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Rising Participation of Non-Sherpa in Mountaineering in Nepal

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Abstract

Sherpa and mountaineering are almost synonymous in Nepal. Once there was a time when Sherpa without mountaineering used to be regarded as half empty and mountaineering without Sherpa would be full empty. But the time has changed now and many numbers of non-Sherpa are taking part in the mountaineering sector. The increasing participation of non-Sherpa in mountaineering has supplemented this sector, on one hand, but in another, their participation has challenged and questioned the Sherpa's legacy and monopoly in the mountaineering. In this regard, the paper analyzes the dichotomous relationships between the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa mountaineers in Nepal. The paper is based on primary data obtained through interview schedule. Sixty one (Sherpa 46 and non-Sherpa 15) mountaineers were chosen for the research. Unstructured interviews and key informants interviews along with *kuragraphy* are the supplementary tools for collecting the information. Interestingly, the mountaineers have mixed views regarding the participation of both the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa in the mountaineering sector. Regarding the preferences for working together in mountains 65.2 per cent Sherpa mountaineers preferred Sherpa as fellow workers but none of the Sherpa informants preferred non-Sherpa whereas 13.3 per cent non-Sherpa informants preferred Sherpa as fellow workers. Similarly, 54.3 per cent Sherpa mountaineers preferred Sherpa for hiring them in mountaineering but none of the Sherpa mountaineers preferred non-Sherpa mountaineers and vice-versa. It seems that both the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa mountaineers are ethnocentric thus a competitive rivalry looms large among them. This study is an attempt to understand the impact of the non-Sherpa's rising participation in the mountaineering fields.

Keywords: mountaineering, Sherpa, non-Sherpa, caste, ethnicity

Introduction

This paper aims to explain the Sherpa and non-Sherpa influence in the sectors of tourism and mountaineering. The Sherpas are not only famous for high altitude workers but also hold a major business in tourism and mountaineering sectors. There was a time when tourists wanted Sherpa workers as guides and other supportive staff in the trekking and mountaineering. As a result, the non-Sherpa tourism workers called themselves Sherpa, because tourists wanted Sherpa (Ortner, 1999) and such a situational Sherpa-ness, was because of improving labor hierarchy, avoiding discrimination and appeasing foreigners (Frydenlund, 2018). Hence, the

term 'Sherpa' is also indicated the post (assistant guide) in trekking rather than identifying the ethnic group 'Sherpa'. But time has changed and many non-Sherpas participate in both tourism and mountaineering sectors. Many non-Sherpas are climbing mountains as guides for mountaineers and trekkers. As Ortner (1999) writes:

...a number of non-Sherpas have achieved success without pretending to be Sherpas, and this has been a source of ethnic pride for the groups in question. The first non-Sherpa Nepali to reach the top of Mount Everest was a Tamang, Sambhu Tamang, with Italian expedition of 1973... On that second expedition, a young man by the name of Narayan Shrestha became the first Newar to reach the top of Everest. The French Everest expedition of 1988 included one Gurung and one Tamang among the high altitude Sherpas. (p. 256)

Western scholars spend much time on the Sherpa, either admiring their hospitality, honesty, hard-work, cheerfulness and as a lifeline of Western tourists in trekking and mountaineering as porters, high altitude workers and climbers (Fuerer-Haimendorf, 1964; 1984; Ortner, 1989; Fisher, 1990; Brower, 1991; Stevens, 1993;) or disagree with the metaphors (Adams, 1996). Adams (1996) explains Sherpas' idealness a fake and constructed for achieving material benefit from Western tourists. They do mountaineering for their own fame and dignity. Hence, the Sherpas are to be subjectively interpreted (Luger, 2000).

Whatever else the scholars have stated about the Sherpa, mountaineering is their dignity and pride (Ortner, 1999; Brower, 1991) that has begun with the stepping on the Mt. Everest summit by Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary in 1953. This feat on the Mt. Everest made the Sherpa world-wide famous and popular. They are famous as skilled high-altitude workers and are equally known for their hard work, dedication and honesty. The tourists also perceive Sherpa as ever-smiling people even on the hard days in the mountains. But today, non-Sherpa people of Nepal are also taking part in the mountaineering and their number is increasing every year (MoCTCA-2020). The main causes of non-Sherpas' participations in trekking and mountaineering are several social and economic opportunities in tourism and mountaineering, outmigration of the Khumbu's Sherpa from their traditional Sherpa villages and in-migration of the non-Sherpa in Khumbu (Shrestha, 2018b). Such an outmigration of Sherpa and in-migration of non-Sherpa people inside Khumbu illustrate the search of better opportunities. Both types of migration created opportunities and the challenges in the tourism and mountaineering. The participation of non-Sherpas in the tourism and mountaineering sectors thus, has changed the Sherpa's monopoly in this sector.

