

**PROHIBITION ON MARIJUANA CULTIVATION AND ITS ROLE IN  
SPARKING THE MAOIST CONFLICT IN WESTERN NEPAL: A  
SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY**

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**LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION**

This is to certify that this thesis entitled "**Prohibition on Marijuana Cultivation and its Role in Sparking the Maoist Conflict in Western Nepal**" was prepared by Mr. Narayan Prasad Sharma, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master's Degree of Arts in Sociology, which he has completed under my guidance and supervision.

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**LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE**

This thesis entitled "**Prohibition on Marijuana Cultivation and its Role in Sparking the Maoist Conflict in Western Nepal**" was submitted by Mr. Narayan Prasad Sharma has been accepted by the Thesis Evaluation Committee for the partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master's Degree of Arts in Sociology.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare to the best of my knowledge that this Thesis is original. No part of it was earlier submitted for the candidature of research degree to any faculty or any university.

I further assert that the data, fact and figures included in this Thesis are genuine to the best of my knowledge and for the time being. No data, fact or figure has been misrepresented to arrive at the findings, conclusion and suggestions.

.....  
Narayan Prasad Sharma

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## ABSTRACT

Nepal outlawed the cultivation, production and trade of marijuana (cannabis) in 1976 largely in response to rising international pressure, emanating particularly from the United States and global anti-narcotics initiatives attributable to the "War on Drugs". This sudden policy switch was enforced with little attention to our local realities, especially in economically delicate regions like Rukum, Rolpa, Myagdi and Baglung as well as other mid-western hill districts. There, marijuana has served not only as a lucrative cash crop but also a key cultural epithet. Cannabis farming constituted one of the few viable sources of dependable income for thousands of rural households in areas marked by limited arable land, poor market access and scant infrastructure. Its ban abruptly ended this crucial livelihood base, plunging the local growers into abject poverty and exacerbating already precarious living conditions. The absence of alternative employment programs, effective development initiatives or state-led compensation aggravated the already existing financial insecurity and reified the perceptions of abandonment by the central government.

Hence, this policy departure abruptly sealed off one of the few credible ways that the rural households in highland villages could generate cash in environments where traditional agriculture offered little hope. Countless families - who had conventionally depended on small-scale cannabis sales to buy essential commodities like salt, spices, oil, clothing, foodgrains, medicine or school items - suddenly found themselves without buffer. Instead of rolling out replacement income programs, targeted rural investment or extensive service for new crops, the officials relied on enforcement resources on abolishment, while leaving economic rehabilitation largely unaddressed. The resulting misery broadened an already wide gulf existing between the indigenous hill communities and the administrative centre in the capital.

These regions were already burdened by structural adversities, including landlessness, exploitative tenancy arrangements, food insecurity and insufficient access to schools, roads and healthcare facilities. The sudden loss of a steady income stream spurred by marijuana ban further compounded these challenges, eroding household resilience and deepening social distress. As state authority was implemented mainly through punitive

measures rather than service delivery or livelihood support, many rural communities began viewing the government as a coercive, distant and indifferent entity, insensitive to their survival concerns.

Such conditions proved fertile for anti-state actors like the the belligerent Maoists for mobilizing the public behind their flag. When the Maoist insurgency erupted in 1996, it drew heavily on the popular discontent of underserved rural populaces in western Nepal, i.e. the erstwhile Rapti and Dhaulagiri zones. With a fair degree of success, the rebels portrayed the marijuana bans as emblematic of Kathmandu-centric governance that put international agenda above the local welfare. By tying the ban to broader accounts of political exclusion, class oppression and economic exploitation the Maoist columns were able to resonate with communities that had experienced crippling livelihood losses. As its result, the mid-western regions, especially the likes of Rukum and Rolpa, became the hotbeds of insurgent activity. These districts had been harshly affected by economic inactivity following the ban and were also marked by minimal state presence and hostile terrain, which fostered insurgency operations. This leftist messaging further promised economic justice, recognition of traditional cultural practices and land reforms, thereby enabling the movement to rally itself as a champion of rural interests and cultural autonomy.

Internationally driven drug control measures also played an oversized role in shaping these undesirable outcomes. By imposing uniform solutions with no regard for local socioeconomic realities, external anti-drug initiatives yielded unintended consequences that disproportionately hurt the vulnerable communities. This disconnection between global priorities and local livelihoods fomented growing resistance against both the state which was seen as a conduit for external influence. The marijuana ban thus illuminates the risks of top-down policymaking in the marginalized and conflict-prone zones. The failure to fuse enforcement and development strategies and the absence of viable transition pathways for affected populations not only deepened poverty but also fostered popular unrest. Thus, Nepal's 10-year-long civil war proves how long-term economic deprivation, when coupled with political exclusion and ideological mobilization, may build up to an armed insurgency.

In sum, while the ban on cannabis farming was not the sole driver of Maoist conflict, it served as a key catalyst that magnified the existing socioeconomic and political tensions in the western part of Nepal. By stripping the underserved communities of a vital source of lifeline without offering credible alternatives, the state inadvertently reinforced public grievances which the Maoists effectively mobilized afterwards. Thus, this episode underscores the significance of context-sensitive policymaking and inclusive development policies in preventing any future conflict and fostering long-term stability.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT FORMS

### A) Abbreviations

ACP	:	American College of Physicians
AI	:	Artificial Intelligence
AIG	:	Additional Inspector General (of Police)
APA	:	American Psychological Association
APF	:	Armed Police Force
BBC	:	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBD	:	Cannabidiol
CBO	:	Community Based Organization
CCTV	:	Close Circuit Television
CPN (UML)	:	Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist)
ECDD	:	Expert Committee on Drug Dependence
CPN(M)	:	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
ECDD	:	Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (WHO)
EU	:	European Union
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussion
FY	:	Fiscal Year
GIS	:	Geographical Information System
GO	:	Government Organization
GoN	:	Government of Nepal
HIV	:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	:	Information and Communication Technology
IEC	:	Information, Education and Communication
IGO	:	Intergovernmental Organization
INCB	:	International Narcotics Control Board
INGO	:	International Nongovernmental Organization

MP	:	Member of Parliament
MoU	:	Memorandum of Understanding
NA	:	Nepal Army
NCCIH	:	National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health (US)
NCP	:	Nepali Communist Party
NDCB	:	Narcotic Drugs Control Bureau (Nepal Police)
NGO	:	Nongovernmental Organization
NP	:	Nepal Police
NRM	:	Natural Resource Management
RIRD	:	Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project
SAARC	:	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SoP	:	Standard Operating Procedure
SSRN	:	Social Science Research Network
THC	:	Tetrahydrocannabinol
TV	:	Television
UAV	:	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UK	:	United Kingdom
UN	:	United Nations
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGA	:	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF/N	:	United Nations Children's Fund/Nepal
USA	:	United States of America
USAID	:	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	:	World Health Organization
USD	:	United States Dollar

## **B) Short Forms**

&	:	and
©	:	Copyright
Art.	:	Article
Dr.	:	Doctor
e.g.	:	Exempli gratia, for example
edn.	:	Edition
ed.	:	Editor
et al.	:	Including other persons
etc.	:	Et cetera, of the same class, more to follow
i.e.	:	That is to say, in other words
Fig.	:	Figure
Ibid	:	Just as above
Mr.	:	Mister
Ms.	:	Miss/Mistress
n.d.	:	No date
No.	:	Number
p.	:	Page
Prof.	:	Professor
s., sec.	:	Section
supra	:	Refer above

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

My current study titled "Prohibition on Marijuana Cultivation and its Role in Sparking the Maoist Conflict in Western Nepal: A Sociological Inquiry" delves into the intersection of sociopolitical, economic, and cultural dimensions of Nepal's rural society, particularly in the context of marijuana (cannabis) cultivation and its regulation. It tries to capture the convergence of global drug policies, state enforcement measures, and grassroots socio-economic conditions that collectively shaped a pivotal chapter in Nepal's recent history.

For the sake of clarity, we need to understand the conceptual terms first before delving deep into the contents. Cannabis refers to a plant variety grown in the hills and plains of Nepal having some psychotropic as well as healing properties. Marijuana denotes a produce of cannabis made from its dried leaves featuring recreational and medicinal attributes. In popular discourse however, the terms cannabis and marijuana are often found to be used interchangeably. In contrast, hashish is an organic but narcotic substance derived from cannabis plant when people roll its resin (*chob*) on their palms, scrape it and turn it into pills or bars. Thus, whereas marijuana, hemp seeds and fibre are the desirable and beneficial derivatives sourced from a cannabis plant, hashish is an unwanted and harmful byproduct of the same strain. That is why, there is an ascending and science-backed movement worldwide to legalize marijuana whereas the abhorrence towards hashish still remains the same.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 147 million people worldwide consume cannabis, amounting to more than 2.5 percent of the world population (Pathak et al., 2024). Cannabis sativa has been utilized by humans for thousands of years for medicinal, shamanic and recreational purposes. Over time, the plant's versatility has expanded considerably due to its rich array of chemical compounds, phytochemicals, and lignocellulosic biomass, which support a wide range of health-related and industrial applications.

As per the United States National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), the cannabis plant contains around 570 different chemicals, with the most important ones being Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD) (Pathak et al., 2024). Whereas the THC is primarily responsible for the plant's psychoactive effects, the CBD is known for producing more relaxing and non-intoxicating effects. The potential for abuse or dependence is generally linked to higher levels of THC relative to CBD. The cannabis variants found in the western hills of Nepal are prized for being organically grown and containing CBD more than THC, thus having less psychoactive impact and more of soothing and relaxing effects. Moreover, since the soil, climate and topography of western hill belt best suits marijuana cultivation, Nepal's cannabis is rated as one of the best among the world in terms of quality and purity.

Cannabis and its derivatives (e.g. marijuana, hemp seeds, fibres, hashish, etc.) have historically played a significant role in the agrarian economies of Western Nepal, both as a subsistence crop and as a source of income in marginalized communities. However, the prohibition on its cultivation, enacted under international pressure during the 1970s, disrupted local livelihoods, exacerbating poverty and discontent in an already economically fragile region.

The 1970s brought significant shifts in global drug policies. Under the influence of the United States-led "War on Drugs" and adherence to international conventions such as the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961) and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), the Nepali government criminalized the cultivation, trade, and consumption of marijuana. These regulations, while aligning Nepal with global norms, failed to consider the localized economic dependencies of rural communities, especially in the western hinterlands. In fact, this decision was made without adequate consideration of the socioeconomic realities faced by local farmers, whose lives were intricately woven into the agricultural practices surrounding marijuana.

The Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act of 1976 was a big leap in this direction which criminalized the cultivation of marijuana beyond 10 plants for each household. It also penalized the production, storage, sale and distribution of this medicinal product, except under state supervision and medical prescription. This Act, still in force, imposes harsh

jail terms and hefty fines for the growers, dealers as well as consumers of cannabis products, other than the seeds and fibre.

Previously, the government would distribute licenses to grow, store and sell the marijuana derivatives in a commercial scale. Smoking weed was not forbidden and places like Jhonchhe in Kathmandu and Lake Side in Pokhara would teem with hippie tourists flocking in droves from the West to enjoy the oriental and spiritual way of living a carefree life, during the 1960s and mid-1970s. Tens of thousands of Western tourists entered Nepal through the Silk Road (Karki, 2023).

For many rural communities in western Nepal, particularly in the 20th century, marijuana (cannabis) was not just a traditional crop but also a vital economic resource. It was cultivated for both local consumption and as a cash crop traded on various markets. The economic benefits derived from marijuana provided farmers with a means to sustain their families and invest in other agricultural and household activities.

Moreover, the cannabis products, especially hemp seeds have been the prized daily spice in the local kitchens as well as a trusted medicinal source for treating both human and animal ailments including flu and rheumatism. Thus, marijuana and its derivatives enjoy a coveted position in the way of life in the western hills of Nepal as key economic and cultural enablers.

The oldest Vedic scriptures mention cannabis as a sacred plant due to its close association with Lord Shiva. Spiritually, it is used by sadhus for mediation. In social context, people use cannabis at the time of gatherings, festivals and mourning time to reduce anxiety and stress.

Likewise, Ayurveda uses cannabis to treat ailments like food poisoning, digestion problems, gout and rheumatism and as pain relieving agent, apart from its use to stimulate appetite and treat sleep problems (Shakya et al, 2021). We worship Lord Shiva, a wise deity who recognized the great medicinal value of cannabis, but over the last 45 years, we were duped into believing that cannabis was harmful (Tamang, 2021).

The Western part of Nepal, marked by its mountainous terrain and lack of infrastructure, has long struggled with economic marginalization. The cultivation of domestic

marijuana, also known as weed or hemp, was historically embedded in the socio-cultural and economic practices of rural communities. For many farmers, marijuana served as a cash crop that helped offset food insecurity and generate income in a region with few financial alternatives.

Beyond its economic role, marijuana also held cultural and traditional value in local rituals and medicine. Harvesting of food (seeds known as *bhang*), fibre (stem) and medicine (seed and leaves) from a single cannabis crop was reported by HB Hodgson, a British colonial officer, in 1855 as a unique Nepali tradition, which was not reported from other regions (Kloepfer et al, 2025).

However, a sudden ban on this centuries old practice abruptly upset the socioeconomic and cultural fabric of the nation, especially in the western highlands where marijuana farming was the only dependable and sustainable way of earning a decent living. We have to look this plight from a perspective where poverty was rampant, most people were illiterate, roads, electricity and communications networks were non-existent, trade in goods and services was nascent and employment opportunities were confined in the subsistence farming practice alone back then. Foreign labour migration and foreign direct investment were also next to nothing at that time.

