TOURISM, ETHNICITY AND EVERYDAY INTERACTION IN KHUMBU

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Abstract

Khumbu, globally known for Mount Everest and Sherpa people, was historically a predominantly Sherpa region. However, people from other regions migrated to Khumbu in search of multiple opportunities in tourism sectors. Simultaneously, affluent Sherpas began relocating to Kathmandu, Europe and North America. The immigration of non-Sherpas and out-migration of Sherpas not only altered the demographic composition but also made Khumbu a multicultural community which led to change their everyday interaction. This paper argues that the increasing participation of non-Sherpa in Tourism of Khumbu has not only supplemented this sector but also challenged and questioned the Sherpa's legacy and monopoly in the tourism. The paper also focuses on how Sherpas and non-Sherpas interact with each other through their ethnic based organizations. Based on the ethnographic field work: unstructured interviews and observation, the paper explores that both Sherpas and non-Sherpas have established their ethnic based organizations for maintaining ethnic identity. The organizations work as joint power and strengths of each ethnic groups. Simply, the organizations are social and cultural in nature but they are not limited within the given frame, most importantly the power and authority is embodied within them. I argue that the ethnic based organizations not only support the needs of each ethnic groups but also managed the interethnic relations and multiple identities with bargaining, exercising and balancing the power and authority within Sherpa and non-Sherpa groups in Khumbu.

Keywords: Sherpa-non-Sherpa, interethnic relationships, ethnic based organizations, power, cultural values

Introduction

Tourism is multifaceted phenomenon with wide-ranging effects on society, economy, culture and environment. The development of tourism in any destination brings both opportunities and challenges to hosts communities and various stakeholders. Beyond its

economic implications, tourism serves as a platform for social and cultural interaction among hosts, guests, agents and other actors.

Anthropological literature has long examined the interaction between guests and hosts, beginning with early studies on tourism (Smith, 1989). Scholars have generally framed tourism's impact on host communities in three main ways. First, some argue that tourism benefits local populations by generating employment, increasing income, and contributing to economic development (Deike, 1994; Freitag, 1996). Second, others assert that tourism is detrimental to the social fabric and cultural values of host societies (Hodge, 1992; Hall, 1994; Kariel et.al, 1982; Cohen, 2001). The third, a balanced perspective recognizes that tourism has both positive and negative social and cultural impacts (Macleod, 1999; Salazar, 2005). In addition to these views, some scholars have explored the interaction within the hosts communities at tourism destinations, shedding light on intra-community dynamics (Wood, 1997; Hitchcock, 1999; Hilliman,2009).

Khumbu globally known for Mt. Everest and the Sherpa people, was historically predominatly Sherpa region. The Sherpa are believed to have migrated from the Salmo Gang region of eastern Tibet during 14th or 15th century (Rogers, 2007) though Brower (1991) suggests their arrival around 1533 from the Kham region of Tibet. Tourists and scholars have long praised the bravery and hospitlaity of the Sherpa, often using metaphors such as "hardworking," "ever smiling," and "cooperative" (Fuerer-Haimendorf, 1964; Brower, 1991), who climbs the mountains for supporting other climbers, able to make multiple records in mountaineering sectors (Shrestha, 2023). However, as tourism expanded, people from other regions migrated to Khumbu in search of business opportunities and employment in the tourism sector. Simultaneously, affluent Sherpas began relocating to Kathmandu, Europe and North America. The in-migration of non-Sherpa groups (Rai, Tamang, Magar,Newar, Kshetri/ Brahmin, Newar etc.) and out-migration of Sherpas have significantly altered the region's demographic composition transforming Khumbu into a multicultuaral landscape.

Historically, Khumbu was primarily settled by Sherpas, along with a few blacksmiths (kami-an "untouchable" caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy) households and other ethnic groups such as Tamang, Magar, Rai, and Newar, who have arrived for business and employment opportunities (Fuerer-Haimendorf, 1964; Brower, 1991; Stevens, 1993, Shrestha, 2023). While the Sherpa have historically remained the dominant group in Khumbu, their populaiton is gradually declining. For the illustration, the study of Pawson et al. (1984) compared caste and ethnic demographics from 1970 to 1982, noting that the Sherpa populaiton decreased from 86.5% in 1970 to 81.2% in 1982-a

drop of 5.3 percentage points in just a decade.