In this a context, the paper analyzes the ever growing competitive interrelationship between the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa' workers in tourism and mountaineering sector in Nepal. The research also aims to analyze the perceptions of both the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa mountaineers regarding their participation and interrelationships during the period of mountaineering in Nepal.

Material and method

This paper is based on both primary and the secondary data. Semi-structured interview schedule, unstructured interviews, key informants' interviews and kuragraphy are the sources of primary data which was conducted in different months of 2022/ 023 inside Kathmandu Valley. The data is carried by the purposive and snowball sampling with 46 (75.40%) Sherpa, and 15 (24.60%) non-Sherpa informants. These sampling methods are useful for the present study for selecting the Sherpa and non-Sherpa informants rationally. Probability sampling

may exclude some of the caste and ethnic based informants that the research really needed. The non-Sherpa informants incorporated Gurung, Tamang, Rai, Magar and Chhetri. The table details about the sample population for the study.

Table 1

Caste and ethnicity of sampled mountaineers

S. N.	Caste/Ethnicity	Male	Percent
1	Sherpa	46	75.40
2	Gurung	7	11.50
3	Tamang	5	8.20
4	Rai	1	1.63
5	Magar	1	1.63
6	Chhetri	1	1.63
	Grand Total	61	100

Source: Field study, 2022

At the same time adequate secondary information through books, journal articles, reports and other forms of resources such as interviews on YouTube and so on have been used for the study.

Interethnic interface in tourism

Tourism is a process of social interaction. The social interaction not only takes place between guests, hosts and agents but also among the hosts' communities. Hitchcock (1999) stated that social interaction within tourism often involves the study of interethnic relations. Hitchcock focused on the cross-cultural relationships among ethnic communities. Tourism brings many types of people together into contact who are not only strangers to one another but are also members of different ethnic groups. The forms of social and cultural interactions are not similar all over the world. The level of interaction differs from place and time. Wood (1997) presented several cases of interethnic relationships in various parts of the world. Such as competition, unequal relationship, ethnic based division of labor and low wages for marginalized ethnic group in Xinjiang, China; power struggles in Fiji and rivalry relationship between Tamang and Sherpa in Khumbu.

Hilliman (2009) examined the relationship between Tibetan and non-Tibetan migrants due to the promotion of tourism in Tibet. The author stated that Tibetans are deprived of high paid jobs in the city because of the migration of non-Tibetans. The expansion of tourism set a challenge for ethnic identity formation and ethnic relations in China. The author further states:

Ethnic consciousness is further enhanced by the frequent Tibetan-non-Tibetan encounters that tourism brings. Ethnic consciousness may rise through the pleasant experience of discovering different attitudes, tastes, or customs in others, or less pleasure through the experience of missing out on higher-paying work that goes to non-Tibetans. (p. 3)

Tourism is responsible for changing, constructing and reconstructing ethnic identity. Becoming conscious about their ethnicity is related to maintaining uniqueness and being

different from others.

Another case was presented by Adams (1997) about the battle between two ethnic groups in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Adams (1997) presented the cases of the battle over guiding rights. When the government of Indonesia made licenses compulsory for guiding tourists, the local guides of the Torajans community lost their jobs with the inclusion of other Muslim, Buginese and Chinese guides. These non-Torajanas guides are paid much more than locals but the new guides misrepresented the predominantly Christian Torajans as pagan backward. Guneratne (2001) presented a case of Chitwan, Nepal where non-Tharu guides misrepresented the Tharu as stating them 'jangali' people. However, different ethnic-based organizations exist in Khumbu to ensure the economic, social, cultural, and natural resources. The Sherpa, Tamang, Rai have established their own ethnic-based organizations that not only identified themselves as separate ethnic groups but also support to balance of power among various ethnic groups in Khumbu (Shrestha, 2018b). Shrestha (2018b) writes:

