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## Diversity Management: Critical Pedagogy in Nepalese Education

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### Abstract

This article delves into the realm of critical pedagogy, a dynamic educational approach designed to cultivate critical thinking skills among students. It explores the relevance of critical pedagogy emphasizing critical thinking and social justice, aligns seamlessly with managing diversity in classrooms, fostering inclusive environments and empowering students to engage with diverse perspectives. It critically underscores the vital role played by critical pedagogy in effectively managing diversity within educational settings. Drawing from extensive literature and the author's insights, it offers a valuable tool to address the complexities of contemporary classrooms. The article significantly contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational approaches by highlighting the transformative impact of critical pedagogy, advocating for its integration into school curricula, and emphasizing the collaborative roles of both teachers and students. Through this comprehensive exploration, the article positions critical pedagogy as an indispensable framework for fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments in the face of diverse challenges.

**Keywords:** diversity, transformative, consciousness, critical thinking

### Introduction

Critical pedagogy represents a transformative and progressive approach to teaching and learning that has garnered significant attention for its potential to address issues of social justice, equity, and diversity in educational settings. This pedagogical framework challenges traditional teaching methods that often perpetuate existing power structures and inequalities, advocating instead for a more inclusive and empowering educational experience (Freire, 1970).

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Nepal's educational heritage draws from centuries-old traditions, deeply influenced by traditional education system. As it is common knowledge, in the traditional system, students record, memorize, repeat and regurgitate in the examination without perceiving and internalizing what they mean. They receive, memorize, and repeat passively without any two way of interaction and negotiation constructively. The traditional classroom is teacher-centered and authoritative in which every learner from a diverse society is given chance to construct knowledge without collaboration (Kandel, 2020; Dhungana, 2020).

Despite the influences of globalization, the principles of critical pedagogy, which are more prevalent in western educational philosophy, are still gaining recognition in Nepal's educational landscape. Various international governmental organizations (INGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have actively promoted rights-based approaches and initiated projects aimed at raising critical awareness among marginalized groups in the country. The awakening of the deprived, including Dalits, most backward indigenous people and women in a democratic environment also paved the way towards augmenting an NGO movement in Nepal (Khanal, 2006).

However, the impact of these efforts has not always aligned with their intent, revealing the complex interplay between educational theory and practice. While the Government of Nepal has acknowledged the significance of critical pedagogy and incorporated it into the school curriculum, practical challenges persist. It has been observed that schools and educators often prioritize theoretical aspects over practical implementation.

Government of Nepal's has recognized of the importance of critical pedagogy and introduced in school curricula but several researchers concluded that the implementation is not effective; its incorporation into the school curriculum has not always translated seamlessly into practice. In their study, Sharma and Phyak (2017) emphasize the insufficiency of conventional critical pedagogy practices in confronting the ideological tensions resulting from the conflict between broader institutional constraints and teachers' individual aspirations for transformative pedagogy. They observe persistent practical challenges, with schools and educators consistently prioritizing theoretical aspects over actual implementation. This underscores the complex interplay between educational theory and practice, highlighting the existing gap between intent and impact.

Nepal's classrooms pose a myriad of challenges related to diversity management, encompassing gender discrimination, social inequality, inclusiveness, disabilities, cultural and religious taboos, child labor, early marriage, harassment,

child rights violations, and cultural hegemony. Gender dynamics, influenced by a preference for sons, perpetuate male domination, affecting access to education. Social discrimination against those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds further shapes educational experiences. Dahal et al. (2017) noted that the school environment lacks friendliness toward girls, particularly emphasizing the need for male teachers to enhance their understanding of menstrual hygiene and various forms of discrimination associated with menstruation, such as Chhaupadi. Despite this, male teachers tend to maintain a distance from female-related issues.

In this context, the integration of critical pedagogy into Nepal's school curriculum gains heightened significance. It becomes a crucial avenue for addressing the diverse challenges the country faces, aligning educational practices with principles of social justice, equity, and inclusivity. Furthermore, it underscores the pivotal role of teachers in translating curriculum objectives into meaningful and empowering classroom experiences.

