

FOLK THEATRE ELEMENTS : A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the essential elements of folk theatre that shape its folk dramaturgical form. These elements are explored not only as artistic techniques but also as carriers of oral tradition, collective memory, and cultural identity. The study argues that folk theatre's improvisational style, integration of ritual symbolism, and emphasis on communal interaction produce a holistic mode of performance that contrasts with Eurocentric theatrical models. Methodologically, employs interdisciplinary methods including participant, observation, direct engagement, and both emotional and physical involvement and AI tool to capture the lived realities of folk theatre elements within its socio-cultural context. This integrated approach ensures a robust investigation of folk theatre elements while contributing to wider debates on tradition, cultural sustainability, and technological mediation in performance studies.

KEY WORDS: Folk theatre, element, theatrical, performance, cultural, community.

INTRODUCTION

The folk theatre is a communal theatrical performance including drama, dance, music, ballad, opera as well as many more open ritual and cultural performances, which is performed by the local community to gain blessings from their ancestral gods and goddesses at a public place on certain time period (Fieldwork, 2025)². Often, the folk theatre is based on the traditional issue that represents ancestral livelihood of the society. Folk theatre has a traditional norms and value and performed as traditional communal value but folk theatre is not only traditional performance, it also is performance of knowledge and wisdom. Folk theatre has cultural "norms, values and beliefs" (Rai 8). Therefore, folk theatre is begun, performed and ended with norms and value. Folk theatre reflects an expression of cultural heritage, encapsulating the values, beliefs, and traditions of specific communities. Folk theatre has oral tradition and is also transformed one generation to another generation since its origin. Folk theatre has a simple performance although; this folk theatre is enthusiastically performed by local community with acting, dance, song, musical instruments, and the costume because this performance is their ancestral tradition. Folk theatre is not well furnished and facilitated like the modern facilitated drama because folk theatre is designed and performed with their own local and natural resources to set up a stage, as these are based on the folk society. As an art form, folk theatre is not only a medium for entertainment but also a role for cultural preservation and communal identity because folk theatre has a dynamic form that incorporates various artistic elements, each contributing to its overall narrative and performative

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² The fieldwork was conducted by researcher at Sakh Village, Musikot Rural Municipality West Rukum, Nepal, between 14 and 29 January 2025.

structure. However folk theatre is not only traditional theatrical arts but it is also the cultural "high arts" to the popular arts, including live arts performed in all venues and non-live arts through all forms of mass media (McCarthy et al. 5). However, folk theatre distinguishes itself through its emphasis on communal participation and cultural practices. Therefore, this article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the core elements that define folk theatre, exploring how these components interact to produce a cohesive and impactful theatrical experience. By identifying these elements, the article seeks to deepen our understanding of folk theatre as both a cultural artifact and an art form.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a conceptual framework grounded in folk theatrical studies to examine the constitutive elements of folk theatre. These elements are approached not merely as artistic devices but as cultural signifiers that embody communal values, beliefs, and identities. Methodologically, this article combines an interdisciplinary methods—participant observation, direct engagement, and both emotional and physical involvement to capture the lived realities of folk performance within its socio-cultural context. Such an ethnographic orientation allows for an in-depth understanding of how specific elements are embodied and transmitted across generations. A close discursive-analytical approach is adopted, integrating existing scholarship with the researcher's experience, thereby bridging theoretical perspectives with practical engagement. In addition, interdisciplinary methods are employed to explore how globalization shapes and transforms localized theatrical elements without erasing their cultural distinctiveness. Finally, artificial intelligence (AI) tools are also integrated to enhance methodological rigor by enabling systematic qualitative analysis, identifying recurring performance patterns, and validating observational data. This interdisciplinary approach ensures a strong investigation of folk theatre elements while contributing to wider debates on tradition, sustainability, and technological mediation in performance studies.

ELEMENTS

Folk theatre evokes its reliance on oral narratives, often derived from myths, legends, local histories, and spiritual belief systems. It explores as a dynamic medium for expressing philosophical values and communal beliefs. It emphasizes themes such as justice, harmony, moral conduct, spirituality, and resilience, functioning not merely as entertainment but as a living cultural practice that transmits folk knowledge and sustains collective identity. However, folk theatre employs "several key elements that distinguish it from classical and contemporary theatrical forms" (Puma 90). As Aristotle's concept, main elements of theatre are plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. These elements offer a useful framework for understanding the structure and performance of folk theatre. Moreover, Perry Cornel's theories of narrative structure—emphasizing the significance of the beginning, middle, and end—provide a valuable lens through which to analyze the flow and coherence of folk theatre narratives. Not only these concepts but also folk theatre has multiple elements— including—title, creator, plot, purpose, character, performers, acting, dance, music, dialogue, linguistic style, conflict, costume, prop, setting, stage, lighting, audience, and organizer, which are integral to the authenticity and success of folk theatre. This article contrasts these theoretical models with the specific cultural practices of folk theatre to provide a comprehensive understanding of its theatrical elements.

TITLE

Folk title is a cultural introductory part, which is can be found in the folk theatre. The tile of folk theatre is derived from the central theme, or events, or a main character, but it must be concise, resonant, and reflective. It is taken from community either in direct or symbolic modes. Direct title introduces the subject matter, while symbolic titles evoke deeper cultural, moral, or philosophical meanings as Chinese *Shaoju*. It offers illustrative examples and carries symbolic significance, highlighting societal challenges and moral dilemmas. It clarifies its objectives, illuminate themes, foreground character roles, and frame audience interpretation, functioning as both narrative signposts and cultural artefacts. Therefore, Folk titles reinforce the integral relationship between form, content, and socio-cultural context, which is delivered by creator.

CREATOR

Folk creator is a communal theatre master, who creates folk theatre and includes social, political, moral, linguistic, and philosophical issues. Folk creator can be based on traditional community because folk theatre is designed by their experience and necessity. They can be from any gender, age, cast and community of society but they must know social norms and value of the society. While creating folk text, creator deeply meditates, emotionally feels and crafts theatrical events, finally uses theatrical concepts and imagination. They assert communal experience, feelings, emotions, the actions of life and so on in the theatre. They extend beyond the artistic to include the transmission of communal values, wisdom, and histories. Therefore, the Folk creators are not only the creator but they are also cultural mediators, who shape narratives to reflect collective memory and explores folk theatre plot.