Table 1. Caste and ethnic composition of Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality in 2021

S.N.	Caste/Ethnicity	Population	Percentage
1	Sherpa	5140	60.7
2	Rai/ Kulung	1296	15.3
3	Tamang	894	10.6
4	Magar	460	5.4
5	Bishwo Karma	317	3.7
6	Chhetri	118	1.4
7	Newar	108	1.3
8	Pariyar	74	0.9
9	Others	62	0.7
	Total	8469	100

Source. CBS, 2022

According to the 2021 census, Sherpa comprise 60.7% of the population in Khumbu, while the remaining 39.3% represents various non-Sherpa groups. In 2011, Sherpa made up 62% of the population, indicating a decline of nearly 2% over a decade. Shrestha (2018a) highlights a sharper contrast in Lukla Bazar, where Sherpas account for only 41%, while non-Sherpas constitute 59%. These figures demonstrate both the out-migration of the local Sherpa and the in-migration of non-Sherpas into the region.

This demographic shift has not only transformed the population structure but has also significantly influenced social, cultural, and economic relations among different groups. Each ethnic group differ in religon, culture and traditon. Non-Sherpa communities follow Hinduism, Kirant and Bon- Buddhism (Shamnistic Buddhism) religion, while the Sherpas predominantly practice Tibetan Buddhism. The religious and cultural dinsinctions contribute to ideological, social, and economic differences, which can foster tensions and conflict (Shrestha, 2020).

For non-Sherpa groups, a key chllaenge is maintaining their ethnic identities, expressed through cultural and ritual practices. In addition to this, balancing power and authority with Sherpas is another challenge where Sherpas historically hold authority and control over tourism resources. Conversely, Sherpas often seek to preserve their cultural and religous legacy and resist any perceived threats posed by the growing presence of other groups.

This context has led to varying forms power dynamics between Sherpas and non-Sherpas. This paper aims to examine how power and authority are exercised by Sherpas over non-Sherpas, and how non-Sherpa groups resist, negotiate, or balance these power relations-often through the formation of ethnic-based organizations. It explores interethnic interaction in the Khumbu region through the dual lenses of power and ethnic identity.

Materials and methods

I first visited the Khumbu in 2013, beginning my journey from Kathmandu (Tribhuvan International airport) to Gorak Shep and Kalapatthar as a part of trekking group that included 20 European tourists, 11 Nepali porters, one guide and 5 sherpa (assistant guides) including myself. During this trek, I carried my own luggage approximately 15 kilograms -in order to better understand the conditions faced by porters and to observe their interaction with Sherpa, tourists and non-Sherpa in the Khumbu region.

Throughout the journey, I met many Sherpa and non-Sherpa individuals engaged in trekking and trourism business. As it was my first visit, I conducted a thorough 15 day observational study of Khumbu and its' people. I later returned to the region for extended ethnographic fieldwork in 2015 and 2017, fousing on both Sherpa and non-Sherpa communities. The data presented in this study has also been updated with additional field visits and follow-up interactions as recenlty as 2022.

To collect information, I employed a mix of qualitative methods, including both participant and non-participant observation, unstructured interviews and key informants interviews. These were conducted both in Khumbu and in Kathmandu, targetting individuals involved in tourism and local community.

Results and discussion

Power of Sherpa: Access, coercion and resistance

I begin this section with the statement of Michel Foucault’s concept of power. The statements conceptualize this section, focusing on both Sherpas and non-Sherpas' interactions and interrelations in their everyday lives.

All the relations of everyday life bear a certain stamp of power. People acting as 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 (Foucault, 1980 cf. Dirks, Eley and Ortner,1994:4).