The ethnic based organizations has not only incorporated their ethnic identities but these organization also has helped to maintain the structure of power within the same ethnic group. The enforcement of local Sherpa on non local Sherpas or Tamang has clearly indicated their power exercise on them. Such activities of enforcement and exercise of power on the different parties encourages the other people to be united together for their betterment and against the dominant segments. (p.269)

The ethnic-based division of labour prevails in trekking and mountaineering in Nepal. Caste and ethnic-based discrimination are common in several tourists' destinations in Nepal (Frydenlund, 2017; Shrestha, 2018b). Literatures on tourism show various forms of interethnic relations broadly covering social, cultural, economic and regional (land-based) interaction in different tourism destinations.

Trekking and mountaineering create not only socio-economic mobility of the concerned people but also encourage migration. The rich trekkers and mountaineers gradually leave their place of origin and out migrate towards the sophisticated towns but the poor who just see opportunities in these sectors work in various difficult situations and migrate towards the highest altitudes as in Khumbu.

Sherpa and non-Sherpa interface in mountaineering

Trekking and mountaineering require physical strength along with skills and experiences. Hence, it may not require a particular caste or ethnicity for its success. But in Nepal, the Sherpas are taken as active, honest, hardworking and cooperative people who can climb the mountains and support the Western climbers as mountain guide, trekking guides and porters. That's why they are highly demanded by Western tourists as their supporters. The involvement of the Sherpas from the beginning of the tourism and mountaineering proves their indispensability in this sector.

But today non-Sherpa people are also climbing the mountains every year. These people are also able to make and break records in mountain climbing. But the number of non-Sherpa climbers is relatively very few. This section of the paper presents the frequency of summiteers on the basis of nationality, caste and ethnicity on three different mountains in Nepal (Mt. Everest-8848.86m., Mt. Annapurna I, 8091m. and Mt. Amadablam, 6814m.)

Summits on Mt. Everest (8848.86m.)

Since the first summit by Tenjing and Hillary on May 29, 1953, Mt. Everest has been climbed 6507 times successfully. Among them, the male mountaineers climbed it 6036 times (92.76%) and 407 (7.24%) times for females. If we see data on the basis of nationality, foreign climbers climbed it 3411 (52.43%) times and 3096 (47.57%) times by Nepali climbers. It shows that the numbers of Nepali summiteers/ summits are higher than any other particular foreign countries' summits (MoCTCA, 2020). While analyzing the same data in the context of Nepal by sex, the number of male summiteers/ summits is higher than the female. The male Everest summiteers/ summits are 3044 (98.32%) and the female is only 52 (1.68%).

However, the following section of this paper analyzes data on the basis of the caste and ethnicity of the summiteers that have successfully summited several mountains.

Table 2

Caste and ethnic composition of the Mt. Everest summiteers of Nepal from 1953-2019

S. N.	Caste/ ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
1	Sherpa	2879	93.00
2	Tamang	68	2.19
3	Brahmin/Chhetri	54	1.74
4	Gurung	35	1.13
5	Magar	22	0.71
6	Newar	15	0.48
7	Rai	11	0.34
8	Shahi	03	0.09
9	Others	09	0.30
	Total	3096	100

Source: MoCTCA-2020

It is a fact that the Sherpas have contributed a lot in the sectors of tourism and mountaineering. They have showed their bravery from the early history of mountain climbing including the conquering of the world's highest mountain Mt. Everest. They make and break the climbing records in each season. Talking about the summit of Mt. Everest, Sherpa climbed it 2879 times. It means among the total 3096 summits on Mt. Everest from the year 1953 to 2019 by Nepali summiteers, 93 per cent of summits were made by Sherpas and only 7 per cent of the summits were made by non-Sherpas summiteers. Among non-Sherpas, Tamang (2.19%), Brahmin/Chhetri (1.74%), Grurung (1.13%), Magar (0.71%), Newar (0.48%), Rai (0.34%), Shahi (0.09%) and others (0.30%) made summits on Mt. Everest (MoCTCA-2020). The disparities on the data of climbing Mt. Everest by various caste and ethnic group are not only interesting but also raise multiple academic inquiries on the least participation of the non-Sherpas in the mountaineering.