PLOT

A folk plot is a sequence of communal events, which are contained with primordial issues such as historical, mythological, or religious themes and so on. It is based on the communal stories and symbols, which express deeply with the audience but its re-crafted plot losses cultural authenticity, diminishing the event's connection to the cultural and moral structure. It can be different types of "plot" (Diwas 26-28). However folk theatre plot is performed as the original text because this plot is not only performed with the communal events but it is also performances of identity, knowledge, wisdom and philosophy. Therefore, the plots made aware of the audience and raised a communal issue because they are watched in a reformed way by the audiences, who are decided whether the folk theatre is performed properly or not. If the folk theatre plot is not designed properly as cultural and cultural value and norms, the audience criticizes on events, which are already familiar to folk society and acknowledged by audience, who already know the theatrical theme, subject, plot, purpose and so on.

PURPOSE

Folk purpose is thematic expression and collective representation. It can be dimensional folk theatrical purpose but the main Folk purpose is to worship ancestors, gain blessing from their ancestors, and their cultural continuity tradition. Unlike modern theatre, folk theatre has its own purpose within communal life, employing oral narratives, music, dance, and symbolic action to communicate meaning to a wider audience however folk theatre explores dimensional purpose—social, cultural, and philosophical domains. At an aesthetic level, folk theatre seeks to create a coherent artistic expression, which integrates narrative, character, music, dance, and ritual,

transforming ordinary experiences into symbolic and engaging forms. Folk theatre conveys lessons about virtue, justice, and responsibility through characters. It explores the tensions and aspirations of everyday life while simultaneously strengthening communal bonds, often employing humor and satire to critique social injustice. Not only social purpose, folk theatre preserves myths, traditions, and collective memory, while also dramatizing the deeper dualities of human existence—order and chaos, joy and suffering, life and death. Finally, folk theatre fulfills an entertainment purpose, captivating audiences with humor, music, and dramatic action, ensuring that its social and moral messages are delivered in memorable and enjoyable forms.

CHARACTER

Folk theatre character is cultural actors, who are designed as story of folk theatre. They are also categorized as their cultural significance like divine characters, legendary characters, social characters, trickster characters, allegorical characters, antagonists characters and many more other character. They can be both types as human and nonhuman being from any genre, age and community but both kinds of characters communicates as human being and develop plot of the folk theatre. Human being characters can be as people while nonhuman being character can be as animal birds, monkey, river, sky, earth and many more. However, they assume diverse social roles and genres, acting as both mediators and presenters of the enactment, guiding the audience through the unfolding events and advancing the narrative purpose. They embody conflict, interacting with the dramatic structure to communicate moral, social, and spiritual tensions. Their expression incorporates dialogue, acting, music, dance, and ritual gestures, producing vivid representations of individual and communal life. They appear as collective entities, reflecting the social fabric of the community, while consistently symbolizing essential aspects of human experience. Their performance is contextually shaped by time, circumstance, costume, language, religion, ritual, culture, tradition, and custom, and dialogue serves as a performative medium that conveys narrative, emotion, and cultural meaning from the beginning to the end of the performance. These characters are distinguished by exaggerated gestures, culturally specific costumes and props, and a flexible, improvisational performance style, which allows adaptation to diverse audiences, occasions, and socio-cultural contexts.

PERFORMERS

Folk performers are local actors, who can be from any age, sex, caste, and community but they must know and have the ability of theatrical events. They act as their ancestors but their acting is based in a communal way, which needs a leader, who guides other actors for better performance with acting, dance and music. They often embody larger-than-life characters, including gods, heroes, and mythical beings. Unlike in modern theatre, they are not merely actors; they are knowledgeable and dedicated persons, who are seen as embodiments of collective cultural identity. Therefore they are rooted in the community's values, and their ability to portray these characters authentically is central to the success of the theatrical performance and performers, perform folk theatres with acting, dance, music and many more.

ACTING

Folk acting is a cultural acting, which represents collective real life of society. Unlike modern acting, folk acting is inherently participatory, improvisational, and rooted in oral tradition.

It takes a local place within communal settings such as ritual ceremonies, seasonal festivals, life-cycle events, and public gatherings, and is characterized by its strong connection to local myths, customs, and worldviews. It employs both internal and external techniques. Internal acting involves the performer's deep emotional engagement with the character's inner life, while external acting relies on expressive body language and stylized movements to convey meaning (Puma 92). Through this dual approach, folk acting creates a vivid and immersive emotion for both performers and audiences. These emotions bond to the performers and the society. Folk acting transcends mere representation; it is an act of cultural embodiment and transmission. It portrays deities, ancestors, historical figures, or symbolic archetypes, thereby reinforcing communal values, cosmological beliefs, and ethical norms. The boundary between actor and audience is often porous, allowing for collective participation and reciprocal meaning-making. In essence, folk acting plays as a vital role for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, functioning not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a dynamic mode of pedagogy, social commentary, and spiritual practice, which are interlinked with dance.

DANCE

Folk dance is a cultural body movement with a musical rhythm. It is based on a sequence of steps and rhythmic body movement, which has a combination of body, movement, space and time. Folk dance is originated and developed from ritual performance, which involves folk tunes, songs, lyrics, verses, and instruments. Folk dance is performed by local dancers in the folk theatre with an artistic form to share ideas, feelings, emotions, and expressions, which makes emotional to the audience. Therefore, folk dance is an expressive form of movement that is intertwined with the rhythm of the narrative. It plays as both a narrative tool and an emotional outlet, enabling the performers to convey emotions, actions, and stories through choreographed movements. Folk dance often incorporates elements of cultural rituals, celebrations, and life events, and its movements are deeply symbolic. By synchronizing the physicality of dance with the music and acting, the folk theatre becomes more dynamic and emotionally charged, offering the audience a multisensory experience, which is interlinked with folk music.

