority and the control of the definition of reality.

Cheong and Miller (2000) highlighted the power approaches of Foucault and its’ application on tourism. They stated that “Foucauldian power elucidates a multiplicity of power relationships involving targets and agents in every social situation. Each case entails a specific mixture of productive and repressive strategies and techniques exercised by the agents over targets” (p. 378).

Here, the tourist is the ‘target’ and the agents refer to the public/private sector brokers, locals, academics, market researchers, travel writers and so on. Again Cheong and Miller (2000) describe four features of Foucauldian power which can be applied in tourism a. the omnipresence of power in tourism, b. power in tourism networks, c. the touristic gaze, and d. repressive and productive touristic power. Bourdieu (1994) argues that power is reproduced through the relations of individuals in society. Basically the systems of classification, for example, the divisions by age, sex, or position in the relations of production that make their specific contribution to the reproduction of the power relations. The behavior of the host-guest and the agents are also determined by their social position such as age, sex and so on as stated by Bourdieu in the trekking in Nepal. As Bourdieu

(1994) states “economic power lies not in wealth but in the relationship between wealth and a field of economic relation. Just as economic wealth cannot function as the capital until it is linked to an economic apparatus” (p.179).

Fanon (1968) describes the strong and dominating power of guest. Fanon stated that the hosts and the guests treat them with each other not only as strangers but also as objects. Fanon also discusses the issue of power disparities and discrimination lead by the prejudice of the guests and hosts. Similarly, Orlove’s (1977) study has focused on the decline of local elites and changing the structure of power in Canchis, Peru and raises the questions of power. The prevalent literature would provide a clear idea of analyzing power relations and dynamics between the guests and hosts in the trekking of Nepal.

In regard to power conceptualization and its application, Hall (2010: 202) raised some key questions with respect to power structure research, they are; 1. What organization, group or class in the social structure under study receives the most of what people seek and value (who benefits?) 2. What organization, group or class is over-represented in key decision-making position (who sits?) 3. What organization, group or class wins in the decisional arena (who wins?) and 4. Who is thought to be powerful by knowledgeable observers and peers (who has a reputation for power?) These research questions may be significant for studying tourism in the particular community to analyze the pattern of rights on the resources like land, water, and its distribution.

Similarly, Ortner (1999) raises many serious questions about studying cultural encounters. She has focused on the asymmetries of power relations in tourism of Khumbu. She has analyzed the power relations between the dominant and the dominated, i.e. the *Sahib* and the *Sherpa*. For studying cultural encounters between guests and hosts, she further states:

It is essential to situate both sahibs and Sherpa’s within the specific contexts from which they come. The context of sahibs and Sherpa’s are totally different. Sahibs are largely from educated upper middle classes, and that Sherpa’s come mostly from less privileged positions within their own society. Their encounter is not only a simple encounter between two culturally different groups; each group, in turn, is the embodiment of other forms of difference, differences that they bring with them and that shaped the enactment of difference between them. (p. 22)

Unlike her findings between *Sahib* and *Sherpa* I argue about the dominance of host and agents on guests during the trekking in Nepal.

The application of power in studying tourism is important for exploring and analyzing the social and cultural relations among people and power structure of

the society which is determined by the resources gained through the tourism activities. But the application of power in tourism study may explore only about power relations, power structure and power dynamics in the tourists' destination and unable to address the issues of cultural commoditization, authenticity and other forms of peoples' in day to day activities.

Tourism culture and tourist behavior

Trekking in Nepal and elsewhere in the world includes the guests, the hosts, and the agents. The guests incorporate all types of tourists who visit the destinations. The hosts are local people engaged to provide various services to the tourists in the destinations. The agents are neither guests nor hosts. They are like middlemen. The trekking leaders, guides, porters and other supportive staff come under this category. The agents are employees whose duty is to serve the tourists and make trekking successful.

These three different parties, directly involved, have greater roles and responsibilities in trekking. The guests, the hosts, and the agents are culturally different and so are their roles and status. The tourists' behavior is influenced by their own national culture i.e. tourist culture. The tourist culture represents to their country and national character that the tourists exhibit during their visits. The host culture is the culture of the host country. It is reflected through local people and service providers with which tourists come to encounter during their visit. The agents may be included under the host culture but they play dual roles of both hosts and guests.

