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**THESIS PAPER ON THE TOPIC**  
**PORTERS: THE SILENT BACKBONE OF TOURISM INDUSTRIES**

**STUDENT NAME- PRATIMA POKHREL AND DAWA NURBU TAMANG**

**STUDENT PIN- 20221259 AND 20220542**

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## **Abbreviation**

HAI- High altitude illness

TAAN- Trekking Agencies Associations of Nepal

ILO – International Labor Organization

GDP- Gross development product

IPPG- International porters protection group

NTB- Nepal Tourism Board

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## ABSTRACT

The problem that employees in the tourism industry has been researched and studied in many different countries, however, research into porters' issues in Nepal's tourism sector is limited. Porters serve as the silent backbone of the tourism industry, particularly in the fields of adventure, trekking, and mountaineering tourism. Despite porters having a notable impact on the tourism industry, they are seen as the most affected and vulnerable workers in the tourism industry. This thesis delves into the numerous issues faced by porters, ranging from harsh working conditions to economic exploitation, discrimination, and lack of legal protection. In addition, porters often endure gruelling labour, carrying excessive loads in extreme weather conditions without adequate safety measures, fair compensation, or proper medical support despite their critical role in facilitating tourism.

Social as well as cultural aspects also play a role in the challenges porters face. In many regions of Nepal, porters come from marginalized communities with limited access to education and alternative employment opportunities. Employees like porters frequently face discrimination, cannot receive adequate housing, food, and medical attention, and are viewed as just workers rather than skilled professionals. Additionally, prejudice based on caste, ethnicity, or geography makes their problems worse, especially in places where social hierarchies are strongly established. They often lack the power of bargaining and are unable to advocate for their rights, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. The absence of regulatory frameworks from government and enforcement mechanisms further exacerbates their struggles, leaving them with less to no means to improve their working conditions in the tourism field. Moreover,

To find out these types of issues, research was conducted using qualitative data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with porters, further, we interviewed five porters. The four primarily work in the Himalayan region as trekking Porters (men); one is a local female porter who carries loads for local folks. And data were analyzed by using thematic coding. The research findings show that many problems porters face like low payment, lack of safety precautions, lack of accommodations, no bargaining power, discrimination etc. Now, with the help of policies, awareness, education and training, porters can shift the social values and norms and contribute to the tourism sector very wisely in Nepal.

## CHAPTER - 1

### 1. BACKGROUND

Porters are often known as load-carrying individuals from underprivileged economic circumstances who support trekking or expedition groups in carrying their cargo (Malville, 1999). In addition, they are the mainstay of the remote region economy as they are the key form of haulage across the mountain areas of Nepal. From the beginning of Himalayan mountaineering, local Indigenous Mountain peoples have been employed as porters tasked with doing the most arduous and often risky work on the mountain (Basnyat & Litch, 1997).

The equal treatment of Nepali porters in the tourism industry is very challenging, especially due to discrimination and working environments like low wages, health hazards, heavy burdens, and lack of career growth (Frydenlund, 2019). They are often viewed only as a load-carrying individual from underprivileged economic circumstances (Malville, 1999). Porters face discrimination, including discrimination based on their gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation. The main reason behind porters' discrimination is due to their ethnic status (Law, and Rodway, 2008). In the context of Nepal, the majority of the porters (Sherpa) belong to the lower caste system and known as an exploited and unskilled underclass by the culture since ancient times. Also, there are no laws to prevent discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, caste, and power in the workplace and even no law against rape in the workplace (Frydenlund, 2017). In addition, porters are frequently not adequately covered by social and health facilities, despite the fact that their work exposes them to significant strains and risks (Zhou et al., 2021). At the same time, research in tourism from a worker's perspective like Porter is very low in Nepal. The nominal results and viewpoints from researchers such as Hillman, (2019), Upadhaya, (2011), and Malville (1999), indicate that wage workers like porters are considered as excluded workers in society as they are constantly abused to work under intense work demands for higher production in harsh weather condition, but when it comes to workplace environments and facility they are deprived of fair and timely wage, job security, social benefits (leaves), workplace safety, basic resources, welfare facilities, childcare and health insurance. In

addition, many people are forced to perform this demanding and dangerous work because jobs are scarce in many destination countries (Bauer, 2006). Also, tourism is seasonal and occasionally unpredictable, a large number of porters in temporary positions with no job security because tourism is seasonal and occasionally unpredictable (Upadhayaya & Upreti, 2008b).

Porters are key to the success of the tour as well as the security and comfort of the clients when trekking or climbing mountains (Minetti et al., 2006, p.1). But it is very unfortunate to hear of the many injustices and problematic circumstances that many porters bear in their work environment and the tour field. Additionally, tourism is a warm industry, and the involvement and participation of people from different sectors in tourism have a significant impact on the growth of the tourism industry. Porters' engagement is necessary for every part of the tourism business (Hypatia and Thompson, 2014). However, it remains a matter of quandary on why, despite having such a remarkable performance by porters, the Nepalese travel and trekking porter profession is still dominated and limited. Thus, there is a need to find out the issues and challenges that they face in tourism for their empowerment and rights in the tourism field (Hillman, 2020).

## **1.1.INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1.1. TOURISM**

Throughout the 20th century, tourism has grown into one of the world's fastest growing and most important industries (Hong, 2008). It plays a key role in society, culture, and politics while also supporting related sectors like travel, hotels, food, entertainment, and shopping. Tourism is a major part of the economy, helping it grow and develop (APEC Tourism Charter, 2000). Spending on tourism has become a major economic force, creating jobs, increasing incomes, generating tax revenue, and boosting foreign currency reserves. Many regions, such as the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, benefit greatly from tourism (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000).

### 1.1.2. THE MOUNTAIN TOURISM AND NEPAL

Over time, mountain tourism has grown in popularity and significance among other forms of travel (Moss and Godde., 2000). Mountain regions have seen tremendous growth in recent decades, and they are now the second most popular tourist destinations after coastal areas. Mountain tourism makes up roughly 15-20% of all tourism worldwide and generates between 70 and 90 billion dollars annually (Taher et al., 2015). Additionally, Nepal is a popular destination for mountaineers looking for the challenge of climbing the highest peaks in the world. There are over 3,310 peaks in Nepal's Himalayan range, with about 1,310 of them rising to a height of 6,000 meters (Shrestha, 2000). Although many of these peaks are now open for mountaineering by the Nepal government, many more are yet unclimbed. More than 400 peaks have been made accessible for climbing by the nation's Department of Tourism, accommodating climbers of all skill levels (Apollo, 2017). Even if many other summits, including Ama Dablam, Island Peak, and Mera Peak, provide exciting climbs with various technical demands, Mount Everest is still the ultimate aim for climbers. Mountaineers from all over the world come to climb during the spring (March to May) and fall (September to November) seasons (Huey, 2020). Nepal's distinctive mountain lodges and teahouses and the country's thriving climbing community create a rich and encouraging environment for climbers. Nepal's mountain tourism industry has changed dramatically (Shrestha, 2020). Today, with the assistance of local guides and porters and access to various contemporary amenities, individuals from all backgrounds and skill levels go out on mountain treks. Facilities such as medicine, oxygen, supplements, food, and drink are available even in the high camps of the Mountains; these are carried by local labourers on their backs (Apollo, 2017).

Nepal's mountain tourism attracts tourists from all over the world with its fascinating fusion of adventure, culture, and charming beauty (Nepal., 2011). Nepal is home to eight of the fourteen highest peaks in the world, including the famous Mount Everest, the highest point on Earth, and is crowned by the gorgeous Himalayas. Nepal is one of the top locations for trekking, mountaineering, and cultural discovery because of its distinctive geographic location. The South Asian landlocked nation of Nepal is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, diverse environment, and significant historical background (Upadhayaya and Upreti., 2011). India borders Nepal to the south, and China borders it to the north, The



country's triangular flag sets it apart from other countries. Nepal is also renowned for the courage of the Gurkhas and for being the birthplace of Lord Gautam Buddha. Three geographical zones—the Terai, Himalayan, and hilly regions—make up Nepal's 147,181 square kilometres. Buddhism and Hinduism are the most prevalent religions in the country, which is a patchwork of languages, cultures, and faiths (Nepal Tourism Board., 2020).

### **1.1.3. LAND SCARCITY AND GRAIN DEFICITS**

Portage work allows many hill populations in eastern Nepal to support their subsistence farming with cash income without having to leave their homes completely in pursuit of other wage labour possibilities (Shrestha, 2000). People of the Middle Hills endure having to carry loads on their backs because half of Nepal's rural population lives far from an infrastructure network. Apart from the few wealthy people who may allow others to carry their loads, all Nepali hill families are used to hauling their own loads, and children are taught how to balance loads on their backs at an early age through the use of a tumpline, which is referred to as a Namlo (forehead strap) (Malville, 2005).

Because of the lack of agricultural land and a rapidly growing population, Nepal's traditional housing area which is identified as Pahari (the middle hill of Nepal), endures repeated and continuing food shortages (Upadhayaya and Upreti., 2011). Farmers from most of the hilly region struggle to produce enough grain to sustain their families, even with multiple cropping and comprehensive terracing of steep hillsides (Malville,2005). As cereal or other food grains provide 80–90% of the calories and more than half of the protein in the Nepali diet, the annual grain shortages, which can range from 4.8 months in western Nepal to 2-3 months in eastern Nepal and that significantly impact the level of nutrition. In multiple regions of Nepal, widespread malnutrition has been reported with between 50 and 60 per cent of children showing indicators of chronic undernutrition (Malville, 2005).

Normally Hilly households use a range of different strategies, such as military labour, paid labour, going abroad for work, taking loans and borrowing funds to meet their basic needs and deal with anticipated food shortages. Food shortages can be temporarily addressed by taking out debt frequently at exorbitant interest rates. However, if the money borrowed is not repaid or not paid on time, it can have disastrous effects such as home and land loss, bonded labour, or having to go abroad (Malville, 2005).

#### **1.1.4. REPRESENTATIONS OF NEPALI PORTERS**

Nepali workers as porters are shown in a variety of ways. "Porters as a group are mostly poor people," according to a recent piece criticizing the mistreatment of mountaineering and adventure porters (Parker, 1989). The true question is not about whether the Nepali porters are poor, but rather if they are poorer compared to their fellow villagers, given that UNICEF views almost everyone in Nepal as poor apart from a few experts, businessmen, and possibly some large farmers. The resilient Khumbu and Darjeeling Sherpas are undoubtedly the most well-known Nepali porters as they have gained a lot of reputation as high-altitude porters on various mountaineering trips (Evans, 2009). However, only a few of the porters seen on the hiking paths today are ethnic Sherpas even though in the Western world, the term "sherpa" is essentially associated with porter but instead, they are members of other mountain communities with Tibetan ancestors. Rather than the load carriers themselves, Sherpas are more inclined to be the lodge owners and traders who hire the porters (Malville, 2005).

#### **1.1.5. SHERPA AND SHERPAS AND THEIR HISTORY**

For generations, people living in high-altitude areas have been renowned for their great strength and ability to survive in thin air. The Himalayan Sherpa community is particularly notable among them. Sherpas have a deep Tibetan background, having migrated from the Tibetan plateau to Nepal's hilly regions some 400 years ago (REFERENCE). It's believed that their ancestors lived at high altitudes for over 25,000 years—longer than any other group in history (McIntosh., et., al., 2011., pp-65-71).

Even before climbers began targeting the towering peaks of the Himalayas, Sherpas played a crucial role in exploring these rugged landscapes. When British expeditions first ventured to Mt. Everest in 1921, Sherpas became essential members of every journey to the summit. Known for their remarkable stamina and strength in the harshest mountain conditions, the Sherpa people have become legendary for their endurance at extreme altitudes (Evans, 2009), Sherpas are known to have unique genetic traits that make them well-suited to living and working in high-altitude environments. Studies show they expend less energy when carrying heavy loads compared to people of similar physical characteristics from

lowaltitude regions. Additionally, Sherpas tend to have greater total lung capacity and vital capacity, which gives them an edge in adapting to the thin air of high altitudes. These anatomical and physiological advantages enable them to thrive in challenging mountain conditions (McIntosh., et., al., 2011., pp-65-71).

One cannot discuss Nepal's trek and tourism without bringing up the word "Sherpa." The Sherpa are strongly linked to the Nepalese trekking experience for a large portion of the world. Although its precise definition is frequently ambiguous, "sherpa" refers to people who is popular in a doing jobs in mountain since ancient time, such as guides, porters, or climbers (Karki and Kafle, 2020). It now refers to any Nepali mountain worker on a global scale. But a crucial distinction is sometimes missed: the term "Sherpa" (capital "S") designates a particular ethnic group from the Solukhumbu (Everest) region. On the other hand, the name "sherpa" (lowercase "s") has also come to refer to the labor force that makes hiking and mountaineering possible in Nepal (Parker, 1989). Not every person working on Everest or other high peaks is Sherpa, even though the majority of labors on Chomolungma (Mount Everest) are members of the Sherpa community, whose ancestral grounds include the mountain. The Rai, Tamang, Khaling, Gurung, and Kulung Rai populations are among the numerous ethnic groups that contribute to this business, however, the name "sherpa" as a job title oversimplifies their varied contributions. The crucial contributions of these groups are obscured when the term "sherpa" is used in a general way (Frydenlund, 2019: Oh, 2016).

Many people who do not know much about Nepal or Himalayan mountaineering believe that a "sherpa" is just a mountain guide or Porter in the Himalayas but the term "Sherpa" refers to an ethnic group that has long resided in northeastern Nepal on the southern slopes of the Himalayas (Evans, 2009). An increasing number of Sherpas joined mountaineering expeditions in the early 1900s, first as porters, camp assistants, and then climbing aides. They eventually assumed positions as knowledgeable tour guides, base camp supervisors, and tour operators. The Sherpas are the main participants in Himalayan mountaineering today, even though other ethnic groups in Nepal have Tibetan cultural roots (Oh, 2016).

In addition to offering physical adventure, Nepal's mountain tourism is intricately entwined with regional customs and religious beliefs. For instance, the hiking and climbing industry

heavily relies on the Sherpa people of the Everest region, whose culture is closely linked to Buddhism (Klatzel, F., 2010). Nepal's tourist industry is primarily reliant on local porters, guides, and merchants, and the money brought in by trekkers and climbers benefits many isolated areas. Tourists can also immerse themselves in Buddhist and Hindu spiritual traditions by visiting the hilly areas' religious communities, stupas, and temples. Mountain tourism is boosted by festivals like Mani Rimdu in the Everest region, which showcase traditional dances and traditions (Mittelman, M., 2011).

#### **1.1.6. PORTERS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE**

Over the 20th century, the tourism sector has grown to become one of the most important and quickly growing industries worldwide (Hong, 2008). The tourism industry has social, cultural, and political significance and supports domestic travel, hotel, cooking, entertainment, and retail sectors. It is essential to the economy and greatly boosts its vitality and growth (APEC Tourism Charter, 2000). As a result, spending on tourism around the world has become a major economic driver, creating jobs, raising income, paying taxes, and boosting foreign exchange reserves. Many nations and areas that rely on tourism, such as those in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, gain a great deal from this industry (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000). One such country is Nepal, where the country's mountain tourism sector is essential, accounting for about 8% of its GDP. However the well-being of the people who support and work in this industry is still low, despite its significance (Khadka & Paul, 2015).

Porters are known as a load-carrying individuals from underprivileged economic circumstances who support trekking or expedition groups in carrying their cargo in the context of Nepal (Malville, 1999). They are the mainstay of the remote region economy as they are the key form of haulage across the mountain areas of Nepal. They provide rudimentary requirements for their extended family from the income secured by lugging the large and considerable gear of trekkers and others (Upadhyaya & Upreti, 2008b). There are two kinds of porters in Nepal, one for haulage associated with everyday life and another for trekking. The porters mainly involved with general everyday haulage carry various goods including foods, kitchen items such as refrigerators. Porters, who work for trekking, carry the tents and foods necessary for trekking in the mountains. When

mountaineering in winter, trekking porters are particularly in demand for their knowledge of the mountains and their marked physical strength (KANEDAI et al., 1999).

Porters have been an integral part of Nepal's trekking and adventure industry since its start, contributing significantly to the country's tourism economy. According to the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG), around 40,000 people work as porters in Nepal each year, allowing many visitors to discover the country's isolated and scenic villages. Without the assistance of porters, many tourists would be unable to haul their own provisions, making these treks completely inaccessible. Porters improve the overall trekking experience by shouldering big burdens over steep and difficult terrain, frequently carrying weights that significantly surpass their own body mass. They are essential in delivering supplies to highaltitude lodges and expedition camps. Many amenities, ranging from beer to pool tables, are available at these locales because of the labour of porters who deliver them to such remote areas (Gurung, 2024).