MUSIC

Folk music is an ancestral rhythmic tune, which is designed culturally using folk lyrics, folk verses, and folk tunes. It involves songs, lyrics, and musical instrument, which attract and makes emotional to the audience. It has a "cultural musical instruments" (Bandhu 262-264). This musical instrument is played with dialogue in the folk theatre. Therefore, folk music is a cornerstone of folk theatre, providing both emotional depth and narrative structure. It is played with cultural local instruments and is deeply rooted in the community's musical heritage. The role of music in folk theatre extends beyond mere accompaniment; it helps to set the mood, underscore theatrical moments, and enhance the storytelling process. Folk music often contains lyrics that are poetic, philosophical, and symbolic, contributing to the thematic complexity. Coin of melodies and rhythms in folk theatre are not only artistic choices but also cultural markers that communicate shared values and historical narratives. Together with music, folk theatre is also coined with folk dialogue.

DIALOGUE

Folk dialogue is a dialectical communication way, which are created by local actor and used in the folk theatre. It is delivered with rhythm and cadence, highlighting its quality. Generally the folk dialogue is used with a performative language and but sometime it also is delivered textual language. Consequently, this dialogue is perfectly delivered in the form of proverbs, which are used as an objective tool of the theatre. However, folk dialogues can be individual or communal. The folk dialogue is ended and joined as a conjunction with dialectical communication. There is an philosophical organic lyrical stanza, which lures the audience. Therefore, this folk dialogue is highly composed and stylized and often incorporates proverbs, rhymes, and lyrical exchanges. The folk dialogue plays multiple functions: it conveys the moral or philosophical underpinnings of the story, reinforces cultural values, and strengthens the thematic structure of the performance. The use of allegorical language further enriches the dialogue, imbuing it with layers of meaning that are recognized by the audience. Even this folk dialogue is interlinked with linguistic style.

LINGUISTIC STYLE

Folk theatre linguistic style is colloquial language, which reflects local culture, traditions, and social values. It has organic rhythmic and musical qualities, such as chants, songs, or poetic intonations, enhancing memorability and emotional resonance. It involves symbolic language as well as sacred language. It uses everyday speech, local idioms, and proverbs to make the performance accessible and relatable to the audience. It interacts between characters, generating dramatic tension, humor, and social critique, while narrative language allows characters to recount myths, legends, or personal reflections, providing context and depth to the story. Mimetic language imitates real-life speech and behaviors, often exaggerating them for comedic or didactic purposes, thereby entertaining the audience while reflecting societal norms. These linguistic styles are combined into a hybrid linguistic form, integrating vernacular, musical, and symbolic elements to create a performance that is simultaneously engaging, instructive, and culturally resonant. Therefore, folk theatre not only entertains but also preserves cultural memory, reinforces communal identity, and sustains oral traditions. This folk linguistic style is interlinked with folk conflict.

CONFLICT

Folk conflict is a traditional tension between more than two ideas, which is used in the folk theatre. It explores in two primary forms: external conflict, expressed through physical actions, confrontations, and symbolic struggles; and internal conflict, revealed through psychological dilemmas, emotional transformations, and moral choices. External conflict often dominates the rising action; while internal conflict intensifies at the climax, driving the narrative toward resolution. Through these struggles, folk theatre clarifies the nature of characters—human and non-human alike—while simultaneously dramatizing broader social, moral, and cosmic tensions. Thus, folk theatre conflict explores not only as an artistic expression but also as a cultural expression of human existence and integrates character, story, and society into a unified performance. This folk conflict is interlinked with folk costume.

COSTUME

The folk costume is cultural dress, which is used with the wearing by the actor on the stage from the beginning to the end of the folk theatre. It provides symbolic structures, which identify characters and establish the cultural context. Therefore, folk costume represents a social status, gender, and the emotional or symbolic attributes of a character. For example, the attire of a deity or hero may be elaborate and ornate, while the costumes of ordinary characters may be simpler but still rooted in cultural norms. Folk costumes visualize a significant role in setting the tone and visual aesthetics, contributing to the overall cultural narrative that the performance seeks to convey. In the modern theatre, costume expresses the psychology of the performer (Kakchhapati 53). Folk costume gives the cultural sense of persona, nation, period and environment. It creates, develops, establishes and helps to build the characterization. To establish the character's identity and circumstance of art, folk costume and its style are needed in the folk theatre, which express a psychological feeling and erosion of character. However, to perform perfectly, the leader must study the effect of each costume on each other in these various static situations. In all theatrical performance, "all the actors should wear their complete costumes and appear on the stage individually, then together with related characters, and appear on the stage individually, then together with related characters, and then finally together with the entire cast" (Dean and Carra 303-304). Therefore, the folk costume is the visual identity of a human being, which explores communal identity and indicates newness, which is an interconnected folk prop.

PROP

The folk prop is cultural goods, which are used in the folk theatre. It is based on local products, which represents the related community. These objects can range from everyday items to ritualistic tools, and each prop is imbued with cultural meaning. For example, weapons may symbolize power, while offerings could represent spiritual devotion. Folk props create a tangible connection between the audience and the narrative, grounding the performance in the material world while enhancing its symbolic and emotional impact. Therefore, folk props are used to make the theatrical richness. However, in the modern theatre, the props are demarcation of goods, pieces of wood, foods, pieces of vegetables, and electrical goods (Parker and Wolf 317-321). But in the folk theatre, prop visualizes a realistic life, makes it prosperous, and helps to show real-life events. These props establish the artistic performance, which feel owned by the audience and props make setting.

SETTING

The folk setting is a local environment, which makes richness folk theatre. It also reflects cultural events as organic ancestral, political, social, and religious, nation, period, time, and situation and so on. It is not merely passive circumstances but active elements that ground the performance in a particular time, place, and community. In modern theater, setting is tied up with human behavior, as it manifests through spatial and temporal dimensions (Koirala 17-18). But in folk theatre, setting often emerges through social events that serve as conduits for performance, linking thematic expression with communal consciousness. They engage with realities, allowing the performance to resonate with the lived experiences. Thus, folk theatre uses folk setting as ensuring cultural relevance and facilitating collective reflection on societal conditions, which are seen on the folk stage.