The concerned parties develop a tourism culture during trekking. Jafari (as cited in Reisinger, 2009) states tourism culture as "the outcome of the behavior of all participants involved in the tourism process, that is, the behavior of tourists and those who offer tourism and hospitality products and services" (p. 104). In this section of the paper, I will analyze the various encounters among the guests, the hosts and the agents who create a trekking culture during their visits.

Trekking, tourists, and trekking companies

Trekking begins when the trekking company and the tourists interact with each other. Some trekking companies would have international trekking organizations in contact that connect the tourists in local Nepali trekking companies, and sometimes the individual contact between the company and the tourists also make the tour get fixed in Nepal. The company proposes the package of trekking including their food and accommodation. In agreement on payment of the package from both sides, the trekking is determined. When both sides agree upon the payment on the package, the trekking starts at the fixed date.

The company does carry the necessary preparation for the trekking before the

arrivals of the guests. The preparation includes the management of food and accommodation in Kathmandu and in the trekking trails. The company should also manage domestic flights, bus, trekking leader or guide, staff, porters and so on. There are some administrative processes such as taking trekking permission from the government of Nepal.

The trekking company receives the guests at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) in Kathmandu and takes them to the already booked hotel. On the other hand, the company manages all the necessary equipment including food and other logistics. These things are based upon the nature of their trekking and the number of guests visiting in the trekking. In regards to preparation for the trekking Mr. Chhetri, a director of trekking company in Kathmandu, tells:

The staff, equipment, food and logistics depend upon the nature of trekking. If the trekking is based on 'tea house' (generally called tea house trekking where tourists stay at the hotel for the night for food and other logistics) we require few staff and food but in the camping trekking (tourists stay at the camp at night and food, drinks and other have to be managed by the trekking staff in the tent) we need to carry many things so that we require more manpower and other essentials (personal communication with Mr. Chhetri in October 2017).

The amount that the tourists pay also differs on the basis of the nature of their trekking and the services provided to them in the trekking. It seems that the interaction between the tourists and companies are economic in nature - just service provider and receiver, but such an interaction determines the structure of trekking, decision-making process, the exercise of power and authority among various segments in the trekking because of the economic exchange between these two segments further determine the other aspects of trekking such as nature of food and other facilities.

Cross-cultural interaction between the tourists and supportive staff

"Ye bhai Aja khair lai k Khuwaune ho?" "Hello brother, what food do we serve to tourists today?" Mr. Shrestha, a guide, asked to his staff. A lady hotel owner speaks; *(dai dherai item nadinuhos hai, menu ma bhako sabai paidaina bhannu hos)* "Brother do not offer multiple items to tourists. Tell them that some of the items that are enlisted in the menu may not be available". This conversation among guide, staff, and hotel owners were frequently heard in the Everest and Mustang treks. This conversation is one of the examples of power application in the trekking in Nepal. In the group trekking selection of food items depend upon not only on the tourists' choices but also in the guides, staff and hotel owners. Food options depend upon the budget of the trek. But, the story does not go like this. I observed that European tourists were very fond of tea and coffee. A tourist

could have more than two glasses of tea in one sitting. The more glasses of tea that the tourists drink, the more money should the guide pay. If the tourists choose the expensive menu (food or drinks), the result is reflected in the guide's face because the guides always try to save some extra amount beside his/ her salary. This is why there is politics in the food and drinks in the trekking.

But this cannot be generalized in all the cases. The tourists get least options or sometimes no option in lunch because it would take much time to cook multiple food items for (a larger group) many people. During my both Everest and Mustang trekking, I observed the tourists had noodle soup at lunch every day. It is not because of saving politics but because of the time-saving. To reach the fixed destination the group cannot spend more than an hour at the lunch. Whatever the reason may be, the tourists may not decide themselves about the food items in the trekking.

When the tourists reach at the hotel for night stay, the guides distribute the rooms to the tourists. In the trekking trails, the hotels and rooms vary from place to place. The rooms are not similar in the same hotel too. This is why the guides cannot afford the same types of room for all the guests. It is the guides' decision to provide a particular room to particular tourists and the guests would accept it. The tourists do not choose a particular room. In Namche Bazaar, a female tourist of 57 years of age took permission for sharing the room with a male tourist. "May we sleep together tonight?" She asked. I was surprised to hear this but the guide said, "Ok ok, no problem." The exercise of power and authority of the guide is not restricted into the bedrooms too.