Porters, often known as "ants," due to their incredible strength, can be seen pulling massive loads on mountaineering excursions, particularly on peaks like Everest. However, their contributions go beyond transportation. Porters have frequently saved lives and rescued trekkers and climbers in crucial situations like serious injuries or altitude sickness (Gurung, 2024). In several situations, they have taken people to safety when no other options were available, demonstrating their important role in Nepal's adventure tourist sector. Given their critical contributions, protecting their rights and well-being is critical, since the future success of Nepal's wilderness and expedition activities is heavily reliant on their hard work and dedication (Gurung, 2024).

#### **1.1.7. SITUATION OF PORTERS IN NEPAL**

From the beginning of Himalayan mountaineering local indigenous mountain peoples have been employed as porters tasked with doing the most arduous and often risky work on the mountain (Basnyat & Litch, 1997). Without them, tourists who have kept the Nepali Himalaya on their bucket list wouldn't be able to turn their dreams into reality. However, these people are the ones who suffer the most while working as porters. A safe workplace environment is important for a porter, as one-half of the working hours are spent at the

workplace, which determines the quality and productivity of their work (Lama, 2020). The impact of a workplace that is physically and emotionally safe is very important. According to Gahlot, Rana, & Singh (2020), wage workers are considered excluded workers in society as they are constantly abused to work under intense work demands for higher production in harsh weather conditions, but when it comes to workplace environments and facilities they are deprived of fair and timely wage, job security, social benefits (leaves), workplace safety, basic amenities, welfare facilities, childcare and health insurance (Gahlot, Rana, & Singh, (2020).

Hundreds of Nepali indigenous workers like porters have died on various mountains while climbing the Himalayas and South Asia while their families receive limited to no protection or financial support to overcome the significant tragic trigger (Lama, 2020). Partially, what feeds into this situation is the social and political marginalization that indigenous mountain peoples have experienced in Nepal which increased their levels of precarity (Upadhyaya & Upreti, 2008b). There have been multiple failures on all sides when it comes to the regulatory work environment and working conditions of wage workers like porters (Malville,2005).

Specifically, there are no porter-run organizations in Nepal (Upadhyaya et al., 2022). If we see the status from Historical way, Nepal had foreign-run nonprofit organizations that claimed to uphold for the rights of porters but in practice, they just provided aid in the form of clothes, some medicines or food—especially during the pandemic height—as opposed to show a bigger role in recommending for social and industry changes on behalf of the porters (Hillman, 2021). Despite the salary set forth via the Porter laws in Nepal through the guidelines of salary, the porters are often subject to low pay and even nonpayment of wages in their employment (Malville,2005). This happens because there is a huge supply of workers available for the limited number of jobs like portering, making it easy for tour operators to hire and choose the people willing to accept lower pay. (Upreti et al., 2018). Gelal, (2022), stated in this matter that coverage of employment in the formal sector is too small and informal sectors must absorb an ever-increasing supply of labour. So, the volume of underemployment is always very high in the Nepali economy. In addition, tour agencies have taken advantage of tipping culture too, as they reportedly instruct porters that their pay will come solely from the tips they receive.

Further, porters are often ill-equipped with inadequate clothing, gloves, sanitisers, masks as well as hiking gear (Basnyat & Litch, 1997). At the same time, companies frequently place the financial burden on workers like porters to buy work-related necessities on their own (Nepal, 2022). Moreover, during illness or accident, porters typically do not have accident insurance of their status as seasonal workers. Although there have been reports of tour agencies providing some type of insurance or funding for accidents, these tour agencies are the exception to the rule. To this day, Nepal does not have the legal obligation to provide either benefit to wage workers like porters (Lama, 2020).

## **1.2.PROBLEM FORMULATION**

The trekking companies employ hundreds of porters on a daily wage basis for fixed days to assist the tourists visiting Nepal. The main duties of these porters are to carry luggage and other essentials of tourists during the period of trekking (Uprety et al., 2018 p.387). Tourism is one of the main income sources and an effective medium for the locals including porters in Nepal (Lama, 2020). However, trekking to the mountain region is not easy work because of its topography and hills located at higher altitudes (Malville, 2005). Walking for several hours every day with a heavy load without sufficient equipment, porters endure physical hardship each day, and sadly, sometimes they also lose their lives because of this adversity (Malville, 2001). During the trekking period, porters not only encounter natural hazards but also frequently deal with various difficulties, such as discrimination and abuse (Upadhyaya et al., 2022). In the context of Nepal, workers as porters are considered excluded human in society as they are constantly abused to work under intense work demands for higher production in harsh weather conditions, and when it comes to workplace environments and facilities, they are deprived of fair and timely wage, job security, social benefits (leaves), workplace safety, basic amenities, welfare facilities, childcare and health insurance (Law & Rodway, 2008). The most common way to abuse a porter is to get them to carry too much and pay them too little. This is due to the insurance, salary, and safety of porters are left in the hands of trekking companies that have little to no regulations for how to conduct their business or treat their workers like porters (Upadhyaya et al., 2022.p.73).

These services providing key actors like porters come from economically very poor families from many mountain districts but work under adverse circumstances, without a standard Code of Ethics (CoE) to the needed extent (Upadhayaya et al., 2022). In addition, Nepali guides, and porters, who are also athletes and climbers, are almost completely missing in international media and are often mentioned only as a footnote in mountaineering stories.

Thus, porters are the lowest in the labour hierarchy but are the backbone of the trekking industry because of their immense role in making trekking accessible to trekkers (Hillman, 2021).

On the other hand, while all the employees in the world get contracts as well as training before starting a job the porter market in Nepal is informal with very few porters receiving any form of paperwork (Hillman, 2021). In an industry as precarious as trekking, it is necessary to have contracts on various topics such as sickness, pay, training and so on that will not only ensure the safety of porters but also the trekkers they are accompanying (Kratzmann, 2020). In Nepal, porters are treated as a marginalized community whose struggles and lifestyles have not received enough attention in scholarly publications (Lama, 2020). There has been some research published on as physiological issues of porters or guides while trekking in general (Bauer, 2006), however, there is no attention that has been given to the main issues that porters face while working and how pitiful the working conditions them. At the same time, lack of a bargaining system and discrimination are barriers to the good working status of porters. Thus, there is a significant gap in the way porters are treated due to their social status and unequal power relations within the industry and the issues they face while doing work as porters. We hope our research can fill in a fraction of that gap by exploring how porters in Nepal are facing the harsh working conditions, lack of health facilities and lower regard for treatment during work that have been affected for so long. This type of research is important to improve working conditions and create a sustainable future for Nepali trekking porters. Thus, based upon the above descriptions we have made the following question for our research.

#### **Research question:**

**What are the issues that the porters face while doing work, as a porter and how are the working conditions of tourism industries in Nepal?**



## **CHAPTER – 2**

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter discusses the relevant literature as depicted by the previous researchers to give a good insight into the topic chosen for this study. Mainly, this chapter mentions the concept of a porter and the problems they face in tourism like discrimination, power relations, workload, low wages, health issues and how these things affect them.

#### **2.1.EMPLOYEE IN TOURISM SECTOR**

The sector of tourism is a vast industry that employs a large percentage of the global workforce. The industry involves a variety of businesses, like hotels, restaurants, travel and tour agencies, and transportation companies (Sharma & Dangal, 2019). The workers and employees working in the tourism field play a significant role in shaping the experiences of the customers, and the job responsibilities are different depending on the staff's job position and the specific sector they work in (Gelal, 2022). According to Elbaz & Haddoud (2017), the tourism industry is a labor-intensive industry, and a main contributor to the global economy, providing opportunities of employment to millions of people worldwide. However, Porto et al, (2021) argued that the industry of tourism growth has been accompanied by concerns regarding lower labour standards. Working conditions violations in the tourism industry are widespread, and they affect vulnerable groups, especially daily wage workers, women, and children. Maville, (1999) said that the employees in tourism are more often subjected to an exploitative working environment, including heavy and long hours of work, less wages, and also inadequate to no accommodation while working. Women and children are more often risk at of being exploited as reports of sexual harassment and discrimination (Gelal, 2022).

Generally, the tourism sector employees work in an informal economy, which means, workers who are not registered do not have formal contracts and also not covered by labour laws and protections (Raj Adhikari et al., 2011). Dixit, (2019) added that the condition of working as an Informal makes it difficult for them to receive fair salary, safety and healthy

working environments, and opportunities for career advancement (Dixit, 2019). In addition, Walpole, (2016) agrees that informal employment makes it more challenging for employees to organize as well as negotiate for their rights. According to Baumann & Dharel, (2014) low wages, discrimination and the heavy workload are the main issues faced by employees in the field of tourism. Many employees in this sector, particularly those in jobs of low-skilled are paid low payments and that is often insufficient to cover even their basic needs (Baumann & Dharel, 2014). Low wages create issues for employees to gain further opportunities for career development, as they may not have the financial ability to invest in even training and education (Dixit, 2019). The lack of strong legal protections leads to less fair work for all employees in the tourism sector. In many countries, labour laws, rules and regulations are enforced very weakly, leaving employees vulnerable to exploitation as well as abuse (Minetti et al., 2006, p.1). Furthermore, employees may face discrimination, which is based on their ethnicity, gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation. (Halder & Patra, 2021).

In the context of Nepal, 96% of workers are employed in an informal sector where minimum wages and other provisions such as the Social Security Fund, are less likely to be honoured and harder to enforce (Halder & Patra, 2021). The CRI index (Centre for Research and Information) shows that the rights of women and workers in the workplace are very poor, and the country is ranked for labour rights among the lowest countries in the world (Minetti et al., 2006, p.1). There are no laws to prevent discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, caste, and power in the workplace and even no law against rape in the workplace. Bonded and forced labour are still highly prevalent in Nepal, with more than 100,000 bonded labourer households involved in agriculture (Baumann & Dharel, 2014). A certain amount of advance money is handed to the individuals who are willing to work (Sharma & Dangal, 2019). From a psychological perspective, workers accept the offer without considering the consequences of working under the given terms and conditions because they subconsciously view only the benefits of the advanced amount; therefore, the workers are trapped in a cycle of poverty through bonded conception labour force, which is a modern form of slavery (Halder & Patra, 2021). These people are excluded from prosperity and denied their rights.

## 2.2.EMPLOYEE DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is the unequal treatment of individuals and has long been a social issue (Santos & Varejão, 2007). In general, discrimination is the use of power by a superordinate group to impose customary or legal restrictions and deprivations upon a subordinate group to maintain a situation of privilege and inequality (Zhou et al., 2021). It may involve enforced residential segregation, differential access to educational or employment opportunities, discrimination at the workplace, and imposition of other customary and legal disabilities (Frydenlund, 2017). Discrimination is basically a result of a prejudiced state of mind. It may occur in various spheres of human activity. For example, in the tourism sector, discrimination against employees can take many forms, including based on caste, race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, and disability (KC, 2013). In the tourism industry, the earliest work to examine discrimination was that of Clarke and Cricher (1985), who mentioned that workers might receive different mistreatment because of their social status. As the Tourism industry is largely service-oriented and interaction-based, workers may be discriminated against because of their sex, appearance, race, social status and so forth. For instance, “sherpa” as a porter in Nepal discriminates based upon a caste system. Caste, as an institution and system, is hierarchical differentiation of ritual status. operationally, caste groups are groups belonging to the Indo-European cultural orientation and occupying both uppermost (Brahman, Chhetri and certain Newar groups) and bottommost ( dalit, sherpa groups) rungs in the caste hierarchy in Nepal (HITCHCOCK, 1978). In addition, Maville (2005), added that in many regions of the Nepalese Himalayas, portering of heavy loads has not been a voluntary occupation, but has been forced upon certain populations by "power and poverty". For instance, the Tamang and Sherpa people, who live in the hills and mountain area, are one group that has always been forced to live as porters. These people have been treated as an exploited and unskilled underclass by the cultured urban classes of Kathmandu since ancient times (Upadhayaya et al., 2022). Dixit (2019) agrees on Maville (2005), that Tamang and Sherpas tribes in central Nepal served the central elites by acting as an underutilized labor reserve. Neglect was shown in their subsistence economy and marginal niche. However, in eastern Nepal, the majority of human load carrying appears to have been voluntary rather than state-imposed labor, with a Sherpa monopoly being prevalent (Bennike & Nielsen, 2023).

Discrimination is characterized into two forms: blatant discrimination and subtle discrimination (Van Laer and Janssens, 2011). Compared with subtle discrimination, blatant discrimination is relatively overt and easy to recognize. Typical examples of blatant discriminatory behaviors are physical violence, verbal and nonverbal threats, inappropriate jokes and unreasonable refusal towards disadvantaged groups (Ahuja and Lyons, 2019). Blatant discriminatory behaviors negatively influence employees' experiences and can be challenged on legal grounds. However, more subtle, or everyday forms of discrimination are difficult to address in contemporary Tourism services. Subtle discriminatory behaviors are less visible, more ambiguous, and less easily recognized (Van Laer and Janssens, 2011). Entrenched in service interactions, examples of subtle discriminatory behaviors include undervaluing or neglecting, inequality and other micro aggressive behaviors (Brown and Osman, 2017).

According to Zhou et al., (2021), due to the intensive interpersonal interactions and hostile work climate, workers in the tourism industry are exposed to high emotional labor and violent environments, encountering mistreatments, such as verbal and physical aggression, bullying and sexual harassment (Zhou et al., 2021). Thapa-Parajuli & Paudel, (2018) argued that discrimination in the tourism sector happens not only due to work climate but also because of the lack of awareness and understanding. The majority of people are not aware of the extent of worker discrimination and the impacts of negativity on employees' lives in the tourism field. Thus, addressing this kind of issue requires raising awareness, education and increasing understanding of the issue among all the stakeholders (Santos & Varejão, 2007). According to K.C, (2013), the lack of legal rules and protections for employees in the tourism sector is another factor that relates to discrimination as it is often illegal under national and international law; however, Goodman Chacky & Emilian Shirima, (2023) argued that these laws are not always enforced effectively. In a few cases, employees may be subject to discrimination that is not covered by existing rules, laws and protections (Goodman Chacky & Emilian Shirima, 2023). According to Brandt, (2018), the nature of the tourism sector is characterized by high demand, variability and seasonability. During peak seasons, businesses and tour agencies require additional workers to meet the high demand which can create a situation of competition in which discrimination is often likely to occur (Brandt, (2018). Discrimination of the people who

work in the tourism sector can have severe consequences for their physical, and mental health, career prospects, and job satisfaction (Brewster & Z.W. 2012). It can lead to anxiety, depression as well and stress affecting employees' mental health as well as limiting employees' career opportunities, as they may be denied opportunities like promotions or access to training and development opportunities (Brewster & Z.W. 2012).

### **2.3.COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

To negotiate their terms and conditions of employment, workers band together and send representatives (Doellgast & Benassi, 2014). According to Traxler (1994), collective bargaining is a process that involves two parties representing the interests of the employer and the employee negotiating and jointly making decisions. It also involves the continuous process of application of an agreed set of rules and regulations to govern the substantive and procedural terms of the employment relationship (Doellgast & Benassi, 2014)" Since collective bargaining is usually conducted inside a framework of laws, procedures, and rights outlined in both national and international law, it can be considered the most advanced form of representative or collective voice. A variety of actors, including the government, labor unions, works councils, employers, middle management, and workers themselves, may be involved (Lin, 2022). However, depending on the bargaining structure and the rights granted to them by law and customs, each of these actors' roles in the bargaining system differs significantly between nations (Upadhayaya et al., 2022).

All workers, including those in the tourism sector, have the necessary right to be involved in collective bargaining. Despite its significance, workers in the tourism industry have little to no collective bargaining power and even face obstacles such as weak labour unions, and help from the government (Parajuli, 2009). Due to its high degree of seasonality and volatility, the tourist sector relies heavily on temporary and casual labour (Doellgast & Benassi, 2014). It is challenging for labour unions to negotiate on behalf of these workers since they frequently lack job stability and are not protected by collective bargaining agreements. Because they cannot represent a stable and cohesive workforce, labour unions' bargaining power is weakened by the casualization of the workforce (Traxler, 1994).

However, Temizkan & Yücesoy, (2020) argued that it creates challenges for labour unions to recruit and maintain members because many people in tourism are hired on a casual

basis or a short term (Law & Rodway, 2008). Temizkan & Yücesoy, (2020) agreed upon as he said, unions lack the resources, tools and legal safeguards necessary for collective bargaining, and weak labour unions find it difficult to negotiate with employers (Temizkan & Yücesoy, 2020). Furthermore, he added, by guaranteeing the enforcement of labour laws, offering workers legal rights, and creating an atmosphere that is conducive to labor union operations, governments play a critical role in assisting workers in engaging in collective bargaining (Temizkan & Yücesoy,2020).