STAGE

The folk stage is a cultural open stage, where folk theatres are performed enthusiastically for begging blessing from their ancestral gods and goddesses. These "cultural stage is the place where the performance occurs- in homes, temples, public halls, and community centers" (Bell 131). It explores living being because folk theatre is the way of the livelihood and activities of life. Folk stage is built communally in order to converse the tradition of the folk stage. Folk stages are visualized by lighting. Therefore, the folk stage is culturally a flexible, often open-air space that emphasizes the communal nature of the performance. Unlike modern theatres with fixed stages, folk stages can be adapted to various environments, such as village, religious sites, a house, garden, temple, square or resting place, field, pass, in front of the monument hut bazaar, carnival, etc but depending on its theatrical nature, the folk stage can be often symbolic, reinforcing the connection between the performance and the community's cultural or spiritual life.

LIGHTING

Folk lighting is traditional lighting, which is created from local resources like using the light of the sun, moon stars, butter light, torch, bonfire, etc. Folk lights visualize the events. While theatrical performance, the sunlight is used for the day time, but butter lamp, torch, bonfire etc are used during the night time (Puma 95). This folk lighting is often minimal and natural, relying on daylight, fire, or lanterns to illuminate the performance. Normally folk lighting may not be as controlled as in modern theatre; folk lighting plays a symbolic purpose. It marks transitions between scenes, highlights important moments, and helps to create the atmosphere of the performance. The play of folk light and shadow can also convey themes of spirituality, mystery, or danger, enhancing the emotional engagement of the audience.

AUDIENCE

Folk audiences are the local people, who are participated in a group and watch folk theatres. They can be from any age like child to adult, any sex like male or female and any cast and community. Folk audiences play different roles like management team and performers. Sometimes, folk audiences are involved as audience and sometimes they involved as actors and perform as real actors. They not only are actively participated from their local land but also from the world. For those, who wait years to participate in the ritual festival or come all the way from different parts of the world to participate in such ritual festivals, the experience itself becomes the process of identity formation, and the participants collect very important subjective experiences (Schechner 70). Therefore, the folk audience is not a passive observer; rather, it plays an active role in shaping the theatrical performance. Sometime audience may interact with the performers, offering responses, and cues, or even participating in the performance itself. This interaction reinforces the communal aspect of folk theatre, where the boundaries between actors and audiences are often blurred. The audience's collective memory and cultural knowledge shape the performance's interpretation, ensuring that the event resonates deeply within the community.

ORGANIZER

The folk organizer is a community manager, who manages the theatrical date and events. Generally, folk organizers can be community however sometimes they can also be a person or an institution. Therefore, this folk organizer plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth execution of the theatrical events. Often a community leader or a cultural steward, the organizer oversees

logistical details, coordinates performers, and ensures that the necessary resources—such as costumes, props, and space—are available. The organizer also plays as a guardian of cultural authenticity, ensuring that the theatrical performance remains true to cultural practices while accommodating the needs of the audience.

These above-mentioned elements are basic components of folk theatre, however, they though distinct, are highly interdependent. Each element contributes to the overall theatrical coherence. The interplay between these elements ensures that folk theatre remains a living, evolving art form that continues to resonate with audiences across generations. Moreover, these elements highlight the collaborative nature of folk theatre, where community participation and cultural memory are central to the performance's success.

CONCLUSION

Folk theatre is a combine traditional performance of music, dance, acting, visual arts, and theatrical performance into a coherent expression of communal identity. Folk theatre plays not merely as a form of entertainment but as a living repository of cultural memory and societal values. Simultaneously, folk theatre explores the transmission of ancestral knowledge systems, philosophical wisdom, and historical narratives. Not only this but also folk theatre is communal ethos, participatory nature, and integration of performative elements. The elements of folk theatre reveal a performative system that is both cultural and dynamic in modern form. Exploring on oral tradition, improvisational techniques, and collective memory, these theatres are not confined to a fixed script but are shaped by the evolving cultural context of the community. Furthermore, folk theatre elements what theorists refer to as "cultural and transformative" art, wherein each folk theatre reaffirms cultural continuity while simultaneously adapting to contemporary socio-cultural realities. Its reliance on symbolic language, stylized movements, and cultural musical instruments elevates the theatrical performance beyond mere audience, positioning it as an immersive, affective experience that engages both performers and audiences in a shared cultural and ritual performance. Despite its informality and lack of modern theatrical tools, folk theatre achieves remarkable narrative complexity and emotional depth. Folk theatre's aesthetic and performative dimensions are skilled of expressing universal themes of morality, origin, spirituality, and human experience. Therefore, folk theatre highlights an essential role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage while also providing a platform for cultural expression and continuity. In summing up, as a performative tradition sustained by collective participation and intergenerational transmission, this theatre represents the ethos of a community and reinforces its cultural identity and sovereignty. Therefore by identifying the core elements of folk theatre, this article explores a depth understanding of significance as both a cultural artifact and an enduring art form in the global embroidery of folk theatre traditions.

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Political Corruption as a Systemic Issue: Its Impact on Poverty, Inequality, and Development in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines the profound impact of political corruption on Nepal's socioeconomic development, a landlocked country struggling with pervasive corruption. The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive, evidence-based discussion, highlighting how corruption undermines development indicators, social metrics, and erodes public trust. The methodology employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a qualitative analysis of prominent corruption scandals with a quantitative analysis of socioeconomic indicators and public expenditure data to establish a correlation between corruption and development outcomes. Significant findings reveal that corruption is a systemic issue, not merely a symptom, that exacerbates poverty and inequality by diverting resources from the populace. While governmental and non-governmental anti-corruption initiatives exist, their effectiveness is limited by a lack of political will and deeply ingrained patronage networks. The paper concludes that tackling corruption is a fundamental prerequisite for Nepal to achieve genuine and sustainable development, safeguarding its democratic future.