This study seeks to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with the practical implementation of critical pedagogy in Nepal's educational context. By examining the intersection of traditional teaching practices and the principles of critical pedagogy, this research aims to shed light on the complexities of managing diversity in the classroom and fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

### **Methods and Procedures**

The research design for this study was carefully developed to comprehensively explore the intersection between critical pedagogy and Nepal's traditional educational landscape. Initially, an extensive literature review was conducted using reputable platforms like Google Scholar and Leabgein, identifying a total of one hundred relevant research articles and ebooks. To ensure specificity and relevance, a purposive sampling method was employed, resulting in the intentional selection of 25 articles downloaded.

This selection process aimed to construct a focused and meaningful dataset (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), guided by the articles' relevance to the research topics and overall intent. The research process involved a meticulous identification of materials to establish a nuanced understanding of critical pedagogy and its diverse applications. The research design embraced a qualitative approach, incorporating not only the researcher's personal teaching experience but also insights from peer teachers to provide a holistic perspective.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Classroom Diversity**

Diversity is defined as how people are different in the workplace. It is also known as the verities of people living in the same workplace. Furthermore, it is defined as the sum of ways that people are both like and alike. Guion (1999) describes diversity as “a mosaic of people who bring a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values and beliefs as assets to the groups or organizations with which they interact” (p.1). The dimension of social diversity in educational settings reflects the realities of student presence in school. Diversity of the classroom reflects the different social, cultural, economic, religious, cultural conditions, physical, mental and psychological differences among the students. Thus, managing the diversity of the classroom is understood as a teaching-learning activity with respecting the environment of diversity.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is a progressive idea that plays a vital role to manage the diversity of the classroom. “Critical pedagogy is a movement involving relationships of teaching and learning so that students gain a critical self-consciousness and social awareness and take appropriate action against oppressive forces”(McKernan, 2013). McLaren further defines critical pedagogy as “Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state “ (McLaren, 1998, p.45). This concept emerged in the educational pedagogy after the ideas of critical conciseness, oppressed pedagogy introduced by Paulo Frier in 1970.

Critical pedagogy is not a specific approach like traditional pedagogy. According to Sanjakdar et al. (2015), “Critical pedagogy is an approach to learning and teaching ... not a specific point of arrival; a cycle in which teachers and students make meaning, arrive at solutions, question the consequences and return to making meaning” (p. 68). The relationship between teachers and students is closer in critical pedagogy based on dialectical theory and seeks to understand the contradictions in society. Critical pedagogy serves as a means of promoting social justice within the classroom setting, offering an opportunity for students from oppressed classes. Uddin (2019) highlights that it is a vital teaching strategy aimed at bolstering learners’ awareness of justice and social equality, ultimately enhancing their knowledge.

### **Critical Pedagogy and Managing Diversity**

Critical pedagogy is an educational framework deeply rooted in the

intersection of education and critical theory. It has gained prominence for its capacity to address issues of social justice, equity, and diversity within educational settings. Emerging from the transformative works of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the mid-20th century, critical pedagogy has evolved into a powerful tool for managing diversity in education. Freire's seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, laid the foundation for this approach by emphasizing the need to challenge traditional educational methods that often perpetuate existing power structures and inequalities (Freire, 1970).

At its core, critical pedagogy promotes a transformative educational approach that encourages students to scrutinize, analyze, and challenge societal norms and injustices. Through this process, students develop a profound understanding of the social, cultural, and political forces shaping their world. This educational framework recognizes students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities as valuable assets in the learning process, reframing them from obstacles to opportunities (Giroux, 2011).

In the context of managing diversity, critical pedagogy provides educators with a robust framework to establish inclusive and equitable classrooms. Facilitating open dialogue and exploring the impact of systemic discrimination, this approach empowers students to actively participate as agents of change in addressing issues such as race, gender, sexuality, and culture (Giroux, 2011).

Central to critical pedagogy is the belief that education should not be a passive transmission of knowledge but an active engagement with the world. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the unique perspectives and lived experiences of every learner, valuing diversity as a catalyst for deeper learning and societal transformation (Shor, 1992).