Despite the limited government support for these types of issues and minimal legislative safeguards for workers as well as a hostile work environment for labour unions in emerging nations (Lin, 2022). Collective bargaining is crucial to advancing decent employment and enhancing working conditions for employees in countries like Nepal. Unions can offer employees a safe working environment, fair pay, and job stability. Additionally, it facilitates the development of a positive and cooperative working connection between employers and employees, which may result in increased efficiency and productivity (Upadhayaya et al., 2022). Several tactics can be used to address the issues that workers in the tourism industry face as a result of the absence of collective bargaining and referral central. These include creating creative strategies for collective negotiation, bolstering labour unions, and boosting government support for collective bargaining (Kratzmann, 2020). Labour unions, for instance, can concentrate on empowering workers by providing education and training initiatives. In addition, governments have the power to uphold labour laws, give workers legal rights, and foster an atmosphere that is conducive to labour union activity. The difficulties faced by porters in the tourism industry regarding collective bargaining can also be addressed by creative strategies like sectoral or industry-wide bargaining (Upadhayaya., et. al., 2018).

#### **2.4.UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS.**

According to Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, (2006), power is subjective and thus difficult to define. Ujma (2001, p. 38) noticed power as ‘the ability of one to get another people to do what it otherwise would not have done’. The power which people exercise in their day-to-day lives influences and determines other’s behavior. According to Hazra et al. (2014), every human relationship in daily life carries a certain mark of power. He went on to say

that we as humans can no longer be thought of as merely carrying out functionally defined roles as male and female, parents and children, teachers and students, health sectors and patients, priests and penitents. Instead, these terms define relationships in which the parties, regardless of what else they may do, are continuously negotiating issues of power, authority, and control over the definition of reality. According to Hazra & Associates (2014), unequal power relations in the tourism sector significantly shape the experiences of workers, often manifesting as labour exploitation, socioeconomic dependency, and cultural commodification (Bennike & Nielsen, 2023). Many tourism-dependent economies, particularly in the Global South, rely heavily on international tourism, creating a structural imbalance where multinational corporations and global tour operators dictate wages and working conditions (Shrestha, 2018b). Tourism workers frequently endure low pay, seasonal job insecurity, and limited benefits, leaving them vulnerable during off-peak periods (Uprety et al., 2018). Similarly, racialized power dynamics further increase those inequalities with marginalized ethnic groups that are disproportionately related to low pay such as outdoor and physical work and it often excludes workers in the tourism industry from opportunities, which are predominantly reserved for individuals from privileged backgrounds (Hazra et al., 2014). In addition to economic disparities, the workforce from the tourism sector faces cultural exploitation, as they are often positioned as intermediaries who commodify and perform their cultural identity for the consumption of customers (Tshing, 1994). This process not only disconnects workers from their cultural heritage but also reinforces power imbalances by catering to tourists' or tour operators' expectations while neglecting their well-being (Tshing, 1994). Moreover, language barriers and a lack of representation in decision-making processes make double their marginalization, as many workers have limited means to advocate for improved conditions. Unionization efforts are frequently stymied by the fragmented and transient nature of tourism work, while inadequate labour protections in many countries leave workers without recourse for exploitation or harassment (Lama, 2020).

In the context of Nepal, the porter's occupation occupies the lowest status and position in the hierarchy (Lama, 2020). The behaviour of the hotel/lodge owners and other support staff during work is dominating over the porters (Knight, 2016). The porters occupy a marginal position because of the lack of their representation, their inability to spend

(economically low condition) in big hotels and their weaknesses in language for communicating with the tourists (Upreti et al., 2018). The tourists have sympathy for the porters as poor and uneducated Nepali youths (Knight, 2016). Whenever the dominant social actors give pressure to the subjugated group such as the porters, the dominated group can resist this power relation. The way of resistance is direct and indirect (Hazra et al., 2014). For instance, sometimes the porters directly resist the tourists and other support staff and leave the loads on the half portion of the trekking route. Indirectly, they pretend to be sick at high altitudes. Although the porters have their organizations to fight for their rights, they are not effective (Upreti et al., 2018). Clearly, some of the groups are excluded from participation in the field of tourism because of socioeconomic disadvantage (Hughes, 1991) but exclusion and marginalization also result from discrimination, cultural prejudice, and fear.

## **2.5.SOCIAL JUSTICE.**

The goal of social justice, a complex idea, is to give everyone, especially underprivileged groups, fair access to resources, opportunities, and rights (Karina., 2024). Recent research in several fields has examined how social justice can be advanced as well as the structural obstacles that stand in its way, it is often acknowledged that education is a crucial means of promoting social justice. Miller., 2001: Karina., 2024 carried out a thorough analysis of the literature to examine how educational changes and policies affect underprivileged groups. Key topics including curriculum change, teacher preparation, community involvement, access and inclusion, and resource allocation were found in the study (Miller., 2001). Even while underprivileged groups now have better access to education in many nations, there are still issues with guaranteeing high-quality education and long-term equity. Further, the study highlights the need for ongoing policy modifications and additional investigation into the long-term consequences of educational changes. Rawls (1971) also defines social justice as the belief that organizations should be structured in such a way that they help the least advantaged members of society while preserving equal liberty for everyone. Furthermore, according to the United Nations (2006), social justice is "the fair distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society."



(Hyttén and Bettez., 2011) have explained that economic justice, racial equality, gender fairness, and access to healthcare and education are just a few of the many sides that make up social justice. Moreover, fair wages, worker rights, and poverty alleviation are the main focuses of economic justice. Eliminating prejudice and advancing equal representation in all areas of life are the main goals of racial and gender justice. The capacities approach, put out by Amartya Sen (1999), is one of the fundamental frameworks for social justice. It contends that rather than focusing only on financial prosperity, justice should be evaluated by an individual's capacity to attain well-being.

The field of social justice is still dynamic and difficult, always changing to meet new societal issues and challenges. Modern activists must negotiate the complex interactions of cultural, economic, and political grassroots, even as historical movements offer context for current conflict (Buettner-Schmidt., and Lobo., 2012). A sophisticated comprehension of these dynamics and a dedication to real systemic change are necessary to guarantee that social justice initiatives are inclusive and successful. Furthermore, in the tourism sector ensuring fairness, honesty, and equality for all employees—regardless of their industry, job type, or background—is the goal of social justice in working conditions. It entails promoting safe working conditions, equitable pay, manageable hours, the ability to form a union, and defence against exploitation and discrimination (Hocking., 2017).

## **2.6.HEAVY BURDEN AND LOW PAYMENT.**

Tourism often creates numerous employment opportunities; however, the job quality is typically below average, featuring too many low-paying jobs and a high percentage of parttime and seasonal employment (Choy 1995). Tourism has been a popular development strategy for developing countries like Nepal, because of its potential to create large economic impacts and numerous new job opportunities with what is often perceived to be relatively little economic, environmental, and social costs (Seckel Mann, 2002). However, Gelal, (2022) argued that the nature of tourism work, which is characterized by its labourintensive structure, requires a considerable human workforce to deliver services across diverse sectors like accommodations, travel, and entertainment. Studies, including those by (Choy 1995) bring out the seasonal and unpredictable demand that worsens the

workload, often require the workers to keep to irregular schedules, including nights, weekends, and holidays.

These kinds of demands negatively impact the work-life balance and contribute to employee's dissatisfaction (Malville, 1999). Heavy workloads and uplifting are a central challenge, with front-line employees such as hotel staffs, tour guides or porters that demand emotional as well as physical labor (Choy 1995). Gelal, (2022) highlights that the roles which is coupled with extended working hours, lead to burnout and elevated stress levels, thereby reducing the job satisfaction. However, in opposite to this demanding job, wages in the tourism sector are notably remaining low (Raj Adhikari et al., 2011). Reports by ILO, (2013) reveal that the tourism sector often offers below-average wages compared to other industries. The prevalence of part-time and temporary contracts further worsens economic insecurity, providing limited benefits and little job stability (Raj Adhikari et al., 2011).

On other side, Gender difference blend the challenges in work, as women—which are known as a substantial portion of the tourism workforce—are frequently put down to lower-paying roles, such as housekeeping and customer service, with very limited career development opportunities (Malville, 2005). This unequal distribution of pay and their roles reflects gender biases that strongly impact women in the tourism field (Gelal, (2022)). In addition, the cumulative effect of heavy workloads and inadequate compensation has far-reaching consequences on employee well-being. Research by Wilson and Dashper, (2022) indicates that financial instability and workplace stress contribute to significant mental and health issues, including anxiety and depression, among tourism employees. And such challenges lead to high employee turnover rates, further straining the industry's human resources.

In the context of Nepal, normally porters are forced to perform the incredibly difficult task due to the lack of other work options for people in Nepal to make a living (Upadhayaya & Upreti (2008b), Kumar et al (2001), further agree that porters start carrying about 35 kg at the age of about 12 years old and stop at the age of about 40-65 years old (population mode 25-30 years old), working for 6-8 h day for many months. In addition, previous fieldwork by Malville, (1999) studied long-distance transport on three traditional trade routes in eastern Nepal and found that most of the porters had been hired by hill shopkeepers or

development projects. Because these “commercial” porters are paid on a unit weight basis from point to point, they have strong incentives to carry as much weight as possible (Lama, 2020). The average adult male commercial porter in the survey carried 73.4 kg (161 lbs), equivalent to 147% of his own body mass of 50 kg. Petty traders in business for themselves (dokay sahus) carried some of the heaviest loads, averaging 79 kg (174 lbs.) Villagers reprovisioning their homes tended to carry lighter loads (59 kg or 130 lbs.) but occasionally transported much heavier loads if they planned to resell a portion of the load at a profit (Malville, 2001).

Klaveren, (2000) considers underpayment as another major issue in portering employment. Thus, to address these important issues, literature suggests several kinds of potential strategies such as fair wage practices, improved working conditions, and employee assistance or training programs (Klaveren, 2000). While these initiatives offer further hope and their implementation remains uneven across regions and organizations. Furthermore, gaps in the literature remain, particularly regarding the long-term implications of these challenges on workforce sustainability and the evolving impact of trends like digitalization and post-pandemic recovery (Wilson and Dashper, (2022). Addressing these issues is imperative not only for the betterment of employees’ lives but also helps to ensure sustainable growth in whole tourism industry and the stakeholders (Upadhayaya et al., 2022). In addition, coordinated efforts from the stakeholders, including policymakers, industry leaders, and researchers, are essential to create a more equitable and sustainable future for tourism employees (Klaveren, 2000).

## **2.7.LANGUAGE BARRIER**

Language obstacles, whether at home or foreign, occur when people do not speak the same language or when one party's proficiency in the language is insufficient to communicate successfully. Different native languages, accents, dialects, or even differing degrees of fluency in a common language can all be examples of these obstacles. Depending on the situation and the people involved, the effects of these obstacles might vary from miscommunication to total breakdowns (Richards, 2017).

Language problems are particularly common in international organizations or mixed cultures. For example, businesses frequently hire people from a variety of language

backgrounds, necessitating the use of efficient communication techniques. Employees may misunderstand instructions, misread cultural clues, and feel generally alienated as a result of insufficient proficiency in a common language. Patients may not speak the same language as their physicians or nurses in healthcare settings, which makes this problem worse and may have an impact on diagnosis and treatment results (Flores, 2006).

Language difficulties are a significant issue that can affect teamwork, communication, and general productivity at work in the Porter Life environment. Workplaces like Porter Life frequently see an inflow of workers from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds as businesses expand and become more globalized. Lack of a shared language among group of team members can result in misunderstandings, confusion, and decreased output.

According to a study, language barriers at work can seriously impair teamwork, job satisfaction, and employee effectiveness. (Harzing & Feely, 2008, Richards, 2017). Language barriers can result in misunderstandings that have far-reaching effects, such as subpar customer service or even mistakes in crucial decision-making, in sectors like healthcare or customer service where clear communication is crucial (Berk et al., 2006). Understanding and removing these obstacles will be essential to preserving a productive and seamless work environment as Porter Life grows its diverse workforce.

Porter Life can employ several tactics designed to promote efficient communication to get past the difficulties caused by language boundaries (Richards, 2017). Offering language training courses to workers to help them become more fluent in the company's main communication language is one such strategy to help people. These programs empower workers by giving them the tools they need to participate more actively in different training programmes, or tasks, in addition to assisting in closing communication barriers. Furthermore, using qualified interpreters or translation software can be a great way to make sure that important communications are heard by people who speak different languages (Flores, 2006).

Furthermore, encouraging a culture of tolerance, active listening, and respect for each other at the workplace is important for lowering irritation and ensuring that all workers, regardless of language proficiency, feel valued and understood (Richards, 2017). By using these measures, Porter Life may establish a more productive and inclusive workplace

where all staff members are prepared to make significant contributions to success and make their lives easier and better.

## **2.8.CAST DISCRIMINATION**

According to Adhikari., and Lawoti., 2024 caste discrimination is firmly ingrained in the social fabric of South Asia, and presents itself in a variety of ways, affecting millions of lives (Mosse., 2018). In Nepal, caste prejudice is a long-standing social problem that has affected many people's lives for centuries, especially those who are members of lower castes like Dalits, Gurung, Sherpa, and Rai. Even though the nation has rules against castebased discrimination, such as those found in the 2015 Constitution, social attitudes and behaviours frequently make these laws less effective (Giri., 2015). Social interactions, marriage, work possibilities, and resource access are still governed by the hierarchical caste system, which groups people according to their place of birth. Dalits and other underprivileged groups experience prejudice in several ways, such as violence, economic hardship, and social exclusion even though they are marked as untouchable by the rich and higher caste people (Gurung., 2017).

Furthermore, beyond personal experiences, caste prejudice in Nepal has long-term effects that undermine societal cohesiveness and sustain structural inequity. Additionally, about 13% of the population is Dalit, and they frequently find themselves in vulnerable conditions with obstacles to healthcare and education, as well as their contributions to society are often underappreciated, and many are compelled to work in low-paying occupations (Adhikari., and Lawoti., 2024). Effective efforts to eliminate caste-based injustices are desperately needed, as evidenced by reports of violence against Dalits, including atrocities and discriminatory practices. In Nepal, groups that support social justice, including the National Dalit Commission, put forth a lot of effort to increase public awareness and advance the rights of underrepresented groups (Giri., 2015).

In Nepal, efforts to combat caste discrimination necessitate a multifaceted strategy that includes education, community involvement, and government intervention. A concentrated effort is required to alter societal perceptions about caste; legal improvements by themselves are not enough. Grassroots initiatives and awareness campaigns can aid in dispelling long-held notions and advancing diversity (Gurung., 2017).

## **2.9. HEALTH ISSUES AND INADEQUATE SUPPORT EQUIPMENT OR ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND OTHER BASIC SERVICE.**

Like Western tourists, porters often come from lower valleys and do not always adapt well to the hypoxic environment at altitude like Western tourists. According to Law & Rodway, (2008), porters experience the highest diversity and severity of illness developing a total of 12 different medical problems. Illness included fever, suspected typhoid, high altitude cough, gastroenteritis, several anxieties, high altitude cerebral oedema and many more. He further added that it is because all the Nepali workers do not reside in high altitude arrears, particularly the porters are likely to be as susceptible to altitude illness as the western trekkers (Law & Rodway, 2008). There are several kinds of risks with working at high altitudes. More concerning is the high rate of evacuation on the porter's back, which signifies the possibilities of severe high-altitude illness, lack of emergency medical responses, and potential injury to the rescuer (Gupta & Dhar, 2024). However, it shouldn't be assumed that all porters are not adaptable to altitude. Especially, the sherpa ethnic group from Nepal are very famous for altitude but most of the people from their ethnicity is in higher posts than Porter (Bondi et al., 2021). In addition, little is known about what prior altitude education trekkers have, the sources of their information, and their confidence in recognizing and treating altitude illness. (Newcomb et al., 2011). There are multiple risks with working at high altitudes. More concerning is the high rate of evacuation on another porter's back, which signifies the possibilities of severe HAI, lack of adequate emergency medical response services, and potential injury to the rescuer (Gupta & Dhar, 2024). Even more limited are data on the knowledge of altitude illness among Nepali porters and guides as well as non-English-speaking trekkers. Porters' use of medications and herbal remedies at high altitudes, however, their understanding of potential dangers has been poorly studied and often delay seeking medical attention due to low levels of education and awareness regarding high altitude illness (Havryliuk et al., 2015)

With a lack of knowledge about altitude illness, limited access to health resources, few (or unenforced) work guidelines, economic pressures from family far away, limited protective clothing, and harsh weather conditions, porters repeatedly face a figurative and literal uphill battle (Koirala et al., 2018). Porters may ignore medical issues until they are

incapacitated because they are not paid if they do not work, and they often do not have any form of financial security for risking their health and lives (Knight, 2016). In a study of workload trends of a few high-altitude clinics in Nepal, it was noted that around 40 out of 100 patients seen at health posts are Nepalese (Newcomb et al., 2011). Others have observed that many of these individuals are from low altitudes. Many of these porters originating from low altitudes have limited awareness of altitude illness or steps for prevention (Lama, 2020).