Tourism development in Khumbu has generated numerous opportunities to the Sherpa and other non-Sherpa populations. Sherpas are primarily involved in profitable sectors such as hotels, lodges, and shops. Many also works in mountaineering as mountain guides and trekking guides. Exceptionally, a small number remain engaged in farming and domestic works. In contrast, non-Sherpa often operates Bhatti (porter shelters), small lodges, and retail shops. Some are employed by Sherpas, working as trekking guides, assistant guides and porters. These people are not only doing prescribed and predesigned roles in Khumbu's tourism but also stamping on some certain power relations.

At the first glance, daily interactions between Sherpa and non-Sherpa individuals in Khumbu may appear harmonious and cooperative. However, viewed through an anthropological lens -especially using "thick description"- these relationships reveal underlying complexities. A clear sense of Sherpa and non-Sherpa, insiders and outsiders as identity bench marks, contributing to tension and contestation over access to natural and social resources. This is particularly pronounced due to the in-migration of non-Sherpa groups, formation of ethnicity-based social organizations, and ongoing struggles for cultural and political authority.

Being "local" or "outsider" is not merely geographic, it is a psychological and symbolic classification. In Khumbu, Sherpa claim indigenous status and often perceive migrants as outsiders primarily motivated by economic gain. Sherpas accuse non-Sherpas of contributing to deforestation, disregarding local rituals, and showing little respect for Sherpa culture. As one Sherpa informant shared:

> Migrants non-Sherpa cut down trees for fuel every year which is the cause of deforestation. They deny to take part in many activities like plantation and so on. Even the Sherpa hotel lodge owners who are migrating from other places denied to take part in *Dumji* festival. So, we local Sherpa compelled them to take part in such activities (Personal communication with P. Sherpa, November-17, 2017).

This sense of pride in local identity is strong. Mr. Sherpa views outsiders as opportunists who earn money in Khumbu but contribute little to social and cultural life. Such emotional detachment is not uncommon among migrants; whose hearts often remain tied to their original homes (Shrestha, 2018a). Exercise of power is reflected in their everyday behavior and interactions. As Foucault (1980) states, " power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinated clusters of relations" (p. 198). The

Sherpas and non-Sherpas are intertwined by ethnicity based organizations where they each exercise their power and authority.

Another Sherpa hotel owner expressed similar sentiments. Proud of running a large hotel for three decades, he emphasized his access to airline and helicopter services. He described himself as a social worker who helps the needy but he showed little interest in engaging with migrant hoteliers, whom he accused of undermining business ethics:

> I have run this hotel for more than 30 years ago. I have good connections with trekking companies, trekking guides and airlines. If my rooms are full, I refer tourists to other hotel without asking for a commission. I can easily manage air ticket and helicopter service. But migrants' hoteliers are doing cheap competition. They offer free meals to trekking guides. They have no access to flight services and do unhealthy business (Personal communication with C. Sherpa, November-7, 2018).

His frustration stems primarily from unhealthy pricing competition. While his hotel attracts trekking guides due to his logistical advantages, he resents that others win business through low prices and free services. This highlights how economic power is closely tied to perceptions of legitimacy and authority in Khumbu's tourism economy. As Bourdieu (1994) states “economic power lies not in wealth but in the relationship between wealth and a field of economic relations….” (p.179). The Sherpa hotel owners are wealthy and the power is embedded in hotel sizes, ways of operation and day to day business. Foucault (1980:154) argues that " In reality power is only exercised at a cost. Obviously, there is an economic cost…." The Sherpas criticize non-Sherpa as not being professional, providing additional facilities to trekking staffs, is a form of power exercise for an economic cost.

On one hand, Sherpas are local, insiders, rich and powerful, dominate both resources and influence. On the other hand, non-Sherpa are outsiders, relatively poor and recent migrants often feel marginalized. While they engage in various tourism sectors such as operating hotels, lodges, bhattis, shops and also work as trekking porters, staffs and guides. They report different experiences and challenges in their interactions with Sherpas. As one non-Sherpa hotel operator put it:

> The Sherpa hotel owners pressure me not to offer additional services to Nepali trekking staffs. They disapprove of my business model that supports both tourists and Nepali workers. Yet, they still come to me asking for donation to support local events (Personal communication with Mr. Magar, November 18, 2017).