Keywords: Governance, Inequality, Nepal, Political corruption, Poverty, Public expenditure, Socioeconomic development

Introduction

Political corruption, the misuse of public offices for private gain, is a serious problem worldwide, but one that developing countries struggle to address in particular. In such contexts, it has the capacity to seriously challenge systems of governance, reduce public confidence in state apparatuses and ultimately hinder socioeconomic development (Suvedi, 2024, pp. 39-58). Nepal, a landlocked country in South Asia, would be interesting to study. It has grown economically, at least relatively speaking, over the last twenty years, but still scores low on global governance indices. It is known to be one of the most corrupt countries in Asia (Shah, 2019, pp. 273-292).

The impact of this corruption is far-reaching, extending beyond the polity to encompass economic growth and social justice throughout the country (Mumtaz & Smith, 2021, pp. 27-33). A variety of structural factors, including the country's political system, low public office salaries, and a lack of effective detection and punishment measures, are cited as contributing to the persistence of political corruption in Nepal. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to examine the intricate and multifaceted relationship between political corruption and Nepal's socioeconomic dynamics.

Background of the Paper

Political corruption in Nepal, including public money embezzlement, misprocurement, and favouritism, is a chronic problem that pervades Nepalese society at all levels of

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government, resulting in large sums of money being spent on bribes. Even though the nation democratised in 1990 and became a federal republic in 2007, this has done little to end pervasive corruption during the ongoing hostilities for more than a decade. Although some reforms have been enacted or blocked, corruption continues to permeate public life. This has been particularly severe since 2015, marked by a lack of fiscal discipline and the misuse of public funds in the aftermath of the earthquake. Public contractility was misused, and poverty increased, along with inequality, highlighting the complex relationship between corruption, poverty, and inequality (Jarvis, 2020, pp. 165-189).

This paper analyses the effects of political corruption on socio-economic development in Nepal, with a primary focus on poverty, inequality, and public expenditure. It is essential to understand the political transition in Nepal and its post-conflict policy implications in order to assess the status of democratisation and good governance. Combating corruption is crucial because it is a dynamic phenomenon and hurts public governance, which results in inefficient provisioning of public goods, misuse of resources and retardation of economic development.

Significance of the Paper

The continuing hump of political corruption in Nepal has a devastating effect on the path of development. Despite a massive amount of foreign aid over the years, it is still locked in vicious circles of corruption, which have paralysed development efforts (Suvedi, 2024:39 58). When public office is abused for private purposes, the result is a less transparent, less responsible, and less responsive government, as well as greater inequalities in access to the opportunities represented by development. The affluent disproportionately appropriate these resources, further deepening socioeconomic disparities. The failure to address corruption disproportionately impacts Nepal's most vulnerable and neglected segments due to ineffective governance. This research aims to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based discussion on the relationships between political corruption and socioeconomic development, utilising empirical evidence from Nepal to illustrate how corruption undermines development indicators and social metrics (Acharya & Scott, 2022, pp. 64-77).

Research Questions

This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How has political corruption in Nepal evolved across different political regimes (pre-democratic, democratic, and federal parliamentary)?
2. What are the specific socioeconomic effects of political corruption on poverty, inequality, and public expenditure in Nepal?
3. What are the key governmental, non-governmental, and international initiatives to combat political corruption, and what are the challenges and limitations of these efforts?

Methodology

The paper employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a qualitative analysis of case studies with a review of existing literature, policy documents, and empirical data. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of political corruption and its far-reaching impacts. The qualitative component involves an in-depth examination of prominent corruption scandals in Nepal to reveal the underlying mechanisms and contexts. A review of both national and international anti-corruption efforts supplements

this. The quantitative component includes an analysis of key socioeconomic indicators and public expenditure data to establish the correlation between corruption and development outcomes. This methodology enables a nuanced exploration of how corruption, as a

प्राज्ञिक विमर्श, वर्ष ७, अङ्क, १४, २०८२ असोज, ISSN 2676-1297

collective action dilemma, undermines social coordination and adversely influences both economic performance and social cohesion.

Theoretical Concepts

The theoretical foundation of this paper is rooted in the understanding that political corruption is not merely a deviation from an ideal state, but a complex, systemic issue deeply embedded in a nation's institutional and cultural fabric (Menocal & Taxell, 2015). We draw on two key theoretical perspectives. First, the classical principal-agent theory frames corruption as a problem of information asymmetry, where public officials (the agents) exploit their authority for personal gain at the expense of the public (the principals) (Amundsen, 1999). This framework helps explain specific acts of grand and petty corruption. Second, and more critically for the context of Nepal, we integrate modern theoretical frameworks that account for systemic corruption. This perspective emphasises how political corruption can become a socially accepted norm, sustained by political instability, weak institutional accountability, and a post-conflict environment (Jarvis, 2020, pp. 165–189). It highlights the importance of analysing not just the individuals involved in corruption, but also the broader sociopolitical structures that enable it. By combining these theories, the paper provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyse how corruption has become so deeply entrenched in Nepal, creating a “collective action dilemma” that undermines both economic performance and social cohesion (Minto & Trincanato, 2021, pp. 21–44).

Findings and Discussions

Conceptualising Socioeconomic Development

‘Socioeconomic development’ is a complex, multi-layered construct, and it is regarded differently from different perspectives, comprising social, political, and economic equity and sustainability domains at all levels. Hence, whereas in early development progress was defined primarily in terms of wealth or economic growth, advanced economies define progress primarily in social and human terms, adding governance, poverty reduction, equity, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion to the discussion. Development is premised on gradual and sustainable change, as various theories advocate distinct viewpoints regarding how it can be accomplished. For example, some scholars argue that governance and the effectiveness of institutions are vital for socioeconomic advancement, while others advocate for radical transformations in socio-political structures (Hassan & Zeb, 2021, pp. 1-35). Development is a multifaceted concept, evolving from a sole focus on economic growth (measured by GDP) to encompassing poverty eradication, reducing inequality, promoting good governance, achieving gender equality, ensuring environmental sustainability, and upholding human rights. These broader aims are pursued through globally recognised development goals. Historically, many developing nations, including Nepal, experienced underdevelopment and poverty stemming from exploitative colonial policies that established them as exporters of raw materials and importers of manufactured goods (Bhattacharyya, 2017). Consequently, in the post-independence era, development strategies in formerly colonised nations focused on industrialisation, requiring the mobilisation of capital, skilled labour, and technology. However, the scarcity of capital led these newly independent

countries to seek assistance from donor agencies, which in turn shaped development policies and fostered a donor-driven development model. Specifically in Nepal, development concerns prioritise social inclusion, equity, empowerment of marginalised groups, good governance, and the establishment of effective and accountable institutions, alongside the imperative of economic growth (Sharma, 2011, pp. 95-115).