This prohibition, thus, was implemented with minimal consideration of the socio-economic realities of the rural farming communities that depended on marijuana cultivation. The sudden eradication of this crop stripped many households of their primary source of income, pushing them further into poverty.

Rural Nepalis starved and the use of hard drugs soared (Williams, 2023). The absence of compensatory economic measures or viable livelihood alternatives created a climate of resentment, alienation, and economic vulnerability among the subsistence farmers in Western Nepal.

The western belt of Nepal, particularly regions like Rolpa and Rukum, has long been marked by poverty, underdevelopment, and geographical isolation. In the mid-20th century, marijuana cultivation and hashish production were a significant source of income for many rural households in these areas. The plants thrived in the local climate,

soil and required minimal resources and care, making them a practical crop for smallholding farmers with limited access to markets for other cash crops.

The prohibition of marijuana cultivation was a major turning point for the poor peasants, tenants and tillers in Western Nepal. With the sudden outlawing of a key income source, many rural households plunged deeper into poverty. The state offered little to no alternative livelihood options, leaving farmers with limited economic opportunities. Simultaneously, existing disparities in land ownership, caste-based hierarchies, and the lack of access to education and healthcare further exacerbated the socioeconomic hardships of these communities.

The state's enforcement of the prohibition often involved the destruction of marijuana fields and punitive actions against cultivators. This not only alienated local populations but also eroded trust in the government, as it appeared to prioritize foreign directives over the welfare of its own citizens. The rural elite, who often benefited from state protection, remained largely unaffected, deepening perceptions of inequality and injustice.

Lack of access to regulated and safe avenues for securing medical cannabis has only fostered an illicit trade and organized criminal organizations have been the sole beneficiary of the government's failure to regulate the cannabis market (Kaini, 2020).

The socio-economic structure of Western Nepal is marked by stark inequalities, with significant disparities in land ownership, caste-based oppression, and limited access to education and healthcare. The region has long been one of Nepal's most underdeveloped and marginalized areas, where systemic neglect by the state deepened feelings of disenfranchisement among the population.

The Maoist insurgency, which erupted in 1996, was a direct response to these entrenched inequalities and state failures. The then belligerent Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) capitalized on these discontents, presenting themselves as champions of the rural poor. The insurgents found a fertile ground for recruitment in regions where socio-economic deprivation and resentment against the state were most acute. The prohibition on marijuana cultivation served as a critical rallying point for the Maoists, symbolizing the

broader exploitation and marginalization faced by rural communities, though this was not the sole determinant behind the prosecution of Maoist led civil war between 1996 and 2006.

The Maoists have also faced accusations of profiting from the marijuana trade. As per US statements, Maoists guerillas during the insurgency years were engaged in drug smuggling to help fund their insurgency. Back then, Narcotics Drug Control Law Enforcement Unit reported that, in some regions, the Maoists imposed a 40 percent tax on cannabis sales. That said, any revenue generated from narcotics was probably quite limited. Since Nepal does not produce hard drugs, this income source was unlikely to become a major contributor to their finances. Fears that Nepal had followed a Latin American or Afghan model of narco-insurgency were unfounded (International Crisis Group, 2005).

The prohibition of marijuana cultivation in western Nepal is a critical factor in understanding the root causes of the Maoist conflict. It illustrates how state policies - especially when imposed without regard for local economic realities - can create significant tensions and discontent leading to conflict. The socioeconomic hardships caused by the ban not only disadvantaged rural communities but also facilitated the mobilization of discontent into an organized insurgency that fundamentally altered Nepal's socio-political trajectory. Addressing such grievances through inclusive policies and equitable development is essential in preventing similar conflicts in the future.

Moreover, globally, many countries that had earlier banned this "psychoactive" substance have now opened up to its diverse recreational, medicinal and commercial use. The world has realized that the cannabis plant can not only be rolled up for a joint, but can also be used for medical purposes as well as for manufacturing durable, breathable textiles, beauty products, food products like hemp milk or hemp protein powder, paper, construction materials and much more (Mahat, 2019). The very system of governmental regulation of cannabis through the issuance of licenses, which Nepal was pressured to abandon, is now being encouraged by the same countries that were once at the forefront of marijuana's criminalisation (Dahal, 2010).

As of February 2026, about 12 countries have legalized the use of marijuana for recreational use including the likes of Uruguay, Canada, Malta, Luxembourg, Germany, South Africa, Mexico, Georgia, Thailand, Netherlands, Czech Republic and certain States of the US. Likewise, medicinal use of marijuana is permitted in over 50 countries including programs allowing prescription access. Whereas Uruguay was the first country to allow recreational marijuana in 2013, Canada became the first nation to free medicinal marijuana in 2001, while it was the first country in the world to ban marijuana way back in 1923.

In this backdrop, Mr. Birodh Khatiwada, a former lawmaker from the Nepali Communist Party (NCP) was the first to raise the issue of cultivating marijuana for medical use and research during the term of previous KP Sharma Oli-led government in 2020. Likewise, Mr. Sher Bahadur Tamang, a former lawmaker from the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) filed a private bill with the name of Cannabis Cultivation (Management) Act to legalize marijuana cultivation and marketing in Nepal with certain legal safeguards, the same year. But it failed to make any headway. These two leftist leaders are still engaged in the campaign to legalize marijuana farming and business in the country. But political instability and frequent change of governments are hindering their cause.

The Karnali Province had already mentioned in its annual policy and program of fiscal year (FY) 2021/22 that cultivation of cannabis for extracting oil shall be facilitated by the government. Likewise, the Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality in East Rukum has also passed a law, An Act for the Conservation and Management of Hemp-Related Products in January 2025 followed by Rules to that effect a few months later. The Act and Rules are aimed not only to promote the cultivation of domesticated version of marijuana, called the hemp (*bhang or bhango*), for its seeds, oil and fibre, but also to deter the locals from engaging in hashish (*charesh*) production or business. Even though marijuana is being discreetly cultivated in 23 districts of Nepal, it is legally banned at the moment (Karki, 2023).

In this wake, from a sociological perspective, this study explores the prohibition of marijuana cultivation not merely as a policy issue but as a catalyst for structural violence and social conflict. Structural violence refers to the systemic ways in which social structures harm or disadvantage individuals. This research also engages with theories of

insurgency and social movements, examining how economic deprivation and state oppression create fertile grounds for rebellion. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal serves as a case study for understanding how local grievances, often dismissed as peripheral, can escalate into large-scale conflict when combined with broader social injustices.

By investigating the link between marijuana prohibition and the Maoist conflict, this work may contribute to broader discussions on the role of structural violence, resource dependency, and state neglect in fuelling social unrest. Moreover, this inquiry aims to highlight the importance of incorporating local perspectives and livelihoods into policy-making, particularly in fragile states. It underscores how top-down approaches, when divorced from ground realities, can deepen socioeconomic divides and spark resistance movements.

## **1.2 Statements of the Problem and Research Questions**

The proposed study will embody the following statements of problem and research questions:

### **1.2.1 Statements of the Problem**

The prohibition of marijuana cultivation in Western Nepal, enforced in alignment with international drug control mandates, significantly disrupted the socio-economic fabric of rural communities. Marijuana, historically a vital cash crop for impoverished farmers in this region, was a key source of income and subsistence in an area characterized by underdevelopment, limited livelihood opportunities, and systemic neglect. The enforcement of prohibition compounded pre-existing economic vulnerabilities, deepening poverty and alienation among marginalized populations.

This policy, while reflecting Nepal's adherence to global anti-drug frameworks, failed to address the localized socio-economic realities of rural communities, leaving them without alternatives or support. The resulting discontent and frustration coincided with the emergence of Maoist insurgency, which capitalized on the grievances of disenfranchised communities, including those impacted by the prohibition. The interplay between the prohibition and the rise of the Maoist movement highlights the complex socio-political consequences of policy decisions that disregard local contexts.

Despite its significant impact, the role of marijuana prohibition as a contributing factor to the Maoist conflict remains quite understudied. This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the socio-economic consequences of the prohibition and its contribution to the dynamics of rebellion in Western Nepal. It examines how state policies, when misaligned with local needs, can act as catalysts for structural violence and popular resistance.

### **1.2.2 Research Questions**

#### **1. Primary Question:**

-How did the prohibition on marijuana cultivation contribute to the socio-economic and political conditions that fuelled the Maoist conflict in Western Nepal?

#### **2. Secondary Questions:**

-What was the historical and economic significance of marijuana cultivation for rural communities in Western Nepal prior to its prohibition?

-How did the prohibition impact the livelihoods, social structures, and economic stability of affected communities?

-How did the Maoist insurgency leverage the discontent stemming from the prohibition to mobilize support and strengthen its movement?

-What lessons can be drawn from this case study regarding the implementation of international policies in marginalized rural contexts?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the link between marijuana prohibition and the Maoist conflict, contributing to broader discussions on the socio-political consequences of state policies in fragile and underdeveloped regions.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The present research has been guided with the following objectives in mind:

1.3.1 To analyse the historical and cultural significance of marijuana cultivation in Western Nepal.

1.3.2 To investigate the role of marijuana prohibition in mobilizing support for the Maoist insurgency.

1.3.3 To propose suitable suggestions for improving the state of affairs based on key research findings.

#### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is premised upon sociological theories and concepts that specify the relationship between state policies, economic deprivation, and social movements. It seeks to offer a structured understanding of how the prohibition on marijuana cultivation contributed to the socio-economic discontent and political mobilization that spurred the Maoist insurgency in Western Nepal. This framework is divided into some key dimensions and interrelated components that carefully guide this research.

##### **1.4.1 Core Concepts and Theories**

###### **a. Structural Violence**

**Definition:** Structural violence signifies the systemic ways in which social structures harm or disadvantage individuals and communities by creating conditions of inequality and oppression (Galtung, 1969).

**Application in the Study:** The ban on marijuana cultivation is conceptualized as a form of structural violence. It disrupted local livelihoods without rendering alternatives, aggravating economic vulnerability, inequality, and social marginalization. These structural conditions laid the groundwork for political disgruntlement and resistance.

###### **b. Livelihood and Resource Dependency**

**Definition:** Resource dependency theory shines light on how communities reliant on specific natural or agricultural resources for their economic survival are vulnerable to disruptions caused by external interventions (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987).

**Application in the Study:** Marijuana farming was a critical livelihood strategy in Western Nepal, particularly in marginalized, subsistence-based economies. The prohibition triggered a "livelihood shock" for communities, pushing them deeper into poverty and forcing them to consider alternative, often illicit, economic strategies.

### **c. Grievance Theory and Insurgency**

**Definition:** Grievance theory surmises that social and economic inequalities, deprivation, and a lack of political representation create conditions conducive to rebellion (Gurr, 1970).

**Application in the Study:** The prohibition augmented existing grievances among rural populations, including poverty, caste-based oppression, and state neglect. The Maoist rebellion exploited these grievances, using them as a mobilizing tool to recruit affected farmers into their cause.

### **d. State Legitimacy and Governance**

**Definition:** State legitimacy infers the degree to which state actions are perceived as just and aligned with the welfare of its citizens (Weber, 1947).

**Application in the Study:** The implementation of the cannabis ban undermined the Nepali state's legitimacy in Western Nepal. The policy was alleged as serving foreign interests rather than catering to the local population's needs, leading to resentment and weakening state authority in the region.

### **e. Social Movement Theory**

**Definition:** Social movement theory probes how collective action emerges from shared grievances, leadership, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structures (Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982).

**Application in the Study:** The Maoist insurgency is perceived as a social movement that leveraged the economic privations caused by the prohibition as a unifying grievance to mobilize rural populations and build their insurgent base.

## **1.4.2 Key Dimensions of the Framework**

### **a. Historical Context of Marijuana Cultivation**

Marijuana cultivation in Nepal, especially in Western regions, was historically entrenched in local economies and culture.

This dimension investigates:

- The economic role of marijuana as a cash crop.
- The socio-cultural value of marijuana in traditional practices.

-Historical state policies toward marijuana cultivation before the ban took effect.

### **b. Implementation of the Prohibition**

The prohibition is widely viewed as a top-down policy influenced by the international drug control mandates.

Focus areas include:

- The legal and enforcement mechanisms used by the state to enforce the ban.
- The immediate and long-term socio-economic effects on rural communities.
- The role of international pressure tactics (e.g., the U.S. War on Drugs) in shaping Nepal's policy.

### **c. Socio-Economic Consequences of the Prohibition**

This dimension examines how the prohibition upset local livelihoods, with particular attention to:

- Economic hardships and loss of income among the farming households.
- Increased reliance on subsistence farming and/or outbound migration for survival.
- Expanding inequalities in already marginalized communities, especially in caste-based hierarchies.

### **d. Grievance Formation and Mobilization**

The study examines how economic and social grievances stemming from the ban fed into broader discontent against the state.

Key factors include:

- The alignment of these protests with pre-existing issues such as land inequality, caste discrimination, and lack of state services.
- The Maoists' depiction of the prohibition as an example of state neglect and exploitation.

### **e. Role of the Maoist Insurgency**

This dimension centres on how the Maoist insurgency capitalized on the outcomes of prohibition to strengthen their movement.

Areas of analysis:

- Maoist strategies for mobilizing the discontent farmers.

- The unification of marijuana ban into the insurgency's political rhetoric.
- How the ban contributed to the Maoist movement's wider goal of confronting state authority and inequality.

### **1.4.3 Relationship between the Variables**

#### **a. Independent Variable**

Ban on marijuana cultivation.

#### **b. Mediating Variables:**

- Economic deprivation stemming from the prohibition.
- Social discontent resulting from the loss of livelihoods and perceived injustice.
- Poor state capacity to afford alternative livelihoods or support mechanisms.