The tourists take permission from the guide about food or drinks they want. But if the tourists should pay themselves they will not ask their guide. When we were walking nearby Namche, a tourist asked the guide. "Mr. K., may I have an apple?" The apples were kept on the way to be sold to the tourists. Whether to take permission or not in regard to food or any other things it depends upon the mode of payment i.e. who pays? The tourists do not always follow Nepali guides and staff if they pay personally.

The tourists resist to guides and staff if they do not like their activities. On the way to Lomangthan of Mustang, a male tourist complained against our conversation. Our guide and I were walking at the end of the tourists' row with frequent conversation with each other in the Nepali language. The male tourist was getting trouble in walking and told, "Two people at the distance of two meters speak frequently in the language that I do not understand. Do you think about me, how boring is it for me? Please, go ahead and talk". He compelled us to shut our mouth up. The guide turned red to his ears. The guide might have felt guilt and shame but I was shocked. Mr. Chhetri, a trekking guide from lower

Solukhumbu also has a similar experience. He tells:

Once I was in Annapurna trekking as a guide. I wanted to take better care of my guests always and follow them while walking, eating, buying and so on. One day in the trekking, a female tourist shouted, 'What do you mean? Why always you follow me? Her anger did not become calm until we arrived at Kathmandu and complained to the company against me (personal communication with Mr. Chhetri; June 2014).

The tourists are not passive recipients' and the application of power is not always asymmetric. Complaining, criticizing, giving little 'tips' and satire are the processes of their resistance but as they do not have much of an upper hand in the trekking, they would have no more options, rather than to follow their guides.

Trekking culture and exercise of power

The role of a leader is prominent and decisive in the trekking. A leader is a powerful person who decides almost everything during the period of trekking. The leader is very much responsible for other guests. The success and failure of any trekking mostly depends upon the leaders' leadership. Leader 'leads' the group every day in trekking. He/she always walks at the front but is supported by one trekking staff called 'Sherpa' (assistant guide may not necessary to be an ethnic one like the Sherpa). The trekking company decides a Nepali or a foreigner lead the trek. The leader is not actually a tourist but an agent, doing his/her duty as a profession.

The leader decides the trekking routes should occur any problem on the way. Sometimes the condition of weather and the health of the tourists compel to change the trekking route. But, to change or not to depends upon the leader. The leader consults with the tourists but this consultation does not make a difference in his/her decision. During Khumbu trekking, our destination was to go to Kalapaththar crossing two different passes, Renzola and Chola. We passed the Renzo-la (a pass at the height of 5200m) and reached Gokyo Lake in the evening. We had a plan to pass Chola (a pass at the height of 5400m), rather harder way to Renzo-la pass. The weather was not so bad but all the places were snow covered. The leader with the consultation of the guide decided to change the route. Instead of going uphill to Chola, we stepped downhill from Gokyo. Some tourists agreed and others argued but the leader did not change his decision. It is not compulsory that the leader should agree on what the tourists say but the tourists must follow the decisions made by the leader.

In Mustang trekking, some of the tourists proposed to change the route from Muktinath to Jomsom. Instead of going directly Jomsom from Muktinath they had proposed to visit one village but the leader rejected it. This is how a leader

exercises his power on the tourists.

There is another case of power exercise of the leader on the tourists in regards to route selection. In Lomangthan, the leader with the consultation of the guide made a plan to visit 'Korala', the border with Tibet which was not in our package. The border 'Korala' is 25 kilometers far from the Lomangthan and it required 50 Euro for each tourist to visit the border. The next case of the visit was that we took a bus from Muktinath to Jomsom that was not in our package. The tourists paid an additional amount for both border and Jomsom trips. These events justify how the leader exercises power on the tourists and how tourism culture is formulated in the trekking.

Food is a basic means of survival for any living beings. The choice of food differs culturally and individually. An individual is free to choose the food he/she likes. It is very general and common for people. But, in trekking food is somehow controlled by the leader and the guide. The tourists get a few food options. The guide with the consultation of the hotel owner prepares the available menu for dinner. After that, the leader and the guide consult with each other. Then, the leader asks the tourists to choose one among the three dishes that they have already listed. For example, the tourists are told to choose a type of soup among tomato, potato or garlic. The leader announces the particular dish and orders to raise hands to the tourists for counting. In every evening the leader decides about the dishes of breakfast for the next morning. This process would continue until the trekking comes to an end. But, this rule is not applicable to those tourists who want to pay themselves that is added to his/her contract.