Porters in the tourism industry are specifically hired to accompany the party or agency into remote areas that demand a degree of party self-sufficiency for safety; there is a responsibility to care for all the party members in remote areas during their period of service by porters (Basnyat & Litch, 1997). All members are dependent on the resources of their own party when trekking in remote areas that lack medical facilities. However impoverished porters lack the financial resources for a helicopter evacuation in the event of a life-threatening injury or illness (Nepal, 2022). There are numerous anecdotal reports of abandoning ill, injured, or poorly equipped hired staff by trekking parties which puts porters' health in danger (Bondi et al., 2021). In addition, trekkers have the privilege of warming themselves with the hot chimney stove during harsh weather. Whereas porters hold on support of each other as they don't have the luxury of heating to heat their bodies to a cold temperature (Lama, 2020). They cannot stay in the lodges, so they must stay and sleep outside because the lodge owners' strategy is to make more money by letting foreigners use the space that the porters may occupy due to this many porters get sick easily and face health issues (Kratzmann, 2020).

### **2.9.1. WORK-LIFE UNBALANCE**

The elements that make up the commonly used phrase "work-life balance" are work, life, and balance (Gupta, 2021). Generally, "life" refers to terms like "family life, personal life, leisure life, fun as well as social life whereas work refers to "employment, career, ambition, basically paid work or livelihood," and "balance " encompasses two areas. Prioritizing "life" and "work" in a way that is both successful and fulfilling is what it means (Gupta, 2021). Work-life balance, according to Gupta and Mittal (2021), is the process of creating a life that strikes a balance between one's personal and professional lives using a variety of

strategies. Work-life balance is a broad concept that fluctuates daily; what is appropriate now could not be the same tomorrow (Bellmann et al., 20220). Bellmann further added that everyone is in competition these days to make their life a decent living and one must demonstrate one's abilities to the fullest daily. Employee efficiency and effectiveness frequently suffer as a result of psychological strain and stress (Bellmann et al, 20220). Work-life imbalance, also known as work-life imbalance, is the state in which an individual's professional and personal lives are not in harmony. This can happen when a person spends too much time on work-related tasks and activities, and not enough time on personal or leisure activities (Aziz & Cunningham, 2008). This can lead to feelings of negativity stress out, insecurity burnout, and dissatisfaction with life. It can also have effects on a person's health, relationships, and overall well-being negatively . To achieve work-life balance, it's important to set boundaries between work and personal time, prioritize self-care, and make time for activities that are important to you (Janes & Wisnom, 2011). Deery & Jago, (2009) argues that longer hours are consistently associated with worse work – life outcomes on all our work – life measures’ results imply that extended work hours are unhealthily accepted, particularly in the hotel and tourism service sectors (Naidoo et al., 2019). The fact that lengthy hours are unsocial and frequently result in less flexibility in how such workers conduct their social and family lives is equally relevant, especially for female employees. In the end, this lack of flexibility frequently results in workers quitting the company and the industry, exacerbating the labour shortages occurring across various industries.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) proposes that motivators such as recognition, achievement, and professional development contribute to long-term job satisfaction, whereas their absence might result in disengagement.

### **2.9.2. FEELING OF UNINSPIRED AT WORKPLACE.**

Herzberg has said that motivating the employee, for instance, recognition, achievement, and professional development enhances employee long-term job satisfaction, whereas their absence might result in disengagement. Furthermore, numerous academics have investigated the idea of demotivation from various angles for instance, according to Dornyei (2001), demotivation is mostly caused by outside factors like common instruction,



unsupportive surroundings, or unfavourable comments. His research on "second-language learners" indicates that high expectations, lack of support, and outside influences frequently cause people to lose motivation. He highlights that outer, demotivating influences might seriously hamper growth even for highly motivated people. On the other hand, Ryan and Deci's (2000) approach to demotivation from the perspective of their Self-Determination Theory contends that when people lack intrinsic motivation—that is, when they don't find fulfilment or significance in their work—that can lead to demotivation results. They argue that there is a sequence of motivation, and that demotivation happens when inherent interest is replaced by pressures from other sources, making work appear less like a rewarding experience and more like a burden.

Another viewpoint is provided by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), which distinguishes between hygienic factors and motivators. According to him, demotivation is often caused by dissatisfaction with external factors such as compensation, job security, or working conditions rather than a lack of drive per se. Herzberg argues that eliminating demotivating elements does not always increase motivation; rather, it avoids discontent and makes room for intrinsic motivators like success and acknowledgement. Another author, about motivation, according to Vallerand (1997), is the state in which people believe they will not be able to accomplish their goals or that they will not be able to act at all. This viewpoint is consistent with the helplessness theory learned, which suggests that demotivation might arise from a situation in which people feel powerless to change as a result, of repeated failure or unpleasant experiences. Some academics think that demotivation reduces a person's sense of purpose and control over their behaviour, while others concentrate on outside factors (Vallerand (1997)).

## **CHAPTER – 3**

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter starts by outlining the approach to the philosophy of science that underpins the paper, followed by a discussion of the research approach and the selected methodology. It then explains the rationale behind using a semi-structured interview approach and details

the data collection method employed. The chapter concludes with a consideration of ethical issues and an acknowledgement of the study's limitations.

### **3.1. PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE – CONSTRUCTIVISM**

How do we perceive the social world? It is deeply influenced by social constructivism, a theory that suggests social phenomena and their meanings are continuously shaped by social contexts (Clark, T. and Bryman, A., 2019). According to Bryman (2016), social constructivism serves as an interpretive framework in which people attempt to understand their surroundings by creating meanings based on their experiences. These meanings are neither intrinsic nor inherent but rather emerge via interactions with others (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, social constructivism emphasizes the crucial role of culture and context in understanding societal events and in constructing knowledge from this understanding (Bernard, 2013).

What connection does this study have with constructivism? The purpose of this study is to comprehend the problems of those who are working in tourism industries such as porters in Nepal as porters are an important part of the tourism industry. The research focuses on exploring how different social actors perceive situations arising from social issues or challenges within their respective fields. It examines how Porters' views have been shaped by their experiences, aligning with the constructivist approach as researchers aim to understand participants' experiences to uncover their subjective truths and perceptions. In addition, this constructivist perspective emphasizes the importance of grasping the diverse 'lived experiences' of individuals, particularly from the viewpoint of those who encounter these situations daily (Wang, 2015). Furthermore, the constructive paradigm is often regarded as the most appropriate approach for qualitative research because it emphasizes the subjective perspectives of participants, which must be interpreted within the specific contexts of particular groups (Bernard, 2013). Consequently, this paradigm is employed in this study to explore and comprehend porters' lives, perceptions and experiences regarding the challenges that they encounter in the tourism industry daily.

Additionally, Bryman (2016) suggests that researchers using the constructivist approach should focus on understanding the situation from the perspective of the respondents. Social

constructivism is closely associated with qualitative research, an ontological stance based on the belief that reality is shaped by the various meanings created by social participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

### **3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH**

We can find mainly two research approaches involving the use of theory, that is deduction and Induction. In the deductive approach, a theory and hypothesis are mainly developed and then the research strategy is designed to test that hypothesis. Whereas in the inductive approach, data is collected and then the theory is developed as a result of the data analysis (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 124). In short, the deductive approach is used for testing existing theory while the inductive approach refines or evolves existing theory/theories (Saunders et al., 2009). In this research, the inductive approach is considered more appropriate since the primary data is gathered through interviews, then the data is analyzed first, and then explanations of the phenomena related to the porters and guides working in mountain tourism industries are developed by existing theories.

### **3.3.METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE**

After defining the philosophy and approach, the next step is to select a suitable choice of methodology for research. There are three ways that a researcher can go through with their research, i.e., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Kuada, 2012, p.117). Qualitative is concerned with developing and seeking explanations of social phenomena through questions like “what, why and how” and that is important and applied to study people’s experiences, their relationship with their surroundings, and their meaning-making process (Levy, 2017, p.24). On the other hand, the quantitative method is related to the relationship between variables by using statistical techniques to collect numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009). The data gathered from quantitative is used to determine whether support for the hypothesis exists or not. A mixture of the above two methods constitutes the mixed-method approach.

For this thesis qualitative approach seems prevalent because the qualitative approach is commonly used to delve into individuals' experiences, examining how they interact with

their surroundings and how they derive meaning from these interactions (Levy, 2017, p. 24). In contrast, quantitative research examines the correlations between variables using statistical analysis, which necessitates the acquisition of numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009). It often employs a deductive technique, in which researchers begin with a hypothesis and then collect numerical data to determine whether the evidence supports the initial premise.

### **3.3.1. REASON FOR CHOOSING QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

The qualitative research method was selected for this project due to the belief that it can offer a comprehensive, in-depth comprehension of complex human behaviours, experiences, and societal events. This method places more emphasis on comprehending the context and meaning underlying people's behaviours and decisions than qualitative research, which is more concerned with numerical data and statistical analysis (Hennink, et al., 2020). Using this method, as researchers we can capture the nuances of human experiences, unearth hidden patterns, and investigate nuanced viewpoints that could be overlooked using more structured, numerical methods. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic matter and is especially useful for researching things that are challenging to measure, for example, emotions, cultural customs, and social interactions (Hennink, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, qualitative research is adaptable, enabling changes as needed throughout the investigation. Researchers can hone their questions, investigate new topics, and go deeper into areas of interest as the study goes on. This adaptability makes it possible to collect and analyze data more responsively and iteratively, which frequently yields the discovery of novel insights (Ellis, and Hart., 2023). Moreover. The close relationship between the researcher and participants promotes a greater understanding of the situation and guarantees that the results fairly represent the participants' experiences and points of view. Because of this qualitative research is especially effective in disciplines like anthropology, psychology, and sociology where comprehending the human condition is crucial (Ellis, and Hart., 2023).

### **3.4.DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

After selecting the appropriate methodology, the next crucial step is to determine the data collection approach, Research typically utilises two main data types: Primary and Secondary. This study draws on both primary and secondary data sources.

#### **3.4.1. PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

Primary data refers to firsthand information gathered directly by the researcher through interactions with individuals related to the research topic. According to Ajayi, (2017.p 16) primary data are collected specifically to address the research problem at hand, using methods that are best suited for the particular problem. Common tools for collecting primary data include interviews, observations, and surveys. This method is favored because the researcher believes it provides the most accurate and truthful information (Mazhar, et al., 2021). In our study, primary data was obtained through an online interview (semi-structured) with porters who are working as a porter in the tourism field. These interviews were conducted via an online platform to gather the necessary data for analyzing our research problem.

##### **3.4.1.1.SEMI STRUCTEURE INTERVIEW**

Interview is a very common choice of method to collect data in qualitative research. The interview types are basically structured, semi-structured or unstructured and are designed based on what types of information are necessary to extract research (Bryman, 2012). For this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data on the challenges and issues especially faced by the porters in the tourism industry. As described by Magaldi and Berler, (2020) this type of interview involves having a set of topics and potential questions, which can be adjusted based on the direction of the conversation. The interviewer may choose to omit or modify questions depending on the flow of the discussion.

Our semi-structured interview process began with a brief introduction to the study's purpose, followed by a series of questions organized into sections. The sections covered background information, general perceptions of porters, especially those working for tourists, the issues they are facing, potential causes, and possible solutions.

This method was particularly advantageous for our study, as it enabled the collection of rich, detailed information from a relatively small group of Porter's participants. During the interview process, we conducted one-on-one interview with five porters. The four are especially working in the Himalayan region and working as trekking Porters (men) one is a local female porter who carries loads for local people. We took an interview using openended questions and allowed them to take control of the conversation to ensure their comfort throughout the interview. The participants were specifically selected because of their direct involvement in the tour industry, as our research is about Nepalese labourer Porters. Firstly, we interviewed three Porters later on we got the opportunity to interview one male and one female porter. Additionally, due to geographical constraints, we conducted semi-structured interviews via WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as we are living in Denmark. Also, we decided to choose this online platform because of the interviewee's preference. Furthermore, we were aware that online interviews could not yield the same insights as in-person interviews, especially when it came to interpreting facial expressions and body language. The respondents felt less anxious and were able to openly share their experiences and insights, hence this method worked.

#### **3.4.2. SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION**

In this research, we utilized a variety of secondary data sources, including academic papers, reports, and documents available on official websites such as the AAU Library, Google Scholar, Google Books, and Research Gate. Additionally, the materials collected comprised statistical summaries, administration data, literature, research papers, books, articles, case studies, and more. These secondary sources were integral to developing our literature review and supporting the primary data obtained through qualitative methods. Furthermore, we incorporated published information from the News article for a Nepalese local newspaper. Saunders and Townsend (2018) assert that using secondary data has a number of benefits, including being easily available and saving researchers time and money. It is crucial to remember that secondary data might not precisely match the current study's specific emphasis because it may have been gathered for different reasons.

#### **3.5.DATA ANALYSIS**

One way to approach the analysis of qualitative data is using themes. According to Bryman (2016), thematic analysis is predominantly used in qualitative research. Themes are derived from a framework, which serves as a method for constructing an index of themes and subthemes. A theme usually arises from a topic that comes up often, but it must also be pertinent to the research question, the topic, and the field of study. Furthermore, because it may be applied to a variety of situations and goals, thematic analysis provides a certain amount of flexibility, as noted by Clark et al. (2021). This adaptability contributes to the method's appeal.

In our research, we structured our analysis according to the six steps outlined by Maguire & Delahunt., (2017): and Braun, & Clarke (2012) These steps are: 1) becoming familiar with collected data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and the last one, 6) producing the report. We began our analysis by thoroughly reviewing all the collected primary data and secondary data, which included the people who gave us their valuable time information and shared their experiences. Our thematic analysis focused on exploring the situation faced by porters and the challenges and issues they encountered in their tourism field.

### **3.6.ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Ethics is critical to the success of any research effort since it guides the behaviour of the researchers. Resnik et al. (2021) define research ethics as "norms for the conduct," which aid in distinguishing between acceptable and inappropriate behaviour. These ethical requirements are required to ensure that participants or responders are not injured during the study process. In the context of educational evaluation, Strike (1990), as cited by Cohen et al., (2017), highlights two key principles. The first is the principle of benefit maximization, which asserts that the best decision is one that maximizes benefits for individuals and their organizations. The second principle, equal respect, requires us to value every individual equally. This principle emphasizes treating all people as free and rational beings with the same fundamental rights as others, and it insists that they should be treated as ends in themselves, not merely as means to an end (Cohen et al., 2017).

To ensure our study was conducted ethically, we took steps to avoid any potential conflicts of interest, whether related to individual or other factors. Participants were given the choice of using the language in which they felt most comfortable, making it easier for them to share their experiences and opinions. We gave participants complete information about the interviews, including the goal of our research. Consent was sought before conducting the interviews, and no confidential information was exposed. Furthermore, all data acquired has been properly attributed to acknowledge the original authors and owners.

### **3.7.LIMITATIONS**

We decided to employ online communication tools like WhatsApp and Messenger to interact with our research participants efficiently, the primary reason for this choice was the high expense of direct phone calls, which presented a major obstacle given how isolated and rural many Nepali communities are. Our ability to reach participants was further challenged by the weak network access in these places, which made conducting interviews more challenging.

However, using these networks to arrange interviews came with its own set of difficulties. We tried to contact participants online, but they weren't always available, which caused scheduling delays. Firstly, we had to call participants to request that they enter into the app before we could start the interview.

Furthermore, a significant obstacle to our data collection attempts was Nepal's unstable internet connection, During our interviews, participants regularly encountered connectivity problems, which frequently led to poor connection quality, and the entire study process became more complicated as a result of these disturbances, which made it difficult to collect accurate and thorough data. We, therefore, had to modify our approaches to overcome these challenges, making sure, to reach them with direct phone calls so that we could still interact with participants efficiently.

## **CHAPTER -4**



## 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on analyzing the data gathered for this research. Specifically, it examines the interviews conducted with porters working in the Nepalese Himalayas, who shared their perspectives and challenges within the tourism industry. The data collected using a questionnaire method is analyzed using a thematic approach, aligning with the framework established in the literature review and interviews.