#### **c. Dependent Variable:**

- Bigger support for and participation in the Maoist insurgency.

#### **d. Moderating Variables:**

- Existing structural inequalities (e.g., caste-based oppression, landlessness, poverty, etc.).
- Maoist propaganda and mobilization policies.
- Local leadership and networks that enabled the insurgency.

This conceptual framework offers a comprehensive structure to examine the study's core hypothesis: that the prohibition on marijuana cultivation acted as a key driver of socioeconomic displeasure and rebellion in Western Nepal. It combines theoretical perspectives from structural violence, livelihood studies, and social movement theory to probe how global policies and state actions can involuntarily light up local grievances and call for a collective action.

By systematically connecting marijuana prohibition to the Maoist conflict, this framework ensures that the study encapsulates both the micro-level impacts on communities and the macro-level implications for state-society relations.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

There have been numerous studies on the prospects of marijuana farming in Nepal. Similarly, there also have been a myriad of researches on the causes and impacts of the 10-year-long Maoist insurgency that ravaged the country. However, only a very few

studies have been carried out, especially by Nepali researchers, shining light on the linkage between the ban on marijuana cultivation and the outbreak of Maoist armed struggle in the western hills. I have aimed to bridge this knowledge deficit by embarking on this empirical research as part of my Master's Thesis.

Thus, this study will be significant in multiple dimensions -academic, sociopolitical, and practical. By exploring the intersection of global policies, local economic realities, and political insurgencies, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how external interventions and state policies can inadvertently exacerbate social unrest and fuel conflict.

The study applies and extends key sociological theories, such as structural violence, grievance theory, and social movement theory, to analyse the relationship between state policies and grassroots rebellion. It aims to deepen the understanding of how globalized policies (e.g., international drug control frameworks) manifest as localized structural violence, impacting marginalized communities and shaping their responses.

While much has been written about the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, there is limited research on the role of specific state policies, such as the prohibition on marijuana cultivation, in exacerbating grievances that fuelled the conflict. The study might add to the literature on the unintended consequences of global drug policies in developing countries, a topic that remains underexplored despite its critical importance for understanding the links between international frameworks and local conflicts.

By intersecting sociology with development studies, political science, and public policy, the study intends to offer interdisciplinary insights into how state actions influence social movements and insurgencies. It also might contribute to discussions on the relationship between economic marginalization, agrarian economies, and political violence.

Nepal's decade-long Maoist conflict (1996-2006) resulted in over 17,000 deaths, around 12,000 from the state side and 5,000 from the insurgents' side, and left lasting social, economic, and political scars. Understanding the root causes of this insurgency is essential for post-conflict reconstruction, peace building, and preventing future conflicts. By examining how the prohibition on marijuana cultivation contributed to the conflict, the study seeks to highlight the complex ways in which state policies can

inadvertently deepen inequalities, erode trust in governance, and trigger sociopolitical unrest.

Findings emanating from the accomplished research might contribute to ongoing debates about the efficacy and fairness of international drug policies. They may highlight the need for drug policies to account for the socio-economic realities of local, indigenous communities in developing countries, advocating for approaches that prioritize harm reduction and economic resilience over blanket criminalization. This is particularly relevant as more countries reconsider their marijuana policies, with legalization and decriminalization gaining traction worldwide.

This study highlights the centrality of economic deprivation and livelihood disruptions in fuelling insurgencies, providing insights that are applicable to other conflict-affected regions worldwide. It seeks to reinforce the importance of addressing structural violence and inequality as part of conflict prevention strategies.

Moreover, this study might open several avenues for future research. Comparative studies on the socio-economic impacts of drug prohibition in other developing countries, may be benefitted from this inquiry, especially in regions where cannabis cultivation has been traditionally practiced.

It may also foster further research on the role of other marginalized livelihoods in conflict dynamics, contributing to a broader understanding of the intersection between economic policies and popular uprising

## **1.6 Organization of the Study**

My present study has been organized into 5 different Chapters. The first Chapter includes baseline information and requirements such as background, statements of problem and research questions, objectives of the study, conceptual framework, significance, limitations of study as well as its organization. It will shine light on the basics of upcoming research, what it will cover, what not and would settle the expectations of audience in advance.

The second Chapter deals with literature review. It shines light on what online and physical resources the researcher has used in finding facts and arriving at conclusion. This Chapter is further divided into 3 key sections of theoretical review, empirical review

and the persistent research gaps in the field of inquiry. Whereas the published books, newspaper articles, journal papers and online content have featured in theoretical review, published and unpublished dissertations, theses and research reports of the past, including individual and institutional, have been tackled in empirical review. A total of 22 authentic secondary sources has been listed in this Chapter together with their strengths and omissions. Based on a careful scrutiny of both the reviews, the research gaps have been duly identified and the study is so driven as to bridge them for the time being.

The third Chapter concerns with research methodology. It provides an overview of the methods, techniques and strategies adopted by the researcher in collecting primary and secondary data as well as in arriving at logical inferences. It features, among other things, topics such as rationale of selection of survey area, research design to be followed in actual study, study population and sampling methods, nature and sources of data, tools and techniques of data collection, reliability and validity of data, and limitations of study.

The fourth Chapter relates to the data presentation and analysis part. Here, I have intended to examine how banning of marijuana farming has impacted the social, cultural and economic lives of locals and whether it has done more bad than good. I have engaged with the study population, primarily by way of fieldwork, inclusive of interview schedules, non-participatory observation and focus group discussion, which has been duly presented and analysed in this section through comparative tables, where necessary. In doing so, I have applied key sociological thoughts or perspectives which best suit the ground reality. This Chapter forms the crux of this thesis as it deals with the relationship between variables, the prevailing sentiments of people in the study areas, the Maoist proposition, and their expectations from the authorities.

Finally, the fifth Chapter focuses on the key findings derived, the conclusion reached and useful suggestions for minimizing the impact inherent with the prohibition of a vital and ancient source of livelihood. This Chapter, in other words, builds on the information and insights accumulated and analysed in the previous 4 chapters. The primary and secondary data collected and reviewed earlier has fed contents into this crucial Chapter which offer a nitty gritty as well as closure to the current research enterprise.

References and Annexure also feature at the end of report.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Review of literature implies a revisit of research studies and other relevant propositions in the related area of study. The result is that the entire past studies, their conclusions and deficiencies, may be known beforehand to the researcher and further investigation can be run accordingly. A careful review of books, journals, reports, theses, commentaries, online materials, etc. assists the research scholar to be informed with the methodologies that have been used by the predecessors in the process of finding answers to research questions, similar to the ones currently in investigation (Sharma, 2025).

Literature review also helps in knowing what other researchers have found in regard to the similar questions, what theories have been postulated and what gaps exist in the relevant corpus of knowledge. It further enables the investigator to understand how the findings of current study may fit into the existing body of knowledge. It is to be noted that reviewing the literature is a continuous process, that runs through the entire research process.

The literature review in this research is primarily composed of the responses of informants covered in this study. The informants have come equally from the state authorities such as local officials, police personnel and academicians, as well as from local people and civil society. As there is a scarcity of academic resource materials in the form of books, magazines, articles or journals currently available in Nepal relating to this theme, I have also resorted to online matters on the subject.

Thus, though most of the research has been done by relying on primary data, I have made use of secondary data as well, elicited from reliable and authoritative sources. While reviewing the literature as such, I have focused not only on the strengths of those sources, but also their shortcomings, so that we may have a balanced oversight of the issue and may fill the lacunae with the present study.

As per the popular tradition, I have divided this Chapter of literature review into the following 3 segments:

## 2.1 Theoretical Review

Under theoretical review of materials, I have included the published laws, policies, books, newspaper reports, journal articles, magazine inputs, and other resources available in the internet, including social media podcasts. These references have not only enriched my theoretical understanding on the topic of this research, but also offered me doctrinal guidance on the intensity and impact of the issue being researched.

To start with, Nepali Times Weekly (2000), in its news report "Maoists and marijuana in Makwanpur", retells us that if we switch cocaine for cannabis and Colombia for Nepal, and the pattern becomes clear. Leftist guerillas actively protecting an illegal crop. Since most marijuana farmers are destitute rural peasants, local Maoist factions in Makwanpur now have a popular cause that they can rally behind. Both the farmers and the Maoists share the same adversary - the police units that frequently destroy cannabis plantations. Two months back, Maoists launched an attack on the Makwanpur police post particularly to frighten security officials and steer them clear from marijuana growers in northern Makwanpur. The Assistant Sub- Inspector at Kalikatar police post conceded that he can no longer risk sending patrols in the marijuana growing areas owing to the rising threat of Maoist ambushes. However, this report is based on the experience of northern Makwanpur only and the real situation then at western Nepal might have differed.

Acharya (2009), in his article "The Maoist Insurgency and the Political Economy of Violence", published in the SSRN, draws on the frameworks of political economy, but highlights observable patterns in violence rather than purely causal claims. He claims that the violence induced by the Maoist insurgency was higher in poorer, more remote and less developed districts. The guerillas purposely built base areas in mid-western hills (e.g. Rolpa, Rukum) where the state reach was feeble, then expanded to exploit similar vulnerabilities elsewhere. He dissects different economic variables and geographic patterns of political violence in the Maoist conflict of Nepal; pertinent for understanding how marginal economies may associate with insurgency. His work underlines how economic marginalization and denial of financial opportunities enabled, and not solely caused, the rebellion's persistence there through strategic rebel choices. Though it doesn't include the variables of cannabis prohibition, it reinforces our conflict causation

scholarship. Moreover, by its very nature, the article does not shed light on how the Maoists were able to rally the locals who were put off against the state, subsequent to its abrupt marijuana ban of 1976.

Dahal (2019), in her opinion piece "From Mellow to High: How the Movement to Legalize Marijuana is Lighting Up Nepal", published in The Kathmandu Post national daily, effectively debates Nepal's prohibition on marijuana cultivation under the Narcotics Drug Control Act 1976, which outlaws the cultivation, sale, and consumption with penalties including up to 3 years in jail time and fines up to Rs 25,000. It focuses on the plant's deep cultural and medicinal origins in Nepal, yet its illegal status, despite global trends toward legalization in countries like Canada and Thailand. Personal stories, including Nirakar's use of cannabis for addiction recovery and Rajiv Kafle's advocacy for medicinal legalization for HIV patients, highlight the therapeutic benefits and social media-driven movements like the #LegalizeNepal. However, it states the Maoist regulation of *ganja* market during the insurgency but does not inquire on how the ban contributed to rural discontent or conflict origins. Statements on western Nepal's socio-economic factors linked to prohibition are also absent.

Mahat (2019), in his essay "An Economic Case for Legal Marijuana" published in the Annapurna Express e-paper, investigates the structural economic impacts of the cannabis ban, quoting USAID and local sources that the ban destroyed a prosperous cash crop economies in Rapti region (Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan), often referred as the core areas of Maoist insurgency emergence. It documents how the ill-timed ban abolished key income, resulting in poverty and out-migration. This underscores the financial grievance dimension of conflict roots and is relevant to demonstrating how the prohibition reshaped rural stratification and opportunity structures. However, it is rooted on secondary reporting only and fails to engage with broader sociological conflict theory (e.g., grievance vs. opportunity). It also does not answer how the insurgent groups might have directly engaged with the local cannabis networks.

The Reason TV YouTube Video (2019) with the title "How the Drug War Destroyed a Hippie Paradise in Kathmandu", successfully details the 1970s hippie influx to Nepal's Freak Street in Kathmandu, lured by its permissive drug culture amid the Hippie Trail

originating from Istanbul. President Nixon's 1971 global war on drugs, pressuring Nepal to enact and enforce strict anti-drug laws, led to the shutting of hashish shops and torching of marijuana fields. This prohibition crippled the western Nepal's economy, where hashish cultivation was an elemental source of stable income for thousands of farmers, ending up in arrests, property forfeiture, and other risks. The economic decline fuelled resentment, which the Communist Party exploited to push for a violent overthrow of the government. Nonetheless, the video excludes particular details on the timeline and mechanisms of how the Communist Party first mobilized farmers in western Nepal against the crop ban. The video also does not probe the exact roles or strategies of local leaders in coupling marijuana ban with broader anti-monarchy sentiments.

Kaini (2020), in his opinion piece "Why Legalize Marijuana?" published in Republica national daily, deliberates Nepal's cannabis ban and its economic consequences for the farmers, highlighting arguments for reform. He reminds us that marijuana is easier to grow than many conventional crops with low input needs, resilient in Nepal's diverse climates, particularly in the hilly, mid-western regions. Legalization could provide farmers with a high value cash crop, advancing rural incomes, lowering poverty and generating export revenue. The 1976 ban, forced under international pressure, has failed to fully check use while expanding black markets, corruption and criminalization of marginalized farmers desperate to eke out a living. He posits that enforcement is inconsistent and harms the already disadvantaged communities without addressing the root causes. Though this article is useful for comprehending current debates and socio-political sentiment, it lacks the academic rigour and evidence on insurgency connections.

Former MP Sher Bahadur Tamang (2021), in his interview published in the Nepal Times, explores the contemporary calls to legalize cannabis in Nepal, while observing that prohibition impoverished the rural communities and drove cultivation underground. He associates economic frustration arising from the ban to social turmoil and notes some activists believe that key links do exist between the prohibition and support for leftist rebellion in the hill districts. The interview covers the different political voices criticising past policy and calling for reform. It further throws light on perceived historical grievances in western Nepal, where Maoist support base was already formidable. However, it is his view rooted in experience rather than academic analysis, and it does

not supply systematic evidence linking prohibition to the insurgency causally. It also centres on the contemporary legalization movement rather than historical dynamics of conflict.