Summits on Mt. Annapurna I, 8091m

Mt. Annapurna is another famous mountain for the mountain expedition for both Nepali and foreign climbers. Mt. Annapurna was first summited by Maurice Herzog in 1949. Thereafter,

hundreds of climbers have summited Mt. Annapurna. The data show that Mt. Annapurna was summited 309 times; interestingly, Nepali climbers summited it one hundred times and rest of the other by the foreign climbers from the different countries from 1949 to 2019 (MoCTCA, 2020).

Table 3

Caste and ethnic composition of the Mt. Annapurna summiteers from 1949 - 2019

S. N.	Caste/ ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
1	Sherpa	94	94
2	Tamang	5	5
3	Magar	1	1
	Total	100	100

Source: MoCTCA, 2020

Talking about the Nepali summiteers on Mt. Annapurna, dominant climbers were the Sherpas. The data show that 94 percent summits were made by Sherpa, 5 percent by Tamang and one percent by Magar. It shows that non-Sherpa summiteers are nominal on Mt. Annapurna.

Summits on Mt. Amadablam 6814m

Regarding the summits on the Mt. Amadablam, participation of the non-Sherpa climbers has increased. All total 12.67 percent summits were made by non-Sherpa (Tamang 4.66, Gurung 3.33, Brahmin/ Chhetri 2.66, Magar 1.33 and Newar 0.66 percentage) climbers on Mt. Amadablam.

Table 4

Caste and ethnic composition of the Mt. Amadablam summiteers in 2019

S. N.	Caste/ ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
1	Sherpa	131	87.33
2	Tamang	7	4.66
3	Gurung	5	3.33
4	Brahmin/ Chhetri	4	2.66
5	Magar	2	1.33
6	Newar	1	0.66
	Total	150	100

Source: MoCTCA, 2020

Mt. Amadablam is selected for the comparative study of the summiteers. This mountain is chosen because of its height. The height of Mt. Abadablam is 6814m only. This study tries to see whether the climbing frequencies of the Sherpa and non-Sherpa differ with difference of the height of the mountains. The assumption made is somehow close to the reality that the number of non-Sherpa's climbing frequencies has been increased in Mt. Amadablam. The data show that 93 percent summits were made by the Sherpa on Mt. Everest, 94 percent on Mt. Annapurna I; but only 87.33 percent summits were made by the Sherpa climbers. This

tendency shows that the non-Sherpa climbers were making attempt on the mountains that have comparatively lower height.

Caste and ethnic politics in mountaineering

The Sherpa and non-Sherpa informants have their own views and opinions regarding significance and indispensability of caste and ethnicity in tourism and mountaineering sectors. This section of the paper has tried to analyze their perceptions through their answers in many issues.

Caste and ethnic status of company owner

Most of the mountaineers in Nepal are paid workers. Mountaineering is their source of earnings and means of livelihood. Most of them do not have their own mountaineering expedition company. The mountaineers do their jobs from the other owners' company. Even the world famous climber such as Sanu Sherpa does not have his own company.

In this regard, the researcher asked the mountaineers about their owners' caste and ethnic status. Identifying the owners' caste/ ethnic status reveals the climber's preference to work with particular caste and ethnic people and vice-versa.

Table 5

Caste and Ethnic Status of Company Owner

S.N.	Caste/ Ethnic status	Number	Percent
1	Sherpa	44	72.1
2	Brahmin/ Kshetri	10	16.4
3	Gurung	3	4.9
4	Tamang	2	3.3
5	Magar	1	1.65
6	Newar	1	1.65
	Total	61	100

Source: Field study, 2022

The data show that 72.1 per cent of mountaineers work in Sherpa's company and 27.9 per cent work in non-Sherpa's (Brahmin/ Chhetri 16.4, Gurung 4.9, Tamang 3.3, Magar and Newar each 1.65 per cent) company. It clarifies the increasing participation of non-Sherpas in the mountaineering business along with climbing the mountains.

Composition of caste/ethnic status of the mountaineers' co-workers

In Nepal, some works have been assigned to specific people based on their caste and ethnic hierarchy. Priestly works are to be done by the Brahmins and some works are designed only for a scheduled caste. But in mountaineering, the division of labour does not depend upon the mountaineers' caste and ethnic status. Mountaineering is a hard adventure which requires physical strength, psychological determination, courage, economic well-being and so on. But, caste, ethnicity and gender-based status also play an important role in several aspects including mountaineering in Nepal.