The tourist told the guide that he would eat local food like other staff in the trekking. The guide consulted with the leader but the leader rejected. The leader tells:

If all guests propose to eat rice and curry (*daal* and *bhat*) every day, it takes much time to prepare. We could not reach at the destination in time spending much time on food. So, the individual choices of food are almost not possible (personal communication with Mr. G. a trekking leader, October 2017).

Of course, the tourists have given some options for choosing foods but these options do not include the tourists' choices. The tourists are compelled to choose among the dishes that the leader prepares. Sometimes the leader imposes his/her decision on minor events such as the selection of place for lunch or dinner. There are multiple dining halls in hotels in both Khumbu and Mustang. The management of multiple dining halls symbolizes their good business because multiple dining halls help to keep the tourists for a longer time. Longer the tourists stay at the dining, the more amount the tourists tend to spend. The leader selects a particular

dining hall for their lunch or dinner. In *Charang* of Mustang, some tourists wanted to have their lunch at an open place at the Sunshine but the leader rejected of doing it. Lower emanates in various ways.

The events are examples of the omnipresence of power in trekking. The application of power is not limited to these stories. The leader not only decides about the resting time while walking but also about the time for lunch. “You finish your lunch within 40 minutes; after 5 minutes we leave the place,” I heard this direction every day in the trekking. I also observed the leader’s decision for visiting the cultural sites and events in the trekking. There are many monasteries on the trekking trails in both Mustang and Khumbu. Visits in cultural sites promote cultural tourism in Nepal. Each monastery has its own story relating to different sects of Buddhism. There was a *Lama* to describe it. The tourists generally offer some amount to every monastery they visit. But there is a fixed amount to pay for observing such cultural sites. For example, in *Chhosar* of Mustang tourists pay Rs. one thousand each to enter and observe the monasteries. It is the leader who decides about the monasteries to visit. I heard several times that the leader was telling his guide not to take the tourists in Gumba.

But, the leader’s duty is not only to impose his/her decisions every time but also to look after the tourists. The leader slows down his/her steps if any tourist cannot follow. I observed that the leader carried a bag of a tourist when the tourist could not walk. It is a reciprocity of power.

Tourists’ behavior with fellow tourists

Before my Khumbu trekking I thought that the tourists who come to trek in a group are either their own kids or friends who know each other. I also thought that they were from the same village or city. But, it was not just the same. Some tourists belong to the same family and city and others are unknown among themselves. They also get interacted when they come to Nepal. Although they travel together in a group, they are not equal in their status. They are diverse in terms of occupation, age, sex, and education. But the diversity makes no difference in trekking for the leader, the guide, and the staff of hotel owners and so on. The level of education or occupation does not create any hierarchy during the period of trekking.

But, extra expenses, the tourist makes in trekking keeps the importance of their economic well-being. The tourists stay in a group, have lunch together, talk, play, and enjoy together but pay separately. This is the fundamental difference that I observed between Nepali domestic tourists and foreign tourists to Nepal. Nepali tourist either sponsors for the lunch, breakfast, dinner, buy some drinks to fellow tourists or they collect money prior to their visit, pay together and calculate the amount later on. But sharing some foods such as chocolates on the way is

common.

The tourists were not busy in talking on the way. They did not make their family matters as the subject of the day. They all have at least interacted with each other. Their interaction is mostly limited to their own relatives and friends. But, making fun to each other, satire and joking on the way and especially in the evening at the dining hall is common ways of their interactions.

The trekking process runs by the amount the tourists pay but the tourists are the less powerful people in the trekking. They are at the bottom of the power structure. Their decisions are least applied in the trekking.

Tourists and knowledge construction

In trekking, the tourists can have any queries about the people and place they encounter. They ask many questions to guide and staff about the flora and fauna they see on the way. The most frequently asked questions in both Khumbu and Mustang trekking were about the names of peaks and mountains. It is really hard to recognize each peak and tell names to tourists because the structures of the mountains seem different from place to place. I recognized Mt. Everest from Everest viewpoint at *Syangboche* but failed to know from other places and so as the case about Mt. Nilgiri and Mt. Dhaulagiri from Mustang. I also asked the guide every day about them. The ordinary guides and staff cannot truly orient about them. The frequent visits to the places and knowledge to read the map make the recognition possible. But it is not sure that every trekking company can manage a perfect guide to them. I observed the guides and the staff discussion for the recognition of the mountains to answer their guests. A hotel owner *Sherpa* in Machhermu tells:

Sometimes guide comes earlier than a tourist and ask me about the name of the mountains. When I answer then he becomes ready to brief the tourists. In many cases, the guide gives wrong information to tourists. The trekking company and government should think about it (Personal communication with Mr. Sherpa, October 2013).