Shakya et al. (2021), in their research paper "Cannabis Use and Abuse in Nepal: A Review of Studies", featuring in the Journal of Nepal Medical Association, effectively portrays Nepal's ban on marijuana cultivation, noting that cannabis was historically raised across different terrains until 1973 when the government suddenly repealed licenses due to concerns over youth corruption, UN pressure, and US narcotics control, making it unlawful under the Narcotics Drugs (Control) Act in 1976. It emphasizes the widespread illegal cultivation in western and southern Nepal, with cannabis growing wild in high hills of central, mid-west, and far-western regions, including northwest Nepal's unique agricultural system for harvesting its seeds, resin, and fibre. In spite of the ban, illegal trade persists, with confiscations of cannabis and hashish often reported, and cultivation seen as rampant in areas like the mid-western and far-western highlands. Yet, the paper omits any direct linkage or reference to the Maoist conflict in western Nepal, such as how the ban might have spawned insurgency through economic grievances, illicit trade, or rural unrest.

Karki (2023), in his article "How Will Nepal Handle Marijuana Cultivation?", published in the web portal The Himalayan Tribune, effectively reflects on Nepal's ongoing debate on legalizing marijuana cultivation for medicinal and economic purposes, as included in the budget of FY 2023/24 for a feasibility study. It highlights the stringent ban under the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act 1976, which outlaws its cultivation, production, and consumption. classifying marijuana as a narcotic drug as per Nepal's adherence to the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961. A few activists and lawmakers, such as Birodh Khatiwada and Sher Bahadur Tamang, push for its legalization for its medicinal properties and potential economic benefits, with Karnali Province toying with the idea of oil extraction for exports. However, it does not explore how prohibition might have exacerbated rural discontent, economic marginalization, or insurgent recruitment in those regions. No references are also made to the Maoist conflict timelines, grievances, or the informal yet crucial role of marijuana in the local economies or armed group funding. The emphasis remains on current regulation debates, international law, and expert

critiques without resorting to the historical conflict analysis. It also inadvertently omits the socio-political unrest in western Nepal tied to the ban's enforcement since 1976.

Karki (2023), in his article "The Hippie Trail in the Shaping of Nepal's Tourism", published in the online portal eTurboNews, precisely recalls the Nepal's hippie era (1965-1973), where marijuana and hashish were legally sold at Freak Street in Kathmandu, attracting throngs of Western tourists via the Hippie Trail, boosting local tourism. It explains how the US President Nixon's 1971 policy pressured Nepal to criminalize marijuana, leading to the creation of Drug Enforcement Agency in 1973 and government destruction of standing cannabis plants. The ban is portrayed as devastating for farmers, who depended on cannabis as a primary source of livelihood alongside rice, causing widespread arrests, starvation risks, and economic hardships. This socioeconomic turmoil is associated with the rise of Maoist insurgency, breaking out in Rukum-Rolpa, as the communists exploited farmer grievances to champion violent overthrow of the government. The Maoists gained traction nationwide, controlling 60 percent of Nepal by 2006, ending the 240-year Shah Dynasty and reshaping contemporary politics. Yet, the article unintentionally excludes particular details on the timeline of the Maoist conflict's escalation beyond 2006. In addition, no explicit mention of how marijuana prohibition directly sparked the conflict in western Nepal is provided, only suggesting indirect socioeconomic links.

The WION YouTube Video (2023) with the title "South Asia Dairy: Nepal Rethinks Ban", effectively examines Nepal's historical role as the "cannabis capital" in the 1960s, attracting thousands of young Western tourists to Kathmandu for licensed purchases. It details the ban imposed after America's war on drugs, labelling cannabis as a dangerous substance, overlooking its traditional cultural and religious significance in Nepal. The video highlights ongoing illegal cultivation and consumption, including by the holy men such as sadhus and *babas*, and the inefficacy of prohibition. Nepal is now reassessing the ban due to financial pressures like dwindling foreign exchange and corruption emanating from its smuggling. Pro-marijuana activists argue that legalizing cannabis could improve farmer incomes, support medicinal use, and revive tourism, with the government showing renewed interest post-2020 parliamentary discussions. Nevertheless, the video omits any deliberation of marijuana cultivation's prohibition particularly in western Nepal. It also

fails to probe the Maoist conflict, including its origins, escalation, or any linkage to the cannabis-related policies or economic grievances.

The Sushant Pradhan YouTube Podcast (2025) with the title "How Nepal Lost Billions Due to the War on Drugs", meticulously touches on Nepal's historical cannabis plantation and its economic relevance before the War on Drugs imposed a ban. It deals with King Mahendra's cannabis policies and the radical shift to prohibition. The role of the Maoist insurgency in the context of cannabis is examined, including connections to Prachanda's funding via the cannabis trade. The civil war's linkage to cannabis in Nepal is highlighted, together with the impact of Singhadurbar's cannabis trade ban. The bright potential for reviving the economy through hemp industry and cannabis farming in Nepal is astutely addressed here. As a drawback, the potential role of marijuana cultivation in sparking the Maoist conflict in western Nepal is discussed in broad strokes but not elucidated in fine detail. Moreover, economic losses stemming from the war on drugs are noted in the title but not quantified in the description.

The Sushant Pradhan YouTube Podcast (2025) with the title "The Untold History of Cannabis in Nepal", successfully investigates the historical and cultural significance of cannabis (*bhang or bhango*) in Nepal, especially in rural, agrarian belts like Rolpa and Rukum, where it was farmed through intercropping alongside crops like corn and beans for fibre, fruit, oil, and medicinal uses. It details traditional practices like weaving hemp into clothing, using fruits for food and pickles, and stems for perfume, highlighting its integration into the daily life, art, and social customs of communities like the Kham Magars. This podcast focuses on how capitalism and modernization, including the influence of East India Company and factory production, led to the fall in hemp agriculture and weaving, thus eroding indigenous knowledge systems and women's status intricately tied to these crafts. It links cannabis to the Maoist conflict, suggesting Maoists may have sold it to finance weapons purchases, depicting it as both a survival tool and a political element in the Nepal's conflict. Still, the video excludes particular details on the accurate timeline and legal framework of the marijuana ban in Nepal, also lacking transcripts or references to when the prohibition was enacted or implemented.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Under the empirical review of materials, I have included published research articles, research papers, and other study reports produced by individuals as well as institutions. The materials being covered under empirical review have offered me with the practical and pragmatic aspects of research problem, its origins, spread and possible remediation measures.

To begin with, Hutt (2004), in his edited volume "Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion", delicately reviews the Maoist insurgency in Nepal from 1996-2006, highlighting its roots in rural poverty, ethnic marginalization, and governance failures in the western terrain like the Rapti hills. It analyses how economic grievances, including failed agricultural policies, contributed to the Maoist mobilization in remote districts such as Rolpa and Rukum. The Chapters further discuss the insurgency's ideological origins, drawing on Maoist strategies customized to Nepal's terrain and society. The collection includes fieldwork on how the conflict disrupted communities and ushered in political transformations, ultimately abolishing the monarchy. It subtly covers the socio-political variables of the conflict, with contributions from various scholars on its causes and effects, both desirable and undesirable. Nevertheless, the book omits direct references to marijuana ban as a vital factor in fuelling the conflict, centring instead on broader ethnic and caste issues. No reference is also given of the 1976 cannabis ban's economic fallout in western Nepal or its role in aggravating the local grievances.

International Crisis Group (2005), in their Asia Report No. 104 with the title "Nepal's Maoists: Their Aims, Structure and Strategy", provides one of the poignant early treatises of the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) during the height of Nepal's civil war (1996- 2006). At that time, the war had already fanned nationwide, controlling large rural swathes and challenging the monarchy and parliamentary system. The Group points out that the Maoist insurgency started with base-building in rural mid-western hills (e.g., Rolpa, Rukum, etc.), graduated to guerilla warfare, then aimed for strategic equilibrium and eventual offensive to seize major cities including Kathmandu. The government's 1976 ban on marijuana cultivation and trade had accentuated local hardships, fuelling resentment and popular support for the rebels. They further taxed *yarchagumba*

collection and also allowed marijuana farming in their base areas with the proceeds divided between the local growers and the Maoist cadres. Still, the Report falls short of precisely measuring the exact degree of impact of marijuana ban to the emergence of Maoist insurgency in western Nepal. Besides, it also, by its very nature, excludes the dependence of local population towards the marijuana trade and plantation, the abrupt ban of which, pushed the people to the other side of polity.

Christiansen (2010), in his research paper "A Great Schism: Social Norms and Marijuana Prohibition", published in the Harvard Law and Policy Review, starts with a premise that there is a yawning gap between the social norms (where marijuana use is widely approved as relatively fair) and the law (state-enforced harsh prohibition with stern penalties). He argues that the prohibition fails to considerably deter use, as norms have shifted away from viewing it as a serious moral or legal wrong. He notes that the enforcement produces substantial costs, including loss of respect for the law itself. Today, it has become apparent that the origins of American prohibition on marijuana were not rooted on solid scientific evidence but on other factors, often linked to racial and xenophobic concerns, tying it with Mexican immigrants, Black jazz communities, and the Red Indian tribes. These are the communities in which consuming marijuana was a culture handed down since generations and have a high degree of tolerance in the use of its variants. He settles that laws should adapt to evolving social norms rather than pointlessly trying to thrust norms to conform to outdated prohibition. Yet, the context he addresses is the US society and provides no discernible links between the marijuana ban and political movements such as the Maoist struggle in Nepal.

Lawoti & Pahari (2010), in their edited volume "The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century", lend a detailed academic account of the Maoist insurgency, shadowing the origins, strategies, socio-economic drivers, and wider conflict variables. It stands out for contextualizing why a violent Maoist conflict exploded in Nepal at the end of Cold War in 1991, inconsistent with the global atrophy of radical communist movements, amid democratic transitions, ethnic objections and state lapses. Strong on political economy, class grievance, and marginalization, it is a vital source for gauging why the insurgency emerged in areas like western Nepal and not elsewhere with similar degrees of poverty and backwardness. The volume tackles the insurgency's rapid

rise from a fringe rural rebellion in mid-western hills to controlling vast terrains, forcing regime change, and foraying into mainstream politics. Still, the volume does not particularly address cannabis ban as a causal factor. Thus, it may require us to synthesize its conflict analysis with the sources of that ban.

Bewley-Taylor et al. (2014), in their Report "The Rise and Decline of Cannabis Prohibition", published by the Transnational Institute, impart a global history of cannabis ban under international treaties, useful for situating Nepal's 1976 ban within global drug control regimes. The Report traces the historical inclusion of cannabis in the international drug control regime, chiefly the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, and mulls the growing fissures in global prohibition, through "soft defections" by various states. They contend that cannabis prohibition is in decline worldwide due to evolving national policies, scientific re-evaluation, and shifting norms, while drawing our attention to legal tensions with the UN treaties. The authors aptly note that the rise of ban was driven by faulty science and politics, as marijuana was mostly consumed by blacks and other marginalized sections of society, rather than by the white elite in western societies, and hence became a soft target. Its decline reflects, among other things, pragmatic national adaptations and a rising sense of realization following increased scientific researches in this field. Calls for a sincere re-evaluation of treaty prohibitions and to align them with objective proof to reduce unwanted harms have been gaining steam. Yet, their Report is not country-specific to Nepal and thus fails to address the internal political dynamics of the country.

Williams (2023), in his opinion piece "Purple Haze", featuring in the Harper's Magazine, minutely traces the 1973 prohibition on cannabis trade and 1976 outright prohibition under the American pressure from the then President Nixon, obliterating Nepal's rural economies. It tackles how the ban targeted traditional cultivation in western Nepal, leading to widespread poverty and unrest. The piece effectively ties this plight to the Maoist insurgency's rise, as economic gloom sparked communist recruitment. Personal stories of farmers and activists effectively document the cultural loss and calls for legalization. It also deals with the global shifts influencing Nepal's rethinking of the ban for medicinal and economic use. However, no quantitative data on affected farmers or

regional poverty is showcased. The impetus on Kathmandu also ignores western-specific insurgent strategies.

Pathak et al. (2024), in their research paper "Current Status of Cannabis Legalization and Decriminalization Efforts in Nepal", published in the Dove Press Journal, ruminates on Nepal's ban on marijuana cultivation under the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act 1976, which outlaws the cultivation, production, and trade of cannabis, including for medical purposes. It stresses historical use of cannabis in Nepal for medicinal, religious, and cultural purposes, such as during Maha Shivaratri festivals, commemorating Lord Shiva. The 1976 Act was highly influenced by US and UN pressure, leading to the closure of legal cannabis shops in the 1970s amid hippie tourism boom in areas like Freak Street of Kathmandu. Regardless of the ban, cannabis remains widely used illicitly, particularly in rural belts, with 80.4 percent of narcotic users reporting it as their primary drug in national reports published from 2012 to 2019. The paper notes ongoing debates on legalization for longstanding financial benefits, including job creation and exports, but highlights the lack of certain provisions for medical cannabis processing Act. However, the article skips any direct explanation of the Maoist rebellion in western Nepal or its ties with the marijuana ban. No discussion is also made of how the 1976 ban may have affected rural economies or triggered insurgencies in areas like the Western hills.