As educational institutions become increasingly diverse, critical pedagogy offers educators a pathway to navigate the complexities of multicultural classrooms. It fosters an environment where diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated as a source of strength and enrichment (Shor, 1992).

Moreover, critical pedagogy invites educators to reflect on their own biases and privileges, encouraging self-awareness and personal growth. By empowering students to challenge stereotypes and engage in critical conversations about social justice and equity, this approach equips them with the skills and mindset needed to contribute to a more just and inclusive society (McLaren, 1994).

### **Classroom Diversity: Opportunity and Challenges**

Educational institutions are operating in an increasingly diverse societal

landscape, encompassing dimensions such as race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, ability, and socioeconomic status. This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges that institutions must address. Racial and ethnic diversity, for example, enriches the learning experience but can also expose entrenched prejudices, leading to disparities in educational outcomes. Similarly, gender identity and sexual orientation demand attention, requiring inclusive practices to ensure all students feel safe and valued.

Cultural and religious diversity can be a source of richness but may lead to conflicts if not managed effectively. Socioeconomic diversity shapes educational experiences, with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds facing challenges in access to resources and opportunities. Students with disabilities bring unique strengths and challenges, necessitating inclusive environments.

In this complex web of diversity, critical pedagogy emerges as a powerful ally. It encourages open dialogue, fostering empathy and the ability to challenge prejudiced views. Critical pedagogy delves into structural issues perpetuating discrimination, equipping students to recognize and critique these systems. It empowers students to be agents of change, creating safe spaces where every student feels valued, irrespective of background (Freire, 1970).

Moreover, critical pedagogy reframes diversity as a source of strength, encouraging students to view it as an opportunity for mutual learning. Despite undeniable challenges, critical pedagogy serves as a guiding philosophy, equipping educators and students with tools to navigate effectively. Through open dialogue, analysis of systemic discrimination, and student empowerment, educational institutions can leverage diversity for a more inclusive and equitable future. Equitable pedagogy, as highlighted by Blanks and Blanks (2009), is essential for providing robust support to all diverse learners, fostering skills application for social transformation in the classroom.

### **Diversity Management through Critical Pedagogy: A Paradigm Shift**

Critical pedagogy developed the behavior of critical thinking among the students. It creates the ability to think critically and make decisions about any event in student. It encourages the habit of rising questions. It argued that one of the advantages of critical pedagogy is to raise critical citizens (Giroux, 1997).

Paulo Freire extensively examined and critiqued the concept of “banking” deeply ingrained in the traditional education system. Describing the banking concept in education as a unilateral process where teachers transfer knowledge to students without promoting critical thinking, Freire argued that this approach discourages

students' ability to engage in critical thinking and further reinforces oppressive structures (Freire, 1993).

Critical pedagogy contributes to managing the diversity of the classroom. Critical pedagogy helps to develop confidence and consciousness in the oppressed classes. Critical pedagogy emphasized to emancipate, and empowerment of those students have oppressed by socio-cultural, economic causes. It encourages the student to think and explore their thought, ideas and criticism. Critical pedagogy helps to transform society engaging educators and learners developing their critical ability. "In critical pedagogy, a teacher uses his or her own enlightenment to encourage students to question and challenge inequalities that exist in families, schools, and societies" (Lunch, 2019, p.1). Critical theory is all about challenging the dominant social structures and the narratives that society has made the most familiar. Critical pedagogy encourages and forces to students of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds to think and speak about their right. It contributes to the management of the diversity of the classroom. Critical pedagogy helps to transform society engaging educators and learners in developing their critical ability. "In critical pedagogy, a teacher uses his or her enlightenment to encourage students to question and challenge inequalities that exist in families, schools, and societies" (Lunch, 2019, p.1). Critical theory is all about challenging the dominant social structures and the narratives that society has made the most familiar.