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Linkages between Political Corruption and Socioeconomic Development

Nepal's persistent issues of underdevelopment, structural inequality, and poverty highlight a significant relationship between political corruption and socioeconomic progress. Despite receiving international development assistance, the nation remains trapped in a cycle of political corruption that hinders development efforts (Suvedi, 2024, pp. 39–58). Political corruption involves the misuse of public office for personal gain, which reduces transparency and accountability within governance structures. This pervasive corruption widens the gap between the rich and the poor, as it allows unequal access to resources that would otherwise be used for development. These resources are seized by those who have at their disposal the power of domination, even over life itself. Analysis of policy documents, reports, and recent chapters has revealed that political corruption in Nepal negatively impacts development indicators, social inequalities, and poverty measures (Acharya & Scott, 2022, pp. 64–77).

Corruption siphons scarce resources from low-income individuals and rural communities, allowing elites to exploit public development programs. Resources are pillaged from state coffers in corrupt systems, leaving development institutions ineffective and development pledges a sham. Corruption in public procurement and education budgets undermines developmental aspirations, fueling social disparities and poverty. Inequality is now seen as a multifaceted social structure of which economic measures are only one dimension.

The continuation of their misery cannot simply be attributed to a lack of growth, but to the system of global capitalism that standardises the measure while ranking differentials. This system-wide corruption of political officials compounds the disempowerment of resources for the disadvantaged and deepens social inequality and poverty. Although some have posited that corruption may be pro-growth in the short term, it is more accurately characterised as being anti-socioeconomic in its outcomes (e.g., income inequality and public good investment). Corruption is thus a prisoner's dilemma in which cooperation with the law of the land by everyone would be beneficial to all for both economic and social reasons. It serves as a means by which the factions cut into this shared public good, the promotion of economic and social rights.

Corruption is defined as the use of public positions for personal gain (for example, private misuse of public funds), which not only wastes resources but also misdirects them, directly impacting and undermining the quality of services delivered to the people, especially those who are poor and in rural areas. This weakens the norms of fairness and responsibility that poor people need for their own development. According to the national household survey of Nepal, corruption costs on average 31%, with adverse consequences for education and teacher training. The lack of action on corruption hits Nepal's worst-off and abused communities hardest, hindered by poor governance. These elements connect political corruption with socio-economic development, enhancing the quality and evidence base of conversation around this issue.

Empirical Evidence from Nepal

Nepal is a relatively small, landlocked country in South Asia, bordered to the north by China and to the south, east and west by India. It was a Hindu Kingdom until 2006, when it became

a secular nation and transformed into a federal democratic republic. Although the transition to democracy has been made, Nepal is plagued by various socio-economic challenges, including poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, that are still prevalent. The expectation is that democracy will enhance development by promoting public participation in decision-making and improving the quality of service delivery. However, the nation has struggled with issues such as rent-seeking behaviours, which include political corruption, embezzlement, and the misappropriation of public resources, ultimately hindering developmental progress. Political

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corruption extends beyond simple 'corruption in politics'; it involves policies, rules, regulations, and actions within the political sphere that contribute to the misallocation of public funds and impede development efforts. In the context of Nepal, political corruption is chiefly associated with the behaviours of elected officials and bureaucrats who exploit and misuse public resources (Budhathoki, 2022, pp. 208–229).

In the 1990s, significant developmental changes were initiated, with a focus on making development plans more participatory and inclusive. This approach aimed to empower local bodies to plan and implement development initiatives effectively. Resources were devolved to these local bodies to promote development; however, the local development situation remains dismal. Local bodies have been mainly non-existent for the majority of the decade following the 2017 elections. Even when they were operational, many were led by uneducated representatives, some of whom had criminal backgrounds. While it is widely recognised that local development has faltered, evaluations tend to be primarily qualitative and anecdotal. The local population often lacks opportunities to express their views on development, highlighting a critical need to elevate popular perspectives on local development issues. Additionally, a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes 'local' within specific social and political contexts is essential. Perspectives on change are often framed through a Western lens, which may not apply to all societies. Accordingly, this text presents an examination of political corruption in local development in Nepal, as perceived by the local populace, supported by empirical evidence that demonstrates how political corruption undermines socioeconomic development (Jarvis, 2020; Shrestha, 2007, pp. 165-189).

Case Studies of Corrupt Practices and Their Effects

The varying effects of corruption on development are discussed through several case studies of corrupt practices in Nepal, highlighting representative examples of the most common corrupt practices. Specific high-profile corruption cases are identified and their impacts on the development process are examined. They are not, however, intended to be comprehensive in all forms of corruption, but rather to depict actual corrupt practices and their impact on development in a vivid manner. The individual cases are portrayed as a story with the underlying purpose of identifying the nature and the conditions of corruption. Aside from describing the cases, the contributions also consider multi-level actors and types of responsibility (government officials, companies, and civil society organisations). Both cases illustrate that corruption is not just about money disappearing, but it is also eroding public trust in government and institutions.

This corrosion is especially detrimental to development, because it needs some fundamental acquiescence by civil society to the legitimacy of government activity. Nepalese cases shed light on the social costs of corruption, which extend far beyond pure pecuniary losses, and on how corruption contributes to inequality, marginalisation, and the weakening of political processes. Corruption in Nepal is a prime example, illustrating how it can undermine an ostensibly democratic system. Finally, the cases are examined comparatively, revealing general trends and insights. Although the case studies are specific to particular corrupt acts,

all deal with development impact areas that are susceptible to corruption. Underlying the case studies is an impetus for reform and systemic transformation. Not only does corruption stifle economic development, but it also erodes the faith and participation of its citizens in the democratic process (Gong & Lau, 2024, pp. 225-230).