This form of resistance is commonly witnessed during my field study in Khumbu. Non-Sherpas mostly opined binary opposite to Sherpas in many matters. In fact, it is also some power dynamics between them. Because, " …there are no relations of power without resistances (Foucault, 1980, p. 154). Such a resistance supports to conclude that Sherpas and non-Sherpas are mingled in some sorts of power relations in Khumbu.

This conflicts arise not just from ethnic differences but also from divergent business models and the broader social dynamics of local vs. outsider identities. The interaction and interrelationship between Sherpa and non-Sherpa are multifaceted. Therefore, understanding Sherpa-non-Sherpa relationships requires attention to multiple dimensions of power.

Non-Sherpa actors often view Sherpas overly commercialized. Two individuals non-Sherpa a *bhatti* owner and a trekking guide told me, " Sherpas do everything, legal or illegal for money". This sentiment aligns with Brower (1993) observation that some Sherpas were involved in 'drug' trafficking:

> ….in the last few years Sherpas have become involved in an illegal international trade entailing higher cost than confiscation of illegal hides or Tibetan artefacts. The world-wide mobility of Sherpas makes them convenient couriers for drugs, and men recruited by trekking and expedition contacts have been caught and imprisoned for drug trafficking (pp. 89, 90).

While it is unfair to generalize all Sherpas as criminal, it is evident that tourism has commercialized and monetized Sherpa society. For the illustrations, porters are frequently denied basic accommodation even when hotel rooms are vacant. They are often excluded from dining halls and must seek shelter in *bhattis* or porter shelters. One non-Sherpa porter shared:

> In Khumbu, I was kicked out of the dining hall. I was compelled to take my luggage outside the hotel even the night was cold and rainy. I had to sleep in the tent, while Sherpa workers were allowed to sleep inside. When tea was serviced, the owner discriminated between Sherpa and non-Sherpa workers (Personal Communication with a non-Sherpa porter, June 12, 2022).

The narratives picturize the worse condition of working class non-Sherpa in Khumbu. I personally witnessed a similar case in Gorak Shep (near Everest base camp) in 2013. A hotel owner reprimanded a porter for sitting in the dining hall, saying it was only for tourists. Although porters are equally essential to trekking, they often face disrespect and marginalized.

As Frydenlund (2017) suggests, such discrimination is not racial but economic. Shrestha (2018b) similarly argues that these tensions stem from inequalities in wealth and access, rather than ethnic hatred.

Differing cultural values and interethnic marriage

Interethnic relationships can be understood through patterns of participation and non-participation in ritual, rites, feast, festivals and everyday interactions. One important marker is interethnic marriage but shared cultural participation also plays a key role. For example, non-Sherpa communities, such as Tamang, actively participate in Buddhists rituals like *Dumji*. In Lukla, one Tamang household contributes one fourth of the total *Dumji* festival expenses, sharing this responsibility with three Sherpas households. The entire Tamang community supports this one household during the festival.

Historically, *Dumji* was celebrated exclusively by Sherpas in Lukla. As the participation of non-Sherpa attendees increased, so did the overall cost of the festival. As the expenses increases, Sherpas began urging the Tamang to share both responsibilities and costs. One Sherpa informant recalled; "Other people (non-Sherpa) didn't contribute money for *Dumji* but they attended the ceremony. It became very hard to exclude them. Their participation increased our expenses. Eventually, we enforce them to actively participate. Now, Tamang contributes one fourth of the total cost." This shows that the Tamang community's participation in Dumji was not an optional, Sherpas compelled them to take part actively. This is due to the economic value and not because of any other social and cultural reasons.

Dispute between Sherpa and Tamang in Lukla date back to early land settlement. One Tamang informant shared that his grandfather, who settled first in Lukla, wanted to buy the land in the mid-Bazar but could not do so due to protest of some Sherpas'.