### **Role of a Teacher**

The role of a teacher is crucial in effectively managing diversity in the classroom through the application of critical pedagogy. In this context, the teacher is required to assume a democratic and flexible stance. A key aspect of this role is actively engaging students in the teaching process and inspiring them to participate in learning through a critical thinking approach (Sanjakdar et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Sanjakdar et al. (2015) argue that pedagogues should not only encourage dialogue and interactive engagement but also foster and amplify the voices of their students. This active involvement and empowerment of students align with the principles of critical pedagogy which emphasize a more egalitarian and inclusive approach to education.

Paulo Freire, a prominent figure in critical pedagogy, distinguishes between two pedagogical approaches: banking concept and problem-solving. In the banking concept, education is teacher-centered, with instructors as active speakers and students as passive listeners. Freire (1993) critiqued this approach and advocated for a problem-solving method, where teachers

motivate students to critically analyze various subjects. In the context of critical pedagogy, the teacher's role is that of a motivator, inspiring students to think critically about any given subject matter and connecting the pedagogical process to students' own experiences.

Abraham (2014) underscores the ethical responsibility of every educator to nurture their students' critical thinking abilities, thereby empowering them to contribute positively to society. This perspective reinforces the teacher's role as a facilitator of critical thinking and transformation.

Furthermore, the teacher-student relationship is crucial, particularly in diverse classrooms. Milner and Tenore (2010) highlight that disconnects between teachers and students often lead to management conflicts in the classroom, driven by misinterpretations rooted in socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic disparities. To address these issues, teachers must foster a sense of trust and equality among all students, irrespective of their backgrounds and characteristics.

Ensuring equity and equality practices is essential for effectively handling diversity in the classroom. Teachers play a crucial role in assisting students with diverse cultural backgrounds in navigating the intricacies of the diverse school environment (Banks, 2014). By creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment, teachers can facilitate students' growth, acknowledging and celebrating the richness that diversity brings to the classroom.

Thus, the teacher's role in managing diversity in the classroom through critical pedagogy is multifaceted. It involves inspiring critical thinking, fostering an inclusive and equal environment, and actively engaging students in their learning journey. Through these efforts, educators can effectively address the challenges and harness the benefits of diversity in education.

### **Role of a Student**

Critical pedagogy, widely recognized as an essential teaching method, encounters notable challenges in practical application, particularly in cultural contexts such as Nepal. One conspicuous challenge lies in the hesitance of students to question and engage in debates with their teachers (Freire, 1970). This reluctance among Nepalese students is often attributed to the profound influence of eastern philosophy, which emphasizes deep respect and unwavering confidence in educators.

Within the realm of critical education, the role of the student holds paramount importance. Students are not passive recipients of knowledge; they are expected to take an active stance by raising pertinent questions about a spectrum of crucial issues, including but not limited to marginalization, oppressed behavior, social injustice, humanitarian action, corruption, child rights violations, social conflict, superstitions, and social discrimination (Giroux, 2011). These themes constitute the foundational pillars of critical pedagogy, providing students with a unique opportunity to scrutinize and challenge prevailing societal norms and practices. Empowered students, adept at questioning and critically examining these issues, have the potential to transcend their roles as mere learners and evolve into change agents within their communities (Freire, 1970).

The critical lens through which students perceive these issues equips them to advocate for positive change and contribute substantively to the resolution of pressing societal problems. Their lived experiences within Nepalese society and their distinctive perspectives render students invaluable sources of insight and understanding (McLaren, 1994). Thus, it becomes imperative to cultivate a habit of critical thinking among students as they navigate the terrain of classroom instruction.

Encouraging students to question prevailing assumptions, challenge dominant narratives, and actively engage in thoughtful dialogue is at the core of critical pedagogy (Shor, 1992). As Shor (1992) emphasizes, fostering such an environment empowers students to harness their agency as knowledge creators, thereby transforming the learning process into a dynamic and participatory experience.