### 4.1. PORTERS SITUATIONS (ISSUES AND THE CHALLENGES).

Portage labour in the tourism sector serves as an essential adaptive strategy for rural households in Nepal to supplement their subsistence agriculture (Upadhyaya & Upreti, 2011). Many porters come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and typically reside in villages located at either the starting points or destinations of their portage routes (Melville, 2005). In various provinces of the Nepal Himalayas, working as a porter is not always a voluntary choice but rather a necessity driven by poverty and lack of alternative livelihood opportunities (Upadhyaya & Upreti, 2008b).

When asking the porters about why they chose to be a porter, many of them responded as.....

*"Many porters come from economically disadvantaged families with limited education. Their primary source of income is agriculture; however, it is often insufficient due to a lack of adequate land for farming"..... (Interview I, II).*

Another participant added that.....

*"Even though it is a very physically demanding job, I am quite happy with what I managed to save after the expedition. Since, I have been working as a porter, and my earnings, though not much, have allowed me to take care of my family um.... Also, I don't have much land to do farming this is the only source I have".... he smiled..... (Interview III)*

After knowing the reason why they became porters, we began to ask them to talk about the conditions and things they get while trekking and their response was very shocking.

#### 4.1.1. FOOD

Normally porters are from remote locations and their educational opportunities have been limited by childhood malnutrition, by the long distance to school and by the school itself which would consist of a one-room building with a tutor teaching all grades (Mittelman, M., 2011). The porter's family would have had a small plot of land to grow one or two staple crops such as potatoes. There would be no health centre nearby and family numbers above the national average. Under these circumstances, it becomes more understandable why so many porters are abandoned to choose employment as a porter. Frustrations and poor health conditions encourage alcohol consumption and domestic violence. Many of the older children abandon school early and can therefore hardly speak any English. So, the vicious cycle repeats itself, with the adolescents escaping home to become porters and earn what appear to be good wages (Mittelman, M., 2011).

According to our first respondent.....

*"We aren't allowed to carry more than 5 kg of our belongings. Sometimes we must work in the kitchen if we want to eat leftovers from the tourists and those who don't work in the kitchen do not get leftovers. This has happened too many times also my friend has experienced this"..... (Interview I).*

According to all interview information,

*"Normally the tour lasts between 4 to 30 days and for that time they usually receive food from the tour operator; however, all claimed that the food is insufficient and not palatable. Wealthy companies give 1 kg rice, 1 kg spaghetti, 1 kg sugar and other nothing else. About 10% of the budget companies give the same but the rest don't give even the poor food supply. In addition, they must carry some other little things to make the provisions more palatable. Some porters can bring toasted corn, toasted lima beans, bread and other little stuff".*

Because of hunger they usually feed on the dishes left by tourists. They can't complain because they won't be hired next time (Mu & Nepal, 2015). On another hand, nutritional deficiencies and dehydration are also prevalent among porters while carrying luggage and or commodities in Nepal (Bondi et al., 2021). When asked about eating habits to be healthy,

Usually, they usually had two meals each day, which was common to most other people in Nepal. We found that individuals usually carried loads of approximately 60 kg to 110 kg. Also, when using a handcart, porters claimed to transport loads of approximately 200 kg to 400 kg individually, but 1,000 kg with three people. The length of their careers as porters, up to the time of interview, ranged from 6 years to 25 years. Working this hard the meal is not sufficient.

*"The type of meal is called Daal, Bhat- Tarkari, (dal meaning boiled well soup made from beans, Bhat 'meaning rice, Tarkari' meaning boiled or fried season vegetables). The meals sometimes included meat, either goat or chicken, but mostly the porters lived on our national food rice" ..... (Interview II).*

*" This diet is a common food in Nepal as almost all Nepali people eat once daily. In addition, the first respondent added we as porters simply must wake up early in the morning to prepare for the day ahead and start with a basic or no breakfast. Some just start their day with only a cup of simple black tea. On the way, we would most probably stop for a quick lunch, including simple food and without much rest, we start again" ..... (Interview III).*

*"All the porters usually drink alcohol; a few glasses every day to help -fresh their body condition" .....(Interview I).*

An average glass holds approximately 150ml and the contents are more than 45 % alcohol. Although the porters know drinking and smoking are bad for their health, they prefer to drink to make their bodies prepare for tomorrow's work. This habit may not have bad effects in the short run, but it may create health problems in the long run. In addition, no one complained of neck problems, but they identified pain with different unexpected incidents. In contrast, all the porters interviewed complained of pains in their knees and backs of the body. The porters did not have any special knowledge or education on preventive measures to avoid occupational problems. However, most wore cloth tightly twisted around their waist based on their theological belief that this would give them strength.

As a tradition, they are the ones who need to reach the camp before the trekkers do. It turns out that the porters probably need to have the ability to maintain high aerobic power for a

long time or carry extra load. Without careful management of resources, and lack of proper nutritious food could be the reason for risks of fatigue, exhaustion and muscle joint pain or instability to the porters (Bondi et al., 2021).

#### 4.1.2. RISK OF DEATH

In addition, the tour company does not provide porters with any kind of clothes, shoes, other equipment, or designated shelter. Porters may shelter under stones or in a jungle cave covered by tarpaulin during the rainy season but often camp in the open being exposed to cold, wind, and rain. Some agencies allow the porters to stay in the kitchen tent after the kitchen is closed or after tourists have left for the night (Mu & Nepal, 2015). However, this open tent does not protect the porters from the cold and only a few blankets are carried due to the weight.

Regarding precautions for safety, it remains always true that some of the companies do not provide proper equipment to their employees. Yet these agencies are increasingly few, given the availability of gear through TAAN's TIMS fund and clothing bank (Tourism Board, 2024). In addition, the ability of agencies to alter negotiated labour standards regarding insurance and equipment is very limited. The only company that deviated from these standards was Three Sisters, which provides its insurance and equipment to its staff in addition to the TAAN insurance and clothing bank. Short of ignoring the nationally set labour standards regarding safety precautions, it appears as though companies only can improve work conditions.

In the case of company equipment lost or damaged (e.g., a fork is lost, or a tent pole is broken), porters must compensate for their pay at grossly inflated prices. If this event happens on the trail, the individual porter must pay, if it happens at the time of campsite, all porters of the party have to compensate for the loss/damage.

*"Umm.... Once we were sent for a group of people and on the way to camp a battered tentpole broke up just because it was worn out and was not acknowledged by the company staff. Thus, we had to pay for that umm.... I can't exactly remember the amount, but we pay around eight to nine thousand rupees"..... (interview II).*

*"Some companies give the clothing to their porters if listed in the company otherwise, they won't get that. And most of the time the quality of the product is so low which don't even protect the person wearing it" ..... (Interview I, II, III).*

*The level of oxygen is very low if you level up high it's scary every time; you are close to death working in such conditions with less equipment, and without gears, it's very dangerous, the rich and normal people cannot imagine our situation only people who are working in this field or experience people can understand how tough it is .....(interview 4).*

This way it seems that companies don't want them to allow for the wear and tear nor the normal risk of damaged/lost things outdoors. The person who chooses and employs porters for a tour is usually the cook or the cook together with the guide. No porter is employed by a tour company in a permanent position. Most porters must wait up to 9 plus days until they are hired again.

*"I/we must sleep in the dining room of tea houses and tent too when rooms are scarce during peak season. There is some convenience when we have shared rooms among many of us like other trek porters and trek guides" ..... (Interview I).*

It is because the tea houses prefer to give all their rooms to tourists, and not to a porter. Porters often face significant discrimination when it comes to accommodation during work. While trekkers and guides are provided with comfortable lodging in tents or hotels or tea houses, porters are frequently relegated to substandard conditions such as sleeping in overcrowded rooms, storerooms, kitchens or even outdoors and these harsh conditions expose them to increasing risk of health issues. Here, the lack of proper shelter and accommodation does not only affect the physical well-being of porters but also keeps alive the cycle of socio-economic marginalization. Thus, awareness and implementation of strict restrictions and regulations are much needed in addressing this issue.

#### **4.2.DISCRIMINATION BASED ON CASTE AND GENDER**

Human rights violations and discrimination in the tourism industry are widespread, and mostly workers like porters are often subjected to exploitative working conditions and

discrimination (Baum & Hai, 2020). It is not uncommon in the case of Nepal that the community especially Sherpa, Rai and Tamang must suffer inhumane treatment due to the caste system and untouchability even in the 21st century. Many porters who have become victims of the caste system and untouchability have yet to get justice in Nepal. Furthermore, Traditional patriarchal beliefs and gender-based social expectations pose substantial hurdles for Nepali women, especially in rural areas, making it more difficult for them to participate in and prosper in the trekking and tourism industries (Hillman & Radel, 2021).

#### 4.2.1. CASTE DISCRIMINATION

In the case of Nepal, porters often tend to be of a different ethnicity than the indigenous people in many areas who are mostly Sherpa and Rai. We noticed they have been victims of discrimination and social despair due to their ethnic status. The caste system significantly shapes obstacles (Adhikari and Lawoti., 2024). When asked about discrimination that they face while working, they have the following responses.

*"As porter, we are treated differently in every little way, one day I sat down in a restaurant with my team operator I was given a drink which looked dirty, while my trek operator was given a menu" .....(Interview I).*

*"We are usually said to sit on the floor or in a separate place, where other team members like tourists, guides can sit and eat together. Lodge owners do not allow us to be in the dining halls during the trekking and they treat us like third-class citizens" ..... (Interview II).*

*"We must sleep either in a dormitory or on the ground or in the kitchen when they finished their kitchen work. We all sleep in the same bed so that we can spend our whole nights easily by getting heat from co-workers, sometimes we sleep with no blankets. In such a situation, we must be physically strong and should have the ability to carry loads" .... (Interview III).*

*Furthermore, when asked about cast discrimination all respondents said,  
"The Khaling people, a group within the Rai ethnic community, often feel isolated in their homeland. Their ancestors come from parts of Solukhumbu that have not benefited much from tourism. Because of this, they have not seen much economic growth. Many Khalings have to rely on tourism-related jobs, which makes them feel like outsiders or even like "servants in their land" .....*

Similarly, the representation of porters as impure and morally suspect reflects the entrenched nature of ethno-racial hierarchies in Nepal, and how place-based processes of racialization and labor dynamics interact to shape the *Adivasi* political identity (KC, 2013). The comments of participants, about separation and discrimination in the upper Khumbu (one of the regions in the Himalayan region) touch on the discursive processes that link lowland Khaling ethnicity to low-level labour and low-class status.

Their stories about discrimination also reveal how the articulation of the Khaling indigeneity escapes dualistic categorization, such as territory-based culture and the classbased experiences of rural, agricultural, and migrant labourers. One man Frydenlund, (2017) combined his view of low labour status with porters, as many workers are victims of social abuse that manifests in segregation and discrimination.

While talking more about their experience and how they faced, one respondent shared his memory as,

*"Sometimes guides or other stakeholders would take our tips away that we earned from tourists and that things resemble a kind of abuse that is due to ethnic and labour discrimination. In other instances, we would be dismissed from work the day before just reaching the destination prohibiting any tips that the porters might receive and maximizing the money for the guides and leaders of the trek. um.... Yes, it is very sad when you hear it but yes this is the reality of our tourism field..... (interview II)*

We can feel the disappointment in his voice, another participant has to say regarding the same question.....

*"We were three people at Dingboche (a place on the trekking trail to Everest) - one Chettri (high caste) and another two Sherpas including me. The hotel/lodge owner differentiated us even in teacups, but I resisted and raised the question about the difference in the teacups. The Chettri stated Rugba (a discriminatory word to indicate Bahun/Chhetri people) and Dungba (another discriminatory word to indicate Rai people) and Dungba means Dhakre porter) for Sherpa people at Khumbu" ..... (interview III).*

The traditional culture and the Hindu religion dominance in the past is responsible for the emergence of a caste-based hierarchy in the context of Nepal (HITCHCOCK, 1978), where illiteracy, poverty, and political underrepresentation have played a significant role in the continuation of the caste-based divisions (Dixit, 2019). In the caste hierarchy, Sherpa, Rai, Tamang- often identified as lower castes and untouchables and were kept at the bottom of the social structure, and this has kept the individual, institutional, and structural discriminations in the case of Nepal (HITCHCOCK, 1978).

For example, untouchability in public/private sectors, labour segregation, and exhibit the workers from socio-economic and political opportunities. It also identifies the religious belief, which is deeply rooted in the religion of Hinduism, known as the primary basis of caste discrimination, according to which sherpas are supposed to be inherently inferior with respect to their intelligence and faculty for work (Dixit, 2019). Also, sherpa as a porter been having trouble living a dignified and freedom of life as defined by different human rights conventions (Dixit, 2019).

Another respondent has linked his discrimination experience with power and unfair treatment by their own people.

*"I am not only discriminated against and exploited by the so-called higher caste people in the Nepalese Hindu system, but also by people within our same caste in the workplace. Generally, our work is under the direct guidance and order of one of the Sherpas in the trekking. Our in charge (Sherpa Naike) decide about the load we should carry every day. The weight may change daily We may not know the guest whom the luggage belongs to. Naike normally cannot make any partiality for dividing the loads but if he has family*



*relations with porter/s, he favours the porter/s by managing lighter loads for his relatives and I am the one who does not have any family relationship with Naika(sherpa leader), thus several times I have faced the partiality"..... (Interview II).*

It shows that discrimination based upon favouritism, or partiality also takes place in the workplace when a team member or leader gives unfair preferential treatment to another. Which has less to do with someone's job performance and more with nepotism or personal relationships.

*"At the same time, another porter added that hotel/lodge owners give priority to, those porters who stay and spend much for food and drinks (for Naika) in their restaurants before and after the trekking. If I do not buy beer to him, he does not select me for the next trekking because the lodge owners have relations with trekking companies and trekking companies have granted authority to them for selecting porters. The hotel and lodge owners always seek tourists who pay much and thus do not welcome us in their hotel and lodges for accommodation even though we pay the fees" (Interview III).*

The accommodation givers (hotels and lodge owners) are the rich people. They have operated their businesses with much investment. They always try to serve the tourists by earning a large amount from them (Bennike & Nielsen, 2023). The hotel and lodge owners feel themselves superior in the community, and the other people in the community also respect them as “big” people. The hotel and lodge owners have both social and economic power so they can easily ignore small business operators, Nepali staff, and the porters. The hotel and lodge owners have good respect for the tourists, even though they know some tourists do not spend much at their hotels and lodges. This unconditional respect for tourists (even though they spend less money in hotels and lodges) is because of their perceptions towards the tourists as high-class citizens- white people who are rich, educated, and knowledgeable, whereas another group of porters are uneducated and counted as thirdclass citizens.

#### **4.2.2. GENDER DISCRIMINATION.**

Women have the potential and the right to actively participate in the tourist sector as essential members of society. Their involvement is crucial in advancing gender equality in the industry in addition to helping the country's economy flourish (McHugh, 2018; Hillman, 2020). Theories of gender inequality argue that women often occupy different positions than men in various contexts in society because they are treated as inferior and disadvantaged (Chettri, 2009; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2000).

One of our female porters has to say on this

*" I started this job one year ago because my husband died, and I have a daughter she is 5 five years old I have a mother-in-law, and she is old she looks after my baby and cooks food for us and I can work out. Nowadays, society seems a bit flexible for women even though the recruitment agencies do not prefer women to be porters as they believe that we do not have the strength the men, So I never had an opportunity to be a tourist porter I carried local people Phakding (way to Everest Base Camp) around here only"..... (interview 5).*

In a country like Nepal, women have always been victims for many reasons some do not have the freedom to work in the field and if by chance they get that opportunity to work in the field the society and the company don't trust them make that even worse.

*Furthermore, she added, "There are few women trek guides they are smart and they know the English language but I can't speak so I carry things for local shops and local people this is the only thing I learned from my parents I am not much educated so I will not be eligible for others job and even I don't have land for agriculture so this job run my house ".....(Interview-5). Further, she wants to make her 5-year-old daughter educated "I want my daughter to be someone who does not have to carry things (Bhaariya) Porter; I want her to be a teacher or in a government job, so I am working hard". (INTERVIEW 5)*

Women's possibilities have historically been shaped by gender and caste, which frequently prevents them from obtaining jobs and career building. The continued existence of gender

stereotypes and traditional roles in Nepal is one of the main causes of occupational disparities between men and women, resulting in both horizontal and vertical labour market segregation (Lucena et al., 2021). Furthermore, traditional gender expectations are reinforced by the persistence of gender-based work stereotypes in the tourism sector (Je et al., 2020). Like other industries, tourism has a gender hierarchy, with women frequently assigned to positions with very few or little opportunity for professional progression since they are thought to lack the managerial skills that are traditionally associated with men.