Kloepfer et al. (2025), in their research paper, "Revealed Reality of Cultivation and Licit/Illicit Use of Cannabis in the Western Mid-Hills of Nepal", featuring in the Journal of Cannabis Research, ponder over the cannabis cultivation practices in rural western Nepal and argue that despite the legal ban, farmers continue illegal cultivation, particularly for seeds and byproducts, sustaining rural livelihoods. The paper documents multi-layered social and economic roles of cannabis (food, fibre, cash crop) and focuses on the gap between law and practice. The article articulates how prohibition ignored local socio-economic contexts, contributing to livelihood crises. It resorts to a list of experiments to uncover sensitive behaviours associated with the husk sales and trade. Evidence shows that the local farmers view cannabis planting as normal and needful despite legal sanctions. The authors advocate the need for a policy based on lived realities rather than unrealistic blanket bans. Still, the article does not link prohibition directly to

the growth of Maoist insurgency. It further discounts the political dynamics of conflict causation in western districts.

Sevigny et al. (2025), in their research paper "Conflict and Social Control among Cannabis Growers", featuring in the International Journal of Drug Policy, explore the conflict dynamics among cannabis growers under different legal regimes globally, imparting us insights into how an outright ban shapes social relations and violence. It is useful for grasping the comparative sociology of drug policy enforcement. From experiences gained from world over, the authors posit that growers often depended on informal norms, community trust, secrecy and self-protection, rather than formal law enforcement. In prohibitionist settings, fear of police raids and seizures added layers of conflict, but open confrontation remained largely limited. They further observe that cannabis cultivation is relatively non-violent, with theft or smuggling as the prime issue rather than interpersonal aggression. Nevertheless, it is not specific to Nepal, and does not address the causation of insurgency.

Thus, these two segments of empirical studies and theoretical analyses reflect various aspects of marijuana cultivation, drug policies, and the socio-political context in Nepal, particularly their relationship with the Maoist conflict. These sources span sociological theories, conflict studies, Nepalese socio-political context, and case studies of marijuana prohibition and its socioeconomic effects.

### **2.3 Research Gaps**

In course of making an initial review of available literature on the title of this research, I have found quite a few research gaps inherent in this issue. I aim to bridge this gap for the time being through my study and inquest.

To start with, existing studies on marijuana ban in Nepal chiefly focus on legal or policy-oriented outlooks, with little attention paid to its socio-economic consequences, especially in rural, agrarian regions like western Nepal. There is a dearth of detailed review of how the ban disrupted local livelihoods, deepened poverty, and contributed to wider social resentment.

Further, the role of marijuana ban as a contributing factor to the Maoist conflict has not been systematically studied. Existing research on the Maoist insurgency tends to

highlight political, ideological, and structural vectors, overlooking certain state policies like the ban on marijuana cultivation that had direct and tangible effects on the disadvantaged communities.

Similarly, only a handful of studies have effectively covered the voices and lived experiences of farmers and local communities impacted by the prohibition. This has led to a top-down narrative that fails to encapsulated the grassroots realities of economic displacement and popular resistance. There is only a scanty ethnographic or qualitative research documenting how affected communities perceived the ban and how these observations influenced their support for or involvement in the violent Maoist movement. Likewise, existing studies fail to probe how the prohibition intersected with other forms of marginalization, such as caste discrimination, landlessness, state apathy and gender inequality, to magnify grievances. The combined effects of economic deprivation and social marginalization on enlistment into the Maoist insurgency also remain quite under-researched.

Lastly, while global drug policies are recognised as the driving force behind marijuana ban in Nepal, only a few studies critically appraise how these international frameworks disproportionately affected rural agrarian communities in the Global South. The role of external pressures, such as the U.S.-led "War on Drugs," in shaping Nepal's domestic policies and their unintended outcomes also remain inadequately investigated.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Nature of Research**

The study is of empirical nature and is based on descriptive as well as analytical method. I have pursued multi-resource methods. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected, with the qualitative information prevailing over the quantitative. Fieldwork has chiefly produced qualitative and primary data whereas quantitative and secondary data have been gathered mainly through library and internal study.

I, as a researcher, want to identify this inquiry as cross-sectional and across-case research. Ratio scale of measurement has been used predominantly over other scales. The validity and reliability of research findings have been verified by checking them against the pre-set research problem and objectives. The conceptual and operational definitions of key terms have been derived from their connotations as used in sociology and conservation studies.

A bulk of primary data has been elicited from the 150 interview schedules filled at the rate of 15 schedules per single settlement, and 10 focus group discussion forms duly filled with the informants at the rate of one such discussion in every such settlement. The respondents have come from a wide variety of ethnicities, income groups and professions and constituted both men and women. As for the secondary data, they have been compiled majorly from the available physical and online sources of information. I have pursued a direct but unstructured research method. As for the in-text citation and referencing of sources, I have followed the APA style, 7th edition, published in October 2019.

Based on the findings derived from the reports and schedules as well as my background study, I am able to wrap up my research together with the conclusion and suggestions. I actually finished this research within 6 months of its initiation.

Further, this study adopts a sociological lens, utilizing qualitative methods such as interviews with affected farmers, ex-Maoist combatants, local leaders, and law

enforcement officials. Archival research and secondary sources, including government reports and Maoist propaganda materials are employed to triangulate findings.

### **3.2 Research Design**

I have pursued the following research design while undertaking the current study within the prescribed time limit of 6 months. The actual fieldwork was done in the month of October 2025 for a period of 18 days including travel time.

#### ***Title***

"Prohibition on Marijuana Cultivation and its Role in Sparking the Maoist Conflict in Western Nepal: A Sociological Inquiry"

The research objectives were framed to answer the primary question of how did the prohibition on marijuana cultivation contribute to the socio-economic and political conditions that fuelled the Maoist conflict in Western Nepal? Three preset research objectives were to analyse the historical and cultural significance of marijuana cultivation in Western Nepal; to investigate the role of marijuana prohibition in mobilizing support for the Maoist insurgency, and to propose suitable suggestions for improving the state of affairs based on key research findings.

The conceptual framework revolves around the central issue that the prohibition on marijuana cultivation disrupted traditional livelihoods in marginalized regions of western Nepal, creating socio-economic grievances that aligned with the Maoist movement's revolutionary narrative. Key constructs in this regard include the state policies and governance, economic disruptions, political alienation, and insurgency dynamics. The theoretical underpinnings driving this research have been the grievance theory and state-periphery relations. Similarly, geographical isolation of western Nepal, limited state infrastructure and development and deep-seated socioeconomic inequalities remain as the contextual factors.

This interplay of economic disruption and political alienation due to marijuana prohibition contributed to the broader appeal and success of the Maoist insurgency in these districts. This framework thus links socio-economic policies, structural inequalities,

and political unrest, providing a basis for analysing the role of prohibition in sparking conflict.

The research methodology begins with a research approach that is to employ qualitative methodology to capture the lived experiences, perceptions and socio-political dynamics surrounding the issue. Data collection tools include interview schedules that have been filled with the participants, i.e. former marijuana cultivators, Maoist cadres and sympathizers and local level as well as law enforcement officials, including the police personnel. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in 10 different settlements to review government policies, local records and media reports on the clandestine marijuana business. Besides, non-participatory observation to take note of the current socioeconomic conditions have been carried out as and when required.

As for the sampling technique, I have employed purposive sampling to select individuals and communities directly affected by the prohibition. The sample size comprises 150 individuals, 15 from each of the 10 settlements, to ensure diverse representation. Snowball sampling is also used to trace the next individual from the current one.

With regard to data analysis, I have employed thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes, such as economic deprivation, political alienation and support for insurgency. Moreover, I have also attempted to analyse the collected facts and figures from both the qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Content analysis and narrative analysis have guided my qualitative analysis whereas descriptive and inferential statistics have driven the quantitative analysis process. In interpreting the results, I have included interpretation of the findings, presentation of tables, and a discussion of the study's limitations. Through this approach, I have aimed to extract meaningful insights from both qualitative and quantitative data, resulting in relevant findings and well-supported conclusions.

Ethical considerations are also a critical aspect of my research enterprise. In course of my study, I have paid due attention to the crucial factors of informed consent, confidentiality, respect for participants, integrity, voluntariness and transparency. I have replaced the real names of some respondents with code names, especially of active-duty police personnel because they were reticent to put their original names on paper. No photographs were taken of the informants during the fieldwork without their prior oral

permission. In addition, expected outcomes, timeline and an organized dissemination of findings also feature prominently in my research design. Thus, this research design provides a structured approach to examine the intersection of socioeconomic policies, political grievances, and conflict dynamics in western Nepal.

### **3.3 Sources of Data**

As with the case of most other researches, this study also incorporates both the primary and secondary sources of data, as follows:

#### **3.3.1 Primary Data**

The primary data involved in this study is comprised of the following documents/instruments:

- Interview schedules filled up by me and the two research associates during fieldwork
- Focus group discussion, and
- Field notes filled through unstructured observation

Thus, interview schedules, focus group discussion forms and field notes are employed as the basic tools of primary data collection. Since this research also incorporates a field component, I spent 18 days in a single stint with the target population residing and travelling in the settlements selected for fieldwork. I have chosen 10 settlements, at the rate of 2 and 3 from each of the 4 districts of Baglung, Myagdi, Rolpa and East Rukum, and have concentrated my inquiry therein. I have quickly noted down any pertinent information or a striking news story in the field notes. Later, I included them in the draft of this research report. The fieldwork was done in the month of October 2025.

Interview schedules have been filled with the respondents in all of these 10 settlements by means of structured schedules. The respondents included a wide variety of informants including the farmers and former marijuana cultivators, former Maoist cadres and sympathizers, local level officials and leaders as well as law enforcement officials involved in implementing the prohibition.

Moreover, FGDs have been conducted among the respondents in the said settlements, including community members and village leaders, capturing collective narratives and

local perceptions. Field notes were also filled on the basis of real-time and unstructured observation of events, onsite visits to the affected areas, documenting socio-economic conditions, cultural practices and remnants of the insurgency's influence.

### **3.3.2 Secondary Data**

I have also depended on a wide array of secondary data elicited from the following sources:

**-Academic and research publications:** Studies and analyses on the Maoist conflict, state policies and socioeconomic dynamics in Nepal.

**-Media reports and archives:** News articles, opinion pieces, and reports covering marijuana cultivation, its prohibition, and the insurgency.

**-Online content:** Interviews, podcasts, reports and experiences shared on the relevant subject matter published online.

**-Websites:** Trusted websites of the government and nongovernmental bodies, etc.

As for the integration of data, triangulation and comparative analysis have been used as the instruments. With regard to triangulation, data from interviews, FGDs and secondary sources have been cross-referenced to ensure validity and reliability. With regard to comparative analysis, insight from different data sources have been compared to highlight disparities in the perspectives and experiences.

This approach ensures the study captures a holistic view of how marijuana prohibition contributed to the socioeconomic grievances that fuelled the Maoist uprising, drawing on diverse and credible data sources.

### **3.4 Tools of Data Collection**

For the current study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools and techniques have been employed to gather rich and in-depth information to the extent possible. These tools are carefully selected to align with the research's objectives and to capture the complexity of socioeconomic, cultural and political dynamics.

### **3.4.1 Interview Schedules**

Structured interview schedules have been prepared to explore key themes such as the impact of prohibition on livelihoods, community responses and perceptions of the Maoist insurgency. Separate schedules have been developed for the two different respondent groups including the farmers and cultivators, local level and law enforcement officials. A total of 150 interview schedules were prepared and administered to as many respondents. These schedules have mainly generated qualitative and first-hand primary data.

### **3.4.2 Focus Group Discussion**

I have also conducted 10 different FGDs in 10 different places of data collection namely Faliyagaun, Lulang, Gurja, Dhorpatan, Niseldhor, Taka, Sera, Rukumkot, Thabang and Libang. Every such group involved 6 participants each comprising of women, victims, Dalits and indigenous nationalities and local elders, to the extent available. Whereas the interview schedules were filled individually, the FGDs were collected in a group setting. The purpose of FGDs was to elicit critical data not covered by structured interview schedules and to verify the authenticity of information collected during the previous interview phase. A checklist has been developed to guide discussions on community-level experiences and collective grievances. Topics have included pre-prohibition economic conditions, social impacts and responses to the Maoist movement. The FGDs have covered 60 respondents among the total number of 150.

### **3.4.3 Field Notes**

Field notes also have played a key role as tools in primary data collection. I would carry the field notes while conducting interviews or FGDs. I would quickly note down any pertinent information or a striking news story in those notes. Later, I included them in the draft of research report. Based on unstructured observation of phenomena, I have filled 10 different field notes in total in equal number of settlements across the 4 districts.

This combination of tools and techniques ensured that the study collected rich, triangulated data from diverse perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the prohibition's role in sparking the Maoist unrest. They also served to ensure the reliability and validity in the data gathered through primary and secondary sources.

### **3.5 Process of Data Collection**

As for gathering primary data, I studied the subject area, the relevant news and stories in detail. Thereafter, I contacted the study population and built rapport with them. I acquainted them with the purpose, significance and process of this study. The questions to be included in the interview schedules were prepared in advance. Minor impromptu questions were also asked to further clarify the responses.

Once the responses were recorded, I noted them down in computer and placed them in the research report, wherever appropriate. These interview schedules are also included in the Annexure Section. I also transferred the contents of FGDs and field notes to electronic form and used them in the building of this report. Further, I have clicked numerous photos displaying the local way of life and the data collection process, and presented them in the Annexure Section. Due to their visual appeal and immediate effect, photographs have become an important source of data presentation here.

The fieldwork mostly yielded qualitative data as compared to quantitative information. The numerical data was covered mostly from the secondary sources including published reports, management plans, news reports and articles, both in print and online formats.

### **3.6 Study Population and Sample Size**

The universe in my research was the whole population living in the foothills of the 4 districts of Myagdi, Baglung, Rolpa and East Rukum. However, as my study was not of a census type, rather a sample survey, I had to select key individuals and officials who could best answer my queries and offer authoritative data, rather than mere speculations. As such, the local inhabitants, former marijuana cultivators, Maoist cadres, law enforcement officials, local level authorities and community elders formed the informant base for my study.