### **Critical Pedagogy in the Nepalese Context**

Nepal's educational system is deeply rooted in tradition and predominantly follows teacher-centered methodologies, heavily influenced by traditional pedagogy. In this system, teachers are revered as the ultimate source of knowledge, and questioning their authority is considered uncommon. There exists a profound belief in the unquestionable guidance of the guru. Shah (2000) highlighted that religious education, both in Buddhism and Hinduism, primarily involves rote learning, group delivery, and chorus repetition. Despite the global prevalence of critical pedagogy, especially prominent in western philosophy, Nepal's education system continues to adhere staunchly to these traditional approaches. The teacher is perceived as the unquestionable source of wisdom, and the traditional methods of rote learning and group repetition persist. Shah's analysis of religious education resonates with the prevailing traditional methodologies in Nepal's educational framework. Furthermore, the initial educational commission, the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC), delivered its report in 1956, echoing Shah's perspective.

This report underscores the shortcomings of passive learning and fervently supports the adoption of an active, participatory approach to teaching and learning. The commission's stance reflects a growing acknowledgment of the necessity for reforms in the educational system. Nevertheless, the deeply entrenched traditional methods persist in shaping Nepal's educational landscape, despite the ongoing evolution of global pedagogical trends (Shah, 2000).

While Nepal's education system is not immune to globalization, the principles of critical pedagogy are gaining recognition. Various exercises rooted in critical theory are being practiced in the country, often driven by international governmental organizations (INGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a focus on rights-based approaches. Initiatives have been undertaken to raise critical awareness among marginalized groups, such as ex-bonded laborers in western Nepal and women's education, notably the Kamalari education program. However, the impact of these efforts has not always matched their intent. There is a pressing need to integrate critical analysis into the national curriculum. Paudel (2020) highlighted that after a decade of teaching experience in semi-urban areas of Nepal, effective teaching and learning were observed to thrive in dialogic situations and problem-posing approaches. The observation also emphasized the challenges educators face when translating theoretical concepts into practical classroom applications.

Freire (1993) emphasized that both the oppressed and oppressors need education and awareness to address societal problems effectively. Notably, the curriculum for social studies has been designed to address issues of critical consciousness and social justice. However, it has been observed that schools and teachers often prioritize theoretical aspects over practical implementation.

In my own experiences and discussions with my colleagues regarding the implementation of critical pedagogy, I recognize the pivotal role of the teacher in this context. Scholars have underscored the indispensable role of teachers in the effective application of critical pedagogy. Teachers serve as facilitators of critical thinking, playing a central role in bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application within the curriculum. For instance, girls encounter difficulties during their menstrual periods, and the school environment is often not accommodating. Menstrual hygiene and related discrimination issues, such as Chhaupadi, require increased awareness and education, especially among male teachers (Dahal et al., 2017, p. 24).

Implementing critical pedagogy in Nepal presents several challenges rooted in cultural norms, the structure of the education system, teacher preparation, resource limitations, and socioeconomic disparities. Understanding and addressing these

hurdles is crucial for fostering a more critical and inclusive educational environment in the country.

### ***Cultural Norms and Teacher-Student Dynamics***

Nepal boasts a deep-seated cultural tradition of revering teachers, which can sometimes conflict with the principles of critical pedagogy (Thapa, 2015). Students' profound respect for their educators may discourage them from questioning or challenging their teachers, as it is often regarded as disrespectful.

### ***Examination-Centric Education System***

Nepal's historical reliance on examination-centric education emphasizes rote learning and memorization over critical thinking (Bista, 2017). This pedagogical approach leaves little room for the kind of inquiry and critical analysis promoted by critical pedagogy.

### ***Lack of Teacher Training***

A substantial number of Nepalese educators confront challenges due to a lack of adequate training in the principles and methodologies of critical pedagogy (Devkota, 2019). This deficiency in training and resources creates a significant hurdle for teachers striving to effectively implement this progressive educational approach.

### ***Resource Constraints***

Nepal faces resource constraints in terms of classroom materials, infrastructure, and teacher-student ratios (Luitel, 2018). These limitations can obstruct the application of interactive and participatory teaching methods, which are essential components of critical pedagogy.