#### 4.3.UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

On the other hand, we found porters are not only victims of discrimination but also victims of unfair treatment while working. While asking about what type of unfair treatment they face, most of their responses were related to the payment.

*"There have been times when I couldn't get my payment on time. Some agency owners or operations staff think they are doing me a favour by giving me a job. We frequently encounter agencies that complain about the excess payment given to porters"*  
 ..... (Interview I)

*"I have experienced exploit behaviours such as the non-fulfilment of the promised payment. Ummm..... Additionally, agencies offering payments below the ministry's daily rates and cancelling a previously confirmed tour at the last minute and we normally can't even raise questions on that..... (Interview II)*

*"Although I have a daily contract, (word of mouth) I faced interference with the tour program prepared by the agency, and at the end of the tour, the agency representative tried to make a subpar payment, stating in front of the group that I did not comply with the program and accusing me of incomplete work. Thanks to my good communication with the group, I managed to turn the unfavourable conditions in my favour and received the base payment"..... (Interview III)*

According to Klaveren, (2000), the most common way to abuse porters is to get them to carry too much and pay them late or too little. Some travel companies pay as soon as the porter finishes the trip however, some tour and trekking agencies in Nepal might not pay

until six, or seven months after the trek. Porters often have to chase the money and are bound to those agencies until they get the money. Nepal does not have a welfare system for the workers and as a result, workers like porters have to face unethical treatment by companies and the people they are bound with for money. Malville, (2005) has described the labour exploitation that occurs via the employment of naive porters from uneducated communities, resulting in underpaid, underfed and under-equipped porters.

Porters are not only the victim of less payment but many times when the trip is of a bigger group, there is a high chance of being forced to make unethical choices. Some like agencies or tour planners do this to save money. Some are forced by the situation.

*"The local resources are limited in a region, and with an increase in some trek operators and groups, many times the few local resources fail to meet the demand. This leads to overloaded mules and porters during a trek. So many times, when it gets busy, we are forced to carry an extensive amount of, loads smiles..... Sadly, I feel like so much burden on my body" ..... (Interview II).*

*While overloading might seem very simple to a few, few even go further to say that they get more money for ferrying more loads! While it is okay to some extent if we get compensated extra for ferrying more weight, the problem happens later while already into the trek, when one of our groups (Porter) fails to carry the agreed weight, changes his mind, or falls sick!! (Interview III).*

At that time the entire team may land on the problem and the problem further cascades down to all the other remaining people and porters in the team, who now must carry even more weight or do double rounds. In such an altitude, where a normal trekker finds it hard to even walk with his own load and belongings, we as a human being cannot imagine how a porter feels and faces the situation.

#### **4.3.1. "CLIENTS EXPECT US TO BE LIKE A BULL OR DONKEY, THEY DON'T THINK WE ALSO GET TIRED".**

The first interviewee and Maville (2005) state, that words introduce the all-too-common connection between Nepali workers and the strength of animals creating another justification for porters' working conditions.

Tens of thousands of Nepali porters every day in the middle hills or mountains carry excruciating loads on their spines, for the *Sahu* (merchants), for trekkers, and for various developmental agencies. They are important labour segments like a backbone for trekking tourism (Upadhyaya et al., 2022). But despite being crucial for Nepal's booming adventure tourism, carrying backbreaking loads faces harsh employee conditions, low pay, and health risks. Porters often lug loads up to 100 kg, which by far exceeds the permissible limits of weight porters should carry, especially in rugged terrains.

According to IPPG, porters should not be asked to carry a load, which is too heavy for their physical abilities (Max 30 kg in terms of Nepal). Their guidelines say the weight limit may need to be adjusted for trail, altitude, and weather conditions. However, these guidelines seem not to be followed by tour operators or agencies and most of the porters in Nepal end up carrying up to three times the weight limit than they are supposed to be. The work of Hillman (2021, p. 91) also rightly authenticates this issue by stating that the weight of the loads they are employed to carry indicates the working conditions for the porters are frequently grim.

*"I was feeling a little unwell and tired, so I stopped and took an extra breath, and then a client asked: "Do you even get tired?". From his statement, I felt like he saw me as a robot, as her paying me made me into a robot, am I not allowed to be human and get tired?"*

..... (Interview I)

***further, he and the third participant added***

*"When discussing the weight loads, they carried as porters, participant I recounted that, I am hardly visible under the large burden on my back laden with supplies for trekkers. The burden is more than twice the size of my body and can weigh around 90 to 100 kilograms. This is what we as a porter do for our livelihoods. I can't complain about the immensity of my work because this is what feeds me and my family" ..... (participant 1, 3).*

The Sherpa community in the trekking industry is often portrayed as superhuman, with incredible strength and endurance. While this may seem like praise, it leads to unfair treatment. Their so-called superhuman abilities are used to justify the harsh conditions, heavy workloads, and risks they face. Instead of recognizing, these conditions as unfair the

industry glorifies their strength and uses it as an excuse not to improve their working conditions.

It is not uncommon for the porters to carry their body weight. The guidelines are neither practised strictly nor there is any system of checking such heavy loads by the concerned authorities on the trek routes. Many of the porters we talked to were indeed carrying staggering weights. The trip they take up normally two to 3 days and sometimes a week and they repeat the journey each week for the entire trekking season. All porters we talked to were engaged in similar arrangements, paid per kilogram transported and often carrying weights exceeding 60 kilograms.

While discussing why they choose to bear the weight double or more,

*"Responded III, adding that our life is extremely hard, but at least we stay closer to our family and friends. For me being a porter is better than working in a golf country. Working in Nepal's Mountain means I live and work within the same area and our connections to the local area are deep," .....*

*"Another participant had a different kind of answer as he said, sometimes we are bound to carry a heavy weight as our Guide and tourists are forced to put their extra belongings to us because if we deny at the time, there will be a low chance to get a job for another time and also, we weight heavy for more earning" ..... (Participant II).*

*"Participant I added, the load to be carried varied between 15 to 50 Kg on average. However, the weight sometimes can be less than 10-12 kg while working for healthy guests (who themselves want to carry a much) as they are booked through travel agencies and hotels. Also, I observed the trek leader allocating low weight to a porter who is his relative or nearer".....*

Porters in Nepal have little choice but to do this extremely difficult, work. Job opportunities in the country are scarce, forcing many young people to seek employment abroad (Porto et al., 2021). Every year many youths enter the workforce, but nearly half leave for foreign jobs due to a lack of opportunities at home. Despite the hardships of porter work, still many prefer it over migrating abroad because it allows them to stay close and connected to their

homeland and families. This situation highlights the deep poverty in the hills and the Nepali government's failure to support its lower classes, both financially and symbolically.

#### 4.3.2. LOW WAGES/PAYMENT

It seems that the amount of weight carried by porters is subject to different influences and power dynamics. Though TAAN and several unions have agreed to limit the weight amount to 30 kg, and agreement is also subject to agency influence (Upadhyaya et al., 2022). According to the porter's explanation, during treks, many tourists often add to a porter's weight regardless of what the weight limit might be, indicating that the companies do not try to restrict the actions of trekkers and guides. As with wages, the permanent reserve of porters willing to work has pressured workers able to find jobs into accepting whatever weight the company tells them they will carry. Similarly, many trekking and tour companies offer porters extra salary for carrying double quantities of weight. This can financially benefit both the trekking company and the porter – where a company might pay two porters 1500 to 1600 Rs per day and by employing only one worker to carry a double weight the company pay one porter a bonus income of approximately 2500 Rs per day, which ultimately saving money.

Regarding wages, we found that the average daily income of the porter is up to NRs 1800, out of which they spend NRs 700 to 800 daily, on subsistence. It is no longer worth the pain, but they continue to porter, says Hillman (2021). While discussing wages.....

*"Participant I said, as a porter never received the established rate of Rs. 1932.00 as the daily wage while working in Annapurna Conservation Area trekking trip. The received wage I get is between Rs. 1200-1500 for a day. I had to accept this lower rate without any demand/bargaining/opposition due to the fear of losing this job if not accepted. This firsttime rejection could also affect another call for a similar job" ..... (Interview I).*

*"When we go to Everest region as a porter, we get payment of NPR. 1,500 to 1,600 and in Annapurna region, we get payment of NPR. 1,000 to 1,200 but it is not enough as we must pay for a portion of food and shelter by ourselves" ..... (Interview II).*

Most of the bigger-sized trek companies normally assign one person (mostly Naike/ trek leaders/sirdars, guides as the supplier of trekking porters) as their contractors for the supply of porters. The suppliers of porters, who are between bigger-sized trek companies and porters, offer lower wages than the amount offered by the trek companies Wilson and Dashper, (2022). This thing frequently happens in the tourism sector due to the huge supply of workers for the limited number of porter jobs. At the same time, lack of job availability makes it easy for tour operators to hire employees who are willing to accept lower salary and tour agencies at times have chances to take advantage of tipping culture, as they reportedly instruct porters that their wages will come solely from the tips they get from the tourists (Lama, 2024). As per the interview-based information from porters, the suppliers of porters are noticed deducting a few hundred rupees before paying wages to them and becoming benefactors through this dealing as mediators too.

*"One of the respondents said, I am offered Rs. 1,200-1,400 per day in camping trek. It went down to even Rs. 800 too. However, if I go as a porter-guide for a trip assigned by a guest house or hotel. The daily wage offered by a hotel or guest house is higher than a job assigned by Naike or leader(contractor)" ..... (Interview III).*

*"According to respondent II, there is an agreement on paper in which porters should carry weight up to 30 kg but in camping trek, they carry almost 45 kg of weight in one trek because they assign a smaller number of porters than they should. They cut off the money from Porter's name to themselves" ..... (Interview II).*

Here, trek companies deal with the daily rates and weights of trek porters with a contractor and not directly with the porters. For a few commissions in each porter, they arranged to the group. The culture of taking a commission as a game is played from the company to trek guide, trek guide to Naike (leader of the porter), and then from Naike to porters, through which porters are not getting exact payment in obedience to their work. Similarly, the process goes the same as the tips that tourists provide for the porter. If a tourist gives tips directly to the porters, then there is a chance to get a full number of tips but if tips are provided through the guide, the half amount of money from tips to each porter is taken out by the guide as well.



#### 4.4.NO FORMAL WORK CONTRACT, NO UNION, AND NO INSURANCE

Porters are the individuals who genuinely make a living through their laborious efforts. And yet, several factors conspire to ensure that Nepal's porters have no collective voice nor, work contract or proper insurance system. The porters of Nepal are largely unrepresented and illiterate (Kratzmann, 2020). They have little to no bargaining power because the labour force greatly outnumbers the demand. By caste, ethnicity, and geography, they are split apart from one another. There isn't a "factory floor" where porters congregate, which makes organization easier. Porter is defined as a solitary task rather than a group undertaking.

Thus, while asking about the work contract and union. In this regard, participants have the following points,

*"I have been involved in Porter 18 years before and began as Porter guide 12 years ago and got my porter guide license issued in 2014 AD. In these years, I have experienced that there is not any written contract between Porter and the company but only with word of mouth. And there is a Naike who works as a bridge between porter and company. When there is a need for a porter, company, or guide contact Naike and they arrange a few numbers of porters for that trek group" ..... (Interview I).*

The recruitment process in the trekking industry lacks a quality-based approach, primarily due to the absence of a structured Porter's Referral Center, which remains a major barrier to formalizing Porter jobs. At present, there is no centralized information registry for porters at either the trekking agency or government level. Since porters are typically hired on an ad-hoc basis without formal contracts and are paid in cash, employers rarely maintain proper records, if any (Kratzmann, 2020).

*"Another participant added, that when tourists come to trekking companies or agencies, they contact me and other porters for the job. Sometimes, the trek guide contacts me and other porters for the job but most of the time, we have our friend circle from where they get the call for the job. Also, hotels and lodges call us for the job" ..... (Interview II).*

Parajuli (2009) highlights that only a small portion of porters are aware of organizations working for their welfare. Unlike trekking guides, who receive ID cards from the Tourism

Board of Nepal, porters do not have an official identification system. Additionally, when the responsibility of hiring porters is delegated to guides, trekking agencies have no direct interaction with porters, further complicating the recruitment process (Upreti et al., 2018).

*"I/we are not formally assigned to any porter work from any company, but we are contacted through telephone from the company when needed" ..... (Interview III).*

*"Currently, there is even no information registry for us either at the trekking agent or government level. As we are hired on an ad-hoc basis without contracts and are paid in cash, record-keeping of us by our employers is poor or non-existent" ..... (Interview II).*

Although Nepal has a National Identification System, which requires all porters to present their ID for employment, this system only stores basic details such as name, age, and place of birth, without any records of their skills, training, or work experience. Due to the lack of a structured information registry, verifying a porter's credentials—both observable (e.g., training, experience) and unobservable (e.g., reliability, work ethic)—becomes challenging for trekking agencies and other stakeholders in the industry (Kratzmann, 2020). This gap in documentation also creates difficulties in identifying and assisting porters through welfare programs (Upadhyaya & Upreti, 2008b).

At the same time, all trekking companies require health insurance for their employees including porters, however, health insurance facilities in Nepal are poorly organized and barely substantial for all the porters. This is true for all; particularly to the labourers in the country and porters are also no exception in this case (Law & Rodway, 2008). Normally, travel agencies pay the porters and leaders as soon as they finish a trip or trekking, but some trekking companies in Nepal might not pay for a long until after a job. Porters could not do anything at the time due to not having a job contract and protecting their rights to have their wages. Porters and guides often must chase money because they're bound to those companies until they're paid. And even they have a fear of not getting a job for the next time. In addition, Nepal doesn't have a welfare and union system, so people have to do what they can to earn money kicking up a fuss about late payments, heavy weight or even long hours will generally be met with directions to the door (Kratzmann, 2024).

*" One of our respondents expressed not sure about insurance at his company's policy of porter insurance. He further added that he is not confident that the porters in his group are provided with insurance, as many of the workers are switched out with another porter at the last minute". .....(Interview III).*

Mostly, porters are contacted by telephone when the trek group is organized in the company and that person may be from the company or their friend as well and mostly employed without a formal contract. This implies that there is a lack of quality-based recruitment, and a lack of contracts in the industry, which exacerbates their inability to negotiate for better pay. The hierarchical structure of the trekking industry often treats porters as expendable labourers, further diminishing their rights, voice and autonomy. Further, these kinds of informality in industry lead to the lack of verifiability as good porters may lack the platform to credibly signal their strengths and experience. These porters are mostly chosen by the trekking guides, and in some cases, the trekking. Companies themselves select the porters. There are no criteria for choosing the porters but the strong and healthy people who can carry enough loads in low wages are easily chosen. Sometimes they are chosen based on their relations with hotel/lodge owners.

Although the Nepal government requires trekking associations to provide insurance for all their employees, enforcement is little to nonexistent, and insurance coverage relies solely on the decisions made by their companies. Regardless, some of the porters that we talked about were treated without job agreements and insurance. In addition, for those who have insurance, the effectiveness of insurance is so lacking, as porters usually have a lack of knowledge of how to navigate paperwork and claim reimbursement. Many trekking porters who are provided with insurance policies by their companies are not familiar with the work and the process of reporting and documenting their illness or injury and seldom help their employees navigate the process of insurance. Many porters also lack awareness, resulting in a shared view of paperwork as 'too complicated', difficult, and not for them (Upadhayaya & Upreti, 2008b).

#### **4.5.NO BARGAINING POWER**

Governments play a crucial role in supporting Porter by establishing the culture of collective bargaining by ensuring that labour laws are enforced, providing legal protections

for workers, and promoting a favourable environment for labour unions to operate (Zeffane & Melhem, 2018). However, in Nepal, government support for collective bargaining is limited, with labour laws poorly enforced, weak legal protections for employees, and a hostile environment for labour unions (Abukhaitet al., 2023). While talking about collective bargaining porters have the following responses,

INTERVIEW 4/5.....

Given the lack of any form of information registry or documentation of porters in a consistent manner, verification of porter characteristics by trekking agents or any other body related to the industry is difficult. For example, it is difficult to verify basic facts such as experience, training undertaken, etc. This can lead to difficulty in targeting beneficiaries for Porter welfare programs. The issue of poor identifiability and verifiability not only creates a challenge in the design and implementation of any social welfare programs or collective bargaining agreement, but it has also led to severe information asymmetry in the industry.