Governmental and Non-Governmental Initiatives to Combat Corruption

The fight against corruption requires the concerted efforts of the government, civil society, media, private sector, and citizens at large. Both governmental and non-governmental

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organisations in Nepal have been taking initiatives to combat corruption in recent years. Many experts in the field have emphasised the importance of awareness and education in the fight against corruption. Ensuring transparency and accountability in governance is a challenging and complicated task in the Nepalese context. However, it is possible if all stakeholders develop a comprehensive understanding of corruption and collectively take action against it. This will help minimise the risk of corruption rather than eliminate it, as complete eradication of corruption is highly unrealistic (Galtung, 1998, pp. 105-128).

Governmental initiatives encompass laws and policies designed to enhance transparency and accountability within the governance system. The Local Self-Governance Act 1999 provides for the formation of Local Accountability Committees at the local level to monitor the revenue collection and expenditure of local bodies. The Act also ensures the participation of civil society in local governance and emphasises social auditing of development programs implemented by local bodies. The said Act is significant in enhancing local governance transparency and accountability. However, the impact of this provision is still far from adequate due to the lack of awareness among civil society members regarding their rights and roles in monitoring local bodies, as well as the intervention of elected representatives.

Similarly, the Good Governance Act 2008 has made an important provision for establishing a mechanism to ensure the participation of civil society in the decision-making process related to public service delivery. It is mandatory to develop and implement a good governance work plan in all government agencies to ensure transparency, accountability, and good governance. The 2007 Right to Information Act also enhances transparency in governance by ensuring people's right to access information. Although the impact of this law is still limited, it represents significant legislation in upholding transparency and accountability in governance in the Nepalese context (Khanal et al., 2022, pp. 1-10).

Challenges and Limitations in Anti-Corruption Efforts

Nepal is often cited as a distinct case of political corruption. Corruption in Nepal can be described as broadly entrenched, endemic, and systemic; it is found in virtually every area of public life and is sustained by social and political institutions. At the macro level, rampant graft threatens to undermine the very legitimacy of the state. Large-scale public infrastructure contracts are routinely awarded by parliamentarians and bureaucrats to cronies who pay kickbacks, allowing them to pocket the public funds without ever executing the projects. An ill-tempered and under-equipped police force is often used to serve political interests, while the judiciary is widely perceived as being subservient to the executive. These brazen acts of corruption, which in most other states would attract substantial outrage, have been normalised in the public consciousness as a form of political patronage (Suvedi, 2024, pp. 39-58).

Drawing on extensive fieldwork, this research examines the domestic implications of contemporary anti-corruption efforts in Nepal, a low-income post-conflict state plagued by systemic corruption. Despite substantial investments in reform, corruption has continued to

proliferate, creating an embarrassing gap between aspiration and outcome. Beyond the bankrolling dictated mainly by external actors, the Nepalese have a clear stake in tackling corruption. Underlying political grievances subsequently sparked a decade-long Maoist insurgency in 1996, during which Nepal was ranked the most corrupt country in the world. The insurgency's coercive success forced the long-standing feudal monarchy to capitulate in 2006, paving the way for democratisation and renewed hopes of defeating corruption. However, ensuring peace and political stability remained paramount. In the perverse logic of post-conflict state reconstruction, externally mandated anti-corruption efforts were sidelined amid systemic patronage that fed state building (Jarvis, 2020, pp. 165-189).

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The Role of International Organisations in Addressing Political Corruption

International organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and Transparency International have been involved in anti-corruption efforts in Nepal since the mid-1990s. This engagement encompasses a range of activities, from providing pressure and criticism to offering support for national anti-corruption measures, often through collaborative projects between national governments and international bodies. The importance of international pressure on national authorities in combating corruption and promoting good governance is well recognised. On the one hand, this pressure has the potential to strengthen democracy and commitment to human rights. On the other hand, it can be counterproductive if countries and their governments feel they are being lectured in relation to a perceived imbalance of power or "moral superiority. In many post-colonial states, this has led to the view that international anti-corruption measures are part of a neo-colonial agenda (Kaur, 2021, pp. 26-30).

Having gained a foothold in Nepal and committed itself to national anti-corruption measures, it is vital that international organisations learn from both successes and shortcomings, and challenge, revise, and improve their own approaches. Similarly, it is crucial to identify possible risks and dangers inherent to current strategies and focus on shaping and advancing anti-corruption efforts internationally. These issues are especially relevant to international organisations involved in anti-corruption efforts in developing countries, as their leaders often stress that poverty alleviation is the most crucial challenge of the 21st century, and corruption the greatest obstacle to achieving that goal. Nepal has been among the poorest countries since formal assessments began. Within Nepal, political corruption is widely regarded as the primary reason why international aid has been ineffective in addressing poverty. International organisations can be both part of the problem and crucial actors in the fight against corruption.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Several key lessons are discussed from both successful and unsuccessful anti-corruption initiatives in Nepal. Crucially, strategies must be adaptive, tailored to the local context, and shaped by local actors. On this point, some of the best success stories described in the case studies arose from local actors devising their own, locally-rooted initiatives because they were attuned to the political and social context, and because they subjected them to intense pressure to perform. In other instances, successful initiatives came from the outside, but were still primarily driven by local actors (Biekart & Fowler, 2018, 1692-1710).