It is good to analyze whether one's caste and ethnic status bring any differences in work

efficiency. Does one really choose fellow workers from his/her own caste and ethnic group? To know the answer of these several queries I have asked the informants about the caste and ethnic status of their co-workers.

Table 6

Composition of caste/ ethnic status of the mountaineers' coworkers

S. N.	Caste/ethnicity	Sherpa's views		Caste/ethnicity	Non-Sherpas' view	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
1	Sherpa	37	80.4	Sherpa	06	40
2	Non-Sherpa	00	00	Non-Sherpa	01	6.7
3	Mixed	09	19.6	Mixed	08	53.3
Total		46	100		15	100

Source: Field study, 2022

Regarding such questions 80.4 per cent of the Sherpa informants replied that they have Sherpa coworkers in the mountaineering, 19.6 per cent of the Sherpa informants stated that they work with both Sherpa and non-Sherpa (mixed) coworkers whereas none of the Sherpa informants stated that they work only with non-Sherpa mountaineers. In contrast to Sherpa, 40 per cent non-Sherpa viewed that they worked with Sherpa, 6.7 per cent with worked with non-Sherpa but 53.3 per cent, i.e., majority of the non-Sherpa informants worked with both Sherpa and non-Sherpa (mixed) co-workers. The data indicate that there is an influence of caste and ethnic status in the mountaineering sector.

Mountaineers and their comfort to work with other castes/ethnicity

One can have several queries regarding the workers' comfort, cooperation or conflict while working together in tourism and mountaineering. The situation of comfort, cooperation or conflict may be contextual and may not be applied between the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa workers in tourism and mountaineering. The dichotomous interactions may take place within the Sherpa or non-Sherpa mountaineers. However, present study has focused to analyze the various forms of situations between the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa mountaineers while working together. That's why I put forwarded a query to both Sherpa and non-Sherpa informants regarding their ease and comfort to work with a particular caste or ethnic status.

Table 7

Views of mountaineers regarding their easiness to work with other castes and ethnicity

S. N.	Caste/ethnicity	Sherpa's views		Caste/ethnicity	Non-Sherpas' view	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
1	Sherpa	30	65.2	Sherpa	02	13.3
2	Non-Sherpa	00	00	Non-Sherpa	02	13.3
3	Mixed	16	34.8	Mixed	11	73.4
Total		46	100		15	100

Source: Field study, 2022

The perception of both the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa mountaineers is quite interesting. About 65 per cent Sherpa informants said that they are comfortable to work with Sherpa co-workers and 34.8 per cent Sherpa accepted mixed people while working together on the mountains whereas only 13.3 per cent non-Sherpa feel comfortable to work with Sherpa. A huge number (73.4%) of non-Sherpa informants have chosen mixed people as comfortable to work. It means most of the non-Sherpa wanted to avoid Sherpa as their fellow workers. The data also shows that none of the Sherpa informants have chosen non-Sherpa as a comfortable fellow worker. In contrary, 13.3 per cent non-Sherpa informants have chosen non-Sherpa fellow workers in the mountaineering sector.

Preference to provide jobs

Mountaineering is one of the most economically lucrative jobs in Nepal. The job is also interesting because of its nature. Being close to nature, playing with snow-topped lofty mountains, amazing scenes and also a lot of troubles make mountain climbing exciting, risky and challenging too. Mountaineering is teamwork. Proper coordination, cooperation and communication among the mountaineers bring success to every climber. For the success, one should be very much aware about choosing the fellow mates or giving jobs to suitable mountaineers who can handle all the clients and other issues relating to the mountain climbing. But, the question is that who can handle the client well and solve the several issues during the period of mountaineering. Does any caste or ethnic specific people require for the successful mountaineering? Or, mountaineering solely depends upon the individual’s skill and other qualities?