Despite challenges, collective bargaining in tourism is necessary for promoting decent work and improving working conditions for employees (Aynalem, Birhanu, & Tesefay, 2016). Also, collective bargaining agreements can provide workers with work security, fair wages, and safe working conditions (Ram, 2018). It further helps to establish a base of both constructive and cooperative relationships which can lead to better productivity and efficiency for employees and employers in the tourism sector.

#### **4.6.LANGUAGE BARRIER**

Language barriers significantly impact the lives of porters in Nepal, especially those working in the tourism industry. Many porters come from rural backgrounds and primarily speak indigenous languages or dialects, while trekkers and tourists usually communicate in English or other foreign languages. This gap makes it challenging for porters to understand instructions or express their needs and concerns Viwatronnakit et al. (2019), Miscommunication can lead to difficulties in navigation, safety risks, and misunderstandings about work expectations. Additionally, limited access to education and

language training further restricts their ability to engage effectively with clients, reducing their opportunities for better wages and working conditions.

All participants said this

*"Their educational background is not that strong and they only speak English because of the tourists they interact with every day they are fluent, not native, and they hardly understand what makes their life a bit difficult they said that they have difficulty with tone normal English is quite understandable for some of us but sometimes they find hard to communicate with tourist".*

One of our interviewees said .....*"we have to depend on a guide because he understands English, and I never go to school, so our guide helps us to translate sometimes or sometimes the tourist tries us to understand by action or acting some..... He smiles further, and he adds that if the guide is honest or loving he or she will make the journey pleasant they will translate without request".*

Prachanant (2012) states that disability issues, the use of improper words or expressions, a restricted vocabulary, and a lack of grammar expertise are major problems when using English for tourism. Other crucial elements are also highlighted by Viwatronnakit et al. (2019), including cultural diversity, justice, respect, creativity, problem-solving abilities, individual strengths, and good communication. The language barrier in the travel and tourism sector is a result of all of these factors.

*"I have spent ten plus more years in this field as a porter to Everest Base Camp, Tourists are mostly from European countries, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Even though they can all speak English, their accents differ greatly, making it occasionally difficult to understand them as there is an opportunity if you're good in English to become a tour guide or maybe a businessman (Interview IV) ..... He smiled..... Further, he added ...I haven't stepped into school so it's impossible for me and this is the only choice left for me and I have accepted it".*

Language barriers may be a problem, especially when speaking in foreign languages like English, which may be difficult for tourist guides. Access to education, cultural influences,

societal expectations, and economic conditions are some of the factors that affect literacy rates. It is crucial to ensure equal educational opportunities to improve literacy and promote positive outcomes (Karuppiyah et al., 2022). Particularly, in rural and isolated places. The nation lacks sufficient educational institutions for postsecondary education. These facilities are exclusively found in urban regions, and many people must leave their communities alone to pursue their education. Not all Nepali families can afford to send their children away from home for school.

Another participant shared his memory .....

*“I was sitting in the Lukla Airport when one beautiful came she was around 30-35 years old maybe I don’t know but she was young she was from England and she had just 15-20 kg stuff with her, so she just wanted to hire a porter to Everest Based Camp so she was looking all around and every guide was like do you need a guide and Bla.... Bla ... She waited for some time, then came to me and asked if there was a place where she could contact porters only. I simply smiled and replied, "I am a porter. If you want to hire me, I can carry your bag." She agreed to hire me, but I am really bad at English and can only speak simple words. However, she was kind and communicated with me using actions, gestures, and symbols. “He further said that was my beautiful journey till now which was 11 days long she paid for my every meal so yah sometimes you get lucky”.....(Interview4).*

Language barriers further marginalised Porters and hindered their ability to advance in their careers. Although several trekking organisations offer basic language instruction, many porters still rely on guides or coworkers who can help them communicate. Their low standing in the hiking sector is reinforced by this dependence, which also reduces their ability to negotiate. Furthermore, miscommunication brought on by linguistic barriers may lead to unjust treatment, inadequate accommodations, or even hazardous working circumstances. Porters' working circumstances may be greatly improved by addressing this issue through language education programs and improved communication techniques. This would enable them to stand up for their rights and guarantee safer and more fulfilling employment prospects.

## 4.7.WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Porters in the tourism sector frequently struggle to make a balance between their personal life and their professional responsibilities, even though work-life balance is emphasized and should be maintained properly (Gupta,2021). The definitions of work as employment or the condition of livelihood, and life as personal or family time highlight the conflicting demands that the employees in tourism like porters must contend with. Generally, Worklife outcomes are negatively impacted by extended work hours, which are frequently accepted in sectors such as tourism (Deery & Jago, 2009). This shows itself for porters as long shifts of physically very demanding work that do not even offer the time needed for relaxation or leisure activities. So, work-life imbalance was mentioned by all our participants when asked about it and emerged regularly. Therefore, we made it a theme for analysis.

### 4.7.1. SEASONAL WORK AND FREELANCING

Most of the jobs of the employees, in tourism are seasonal and cannot be denied for the porters as well. There are only a few months when the tourist comes, so the job arises accordingly. This is also said by the respondent as: *“Working as a Porter is not my only job. I work in the government sector as a cleaner too and I usually take a few months’ holidays working in the mountains as a porter because income is good in some of the seasons of the year”* ..... (Interview III).

*“Seasonal workers like porters may have long and good wages while in a peak season, but the case is exactly the opposite during off-seasons. This means the good source of income of porters are only few throughout the whole year. The wages of a few seasons or months are not enough for the expenditure of the whole year. Thus, regarding this, a few months’ income may seem negligible if you have a big family or children. So, there is pressure for employees like porters to have another job or work for their regular income as done by”*  
.....(respondent 1, 2,3)

Furthermore, porters do not have a set contract from an employer; instead, they work as independent contractors. According to the majority of our responses, the employment proposition originates from various travel agencies and personal recommendations. This implies that those with strong family links or networks may be able to find more employment possibilities and earn more money than individuals who are new to the area or have few connections. Some employees might become demotivated as a result of this.

The interviewee supports this as well, with one responder stating:

*“The porters’ wages per tour are indeed good in seasons, however, the nature of our job is very irregular, due to the unpredictable schedules when the tourists arrive and the chance of getting the job” (Interview I).*

*“I have rented land for farming and also, I have some animals cows, goats, sheep and chickens that help me to run as well I totally cannot depend on this job, my wife is hardworking when I am out for this job she takes care of everything including children our family grow seasonal vegetables and sell milk in the market” .....(interview 2)*

According to Santosh, the nature of the work is highly unpredictable, depending on when the tourists arrive and the likelihood of landing a job, even though the compensation for each trip is high. As a result, being a porter is not a dependable way to support a household, and people need to have other sources of income. The nature of the task and the money made may also cause frustration. Because the work is so erratic, it interferes with their ability to take care of their families or work another full-time job during the months when they are not employed. Additionally, the revenue from working as a porter only lasts for a few months, which is not fully sufficient, to support the family throughout the year.

**4.7.2. FAMILY RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION DURING TRAVELLING** The literature by Aziz & Cunningham, (2008) draws attention to the mental as well as the physical toll of work-life imbalance, including mental stress, dissatisfaction, and frequent burnout (Aziz & Cunningham, 2008). For porters, these issues may be created by a long unpredictable tour, which is highly physically demanding, and lack of required resources which leads to little time and energy for their personal and family responsibilities. Many porters workday and night shifts



without a fixed schedule, weekends or any time, making it difficult for them to manage the balance between work and family. This leads them to miss family gatherings and limited interactions with their own family or children. Over time, the lack of these things may create emotional bonding between the members of the family and reduce overall family cohesion.

This is also reflected by the respondent as:

*“I have missed like my daughter got a trophy in volleyball; I was not there. and there are many more. I wish I was there.... I miss talking to them and participation with them at that time” (Interview II).*

***And another respondent further added,***

*“I missed my special day as it was the day of my son's birth and even when I tried, I could not come home to see my wife and my son. My wife still complains to me about that, and I feel so guilty, but I cannot do anything as the nature of our job is not like any other job”  
..... (Interview IV).*

Even though the children had their other family members taking care of them, or maybe the children were not very worried about them not being in a picture or in a gathering, the working person as porters has been missing many events of their children's and family's life which was very important for them. This is seen in many cases of working in the tourism field. Moreover, most of the time, working like being a porter demands to be away from home for a longer period, as if the trip is for weeks, months or a few days. Being away from home causes worry and anxiety not for self but for spouses and children. The worry about family is stated briefly by respondents as:

*“There is no network sometimes if we trek in the Himalayas or rural areas. I miss talking to my family. Sometimes, I am worried if they are all right or not. So, I call them as soon as I get the network back” ..... (Interview III).*

The worries that the porter expressed are due to the problem of communication or network. Most of them reflected that they become worried when there is no network, and when they cannot talk to the family easily. There is certainly a problem with communication when

people are at high altitudes which is expressed by the climbers. There is a lack of facilities to communicate *with* the family when the trekkers reach high altitude. The internet connection or other telecommunication facilities are still not functioning fully in Nepal, especially at high altitudes.

*“We, Men, are the leaders or heads of the family; we are responsible for providing financial income and running our family, and we as a porter feel guilty when we are not present when their children are growing up, if any incident in the family causes make us guilt, or on any occasion when they require their head of the family we are away” ...interview 1,).*

Although Nepal has seen a rise in the technology of communication, such as the access of the internet, as a result of various initiatives from the public and commercial sectors, the country is still underdeveloped when compared to the developed world (Bellmann et al. 2020). Technology advancements have also helped Nepal's tourism industry and given high-altitude hikers access to communication channels. Even if things are getting better, there is not enough service, thus in the time of hiking, porters are not able to connect to the world in some parts of the journey.

#### **4.8.HEALTH CONDITION**

The Himalayas are the most well-known regions in the world where labourers must carry heavy objects over difficult terrain to incredibly high altitudes. In such Himalayas, proper health services are limited and unavailable, so it is essential to understand the most frequently encountered medical issues. Concerning porters, the most common risks are related to adverse weather conditions as they work outdoors, they also usually suffer from loss of voice and tiredness of standing and walking.

##### **4.8.1. PHYSICAL WELL BEING**

In a Himalayan area where temperatures of minus degree are commonplace, landscapes are changed each year by snowslides, and oxygen content is a tiny part of concentrations at sea

level, it is definitely that porters are subject to many environmental hazards. Indeed, when compared to other trekkers and occupations, porters face the highest diversity and severity of illness in tourism (Law & Rodway, (2008).

Altitude illness, joint pain, chronic disability, accidents, and other sicknesses like Hypothermia are very common among porters due to not having a piece of knowledge and training related. The problem like altitude sickness occurs because of rapid exposure to low amounts of oxygen (Bondi et al., 2021).

*"According to one respondent, the risk of altitude sickness often rises slowly after 2500 meters, and the symptoms can include headache, vomiting, fatigue, and difficulty sleeping. Both severe and mild forms of altitude problems are common among us" .... (Interview III).*

*"At the time of this study, during an interview, two porters added that they were also in treatment for altitude sickness even though they are Sherpa" ..... (Interview I and II).*

Well, it is opposite to popular belief as all porters are not high-altitude Sherpas. A large proportion of them are from different backgrounds, they live in low altitudes and only go to high-altitude areas for work (Malville et al.2001). Thus, they too are susceptible to acute mountain sickness (AMS) like everyone else. This susceptibility contrasts with the highaltitude Sherpa porters who may be genetically better adapted to high altitude. Although studies about Altitude sickness in porters are lacking, numerous case reports highlight that these problems do, indeed, occur in porters (Havryliuk et al., 2015) but, because of late reporting of symptoms, the sick porters are usually present in extremes. The fact that porters can also be equally at risk of altitude sickness is very important to understand and recognize because there is often a false preconception that porters working at high altitudes are relatively immune to high-altitude illness. It is paramount to realize that this is not the case, and attention must be given to the porters travelling on the expedition.

Coming from a low socioeconomic background (Koirala et al., 2018) and having to work as much as they can to earn enough, the health-seeking behaviour of these porters is

noteworthy in that they only tend to visit health facilities once they become close to incapacitation (Dawadi et al., 2020). Most porters do not have any form of medical or evacuation about falling ill during their work. Nepali staff and porters are often reliant on the preparedness and resources of the trekking group to reduce the risk of medical problems. Although helicopter evacuation for medical reasons is getting more accessible and often may happen for minor complaints in tourists, the porters do not have easy access to medical evacuation.

Regarding safety while trekking, one respondent shared his memory of delivering equipment to camp one, I and my team of seven workers got caught in an avalanche, one lost his life and two more got injured.

*" We (Sherpa) carry oxygen for the client and even though my two other friends were injured and one dead they wanted to continue. I and my friends wanted to give up, stay safe, and grieve but the clients did not, they said "We have paid money. The clients get their will, and they continue towards camp one but are turned around by the weather. On the way down another worker gets caught in an avalanche and dies" ..... (Interview 4).*

*"Again, the same respondent added that two sherpas had to die for them" .... (Interview I).*

*"One of our 2nd participants explained differently in this topic "As a porter I almost worked my whole life forty (40) years I do have multiple problems regarding health such as back pain, gastric, and lung issues even though I am still working. I have to feed my family. I have very old parents. My father is already 93 and my mother is 85 and they expect me to run my family. Having multiple problems, I just visit doctors a few times only and also, we don't have a hospital nearby as we have to go to the city for that"... (Interview II).*

He laughs but there is only frustration in his words. On top of the physical risk and strenuous work, local workers also have to continuously confront having their lives diminished and devalued as they work. Uncorrected refractory errors and photokeratitis are

more common in porters owing to a lack of proper protective gear as well as reluctance to seek health advice. For instance, Gastritis is commonly known among locals as the national disease of Nepal. With poor health-seeking behaviour being the norm among people from rural Nepal, other chronic and noncommunicable diseases can also be expected to factor in the health of the porters, who are usually from poor socioeconomic strata (Basnyat & Litch, 1997).

In addition, a huge number of children working as porters also experience a substantially increased risk of negative physical, emotional, and educational outcomes due to their involvement in exploitive and dangerous work. Working as porters prevents access of children to education and, in turn, better employment, continuing the cycle of poverty in the long run (Bondi et al., 2021).

#### **4.8.2. MENTAL WELL BEING**

The term "mental well-being" is a condition of emotional, psychological, and social health in which a person can manage everyday stressors, work effectively, uphold wholesome relationships, and contribute significantly to their community (Fox, 1999). It entails striking a balance between mental health elements like resilience, self-worth, emotional control, and general life satisfaction. According to the organization of (WHO), mental well-being is a situation in which people can recognize their potential, manage everyday stressors, work well, and give back to their communities. Positive mental health and the capacity to flourish in a variety of spheres of life are more essential than just the lack of mental sickness.

As we found, there is a misconception among porters that running their family is more important than their mental health which is unexplainable. They are talking about mental stress, but it seems as if they do not have any knowledge that chronic stress is often caused by poor pay, demanding physical work, and lack of social acknowledgement that defines porters' jobs. Lack of control over working conditions and job insecurity frequently make this stress worse, another factor that exacerbates anxiety, despair, and occasionally even

hopelessness is financial uncertainty. These mental health issues might be made worse for porters who work in remote areas. Another respondent added,

*"For several months I fought with mental health, but I was not aware that what was the reason as I was so much stressed due to heavy workload" ..... (Interview I).*

*There is a lot of stress in life plus being a woman is not that easy in such a remote area with no opportunities, some days you won't get any of the tasks because I work for local shops the weather is frustrating and sometimes I feel like dying but when I take my girl on my lap I forget my all pain my tiredness everything, further, she mentioned that when she was with her husband the life was quite easy he used to work for family and she is all alone.*

The above statement shows that the participants are not very aware of their health condition until they get serious because of the misconception that they can work, meaning they are doing good. However, it can bring a very dangerous result in long-term incapacity, chronic pain, and musculoskeletal diseases. Severe back discomfort, strains on the shoulders and neck, joint disorders, and foot abnormalities are common concerns that are made worse by inadequate support or less awareness and can result in long-term incapacity, which can damage their mental health.

Additionally, mentally the unpredictability of work schedules creates a high level of stress and anxiety. At the same time, the demanding physical nature of the job can lead to exhaustion, leaving little energy for personal life. Many porters also struggle with financial insecurity, especially those who do not have a permanent contract or work daily. Therefore, only being a porter is not a reliable source of income to sustain the household economically and individuals need to have alternative income sources. There may also be frustration due to the nature of the work and income earned. This may create tension and disturb the motivation of the guide to continue with the job in the long run.