It is compulsory for guides and staffs to know about the place and the route to trek. Sometimes, the guide and staffs do not have knowledge about the route. They ask local people if they meet. But, at the high altitude where there is no human settlement they cannot get information and get many problems at night. Mr. Shrestha, a trekking guide shares his experience:

I was unknown about the route of Dolpo trek. I informed the company about it. But the company enforced me to go because it was the main tourists' season and there was no extra guide in the company. One day I missed the route. I was afraid and walk fast of fearing if the tourists ask me

anything about the route. When tourists met me, he scolded a lot, and then I spoke the reality (personal communication with Mr. Shrestha, November 2017).

A similar experience was shared by another guide about Dolpo trekking. He told me that, “because of the lack of knowledge on the route we traveled up to 7 o’clock in the evening. It was dark. I arranged to sleep in tents. But we found a hotel near our tent the next morning.”

The success and failure of the trekking depend on the knowledge of the leader, guides and trekking staffs. And the interactions of the guides and leaders with the tourists depend upon their knowledge about the trekking routes, people and culture of that area. It is uncertain that the tourists are well informed. The knowledge of tourists is constructed by these people. Language as a means of communication is another factor for the knowledge variation. It is not sure that all tourists understand English and guides may not communicate in tourists’ language. In Marpha village of Mustang, a tourist asked the name of a crop to an assistant guide. He told that ‘I do not know in English but it is called *Fapar* (buckwheat) in the Nepali language’. The tourist just nods his head. I was not sure if he understood it.

Sometimes the foreign leader also gives wrong information to the tourists. A Sherpa guide in the Mustang trekking told us that “I saw a female leader showing Mt. Manaslu from Syangboche of Mustang”. I told her, we cannot see Mt. Manaslu from here. She got angry and told the tourists not to believe me. “Can we see Mt. Manaslu from here?” he asked his fellow guide but all agreed on her.

The tourists also ask many questions about the culture and religion of the people they encounter on the way. In both Khumbu and Mustang trekking, the tourists asked many questions about Buddhism. The structure of the statues of Lord Buddha is different in different monasteries in both Khumbu and Mustang. The tourists have queries to know about it. The structure of monastery at Khumbu is different from the monasteries of Mustang. The simple observation and little knowledge in regard to Buddhism cannot define the real meaning. At such a moment, the guide and staff interpret the meanings and symbols by their own limited ideas which may not represent the actual symbols and meanings. In Mustang, there is a Gumba in a cave called Cave Gumba. The statue of Buddha and Rimboche were well decorated. There were many *Khada* around it. On the ceiling of the cave, things were hanging everywhere. A tourist asked me what the things. I was unknown and the same question forwarded to the staff but he failed to answer. Later, the guide told that it was nothing, only paper patching for decoration. The paper was dark because of the smoke coming from laps, which were offered to the statues. The immediate answer of the staff and guides help to

construct knowledge of the tourists which may not be reliable and true. In Muktinath, there was a big statue of Buddha with a finger touching towards the earth. That was not common to other statue found elsewhere in Nepal. A female tourist asked the meaning of pointing the fingers down. The guide was unable to answer and so was I. The tourists laughed and lashed a satire, “what a guide!” Such situations created the guides and staff to interpret the objects in their own way. Such interpretation may satisfy the tourists at that moment but provides false knowledge about people, places and objects.

The main issue is the valid knowledge construction of the tourists in the trekking. The knowledge about the people and place is a by-product of narratives made by others in the trekking. The knowledge of the tourists is also depend on the travel books and other literatures.

Reciprocity of power among service providers and receivers

There is a direct relationship between hotel/lodge owner, airlines and other service providing agents with the tourists. These agents always give priority to the tourists rather than any other people such as guides, staff, and porters. The ordinary Nepali people do not get a chance to eat before the tourists. I observed several cases in Mustang that the domestic tourists were kept in the second category. The guides and staff who associated with the tourists are at the bottom of the priority. The domestic tourists can have food after the international tourists are done. The turn of guides and other staff comes after the guests.