Table 8

Views of mountaineers regarding their preference to provide jobs

S. N.	Caste/ethnicity	Sherpa’s views		Caste/ethnicity	Non-Sherpas’ view	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
1	Sherpa	25	54.3	Sherpa	00	00
2	Non-Sherpa	00	00	Non-Sherpa	3	20
3	Mixed	12	26.1	Mixed	05	33.3
4	Qualified and experienced	09	19.6		07	46.7
Total		46	100		15	100

Source: Field study, 2022

I have asked the informants about their preference to provide jobs to the mountaineers. Regarding this, 54.3 per cent Sherpa intended to provide mountaineering job to the Sherpa, 26.1 per cent for mixed people and 19.6 per cent chose the qualified and experienced. Similarly, none of the non-Sherpa prefer Sherpa, 46.7 per cent non-Sherpa have chosen skilled and experienced mountaineers whereas 33.3 per cent have chosen non-Sherpa as the base for providing jobs. Obviously, mountaineering has to require a skill and experience mountain guide beyond any caste and ethnic group. However, the situation was not as I expected. There is ample place for caste and ethnic issues in the mountaineering.

Effects of caste and ethnicity on mountaineering

The data show that there are some sorts of inter-relationship between mountaineering and

caste- ethnic issues. To make this issue much clear, I have asked my informants whether mountaineering is affected by the caste and ethnic status of the mountaineers. In response to this question, 45.7 per cent Sherpa said yes but 54.3 per cent of them rejected whereas 73.3 per cent non-Sherpa saw the effects of caste and ethnic status in the mountaineering. Only 26.7 per cent non-Sherpa denied the effects of caste and ethnic issues in the mountaineering. Altogether 52.5 per cent informants replied that the caste and ethnic status of the mountaineers affect the mountaineering but 47.5 per cent informants denied it.

Table 9

Views of mountaineers regarding effects of caste and ethnicity on Mountaineering

S. N.	Perceptions	Sherpa's views		Perceptions	Non-Sherpas' view		Total	Percent
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent		
1	Yes	21	45.7	Yes	11	73.3	32	52.5
2	No	25	54.3	No	04	26.7	29	47.5
Total		46	100		15	100	61	100

Source: Field study, 2022

It seems that the non-Sherpa informants feel that caste and ethnic based inequality for providing jobs, remunerations and other opportunities. The data also show that Sherpa mountain guides prefer Sherpa coworker rather than non-Sherpa. The Sherpa Mountain guides view that the tourists also prefer Sherpa workers as their assistant.

Queries regarding caste and ethnicity by the tourists

Two contradictory views are raised by the Sherpa and non-Sherpa mountaineers regarding the tourists' preferences for selecting their assistants. The Sherpa mountaineers said that the tourists prefer Sherpa mountain guides as their assistant. "The tourists search all the documents of experiences and make several queries on the qualifications of the non-Sherpa mountain guides. But, if there is Sherpa, they do not make any queries. So, I prefer Sherpa mountain guides in my team," (personal communication with Sherpa mountain guides, March-10, 2022). But, the non-Sherpa informants reject the statement. The non-Sherpa informants stated that they have never experienced of being asked their caste and ethnic status by the tourists. A non-Sherpa informant states:

I struggled much for climbing the mountains because I didn't get chance on the Sherpa's company that I spent many years in trekking up to base camps, never given chance because Sherpa prefer Sherpa rather than non-Sherpa, Sherpa never gives chance to other non-Sherpa. But, caste and ethnicity has no role in mountaineering; neither the tourists ask only Sherpa helpers. May be tourists read the books which exaggeratedly appreciated Sherpa only as the best climbers. The tourists never asked me whether I am Sherpa. The tourists just judge on the works rather than ethnic identity. (Non-Sherpa mountain guides Personal Communication, February, 15- 2022)

Table 10*Views of mountaineers regarding tourists' queries about caste and ethnicity*

S. N.	Perceptions	Sherpa's views		Perceptions	Non-Sherpas' view		Total	Percent
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent		
1	Yes	40	87	Yes	14	93.3	54	88.5
2	No	06	13	No	01	6.7	07	11.5
Total		46	100		15	100	61	100

Due to these contradictory statements, I raised a question to all 61 informants regarding the tourists' queries regarding the caste and ethnic status of the mountain guides. In response to this question 87 per cent Sherpa and 93.3 per cent non-Sherpa agreed that tourists ask their caste and ethnic status during the trekking and mountaineering but 13 per cent Sherpa and 6.7 per cent non-Sherpa informants stated that the tourists do not ask their caste and ethnic status.