#### **4.9.GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

The lack of needed resources and support from structural or government support leave the porters as being vulnerable to health issues and strained relationships in their personal as well as professional lives. Bellmann et al. (2020) highlighted that the pressures of modern economic competition, which push individuals to overextend themselves, a reality keenly felt by porters striving to secure their livelihoods. This environment often results in less efficiency and increased psychological strain, further perpetuating work-life imbalance. In addition, as Deery and Jago (2009) argue, long hours contribute to employee shortages in sectors like tourism by driving employees to leave their jobs due to unsuitable and healthy work environments. This is particularly relevant for porters, who might enter the sector in search of less demanding and more balanced opportunities. While asking questions relating to what kind of government support you get from the government.

The respondent has the following response,

*“Honestly, until this date, I have not got any amount of direct support from the government. There are some programs for workers in the tourism sector, but the organizers do not always reach us. However, during COVID-19, I witnessed some relief packages, but they were difficult to access” ..... (Interview IV).*

*“Well, the government does promote tourism, which helps workers like us to get more work, but when it comes to us for personal support, for example: health insurance and pensions—there are very few and it’s not enough. Few NGOs, INGOs and the agencies of tour and trekking provide better support than the government” ..... (Interview I).*

The porters acknowledged that some of the government initiatives exist and are also good for the sector but not what needs to be for the people. This reflects poor dissemination of required resources and a weak structure of the governance that fails to ensure equitable distribution of help. Although the government promotes tourism, which indirectly benefits workers like porters by increasing job opportunities, it does little to ensure their long-term welfare. Despite the physically demanding and high-risk nature of their work, there is a lack of needed health insurance systems and pension provisions like in other developed countries leaving porters vulnerable. This reflects broader labour rights issues in Nepal, where informal and seasonal workers remain largely unprotected. In Nepal, the pension

scheme is provided only in government jobs (Poudel, 2016) and employees must secure their future with their savings. So, there is a dilemma the porters work more hours to have more savings for retirement or should they focus on their present life? This vulnerability could lead to long-term negative effects on the mental health of employees.

Overall, work-life imbalance causes consequences for employees like porters and their performance as well as the employer. Doing a porter job is a very demanding job (both physical and mental) and gaining a work-life balance could be harder than any other fulltime job. Time-away from family, missing important family events, lack of childcare, communication problems with family during tours, job insecurity and lack of support from the government were few mentioned by the participants. Overcoming these factors could be some of the factors to the porters to have the feeling of work-life balance. However, as they have a long time away from their family it may be difficult to have a total work-life balance among trekkers.

#### **4.10. IS THERE ANY CHANGE IN PORTERING TODAY.**

*"Nowadays, tourists also demand well-equipped porters for their trekking period so that they don't have to worry about our safety. This thing forces the company to give proper resources to the porters for the sake of tourists" ..... (interview 4)*

In terms of the rescue operation of porters, the tourism company seems to put pressure on the insurance company for the rescue only if a relative or close one from the company gets in trouble. In other cases, all porters said that there is a facility for rescue if anyone gets caught in a severe accident but only the relative or close one gets lucky. Only a few companies give a brief about the code of conduct to porters.

*"The safety gear and equipment are provided when I have to go to the upper region (danger zones). I as a porter face two major problems whose mitigation will be valued: (a) uncertainty of any rate of daily wage, and (b) lack of getting space in hotels and lodges while peak season I have to go with 1-2 fit tall tourists as porter-guide" .... (Interview II).*



To get treated fairly, the Porters have to have a relationship with hotels, lodges, Agent, Travel companies or *Naikee* therefore, from the all interviews we analysed that there is not much change in the Porters' lives they are on the same track as before the only thing changed is tourist demand that they want a porters who have safety gear and equipment which can help porters to get those things from agent or company.

## DISCUSSION

The situation and the problems faced by porters in the Himalayas of Nepal is a matter of both concern and reflection. Employees like porters in the tourism industry are not only important for the trekking and climbing industry but also enable adventurers to explore the rugged beauty of nature and adventure. However, the challenges faced by porters often highlight systemic generated exploitation and inequalities within the industry of tourism. Porters perform incredibly demanding work, carrying physically heavy loads across treacherous terrain, often at high altitudes where oxygen levels are below. This labour requires remarkable physical endurance and resilience, yet it is undervalued and not praised. Their pay is disproportionately low compared to the profits generated by the trekking and mountaineering industry, as well as the fees paid by tourists. This discrepancy raises questions about the ethics of the tourism industry and whether companies, agencies and tourists are doing enough to ensure fair treatment.

Beyond economic issues, porters often face significant risks due to inadequate safety measures. Many porters lack basic protective resources such as clothing and equipment, such as safety waterproof boots or warm jackets, which are critical for surviving the harsh weather as well as, in physically hard conditions. Altitude sickness and physical injuries are very common, however, access to assistance like medical and evacuation in emergencies is often limited. These shortcomings reflect not just negligence, but also the industry's prioritization of profits over the well-being of its workers.

Socially, porters frequently come from marginalized communities where discrimination, poverty as well as lack of education limit their opportunities in industry. Porters are often

discriminated against based on their ethnicity and seen as a last resort in their work rather than a career of choice, which resembles a cycle of hardship. Despite their irreplaceable contributions, employees like porters are barely recognized and reinforcing their invisibility continuously within the broader narrative of trekking and tourism.

Addressing these issues requires a diversified multiple approach. Fair wage levels, access to physical insurance, and improved working environments, including the provision of proper gear, should be non-negotiable standards in the industry. Education and training in health, safety, and rights would empower porters to advocate for themselves and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation. Tourists and travellers also have an important role to play by choosing companies that prioritize the ethical treatment of porters and showing them respect and gratitude for their efforts.

In essence, the plight of porters in the Nepalese Himalayas is not just a labour issue but a concern for human rights. It needs a call for greater awareness, education, reforming systematic rules, and a shift in attitudes to make sure that the employees who make Himalayan adventures possible are treated with the dignity, respect, and fairness they deserve.

## **CHAPTER -5**

### **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **5.1.OVERVIEW**

This final chapter of our thesis provides an overall summary of the whole study including the entire investigation of the aims and objectives of the study as well as analysis, which were presented already in the previous chapter. Finally, the further recommendations list the actions and further research. As such, this chapter was further subdivided into three sections and that is , conclusion and recommendations and porters request to government and tourist.

## **5.2.CONCLUSION**

This thesis paper has provided insight into the issues and challenges faced by workers like porters in Nepal. It has examined how the Porters of Nepal are under the pressure of the Nepalese caste system and are discriminated against in many ways. At the same time, porters trekking must bear the unethical behaviours as well as the huge responsibility of their trekking groups. Although they are an important part of tourism, they do not have any facility for the protection of their employment and a secure future. In addition, this thesis seeks to conduct a qualitative analysis of porters, especially in the context of Nepal. One of the reasons behind choosing Nepal is that it is a famous country in the tourism sector and is popular for trekking.

Porters are often subjected to unequal treatment, being denied essential resources like food and accommodation, which undermines their rights, dignity as well as well-being. At the same time, they are poorly compensated for their hard work, with wages that fail to reflect the physical demands and the risks involved in their job. In addition, they are forced to carry a load that is far exceeding recommended limits, leading to several illnesses, injuries, and long-term health complications. The lack of a referral centre and bargaining power of porters is driven by limited economic opportunities and the absence of legal protection leaves them unable to negotiate for reasonable pay and better working conditions. Furthermore, exposure to harsh weather conditions, altitude sickness and inadequate medical and health care worsen porters' vulnerability.

Thus, this paper highlights the urgent need for systematic reforms, rules, and regulations including a fair wage system, improved safety measures like insurance, and equitable treatment to ensure the welfare and the rights of porters in the Tourism industry.

## **5.3.RECOMMENDATION**

In order to promote the good performance of employees like porters towards effective, quality services and improvement of livelihood in the tourism sector, the following are recommended.

1. Tour companies like travel agencies or travel operators must be more careful with medical records and the work insurance of all the porters before hiring a porter as this would help to reduce unnecessary deaths or make a person aware of health problems like (AMS) of Employees like porters during the trekking. In addition, Porters' associations, in collaboration with TAAN should negotiate with trekking tour companies to introduce health insurance for porters, to reduce the burdens of risking their life like medical costs to porters.
2. Nepal Tourism Board or TAAN management should establish policies or laws, which force all trekking companies to have radio calls in order to facilitate communication like for rescue based on the health of porters and other company staff.
3. The number of accommodation facilities should be increased, and a law should be made that does not discriminate against them based on their ethnicity while accommodating, and everyone should behave equally so that porters can work freely and get proper rest both physically and mentally while trekking.
4. The Nepal Tourism Board should reform a tourism policy on wages and other payments of porters because it is outdated compared to the rise of living standards.
5. Given the high level of risk involved in trekking, a well-qualified porter with the right skills can be a big asset to the trekking group. His knowledge of first aid, altitude sickness prevention and health are important not only for his safety but also for the safety of the trekkers he is accompanying. Porter training programs will also help porters gradually improve their knowledge and abilities about health such that they are better prepared for the next trip.
6. Social justice for Himalayan porters in Nepal is a critical issue that must be addressed together by the government, tourism business, and international trekking communities. By addressing wage inequities, improving working conditions, enforcing labour laws, and offering educational opportunities, Nepal can secure a more just and equitable future for these industrious workers. Ethical tourism and responsible trekking methods can also

contribute to a more equitable system that respects the dignity and rights of the porters who support Nepal's growing mountain tourism business.

#### 5.4.PORTERS REQUEST ALL TOURISTS AND GOVERNMENT

The lack of strict policy applications and lack of porters' referral centres has supported this trend to continue. It also has compelled accommodation givers like hotels, and lodges (instead of tour/trek agencies) to call porters directly and employ. In addition, there is no government agency, or NGO has yet stepped forward as an advocate for the inhumanely exploited commercial porter.

When asked what changes are needed respondents answered:

*"The main issue is that we don't have fixed prices for tours. Agencies are competing to offer the lowest price, and all tourists want to bargain as we do have to accept what they offer because next time we won't get any job" ..... (Interview I).*

This means all prices need to be equal, set prices for tours, and no bargaining. Workers should also be paid well with fixed salaries. Summit bonuses and tips should be included in the salary from the start. It's not the porter's fault if the client cannot continue. Workers should get their full salary even if they must turn around.

*Sometimes if the tour gets cancelled by a tourist, we won't get paid because as per them we didn't work but what about our time and the value if they are cancelling their trip then it's not our fault we would have to get the opportunity from others it has to be fair I think.... (interview 3).*

The government should make rules and regulations for all so that the Porters can face some change for their rights. Also, porters have to reunite and form a union to discuss the matter and find a solution for them, however, they believe they are not educated. So, the Local and government can only help them as per their perception.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRES

#### Questionnaire samples for interview

1. Could you briefly describe your upbringing and how you became a porter?
2. Why did you choose the porter profession?
3. What is your educational background, and how does it affect your work as a porter?
4. What is your wage rate? Is the wage rate enough to run your family household? If not
5. Why is there discrimination in the wage rate?
6. How many hours do you work on average in a day? How much weight do you carry?
7. Do you work part-time or full-time?
8. How is the distribution of accommodation, food, water and other necessities during portering?
8. Portering is a physically demanding job. What do you think about it?

9. What are the issues that you face while doing portering? ask about high altitude, medicine if sickness, health.
10. Do agencies provide equal rights and things to you when necessary?
- 11 Does the local government support you if necessary?
- 12 Do you charge on your own or do you have any organisation that has rated the amount for your work?
- 13 How about your insurance and job contract for your work?
14. Is your job risky? How and why?
- 14 Is it your hobby to be a porter or a necessity?
- 15 Can you fulfil your family and kid's education through portering? 16 From your perspective what can be done to improve the portering environment?
- 17 Have you faced any kind of abuse (physical or mental) during portering?
- 18 Do you have to buy the necessary stuff, such as medicine, warm clothes, and equipment, by yourself or some responsible person, will provide you while portering at a high altitude?

### **Interview sample**

Interviewer: Hi, Dipak. Can you start by introducing yourself and sharing how long you've been working as a porter?

Dipak: My name is Dipak Pudashaini, and I have been working as a porter for the past seven years. I started when I was 18 years old. Over the years, I've worked with different travel agencies like Discovery Travels and Everest Travels.

Interviewer: What motivated you to become a porter?

Dipak: I didn't have a good education, so I had two choices—either go abroad or work here. Farming wasn't enough to support my family, so I became a porter to earn extra income and help my family.

Interviewer: What is your educational background?

Dipak: I studied until the eighth grade, but I had to drop out because of financial difficulties. Education was considered a luxury when I was a child.

Interviewer: Where are you originally from?

Dipak: I come from a rural village in Rasuwa called Langtang.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about a typical workday for a porter? Dipak:

Typically, we wake up early in the morning, pack our loads, and start trekking before the tourists. We carry heavy bags and walk for several hours each day, often on steep and rough trails. We take short breaks, but we mostly walk continuously until we reach our next stop for the night.

Interviewer: What kind of clients do you usually work with?

Dipak: We generally work through travel agencies, and most of our clients are foreign tourists who come to trek in Nepal. Sometimes, local trekkers hire us, but that's rare.

Interviewer: How do you usually get hired?

Dipak: I got hired through a relative who works as a tour guide. Normally, porters are hired through trekking agencies, but sometimes I also get work through referrals from previous clients or friends.

Interviewer: Do you work independently or are you affiliated with a trekking company?

Dipak: Mostly, I work through travel agencies, but I also take direct bookings from tourists if they contact me independently.

Interviewer: What are the biggest challenges you face as a porter? Dipak:

The biggest challenges include carrying heavy loads, dealing with extreme weather conditions, and the low wages. On top of that, we don't get proper medical care if we get sick or injured.

Interviewer: How do you handle extreme weather conditions during your treks?

Dipak: We try to wear warm clothes, but often we don't have proper jackets, shoes, or gloves. Some nights are freezing, and we have to sleep outside or in very basic shelters.

Interviewer: Are you provided with proper gear by your employer? Dipak: No, we don't get any equipment from the agency. We rely on our own gear and clothes for the trip. Sometimes, clients give us jackets, shoes, or water bottles out of kindness, but we don't receive any support from the agency.

Interviewer: Have you ever faced health issues due to your work?

Dipak: Yes, the weather is unpredictable, and we often face life-threatening situations. I remember once a colleague died in an avalanche at Everest Base Camp. The routes to the base camps are dangerous, and one wrong step could cost you your life.

Interviewer: Do you receive any medical support or insurance?

Dipak: No, we don't get insurance or medical support. If I get sick, the agency will redistribute my load among other porters and pay them extra. My family might receive some compensation if I die, but nothing for sickness.

Interviewer: How much weight do you typically carry?

Dipak: Normally, I carry 25-30 kilograms, but during peak seasons, it can be even heavier.

Interviewer: How are porters typically paid?

Dipak: We're paid per trip, and the amount depends on the company or client. Some pay fairly, but many underpay us. There's no fixed salary. Some agencies use tips from tourists to supplement our pay, but others give tips separately.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you're fairly compensated for your work?

Dipak: No, I don't think we're compensated enough for the hard work we do. Guides are paid much more just because they can communicate well, but porters do all the heavy lifting.

Interviewer: Are there formal contracts when you're hired?

Dipak: No, there are no contracts. We work based on a verbal agreement or some advance payment. There's no written protection for us if something goes wrong.

Interviewer: Have you ever experienced discrimination from clients or agencies?

Dipak: Yes, often. The way they speak to us changes, and we don't get the same treatment as the guides. We sleep in different places and sometimes have to walk to find shelter during peak seasons. Hotels charge us the same, but we don't receive the same respect as tourists. Sometimes, clients or staff treat us well, but it really depends on the person.

Interviewer: Are porters treated differently compared to guides? Dipak:

Yes, guides are treated better, paid more, and have better living conditions. Porters are seen as just laborers.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your work is valued?

Dipak: Not at all. Agencies see us as unskilled workers who are easily replaceable.

Interviewer: What improvements would you like to see in porter working conditions?

Dipak: We need better wages, proper equipment, medical insurance, and fair treatment. There's no training for porters before they start working, and some quit on the first day because they're unaware of the dangers, like altitude sickness.

Interviewer: Do you think there should be a union to support porters' rights?

Dipak: Yes, I believe a union could improve our working conditions, but political interference will probably prevent that from happening.

Interviewer: Would you encourage younger generations to join this profession?

Dipak: No, I wouldn't recommend anyone join this profession. It's hard work with disrespect and poor wages. I would suggest that young people study and find a proper job.

Interviewer: What message would you like to give to tourists and trekking agencies at last?

Dipak: There are many things I'd like to say, but there's no authority to listen to our voices. I would ask tourists and agencies to treat us with respect, pay us fairly, and provide proper support. Without porters, trekking wouldn't be possible. If our conditions don't improve, there may not be any porters left in the future.