It is important to note that no initiatives, successful or unsuccessful, were ever abandoned or scrapped altogether. Instead, in the face of failure, actors generally worked to reshape initiatives or create new ones. This reinforces the importance of a local 'demand' (in this context, a political willingness to take action), without which externally-driven approaches are less likely to succeed. Both successful and unsuccessful efforts at controlling corruption have

been most effective when a wide range of interested stakeholders were actively engaged, including the government, civil society, and the private sector, all of which have key roles to play. Initiatives relying solely on internal processes tended to struggle; on the other hand, those involving external actors also struggled to succeed. There must, therefore, be a pluralistic, multi-pronged approach to combating corruption, with different stakeholders playing distinct roles. It is also crucial that civil society is allowed the space to engage actively in the process. Finally, some best practices from the case studies have been used in Nepal's context before and could be applied more widely. Other lessons learned are of interest, as they highlight international efforts to combat corruption. Nepal has its own experience of

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success in some areas, and many lessons learnt therein can inform international best practice and policy.

Transparency and accountability measures must be carefully designed to fit within existing governance frameworks; otherwise, efforts may end up undermining what they set out to strengthen. In particular, simple transparency mechanisms will not work in the absence of accountable and responsive governance. The Nepalese experience suggests that merely disseminating information does not guarantee public pressure. This is particularly the case when bureaucrats have control over the dissemination of information. In general, designing adequate transparency and accountability initiatives requires a nuanced understanding of the political and social context in which they will be implemented. Several challenges must be acknowledged upfront when applying these best practices. First, political will matters, but it is not easy to measure and assess. Second, some best practices are context-specific and difficult to transfer elsewhere. Third, there are disconnects between theory and practice as well as intention and implementation. Awareness of these obstacles will also contribute to a deeper understanding of the activities devoted to combating political corruption. Finally, the Nepal experience can be synthesised to inform future programming and policy-making. If we zoom out, the fight against political graft requires insight into the value of learning and adjustment.

Policy Recommendations for Combating Political Corruption

This section offers targeted policy recommendations to mitigate the effects of political corruption in Nepal. Political corruption creates an imbalance of power, leading to the capture of public institutions by a few powerful political elites and their benefactors, thereby undermining the very fabric and essence of democracy. The only way to combat the pernicious workings of political corruption is to curtail its growth and containment. This can be done by promoting good governance with transparency and accountability at its core, and through intense and unyielding institutional frameworks established by law (Achwan, 2014, pp. 201-209). The recommendations below outline the specific reforms to be undertaken in critical areas of political corruption that plague Nepal.

The first recommendation is to combat the patronage network that fuels political corruption through vigorous institutional reform. A parliamentary democracy with periodic, multi-party, competitive elections always runs the risk of creating patronage networks. Therefore, governance practices in public procurement, revenue collection, the management and distribution of natural resources, the political appointment of civil servants, and the establishment of citizen engagement in service delivery, as well as other areas of political corruption, should be improved through law-based anti-corruption reform. At the core of these reforms, the legal capacity of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority

should be enhanced to investigate and prosecute political corruption (Gupta et al., 2018, pp. 36–52).

The second recommendation is to foster a culture of accountability through citizen engagement, empowering people to take ownership of government accountability. Awareness-raising initiatives should be undertaken to build a constituency that demands accountability from public institutions, and civil society organisations should be mobilised to empower the poor and marginal sections of society to access and enforce their rights. Political will will remain elusive unless there is a countervailing force that pushes for reform from outside the political arena. Therefore, it is critically important to create a citizen engagement framework both inside and outside policy and public institutions that allows citizens to oversee and empower them to access accountability.

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The third recommendation is to ensure legal compliance that enforces anti-corruption laws in letter and spirit. The public auditing system enshrined in the 1990 Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, as outlined in Articles 96–98, creates a robust watchdog institution against corruption. However, the Auditor General's Office has failed to apply the auditing provisions effectively, allowing public institutions to escape accountability with impunity. Therefore, it is essential to establish institutional mechanisms that ensure audit reports are automatically tabled in Parliament within a specified timeframe and that there is a clear reporting responsibility for the executive branch to address the audit findings.

The fourth is using technology and tools to track and report corruption. Advances in technology can be integrated with traditional public grievance redress mechanisms to provide more exhaustive coverage and better participation by citizens. This may entail the use of both written complaints, phone calls, or attending public hearings, as well as e-governance applications that serve as doorsteps for citizen engagement in the oversight and monitoring of corruption and corrupt practices.

The final suggestion is to instil aversion to corruption from childhood through civic education. Education will obviously play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards corruption. The development of students' social competence should be incorporated into schools' curricula through Civic Education to foster anti-corruption awareness at local levels by educating students on the adverse effects of corruption in society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as this paper demonstrates, political corruption has far-reaching and negative implications for Nepal's economic development. Covering both historical perspective and the contemporary dimension as well as case studies of corruption from developing to developed societies, this analysis argues that corruption is not just a symptom of underdevelopment; it is itself a developmental issue. "There is no systematic, categorical police reform other than a deep systemic rot that eats at the people's trust and exacerbates poverty and inequality." At the heart of the findings is the exploitation of a lack of transparency and accountability by a chosen few for their own benefit, resulting in privation for the majority of citizens.

Government, non-government, and international programs have been initiated to address this problem; however, the effectiveness of these programs is often limited by a lack of political will, a weak judiciary, and the entrenched nature of patronage networks. The most effective approaches are local, adaptive responses generated by an active civil society, for there is no choice but to adopt a multi-sectoral approach in future. This will involve building the capacity of institutions, fostering a culture of accountability through citizen participation, utilising technology to promote transparency, and instilling anti-corruption values among the youth.

Indeed, fighting corruption is essential if Nepal is to achieve genuine and sustainable development and safeguard its democratic future.

Future Directions

This paper provides a detailed discussion of political corruption and its effect on Nepal's socio-economic transformation. Further studies are needed to clarify and better understand this complex topic. Given that corruption is a chronic disease, future research can explore the long-term impact of the anti-corruption strategies outlined or discussed. A comparison with other struggling South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh or Pakistan, would provide functional regional perspectives on both best practices and common obstacles.

Furthermore, a qualitative research study covering the perspectives of citizens living in rural and urban areas would provide a more nuanced picture of how corruption impacts daily life and local governance. Another direction to explore is how technology, such as blockchain and

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e-governance systems, can influence corruption. Lastly, researchers could examine the role of foreign financial aid and its immediate impact on issues of political corruption in countries like Nepal.

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