Thus, the study population for the present research comprises of individuals and groups directly or indirectly affected by the prohibition on marijuana cultivation and the Maoist conflict in the selected districts of Myagdi, Baglung, Rolpa and East Rukum. Even within these 4 districts, only 10 settlements have been chosen to conduct actual fieldwork,

considering the limitations posed by various factors such as time, budget and academic requirements, which included:

- a) Myagdi: The settlements of Faliyagaun, Lulang and Gurja Khani
- b) Baglung: The settlements of Dhorpatan and Niseldhor
- c) Rolpa: The settlements of Thabang and Libang
- d) East Rukum: The settlements of Sera, Taka and Rukumkot

These 10 settlements have been chosen primarily for 3 key reasons. Firstly, I came to know from the locals that they had been leading growers of marijuana back in the days when it was legal. Secondly, they are also part and parcel of the "Guerilla Trail", a string of settlements that witnessed intense Maoist activity and influence during the insurgency days. Thirdly, these villages comprise an assortment of different ethnicities as local inhabitants including the Khas Aryas, the indigenous nationalities (Magars, Kham Magars and Chhantyal) and the Dalit community, allowing for the needful inclusion in thoughts and experiences.

A total of 15 interview schedules has been filled and one focus group discussion carried out in each of the settlements. Thus, it will amount to a sum of 150 interviews and 10 focus group discussion while clubbing all the 10 settlements of 4 districts chosen for fieldwork.

The respondents have comprised of diverse clusters of informants including local residents, former marijuana growers, elected local officials such as Deputy Mayor, Chairperson, Ward Chairpersons and Ward Members, local police personnel, prosecutor, and other local intellectuals. These schedules featured some common questions as well as some different queries also, depending on their relevance to the study population.

The composition of respondents and participants covered in this study may be presented as follows:

**a) As per their gender**

S. No.	Gender Category	Number
1	Male respondents	92
2	Female respondents	58
	<b>Total respondents</b>	150

**b) As per their ethnicity**

Male			Female		
Khas Arya	Indigenous Nationalities	Dalits	Khas Arya	Indigenous Nationalities	Dalits
22	58	12	17	32	9
<b>Total male respondents: 92</b>			<b>Total female respondents: 58</b>		

**c) As per their affiliation**

S. No.	Affiliation	Numbers
1	Local inhabitants and former cultivators	102
2	Local level and law enforcement officials	48
	<b>Total respondents</b>	150

The lack of women representatives in key posts and their hesitation to open up before an interviewer can explain the relatively low composition of female participants in the present inquiry.

**3.7 Sampling Techniques**

I have utilised purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling to identify participants who have rich and relevant knowhow of the theme under research.

**3.7.1 Purposive Sampling:** In the present study, participants have been selected based on their direct experience or involvement with marijuana plantation, its prohibition or the Maoist

insurgency. It ensured the inclusion of diverse viewpoints, including those of cultivators, Maoist cadres and elected officials as well as law enforcement authorities.

**3.7.2 Snowball Sampling:** The technique of snowball sampling became particularly useful for reaching out to the former Maoist cadres and marginalized farmers, as they may not be easily accessible via other conventional recruitment methods. Here, the initial participants referred others with similar experiences or knowledge with whom I maintained contact afterwards.

### **3.7.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the informants during fieldwork comprised of the following:

#### **a) Inclusion Criteria**

- Residents of the Faliyagaun, Lulang, Gurja, Dhorpatan, Niseldhor, Taka, Sera, Rukumkot, Thabang and Libang settlements.
- Directly or indirectly affected by the marijuana cultivation and its prohibition.
- Individuals and officials having ample knowledge or experience of the Maoist insurgency and its socio-political context.

#### **b) Exclusion Criteria**

- Individuals having no knowledge or experience related to the marijuana ban or the subsequent Maoist insurgency.
- Individuals not residing in any of the above 10 settlements.
- Respondents unwilling or unable to provide informed consent.

By focusing on this study population and employing purposive and snowball sampling, I have tried to ensure a focused yet diverse range of perspectives that will illuminate the complex interplay between the ban on marijuana and the dawn of Maoist conflict in western Nepal.

### **3.8 Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

The collected facts and figures have been subjected to data processing, analysis, interpretation and presentation so as to derive key findings and to show the ways forward. As this research is chiefly a qualitative study, no coding, classification and

tabulation of data was done. The textual data elicited from primary and secondary sources was compiled, analysed and presented in the form of findings, conclusions and suggestions. The collected information is also displayed employing several tables which have facilitated the analysis and interpretation of data. The discourse made from Chapters 1 to 4 has been summarized in Chapter 5. Other supportive data also provide a referential value to the research which have been presented in the Annexure section.

The organization of collected data, both primary and secondary, remains a vital step to ensure it is meaningful and manageable for further analysis and interpretation. The devices that I have used in this process include transcription of oral data from verbatim to written, cleaning the impure and redundant data, developing themes that represent the broader patterns or ideas emanating from the data, organization of responses into narratives that fit the research purpose, documenting the context and restructuring of key findings emerging from the study. I have also revisited and refined the themes as new insights emerged during the analysis. Then I annotated data with contextual details such as place, time and participant characteristics, which are central to attain interpretive accuracy.

By organizing data as such, I could draw meaningful conclusions from the data while maintaining the complexity and context inherent in those human encounters and experiences. Further, it helped the data remain accessible to its end users in its true form.

This study adopts a deductive method or reasoning, i.e. a conclusion is made based on some observed statements that are held to be true. In other words, the study starts with an existing theory or hypothesis which has been tested through empirical observation on the field. I began with an initial assumption that the abrupt marijuana ban of 1976 pushed many locals against the ruling establishment and that resentment later fuelled the Maoist insurgency when it broke out 20 years later. My presumption was guided by the media reports and the popular talk surrounding the topic, including those witnessed in social media handles. From the findings of actual fieldwork, my initial hypothesis was proved beyond doubt. Thus, I have moved from general to specific.

Likewise, I have embraced the objective approach which aims to discover objective truth through empirical observation, and without the influence of researcher's personal biases,

preconceptions or impressions. In this light, the key techniques employed in the analysis of this study may be further bifurcated as follows:

### **3.8.1 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Content analysis and narrative analysis have been the two prime techniques utilized during the analysis of qualitative data used in this inquiry.

#### **a) Content Analysis**

Under content analysis, also known as document analysis, I have made a systematic examination of communications or current records.

In doing so, I have determined the presence of certain words, phrases and concepts within several qualitative texts available in print and online variants. Then, I quantified and analysed the presence, meaning and relations of certain words, themes or concepts using the content analysis procedure.

For instance, I have marked and analysed the presence and connotations of several prominent words, phrases and concepts including conflict, livelihood, indigenous communities, dependency, prohibition, insurgency, marginalization, etc. These trigger words and phrases have helped him to locate the relevant text and draw useful contents from them.

#### **b) Narrative Analysis**

Similarly, if we turn to narrative analysis, there is a consensus among qualitative researchers that stories and storytelling are the most popular methods of sharing useful information. From this perspective, most things that we read, heard or see are storied. Hence, the underlying aim of a narrative analysis is understanding what the stories convey and how.

Thus, narrative analysis follows a specific pattern of storytelling. Any narrative may be analysed based on its content (the substance of story), structure (how the story is told), functions (the purpose a story serves) and context (in what place or setting the story is told).

For instance, in course of fieldwork in the aforementioned 4 districts, I came to hear from the locals, numerous stories on their lived experiences of marijuana ban and its impact on

sparkling Maoist rebellion there. Such stories cover, among other things, topics such as ban, insurgency, livelihood, adaptation, migration, smuggling, addiction, local economy, economic stimulation, way of life, etc. These stories and the unique ways of storytelling followed by the locals have not only enhanced my curiosity and attachment with the narrative, but also helped me gain much insight and knowledge on the study area in an informal manner.

### **c) Steps in Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis, in social science research like this one, involves several systematic steps to ensure the data is interpreted accurately and meaningfully. In course of this inquiry, I have pursued the following major steps while processing and analysing qualitative data:

- i) Data preparation
- ii) Familiarization with data
- iii) Theme development
- iv) Data interpretation
- v) Verification and validation, and
- vi) Reporting

### **3.8.2 Quantitative Data Analysis**

By its nature, the scope of quantitative data in this study has been limited and a bulk of such data has been gathered through the works previously done by others, i.e. secondary sources of information. It is because fieldwork and primary data collection with study population often produces their lived experiences, opinions, perceptions and attitudes over the issue under research, which are essentially qualitative in nature. The present inquiry is also heavily tilted towards qualitative data and the use of quantitative data is limited to certain statistical outputs such as the number of total respondents, their variation and composition across each stratum.

Quantitative data in social science research may be analysed using a variety of statistical techniques, which usually fall into descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics summarize and explain the features of a dataset. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. Common descriptive statistics include mean, median and mode. Only the measure of mean has been used in this study.

Conversely, inferential statistics allow researchers to make conclusions about a population based on a sample. They help in testing hypotheses and making predictions. Common inferential statistics include hypothesis testing, correlation and regression and advanced statistical models. The current study did not require such complex calculations. While reporting results, I, as an investigator, have chosen to interpret the key findings, using different comparative tables where needful. By applying these techniques, I have tried to derive meaningful insights from quantitative data, leading to pertinent findings and conclusions.

I have followed the APA (7th edition, 2019) style for citing in-text footnotes and for enumerating sources in the References section. I have also observed all the ethical guidelines that are expected in such types of social inquiry such as confidentiality, privacy, autonomy, integrity, voluntariness, transparency and informed consent.

### **3.9 Operational Definitions**

For this research, exact operational definitions and measurement strategies remain imperative for clarity and consistency. At this premise, the following may be submitted as the selected concepts and variables with their operational definitions, which I have duly integrated in the current study.

#### **1. Marijuana Cultivation**

It refers to the process of growing cannabis plants (*cannabis sativa* or *cannabis indica*) for personal, commercial or medicinal purposes, in my study area of western hills in Nepal.

#### **2. Prohibition**

It signifies the government-enforced legal measures that banned the cultivation, trade, and use of marijuana in Nepal, disrupting its economic and cultural relevance in affected communities.

### **3. Economic Impact**

It infers the unpleasant shifts in household income, employment opportunities, and financial stability in communities that were reliant previously on marijuana cultivation.

### **4. Social Marginalization**

It denotes the perceived exclusion or neglect of local traditions, livelihoods, and voices in policymaking, resulting in a sense of alienation.

### **5. Political Alienation**

It indicates a sense of disconnection or exclusion from the state due to perceived unfair policies and governance failures.

### **6. Maoist Insurgency**

It relates to a 10-year-long political and armed movement aimed at overthrowing Nepal's monarchy and eliminating socioeconomic inequalities, with substantial activity in western Nepal.

### **7. Recruitment**

It means the process by which individuals, especially those affected by socio-economic grievances, joined or backed the Maoist rebellion.

### **8. Socio-Economic Grievances**

They signal a dissatisfaction stemming from the economic hardships and a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities, spurred by the abrupt prohibition.

### **9. Traditional Practices**

They suggest local customs and economic practices, including marijuana cultivation, deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the study area.

### **10. State Enforcement**

It refers to a host of methods and intensity of government actions to enforce the ban on marijuana cultivation.

### **11. Perceived Injustice**

It consists of community perceptions that the prohibition was unfair, unjust, or detrimental to the well-being and autonomy of local growers.

## **12. Rural Livelihood**

It comprises of the means by which rural households sustain themselves, measured by diversification of income sources, property ownership and food security levels in the affected areas.

### **3.10 Limitations of the Study**

It is impractical and impossible to include each and every aspect of marijuana conflict and the Maoist conflict in this type of limited study, due to restraint of time and resources as well as particularity of its objectives. Accordingly, as with any other research enterprise, my current research has been constrained by a few limitations on account of the limited timeframe, resources and nature of investigation. They include the following:

1. This inquiry is limited to only 10 settlements of the 4 districts - Myagdi, Baglung, Rolpa and East Rukum. This may not fully capture experiences from other regions affected by marijuana prohibition or the Maoist conflict.
2. It applies a sociological lens in reading through the problem and leave all other perspectives, such as economic, legal or ecological.
3. This study relies on participants' memories of past events, which may result in inaccuracies or selective recollections.
4. Difficulty in reaching out the key participants, such as former Maoist cadres or marginalized farmers, have somewhat restricted the diversity of perspectives.
5. Finally, the research has been wrapped up within 6 months of time from its inception.

These limitations underscore the potential challenges while providing areas to focus on for mitigating their effects.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

#### **4.1 Analysis of Data**

Analysis and interpretation refer to the process in which raw data is transformed into meaningful insights, revealing the underlying patterns and dynamics of the marijuana ban and its supposed role in sparking the Maoist insurgency in our western hills.

Through rigorous analysis, researchers can identify the root causes of conflicts, assess the effectiveness of current mitigation measures, and understand the socio-cultural context of the affected communities. Interpretation goes beyond mere data presentation; it provides a nuanced understanding of how and why certain conflicts occur, considering ecological, economic, and cultural factors.

This depth of understanding is essential for developing tailored, effective strategies that not only regulate the marijuana cultivation and business but also address the needs and concerns of local communities that the openness should not be abused by the scheming actors. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, the analysis and interpretation process ensures that the findings are robust, comprehensive, and actionable, ultimately contributing to more sustainable management of the marijuana issue so that it will not become a source to any other conflict in the future.