In Syangboche of Mustang, I was mighty hungry and I requested the hotel owner to give me dinner with domestic tourists but the owner rejected. I had to wait until the domestic tourists were through. In Khumbu, I was made to wait until midnight to have dinner. My own observations and experiences reveal the exercise of power among various segments in the trekking. The main question is why hotel/lodge owners behave like that. The easy answer is that there is the reciprocity of power between guests and hosts. This reciprocity is based on the economic transaction between them. Keeping the ordinary people at the least priority and the tourists at the top is because of the unequal economic transactions in the trekking. The hotels owners sometimes charge only little amount and sometimes do not charge to the guides and other staff; this condition has kept these people at the bottom of the power.

The priority is not only limited to food service but also in room selection. The good rooms, attached bathrooms are only for the tourists. In Lomangthan, a hotel owner wanted to take back the key of a room that we were provided. He told me that “the key was mistakenly given to you. It is attached and not for Nepali. This room is for the tourists”. But I rejected. I told him, “Who brought 14 tourists to your hotel? You can charge us as tourists,” and he agreed. Generally, the guides

get good rooms. I have observed that all the trekking staff sleep in the dining hall during the trekking in Khumbu and Mustang regions.

The power and politics in food and bed should be analyzed through the economic relationships between the service givers and takers. The power in trekking is not static, it is dynamic. The identity of the tourists should be defined differently in relations to the other segments. The hotel/lodge owners' behavior differs among the tourists, leaders and guides of the same group. The behavior pattern is different along with their knowledge and perceptions. The each segment has their own knowledge and perception about each other which regulates power and authority.

The airline services of tourists' destinations also give preference to the tourists rather than local people and other staff in trekking. The preference is determined not because of the color of the tourists but because the dollars they pay to the airlines. The weather of Lukla and Jomsom is uncertain at the day time. And every airline flies the tourists first because the cancellation of the flight may minimize their profit. In the trekking season, it is very hard to get the air-ticket for these destinations.

In 2013, I had a flight from Kathmandu to Lukla along with twenty tourists along with one guide and one staff and myself. We were in the runway at TIA after getting the boarding pass. All of sudden, an airline staff called me. He kept me out from the scheduled flight. I waited more than three hours in Kathmandu domestic airport for the next flight. This was the exercise of power by airlines services. The airline had taken one more tourist in my seat. The power of the dollar compelled me to wait more three hours at the airport.

Tourists and resistance

Resistance is a form of protest against unwilling activities. Although tourists must obey the leader and guide during the trekking but they protest while they feel imposition and excessive domination by the leader and guide. I observed 'frustration' as a form of resistance by the tourists in trekking. The facial expressions could be read to their responses in many matters. The tourists are not passive objects. They do not follow or accept whatever comes ahead. The tourists also make complains if they do not enjoy the events. The tourists had also filled the case at a court in 2011 against the trekking company for canceling their visit up to Gorakchhep in Khumbu.

Conclusion

Trekking is not only a visit to the destinations but it incorporates cross-cultural interaction among the guests, the hosts, and the agents. The behavior of tourists, guests and agents are fundamentally based on the power relationships. It is not

easy to behave with culturally distinct people due to the differences in national culture which is reflected through an individual's behavior. There is a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding due to differences in language and variations in the level of knowledge and understanding of the guests, hosts and the agents. Such a problem has an influence on the knowledge construction which is reflected through the concerned segments in the trekking.

Tourism is a leisure activity and entertainment is the main focus of trekking. In such a case, tourism culture may not represent the national culture and the guests, the hosts, and the agents do not show their usual behavior. However, the activities of the trekking company are depended upon the economic power of the guests. Management of the staff and other logistics are influenced by the economic exchange between the guests and the trekking company. Hence, the behavior of the tourists with supportive staff in the trekking is based on the social, economic and cultural aspects.

The exercise of power and authority is vital in cross-cultural interaction in the trekking. The tourists must follow the decisions made by the leader and the guide. Although some tourists resist, it keeps no meaning at all because the decisions are seldom changed. The only way of resisting by the tourists is criticizing the leader or guide, showing frustration or anger, making jokes and satires.

Tourism is a service-oriented activity. There is a reciprocity of power among service givers and takers. The service providers such as hotels, lodges, airlines and so on keep the tourists first. It is not because of '*Atithi Debo bhaba*' or the Guests are the Gods but because of the economic power of the guests.

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