Disagreements on animal slaughtering is very common in Khumbu. Being Tibetan Buddhists Sherpas deny animal slaughtering in the region. In contrary, Hindu non-Sherpa communities and government employees of the similar caste and religion slaughter animals, either open or hidden. I also witnessed slaughtering the chicken secretly by non-Sherpas. According to Shrestha (2018a)

The power of state is strong and effective and sometimes it is attached to certain ideology. The power was attached to Hindu ideology. Even today, Nepal police slaughters goat in a regular basis although animal sacrifice is morally ban in Khumbu. The killing is continued because of state power that the Nepal police have (p. 228).

This situation led them to communal conflict, and are restricted to slaughter the animals openly. These disputes and disagreement is a form of resistance. As Foucault (1980) stated the relation of power exercise and resistance. Resistance is inevitable aspect of power exercise and omnipresence in cross-cultural interaction (Shrestha, 2019).

Despite such conflicts, Sherpa-non-Sherpa relations are not always antagonistic. Numerous interethnic marriages have occurred, helping bridge social boundaries. However, clear distinctions remain. My study found that 72% of Rai, 66% of Tamang and 56% of Magar felt comfortable seeking support from other non-Sherpa groups. In contrast, most Sherpa informants preferred interacting within their own ethnic group. This reflect a common human tendency to feel at ease among those who share language, culture, and geographic origin. Additionally, the insider-outsider framework plays a crucial role in shaping social relations.

Ethnic identity and ethnicity based organizations

Ethnic identity is the bench mark of any ethnic community showing themselves different from other mainstream people on the basis of their distinct culture and identity (Gurung, 2012). Being different or showing differences than other mainstream people is not only a symbol of 'otherness' but it has related with the history and relations of power with other people. Gellner (2012:96) writes "...ethnic identity is the weight and influence of power, history and what Bourdieu called habitus and what the activists call historical opression". Gurung (2012) further clarrifies about innovations of ethnic identity in Nepal in relation to state and power. He states that "the unequal power relations between state and society, particularly historical injustice,political marginalization, social deprivation and cultural genocide of Nepal's indigenous people have resulted in the innovation of their various identities" (p. 193).

If innovation of ethnic identity is because of unequal power relations, injustice and so on as stated by Gurung and Gellner, I must argue such a relations of Sherpa and non- Sherpa people in Lukla for establishing their own organizations to make the power relation balance, avoiding social discrimination and for social justice. However, Foucault (1980) asserted that the individual idnentity is the product of different forms of power exercise. He states:

> "…the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces. There is much that could be said as well on the problems of regional identity and its conflicts with national identity (Foucault, 1980, pp, 73-74)

Examining the tourism literautures regarding ethnic identity of the local people, the schoalrs have mixed opinions. Picard (1995) argues that tourism in Bali asserted self consciousness and made ethnic identity strong. Similarly, Medina (2003) asserts that tourism revitalized and revived Maya culute and identity. In contrary, Gamper (1981) argues that tourism is detrimental, breaking ethnic boundaries and changing ethnic identities in southern Austrian Village. Gunaratne (2001) has focused on psuedo identity of Tharus of Chitwan constructed by Hotel owners and tour guides.

In Lukla, both Sherpa and non-Sherpa communities have established their own ethnicity based organizations. These organizations not only reflect their ethnic identity but also serve multiple purposes. On the surface, they promote socio-cultural unity and economic cooperation. However, beneath these visible goals lie latent functions such as asserting ethnic identity, bargaining for resources, and managing power relations both within and beyond the group.

Sherpa organizations

Sherpas are organized under two main bodies: Sherpa Kiduk, established by local Sherpas and Ghyang Kharka, founded migrant Sherpas. These organizations address practical concerns, such as solving disputes, coordinating festivals, and mutual aid. At the same time, they reflect subtle social stratifications: the divide between "local: and "migrant" Sherpas. This segmentation reveals differences in psychological ownership, economic resources and social status.