Discussions

Caste system is deeply rooted in Nepal. There was a time when the state institutionalized caste system in Nepal. Caste was the main base for the rule. The rulers enforced the caste system to regulate the society in the past. Along with Jayasthiti Malla's caste system in the Middle Age to Jung Bahadur Rana enacted the Muluki Ain with hierarchies of caste system, caste based behavior and works of the people. Even the rewards and punishments were determined by the caste hierarchy of the individual and the group (Hofer, 2004).

Today, our everyday lives, ideas, thought, behavior, practices and so on are somehow influenced by our respective caste and ethnic category. The food that we eat, and cook at the kitchen or the life partner we choose, all are directly influenced by our caste and ethnic status. Some profession is totally caste based such as being *purohit* and doing *puja* by the high caste Brahmin status only and some works by the scheduled caste. Caste system is still prevalent in Nepal and highly practiced in the rural areas of Nepal.

In contrast to many other sectors, mountaineering has not been influenced by the caste system in Nepal. The high caste or lower caste keeps no value and no meaning in the mountaineering. Neither the high caste Hindu Brahmin has a high rank due to his birth status such as caste nor do the ethnic groups fight against the high caste people as ethnic movement or identity politics in the mountaineering in Nepal. It is because mountaineering depends upon physical strength, skills, experiences, psychological determination and so on.

Interestingly, there is Sherpa and non-Sherpa politics in the mountaineering sector in Nepal. The Sherpa has a long history, legacy and hegemony on the mountains and mountaineering in Nepal. It seems that the Sherpa do not want to lose their legacy and monopoly in this sector. Preferring to Sherpa coworkers, being willing to provide jobs to the Sherpa or making unique narratives regarding Sherpa on the mountains and mountaineering are examples of how Sherpa want to maintain their legacy and monopoly in the mountaineering sectors. A Sherpa mountain guide, owner of a mountain expedition company, multiple times Mt. Everest and other mountains summiteer states:

I choose Sherpa mountaineers because the Sherpas adapt easily than non-Sherpa on the mountains. The Sherpas are in priority because foreign mountaineers have high belief

on Sherpa rather than non-Sherpa climbers. If I put forward non-Sherpas climbers as their guides the foreign climbers, ask several queries on the non-Sherpas' climbers ability. The foreign mountaineers ask their bio-data. But, they ask nothing if I put forward Sherpas as their assistants or guides. (Mr. T. Sherpa, Personal Communication, December, 9- 2022)

This narrative is supported by the other Sherpa mountaineers. Present study also reveals that 72.1 per cent trekking and mountaineering company was owned by the Sherpa and this is one of the main reasons for many Sherpa mountaineers' participation. In addition to this 65.2 per cent Sherpa workers prefer to work with fellow Sherpa but none of them intended to work with non-Sherpa workers. In other hand, 13.3 per cent non-Sherpa felt comfortable to work with fellow Sherpa workers. The data show the dichotomous relationships between the Sherpa and the non-Sherpa mountaineers in Nepal.

It might be true that the Sherpas have much more adaptive capacity than any other non-Sherpas because the Sherpas are high mountain dwellers. But recent trends of non-Sherpa's participation, their success and records compel everyone to rethink the statement. However, it may be true that the tourists ask Sherpa mountain guides because of Sherpa's fame all over the world. But, the story does not end easily. The narratives of the non-Sherpa are quite contradictory with Sherpa. They stated that the Sherpa mountain guide and company owner do not want to provide jobs to the non-Sherpa. Their unwillingness to provide job is not because of non-Sherpa's inability to work at the high altitudes but it is because of nepotism or *afno manchhe*. The non-Sherpa workers said that most of the company owners are Sherpa so that they offer this job to Sherpa. A 44 years old non-Sherpa from lower part of Solukhumbu district who scaled Mt. Everest 5 times including one from Tibet side. He also summited Mt, Lhotse (8516m.), Cho-o-yu (8201m.), Manaslu (8167m.), Annapurna (8091m), Mt. Ratnachuli, Amadablam, Derachuli, and other several peaks states:

I struggled much for climbing the mountains because I didn't get chance on the Sherpa's company that I spent many years in trekking up to base camps. He (company owner) never gave me chance because Sherpa prefer Sherpa rather than non-Sherpa, Sherpa never gives chance to other non-Sherpa. Although caste and ethnicity has no role in mountaineering; neither the tourists ask only Sherpa helpers. May be tourists read the books which exaggeratedly appreciated Sherpa only as the best climbers. The tourists never asked me whether I am Sherpa. The tourists just judge on the works rather than ethnic identity. Nepotism works in mountaineering. I may get chance earlier if I were Sherpa, they ignore other non-Sherpa because they think non-Sherpa may get additional status if they are given chance to climb. (K. Tamang, Personal Communication, February, 15-2022)

Such narratives of non-Sherpa mountaineers also prove the Sherpas' monopoly and hegemony in the mountaineering sectors. The narratives reveal not only the nepotism but also blame the Sherpa as ethnocentric, always giving priority to their own ethnic status in tourism and mountaineering sectors in Nepal. In this sense, tourism and mountaineering sectors also prevail as other sectors of Nepal with the influence of *afno manchhe* or *nataka manche*, i.e., nepotism. Hence, one can see the dichotomy between Sherpa and non-Sherpa in the fields of tourism and mountaineering sectors in Nepal.

Gradually, such duality is changing in the mountaineering sector because of two reasons. The first, records of non-Sherpa mountaineers such as Nims dai (Nirmal Purja Magar) and others and world-wide fame of such success. The second is the out migration of Sherpa from the

Khumbu region and abandoning the mountaineering by the new Sherpa generation. The world-wide fame of the successful story has made trust over the non-Sherpa mountain guides in one hand and in another hand number of non-Sherpa's mountaineers are exceeding day by day.

Asking the caste or ethnic status by the tourists is common and natural because most of the tourists understand Sherpa as an idol of mountaineering. The queries regarding caste and ethnic status by the tourists have been accepted by most (88.5%) of the informants. It shows the Sherpa's demands and domination in the mountaineering sector. However, the trend of giving chance to skilled and experiences one rather than to particular caste/ ethnic category should be taken positively. About 19 percent Sherpa and 48 percent non-Sherpa intends to provide jobs to the skilled and experienced mountain guides. Similarly, 34.8 per cent Sherpa and 73.4 per cent non-Sherpa mountaineers intended to work with the mixed community rather than preferring to the particular caste or ethnic background. This is really good because mountaineering requires skills and experiences rather than any particular type of caste and ethnic category of the people. It is also equally true that the demand of Sherpa by the tourists is also not because of their intimacy towards an ethnic group Sherpa but because of their hard work, dedication, honesty and cooperation with the tourists.

Conclusion

Tourism and mountaineering has a short history in Nepal. This sector has gradually begun after the end of Ranarchy and commencement of democracy in 1950 A.D. in Nepal. Interestingly, Sherpa, tourism and mountaineering have remained as synonyms in Nepal. Tourism, mountaineering and the Sherpa are supplementary to each other. The lives of Sherpa without tourism are half empty and mountaineering without Sherpa is completely empty in Nepal. It shows the significance of Sherpa in the tourism and mountaineering sectors in Nepal.

Now, the numbers of non-Sherpa's mountain guides are also taking parts in mountain expeditions. Talking about Mt. Everest from the year 1953-2019 A.D. 93 percent summits were made by Sherpa and 7 percent by non-Sherpa. Similarly, 94 percent summits on Mt. Annapurna I (1949-2019) and 87.33 percent summits on Mt. Amadablam in 2019 A.D. were made by Sherpa. It means 7 percent summits on Mt. Everest, 6 percent on Mt. Annapurna I and 12.63 percent on Amadablam were made by non-Sherpa mountaineers. The data reveal the non-Sherpa's participation in the mountaineering sector.

The increased number of non-Sherpa mountaineers not only increased the competition among the mountain guides but also challenge the Sherpa's legacy, monopoly and hegemony on the mountains. However, the willingness to provide job to their own caste and ethnic category, to feel easy to work with the people from same caste and ethnic category, acceptance of the prevalence of effects of caste and ethnic status in mountaineering are not only the bases or basic requirements for the successful mountain summits but it is also Sherpa and non-Sherpa dichotomy and politics in tourism and mountaineering. Hence, tourism and mountaineering should not be broadly analyzed through caste and interethnic interface but it should be interpreted with a dichotomous interrelationship between Sherpa and non-Sherpa rather than with any form of particular caste or ethnic category.

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