In this light, the analysis and interpretation in the present study have produced the following lines of inquiry:

##### **4.1.1 Involvement of the Local People in Marijuana Cultivation**

The fieldwork carried out in situ revealed that a majority of the local people had been marijuana cultivators in the past, especially their parents and ancestors, until it was officially banned in 1976 following the passage of Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act. Out of the 150 local residents and officials interviewed, an overwhelming majority of 78 individuals responded that their forefathers and mothers happily carried out the marijuana farming in their fields, comprising 70 percent of the informants. Only 44 respondents informed that they did not farm marijuana as a major source of income, but only to meet daily household needs, comprising the next 30 percent. They also reported that marijuana business back then contributed to their financial stability, income generation and cultural conformity.

Table 4.1.1

**Involvement of the Local People in Marijuana Cultivation**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, we did marijuana farming before the ban	106	70
No, we did not farm marijuana in the past	44	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, a sweeping majority of the respondents seem to be the ex-marijuana growers.

**4.1.2 Impact of the Marijuana Ban on the Livelihoods of People**

As regards the impact of marijuana ban on the livelihoods of local people, a thundering majority of respondents replied that the prohibition had indeed impacted negatively on the quality of their lives.

Thus, of the 150 respondents interviewed, including the local residents and local level officials, 104 replied that the ban has impacted their livelihoods in an adverse manner comprising 69 percent of the study population. Only 36 individuals making up 24 percent of the study population reported that the ban has had no negative impact. A total of 10 informants amounting to 7 percent were unsure on whether the marijuana ban was beneficial or detrimental for them.

Table 4.1.2

**Impact of the Marijuana Ban on the Livelihoods of People**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, the ban has impacted our livelihoods negatively	104	69
No, the ban has had no negative impact	36	24
Not sure	10	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, it is a popular opinion for a wide majority of interviewees that the ban continuing from 1976 has indeed impacted their livelihoods adversely.

#### 4.1.3 Government's Support for Alternative Livelihood

On the issue of government's support for alternative livelihood of the locals following the abrupt ban on marijuana farming and business, a majority of the respondents, 80 out of 150, reported that the support measures were average at best, constituting 53 percent of the study population. Another 32 percent replied that the support measures were weak or poor, not able to bridge the gap between sudden loss of livelihood and income and the cushion offered by state support measures in various forms. Only 15 percent of informants replied that the government assistance was effective enough to buttress the loss or damage resulting from the sudden jolt in the socioeconomic lives of the locals.

Table 4.1.3

#### Government's Support for Alternative Livelihood

Particulars	Number	Percent
It was average	80	53
It was weak	47	32
It was effective	23	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, it is a settled opinion that the government's supports for alternative livelihood produced only average results, and were largely subpar.

#### 4.1.4 Influence of Marijuana Cultivation in the Economic Status of Locals

In response to this issue, a sweeping number of respondents, i.e. 104 out of 150, making a whopping 69 percent, replied that their economic status was much better during the times they could cultivate marijuana in their farmlands. Conversely, a small chunk of study population, i.e. 16 percent reported that their economic condition actually improved once

the ban was enforced in 1976. Only 15 percent of the respondents conceded that their economic situation was marginally better during the cultivation period, and not markedly well-off by any means.

Table 4.1.4

**Influence of Marijuana Cultivation in the Economic Status of Locals**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
It was much better during the marijuana cultivation times	104	69
It was marginally better during the marijuana cultivation times	22	15
It is better after the ban came into effect	24	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Therefore, the economic status of locals was significantly better before the ban was introduced in 1976, seems to be the established opinion.

**4.1.5 Key Reasons for Favouring Marijuana Cultivation by the Locals**

As for the motivating factors behind the locals favouring marijuana cultivation over other staple crops, during the time of its legitimacy, a sound majority of 72 individuals out of 150, amounting to 48 percent, claimed that the local soil, climate and land suiting marijuana farming, was the prime factor behind their parents embracing this cash crop back them.

That marijuana is easily sellable and a reliable market for cannabis product is the second biggest motivator chosen by 23 percent of the respondents.

Marijuana requiring no care, labour or manure is the third important pull factor for the local growers during its legalization period, supported by 20 percent of the base.

Lastly, 9 percent of the participants noted that it is safe from pests, insects and predatory animals like bear, monkeys etc. behind their parents enthusiastically growing it.

Table 4.1.5

**Key Reasons for Favouring Marijuana Cultivation by the Locals**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Soil, climate and lands suitable for marijuana cultivation	72	48
Easily sellable and a reliable market for the products	35	23
Needs no care, labour or manure to grow it	30	20
It is safe from pests, insects and predatory animals like bear, monkeys etc.	13	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

So, climate, soil and topography favourable to the marijuana cultivation seem to be the key reason behind the popular support for marijuana cultivation in the western hills.

**4.1.6 Key Reasons behind the Marijuana Ban in Nepal**

As regards this pertinent issue, 90 out of 150 locals interviewed, making 60 percent of the respondent base, replied that the pressure of western powers, especially the US following its so called "War on Drugs", forced Nepal to abruptly ban generations-old marijuana farming, that formed the bedrock of rural economy.

Another 19 percent answered that the fear of deterioration of public health due to addiction among the young adults was the underlying reason behind the ban.

Fear of crimes, violence and thus breakdown in law and order was shared by 15 percent of the study population whereas 6 percent were undecided on the matter.

Table 4.1.6

**Key Reasons behind the Marijuana Ban in Nepal**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Pressure of the western powers, especially the US	90	60
Fear of deterioration of public health	28	19
Fear of breakdown of law and order	22	15
Not sure	10	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, the influence of western nations, particularly the US, was found the most decisive causative factor behind the ban coming into force in Nepal, including our signing of the 1961 Single Convention on Drugs and the 1966 Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

**4.1.7 Measures Taken to Ensure the Ban Was Effectively Enforced**

In connection to this query, 47 informants out of 150, i.e. 31 percent of the participant base, replied that raising public awareness and outreach to the locals was the primary measure taken to ensure the ban was effectively ensured.

Another 29 percent answered that punitive measures like searches, seizures and arrests were the popular methods of ban enforcement.

Destruction of marijuana pockets by the patrolling police parties was reported by 24 percent of the study population.

Likewise, 16 percent of the participants were of the view that radio broadcasts and newspaper notices formed the key measure to effectively implement the ban.

Table 4.1.7

**Measures Taken to Ensure the Ban Was Effectively Enforced**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Raising public awareness and outreach to the locals	47	31
Searches, seizures and arrests	43	29
Destruction of marijuana pockets	36	24
Radio broadcasts and newspaper notices	24	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

This way, the majority opinion seems to be tilted towards raising public awareness and outreach to the locals as the most influential enforcement technique.

**4.1.8 Challenges Faced by the Law Enforcement while Implementing the Ban**

With regards to this query, 74 respondents, making up 49 percent of the informant base, answered that geographical adversity, difficult and remote terrain are to blame for as the key challenges faced by the law enforcement, while implementing the ban.

Similarly, lack of cooperation and support from the locals ranks second as the challenge faced, reported by 29 percent of the study population.

Around 19 percent of the informants expressed that lack of continuous monitoring and surveillance is the prime challenge faced by the police and administration.

Meanwhile, 3 percent of the respondents remained clueless about the matter.

Table 4.1.8

**Challenges Faced by the Law Enforcement while Implementing the Ban**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Geographical adversity, difficult and remote terrain	74	49
Lack of cooperation and support from the locals	42	29
Lack of continuous monitoring and surveillance	29	19
Not sure	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, geographical adversity seems to be the most influential barrier in the way to an effective ban.

**4.1.9 Response of the Local Farmers when the Ban was First Introduced**

Public discontent and protests, often expressed through formal complaints made to the local levels and visiting state officials, ranked as the most prevalent response of farmers when the ban was first introduced. This view was shared by 76 respondents, forming 51 percent of the participant base.

They also recall the times when a local elder Burman Budha held the reins of a horse that the then King Birendra was riding while he was on an unannounced visit to the Thabang village of Rolpa in 1985.

Likewise, 29 percent of the informants see shifting loyalty from the state side to the Maoist cadres as the key response since the ban was introduced.

Around 11 percent of the interviewees observed that the locals did not protest expressly, rather were compliant and observant of the ban as soon as it was put to effect.

However, 9 percent of the respondents were also of the view that what followed the ban in 1976 was clashes and altercations with the police and administration as they tried to put a lid on marijuana cultivation and trade.

Table 4.1.9

**Response of the Local Farmers when the Ban was First Introduced**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Public discontent and protests	76	51
Shifting loyalty to the Maoist cadres	44	29
Obedience and compliance to the ban	17	11
Clashes and altercation	13	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, public discontent and protests were the prime ways that the locals vented their anger and resentment against the state authorities.

**4.1.10 Efforts made to Address the Grievances raised by Farmers**

The most vital effort seems to be the counselling of public and engagement with the local levels as reported by 62 respondents making up 40 percent of the participants.

Likewise, the second dominant effort had been training of farmers to raise staple crops, distribution of fruit and vegetable saplings, and seed animals for raising livestock like goats, sheep and cattle, as cited by 25 percent of the participants.

Around 23 percent of respondents replied that there has been no proper addressing of local grievances at all. Another 12 percent quoted that people did not bring up their grievances openly as much time has passed since the ban first took effect in 1976.

Table 4.1.10

**Efforts made to Address the Grievances raised by Farmers**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Counselling the public, engagement with the local levels	62	40
Training of farmers to raise staple crops, distribution of fruit and vegetable saplings, and seed animals for raising livestock like goats, sheep and cattle	37	25
No addressing of such grievances at all	33	23
People did not bring up their grievances openly	18	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, public counselling and engagement with local levels seems to be the most favourite method of addressing the resentment of local farmers.

**4.1.11 Role Played by the Local Political or Social Leaders in the Ban Environment**

Raising public awareness on the ban and its consequences seems to be the most influential role being played by the local political or social leaders in the current ban environment, as noted by 53 respondents, forming 35 percent of the study population.

Likewise, settling disputes and clearing misunderstanding between the law enforcement and locals seems to be their second prized role, cited by 34 percent of the research subjects.

Lobbying for the conditional release of marijuana farming is yet another role of local political or social leaders, as observed by 24 percent of the participants.

However, 7 percent of the locals complained that they play no meaningful role at all in this connection.

Table 4.1.11

**Role Played by the Local Political or Social Leaders in the Ban Environment**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Raising public awareness on the ban and its consequences	53	35
Settling disputes and clearing misunderstanding between the law enforcement and locals	51	34
Lobbying for the conditional release of marijuana farming	35	24
They play no meaningful role at all	11	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Therefore, educating the public on the ban and its consequences remains the prime job of local leaders and activists.

#### **4.1.12 Effect of Marijuana Prohibition in the Overall Socio-Political Stability of the Region**

With regard to this issue, a total of 80 respondents out of 150, amounting to 53 percent, reported that the ban affected their overall socio-political stability considerably, leading to the eruption of Maoist insurgency some 20 year later.

About 34 percent replied that though the ban affected the socio-political ability of their region, it was marginal or minimal, and not considerable.

Meanwhile, only 13 percent answered that the ban has cast no such impact at all.

Table 4.1.12

**Effect of Marijuana Prohibition in the Overall Stability of the Region**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, it affected our overall socio-political stability considerably leading to the eruption of Maoist insurgency some 20 years later	80	53
It has affected our overall socio-political stability, but not in a significant manner	51	34
It has cast no such impact at all	19	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, going by the majority, it may be deduced that the ban has indeed affected the sociopolitical stability of study region in a detrimental manner.

#### **4.1.13 Was the Prohibition Policy Implemented Fairly and Equitably across all the Communities?**

As regards this critical question, the interviewees overwhelmingly replied that the ban policy was implemented fairly and equitably across all the communities.

A resounding 145 informants out of 150 making a whopping 97 percent of study population shared this view.

Only 3 percent, i.e. 5 participants expressed uncertainty over this matter.

Table 4.1.13

**Fairness and Equity while Implementing the Prohibition Policy**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, it was implemented without any bias or discrimination	145	97
Not sure	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, it has been ratified by the locals that the ban was implemented without any bias or discrimination based on the sociocultural diversity.

**4.1.14 Marijuana Ban Affecting the Financial Stability of Households**

That the marijuana ban affected the household financial stability of people severely was the resounding opinion shared by 81 individuals out of the total 150 interviewees, amounting to a whopping 54 percent. That the same ban affected the household financial stability of people moderately was a secondary opinion shared by 26 percent. Meanwhile, 15 percent of respondents reported that the ban did not affect their household financial stability at all, while 5 percent of the respondents were left undecided.

Table 4.1.14

**Marijuana Ban Affecting the Financial Stability of Households**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
It affected our financial stability severely	81	54
It affected our financial stability moderately	39	26
It did not affect our financial stability at all	22	15
Not sure	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, it seems to be a settled fact that the sudden marijuana ban severely affected the household financial stability of the local population.

#### 4.1.15 Alternatives Pursued by the Community Upon Government Prohibition

As for the alternatives pursued by the community upon the government ban on marijuana farming and its business, the most popular option has been a return to staple cereal crops like millet, corn, potatoes, barley, etc., a view shared by 48 out of 150 informants, amounting to a 32 percent share. Likewise, 28 percent of informants reported that the locals have reverted to livestock rearing such as goats, sheep and cattle as an alternative strategy to buttress the shock created by the sudden ban. Foreign labour migration has been the third popular strategy shared by 26 percent of the participants. Rural to urban migration to nearby cities and towns is the least reported option shared by 14 percent of the total respondents.