Kirat/ Rai organization

The Khumbu Kirant Organization unites Rai households in the region, transcending clan and community differences. Functioning as a cooperative, it collects monthly contributions from over 250 households, offering loans and financial aid. It also organizes religious and cultural events to maintain and assert Kirant identity. This collective action not only strengthens community bonds but also reduces dependence on Sherpas, allowing the Rai to exercise autonomy.

Tamang organization

The Phyfulla Tamang Sewa brings together over 80 Tamang households. The organization supports members economically and culturally while reinforcing a collective Tamang identity. It coordinates Tamang festivals, rituals, and events, such as joint participation in the Sherpa-led *Dumji* festival. Members are expected to follow organization rules, and contributions-both financial and material-are required.

Magar and other groups

The Magar Sangh serves a similar purpose, though the Magar population in Lukla is relatively small. The Magars are highly acculturated group in Khumbu but still they are trying to maintain their separate identity through the organization. Due to the small population size Dalit, Newar, Brahmin, Chhetri and Madhesi have no ethnic based organizations but interestingly, they are aligned with government employees and bureaucrats of similar caste backgrounds. This alignment is often based on shared cultural norms and strategic alliances.

Aunique development is the formation of the Sagarmatha Milijuli Samaj in 2022. Unlike other groups, this organization is inclusive of all caste and ethnic groups, primarily representing temporary settlers. It performs similar functions to ethnic organizations but signals a broader desire among diverse individuals to establish collective identity and secure a place in the socio-political landscape in Khumbu.

Micro-power management through ethnic organizations

As previously discussed, numerous caste and ethnic based orgaizations operate in Khumbu. While these groups may appear to function as voluntary associations formed to support the social and economic well-being of their members, a deeper ethnographic analysis- what Geertz (1973) calls a "thick description" reveals their embeddedness in local power dynamics.

These organizations reinforce ethnic identity by collectively organizing and performing rituals, festivals, and rites. Beyond maintaining culture, these shared performances symbolize collective strength and demonstrate the community's capacity to assert power and negotiate its position within multi-ethnic landscape.

For instance, the Tamang's Fyafulla Sewa has empowered Tamang members by providing financial suppport to the poor and enabling small business development. As one Tamang informant explained:

> Fyafulla Samaj collects money regularly from the members. The organization offers low interest loans to help members start of expand business. Membership is required to take loans. In cases of social and cultural hardship, we also provide small grants as decided by the executive committee (Personal communication with S. Tamang, October-10, 2015).

One vivid example of micro power management through such organizations is seen in the context of *Dumji* festival, a significant Buddhist ritual in Lukla and other parts

of Khumbu. Previously, only Sherpa households sponsored the festival, but due to rising consts, Sherpas began encouraging Tamang households to co-sponsor the event. Each year, three households-two Sherpa and one Tamang share the cost of organizing *Dumji*, which can exceed 2.5 million NPR.

Sherpa initially criticized Tamang households for attending the festival without contributing financially. As one Sherpa informant recounted:

> Tamangs people always come and ate during *Dumji* but didn't share the costs. One year, I gathered all the Tamang and proposed that they should also contribute. They were ashamed but agreed to contribute. Since then, they've taken an active role in *Dumji* (Personal communication with Mr. Sherpa, October-10, 2015).

This scenario illustrates how Sherpas exercised symbolic and social pressure to shift the burden of participation. Yet, through the process, the Tamang used their collective organization to not only participate, but also claim recognition, status, and shared ownership of an important cultural institution. Thus, reciprocity through organization became a means of negotiating power in the Buddhist sphere of Lukla.

The Sherpa community itself is internally stratified, as reflected in the separation between Sherpa Kiduk and Ghyang Kharka organizations. While the former includes long established local Sherpas, the latter comprises Sherpas who migrated from other parts of Nepal. These organizational divisions underscore psychological and political distinctions between "insider" and "migrant" Sherpas. Tensions have surfaced during festivals such as Lhosar and *Dumji*, where migrant Sherpas initially refused to participate in Lukla's celebrations, opting instead to celebrate in their original villages like Namche or Khumjung. One local Sherpa explained:

> Sherpas who didn't join *Dumji* were told.' You earn money here, why don't you join the celebration here too? If you don't want to participate, go earn in your own village.' Eventually, the migrants were compelled to take part in Lukla's festivals (Personal communication with a local Sherpa, October-10, 2015).