### ***Socioeconomic Factors***

Socioeconomic disparities in Nepal can further complicate the adoption of critical pedagogy. Students from marginalized backgrounds may encounter additional barriers to engaging in critical dialogue, as their immediate concerns may revolve around economic survival (Shrestha, 2016).

However, despite these formidable challenges, it is important to acknowledge ongoing efforts and initiatives to incorporate elements of critical pedagogy into the Nepalese education system. These endeavors frequently involve the adaptation of critical pedagogy's principles to the local context and gradual steps toward a more participatory and critical approach to teaching and learning (Sharma, 2018). By addressing these challenges and actively working to align education with the principles of critical pedagogy, Nepal can move closer to providing a more equitable and empowering learning experience for its students.

Critical pedagogy, in its essence, stands as an indispensable ally in the realm of education when it comes to confronting the complex and diverse challenges that educational institutions face today. Its significance lies in its ability to transform these challenges into opportunities for growth, empathy, and understanding. One of its fundamental strengths lies in fostering open dialogue—a platform where students can candidly share their distinct experiences, perspectives, and concerns. This dialogue not only cultivates empathy and mutual understanding but also equips students with the vital skill of challenging prejudiced views.

Furthermore, critical pedagogy goes beyond surface-level discussions by delving into the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate discrimination. It provides students with the analytical tools necessary to recognize and critique these systems, moving beyond attributing disparities solely to individual shortcomings. This depth of analysis empowers students, making them not passive recipients of knowledge but active agents of change. By grasping the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination, they become empowered to challenge these issues both within and outside the confines of the classroom.

Within the critical pedagogical framework, creating inclusive and equitable classroom environments takes center stage. Educators shoulder the crucial responsibility of establishing a safe and welcoming space where every student, regardless of their background, feels valued and respected. This approach recognizes that true learning flourishes in environments where diversity is not just acknowledged but celebrated.

Perhaps most significantly, critical pedagogy transforms the perspective on diversity itself. Rather than viewing it as a problem to be solved, this educational philosophy encourages students to perceive diversity as an opportunity for mutual learning. It teaches them to draw strength and enrichment from each other's unique life experiences and viewpoints. In this way, diversity becomes an asset, a wellspring of knowledge and understanding.

Finally, integrating critical pedagogy into the Nepalese school curriculum is a vital step toward addressing the myriad diversity challenges the country faces. Teachers play a pivotal role in translating curriculum objectives into practical, empowering classroom experiences. By fostering critical thinking and awareness, educators can contribute to dismantling discriminatory practices and promoting inclusivity and equality in Nepal's education system.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, critical pedagogy stands out as a vital approach in navigating

the complexities of diversity within the Nepalese education system. By instilling critical thinking and heightened awareness, this pedagogical methodology becomes instrumental in empowering marginalized groups and dismantling entrenched discriminatory structures. In the context of Nepal, redefining the teacher's role as a facilitator takes on particular significance, emphasizing the need to recognize students as active contributors to the learning process. The concept of mutual learning and teaching encourages educators to create inclusive environments that respect and respond to the diverse experiences and knowledge brought by students from various backgrounds.

Moreover, the recognition of intellectual diversity calls for a departure from standardized educational approaches, urging the incorporation of methods that accommodate the varied learning styles prevalent in Nepal. The call for multicultural respect within the classroom aligns with the rich tapestry of cultural diversity in Nepal, urging educational institutions to create environments that celebrate and embrace the nation's cultural plurality. Additionally, the proposal to include critical theory courses in the Nepalese school curriculum signifies an opportunity for education to play a pivotal role in shaping perspectives and fostering a more inclusive society.

These implications underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive reevaluation of Nepal's current education practices. Implementing critical pedagogy requires a shift towards student-centered, collaborative learning environments that actively engage with the diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of students. Equipping educators with the tools to facilitate critical thinking becomes crucial in a Nepalese context where varied perspectives need acknowledgment and respect. By embracing these changes, the Nepalese education system can not only effectively manage diversity within its classrooms but also contribute to broader societal shifts, fostering an inclusive and transformative educational experience that resonates with the unique socio-cultural context of Nepal.

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