This illustrates how local Sherpas exerted soft power to enforce cultural integration and protect their dominant position. At the same time, the resistance of migrant Sherpas through non-participation is a subtle assertion of autonomy, aligning with Ortner's (1999) understanding of resistance by the less powerful.

The Khumbu Kirant/ Rai organization integrated diffrent Rais people under an umbrella. The organization represents another powerful model of ethnic unity. Though Rai communities are diverse in language, culture, ritual and clan , they have united

under a single organizational umbrella due to demographic constraints. This unity serves both symbolic and strategic fuctions, preserving identity while enhancing political leverage.

The Khumbu Kirant/ Rai organziation has social, cultural, economic and political functions. The social, cultural and economic funciton is visible but the functions of power and politics is almost hidden. They exhibit it whenever they needed. Taking part in social and cultural ceremonies and financing for the poor and needy are some of the visible works of the organization. These functions of the organization has brought Rai/ Kirant people together under the same organization. The organization acts as protesting the dominant party whenever they wanted to supress them especially in access on natural resources like forest. I found some ideological resentment between the Rai and Sherpa in Lukla bazaar, as Mr. Rai stated that 'Amro lai masu bhannu ra bhote lai manchhe bhhannu yeutai ho' (neither placenta meat and bhote- Sherpa a man).

The 'Magar Sangh' plays a similar role, though its visibility is limited by the Magars' small populaiton in Lukla. The Magars are united under the ' Magar sangh' which provide them a psychological reassurance and strengthens their group cohesion.

Finally, I argue that these various ethnic based organizations are not only established for their mutual help and cooperation. Of course, these organizations support every member in social, cultural and economic problems. More than this the organizations exercise the power and authority within and outside of their own caste and ethnicity in micro- level for making the power balance.

Conclusions

Tourism has significantly increased the frequency and depth of interactions among the various caste and ethnic groups residing in the Khumbu region. These communities are inter-connected not only through shared geography and cultural contexts but most notably through tourism related occupations. While individuals primarily engage in their own economic pursuits, they inevitably drawn into relationships with people from other caste and ethnic backgrounds. It is impossible to remain confined within one's own community in daily life. Such interactions, however, are not uniformly harmonious; they can be both cooperative and conflictual, depending on context and power dynamics.

This reality is evident in Lukla Bazar, where residents of diverse caste and ethnic backgrounds navigate a complex social landscape. Each group Sherpa and non-Sherpa

alike is conscious of its identity, status, and relative authority. Sherpas continue to represent the dominant segment in Lukla, while other groups often experience marginalization. In response, these groups have become increasingly aware of their social positioning and have begun to organize themselves through ethnic based organizations.

These ethnic organizations serve multiple functions: they advocate against domination, foster community empowerment, and, crucially, help mobilize economic resources. Many have come to understand that economic capital is central to social power and to asserting one's position within local hierarchies.

It is unsurprising that local Sherpas pride in their status as native residents and assert greater access to natural and social resources. As indigenous inhabitants, they claim historical and cultural legitimacy. However, it is equally valid for non-Sherpa residents both migrant Sherpas and other ethnic groups to demand equal access and representation. Their formation of caste and ethnicity based organizations stems from a shared drive to assert identity, secure resources, and exercise influence in the public sphere.

These organizations have enabled the micro-level circulation of power- as seen, for example, in the coordination of *Dumji* festival celebrations. Ethnic associations also negotiate inter group relationships, fostering both cooperation and contestation. Through strategic bargaining, resource sharing, and symbolic participation, they balance authority both within and between groups. Ultimately, these organizations play a pivotal role in managing interethnic relations and identity politics in contemporary Lukla.

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