Table 4.1.15

#### **Alternatives Pursued by the Community Upon Government Prohibition**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Return to staple cereal crops like millet, corn, potatoes, barley, etc.	48	32
Return to livestock rearing such as goats, sheep and cattle	42	28
Foreign labour migration	39	26
Rural to urban migration in search of better jobs and income	21	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, the locals returning to staple cereal crops like millet, corn, potatoes, barley, etc, seems to be the most profuse alternative pursued by them as an adaptation strategy.

#### 4.1.16 How Effective Have Been These Alternatives?

Most of the respondents, i.e. 98 out of 150 reported that the alternatives pursued by the community following the strict marijuana ban have not been effective to bridge the gap between expectations and reality. This number amounts to 65 percent of the participants' share.

Likewise, 27 percent of respondents informed that those alternative measures were only moderately effective. However, only 8 percent of informants responded that those strategies were quite effective in cushioning the financial shock caused by the sudden ban on marijuana produce.

Table 4.1.16

**Effectiveness Degree of these Alternatives**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not effective	98	65
Moderately effective	40	27
Quite effective	12	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Therefore, the effectiveness level of these alternatives is held as ineffective by most of the informants.

**4.1.17 Significant Social Changes Induced by the Marijuana Ban**

With regards to key social changes induced by the marijuana ban, the local resentment from inside against the state mechanism is the biggest one reported by 62 out of the 150 respondents, clocking 41 percent. Likewise, rise of underground marijuana dealings is the second influential social change communicated by 33 percent of informants. Similarly, 19 percent of individuals shared that no notable social changes have been witnessed since the ban took effect. Likewise, the least reported change has been altercations between the locals and law enforcement reported only by 7 percent of participants, since most of the farmers quickly transitioned from marijuana growing to staple crops raising.

Table 4.1.17

**Significant Social Changes Induced by the Marijuana Ban**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Local resentment from inside against the state mechanism	62	41
Rise of underground marijuana dealings	48	33
No notable social changes witnessed	29	19
Altercations between the locals and law enforcement	11	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, the most profound social change seems to be the growth of local resentment from inside against the state establishment.

#### **4.1.18 Mode of Ban Enforcement by the Law Enforcement Authorities**

As regards this issue, the locals reported that highhanded approaches like search, seizure and arrest constitute a bulk of ban enforcement modality adopted by the government officials. A total of 80 respondents out of 150 shared this view, comprising 53 percent of the informant base. Likewise, the second prevalent mode is the destruction of wild marijuana thickets by police patrols that frequent the villages every now and then, communicated by 23 percent of the participants. Raising public awareness and outreach is the third most influential method of enforcing marijuana ban reported by 14 percent of the study population.

Coordination with the local levels clicked 10 percent of responses pegging it as the least practiced method.

Table 4.1.18

#### **Mode of Ban Enforcement by the Law Enforcement Authorities**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Search, seizure and arrest	80	53
Destruction of wild marijuana thickets	35	23
Raising public awareness and outreach	21	14
Coordination with the local levels	14	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, coercive measures like search, seizure and arrests seem to be the most prevalent mode of law enforcement for implementing the marijuana ban.

#### **4.1.19 Conflict between the Local Farmers and Law Enforcement Authorities**

As regards this pressing issue, a majority of respondents, i.e. 78 out of 150, making a 52 percent share, answered that there was a public resentment against the ban enforced with no groundwork, but not open conflict or tension resulted with the law enforcement authorities. Some 42 percent respondents, however, informed that there was indeed conflict or tension between the two sides, with some altercations reported,

especially during the initial years of ban. Around 6 percent of informants responded with unsurety.

Table 4.1.19  
**Conflict between the Local Farmers and Law Enforcement Authorities**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, there was a conflict or tension	63	42
No, there was a public resentment; but no open conflict or tension	78	52
Not sure	9	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, the majority opinion seems to affirm the fact that despite public grievance or discontent, no open conflagration between the local growers and law enforcement officials (especially the police and district administration) was witnessed.

#### **4.1.20 Role of the Maoists in Shaping the Farmers' Reaction to the Prohibition**

As for this issue, a majority of respondents reported that actually, underground marijuana growth and trade boomed during the Maoist conflict. The local Maoist cadres actually made marijuana business as one of their key sources to fund their insurgency, which also had popular support. A total of 70 out of 150 respondents, constituting a 47 percent pie, backed this observation.

This view was closely backed by 38 percent of respondents who shared the opinion that the Maoists were able to mobilize popular discontent against the government to rally people behind their cause.

Likewise, 15 percent of the respondents opined that the Maoists did nothing substantial to shape public opinion as the public discontent with the ban was already there simmering.

Table 4.1.20

**Role of the Maoists in Shaping the Farmers' Reaction to Prohibition**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Actually, underground marijuana cultivation and trade boomed during the Maoist conflict	70	47
The Maoists mobilized popular discontent against the government to rally people behind their cause	57	38
The Maoists did nothing substantial to shape public opinion	23	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, a majority of informants hold the view that the marijuana farming and trade actually flourished during the Maoist conflict under their auspices. This move served two key purposes. Firstly, it created a steady and sustainable income flow to finance the rebellion. Secondly, the locals were also okay with this arrangement as that suited their economic, cultural and social interests.

**4.1.21 Role of the Marijuana Ban in Sparking the Maoist Conflict**

With regard to this key matter, more than half of the respondents replied that the ban had a crucial role in sparking the Maoist insurgency in western Nepal. A total of 83 out of 150 informants, constituting 55 percent of the study population, shared this view as the Maoists were able to cash in the destitution and disapproval left by the ban among the locals to rally behind their flag. They argued that though there were many places in Nepal such as Karnali where people were poorer and more disadvantaged, the Maoist rebellion broke out from the erstwhile Rapti Zone because of the marijuana element. This observation also expressly endorses the hypothesis of my research.

Likewise, 25 percent of the locals responded that the ban had only a partial role in sparking the Maoist conflict, and not vital. It is because there had been many triggers for the insurgency to flash in, and the marijuana ban is one of them. However, 20 percent of the informants flatly denied the role of marijuana ban in triggering the

Maoist civil war as there had been a 20-year gap between the ban coming into effect in 1976 and the armed uprising of Maoists in 1996. Had there been a direct link between the two, the insurgency would have popped up soon after the ban kicked in.

Table 4.1.21

**Role of the Marijuana Ban in Sparking the Maoist Conflict**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, the ban had a crucial role in sparking the Maoist conflict	83	55
The ban had only a partial role in sparking the Maoist conflict	37	25
The ban had no role in sparking the Maoist conflict	30	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, the established position seems to be the understanding that the ban played a critical role in sparking the Maoist conflict in western Nepal.

**4.1.22 Effect of the Ban on Women and Other Marginalized Groups**

As for the question of whether the marijuana ban had cast a disproportionately ill impact on the women and other marginalized groups due their relative unavailability to seek other mainstream opportunities, a whopping 101 respondents out of 150 replied in the affirmative, constituting a 2/3rd pie of the study population.

Likewise, 20 percent of the interviewees reported that the ban did not impact the women and other marginalized groups anyway more than other groups, and that the effect was spread even among the communities.

However, another 13 percent of the interviewees expressed that the ban impacted the women and other marginalized groups only in a partial or marginal manner, i.e. the ill-effect was slightly harsher on them, but not much.

Table 4.1.22

**Effect of the Ban on Women and Other Marginalized Groups**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
The ban disproportionately impacted the women and other marginalized groups as they have had no better opportunities	101	67
The ban did not impact the women and other marginalized groups anyway more than other groups	30	20
The ban impacted the women and other marginalized groups only in a partial or marginal manner	19	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

So, the ban disproportionately impacted the women and other marginalized groups as they have had no better opportunities elsewhere seems to be the dominant position as regards this issue.

**4.1.23 Key Challenges Faced by the Local Communities During the Early Prohibition Years**

In relation to the issue of key challenges faced by the local communities during the early prohibition years, 55 out of the 150 participants reported the steep fall in disposable household income as the most pressing challenge faced by the locals back then, constituting 37 percent of the study population.

Locals caught between their survival needs and fear of prosecution remains the second most reported challenge following the sudden marijuana ban, an observation shared by 31 percent of the informants. Increase in shadowy and underground deals led by opaque middlemen is the third prevalent challenge thereof, an opinion shared by 24 percent of the respondents.

Likewise, 8 percent of respondents noted that the lack of alternative skills and occupation for the former growers was a key challenge emerging from the ban.

Table 4.1.23

**Key Challenges Faced by the Local Communities During the Early Prohibition Years**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Steep fall in disposable household income	55	37
Locals caught between their survival needs and fear of prosecution	46	31
Increase in shadowy and underground deals led by opaque middlemen	37	24
Lack of alternative skills and occupation for the former growers	12	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, a rapid dip in the disposable household income of locals causing initial financial shock and despair remains the biggest challenge that is yet to be alleviated.

**4.1.24 Whether the Marijuana Cultivation should be Legalized Again?**

In connection to this vital question, 2/3rd chunk of the total respondents approached, replied unanimously that the marijuana farming and business should be reopened with certain terms and conditions, and a sound monitoring framework. However, 26 percent of the informants approached answered that marijuana farming or business should never be legalized again owing to its potential abuse for hashish consumption and the degradation of other regular crops and professions. Moreover, 7 percent of the participants were clueless on whether the ban should be lifted or retained.

Table 4.1.24

**Effect of the Ban on Women and Other Marginalized Groups**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, it should be legalized with certain oversight measures	101	67
No, it should never be legalized again	38	26
Not sure	11	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Thus, there seems a patent majority vote on reopening the marijuana cultivation subject to ample supervision, akin to the current world trend.

#### **4.1.25 Suggestions to the Policymakers on Balancing Ban with Livelihood Sustainability**

In connection with the suggestions to the policymakers on how to balance the ban with livelihood sustainability, 45 out of 150 respondents, i.e. 30 percent of the informant base, replied that licensing of marijuana growers and sellers should be the first step forward.

Another 27 percent suggested that the provincial and local governments should designate certain pocket areas for growing marijuana and no other land parcels should be used to that end.

Around 23 percent of the participants asked for the local levels to monitor marijuana farming and offer technical and financial support to the growers whereas 20 percent recommended that only the qualified institutions and farmer groups should be allowed to grow and deal with marijuana, and not individuals, so that the potential of abuse or misuse is scaled down.

Table 4.1.25

#### **Suggestions to the Policymakers on Balancing Ban with Livelihood Sustainability**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Licensing of marijuana growers and sellers	45	30
Designation of pocket areas for growing marijuana	41	27
Local levels to monitor marijuana farming and offer technical and financial support to the growers	34	23
Only the qualified institutions and farmer groups should be allowed to grow and deal with marijuana, and not individuals	30	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: Field Survey of October 2025)

Hence, licensing of marijuana growers and sellers seems to be the first step ahead for the policymakers in balancing the ban with sustainability in livelihoods. Any

proposed marijuana legalization measure to be initiated by the government should factor in this move at the outset.

## 4.2 Interpretation of Data

Marijuana refers to a psychoactive substance derived from the dried leaves and flowers of the cannabis plant. Cannabis belongs to the genus of flowering plants in the Cannabaceae family and is widely recognized as native to and originating from Central Asia.

The species is mostly dioecious, meaning male (*staminate*) and female (*pistillate*) flowers typically grow on separate plants. However, numerous monoecious varieties exist, where a single plant produces both male and female flowers. Cultivars grown primarily for fibre and seeds are classified as low-intoxicant, non-drug or fibre types, while those bred for psychoactive effects are termed high-intoxicant or drug types. In Nepal, cannabis grows across various regions, but the western mid-hills are credited for top-quality produce.

Humans have used cannabis products for 5000 years and millions of Americans use it regularly with no medical oversight, and as a comparison, aspirin is responsible for hundreds of fatalities every year (Christiansen, 2010).

The international push to regulate psychoactive substance began primarily with opium, especially in China, during the early 20th century. For cannabis, several countries initially favoured regulatory approaches over outright bans, and early evidence indicated that - while not entirely safe - the plant was far less dangerous than the alarmist claims portrayed. Despite limited consensus among delegates at the first international drug meetings on including cannabis, it soon entered the global framework.

While many delegates lacked any knowledge of the substance and were consequently bewildered by inclusion of cannabis in the negotiations, the efforts of Italy, with support from the United States (US), ensured that concern about “Indian Hemp” was mentioned in an addendum to the 1912 International Opium Convention (Bewley-Taylor et al., 2014).

After World War I, the League of Nations intensified efforts to strengthen the international drug control system, drawing greater focus on cannabis. This time it was the Egyptian delegation, with support from the US again, employing hyperbole and

hysteria rather than the available scientific evidence base to help ensure cannabis be recognised as addictive and dangerous as opium (Bewley-Taylor et al., 2014).

Cannabis never underwent a formal scientific evaluation by WHO experts to meet the criteria for the inclusion in the UN Schedules of controlled substances. Still, under the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, it was classified among the most potent controlled psychoactive substances, deemed to have little to no therapeutic value. Despite objections from various Asian and African nations regarding its traditional and cultural uses, the final treaty reflected the strong influence of Western powers during negotiations.

It mandated the elimination of the "use of cannabis, cannabis resin, extracts and tinctures of cannabis for non-medical purposes" which was required as soon as possible but, in any case, within 25 years". The sole exemption was the exclusion of leaves and seeds from the treaty's definition of cannabis, which preserved its use in the traditional and religious practices involving hemp seeds (*bhang* or *bhangho*) in Nepal and India.

Then, cannabis first came under international control via the 1925 Geneva Convention, also known as the Second International Opium Convention. Signatory countries gradually adopted more restrictive domestic laws. In the 1930s, driven by rising domestic concerns - particularly among certain ethnic groups - the US shifted from a supporting role to leading an aggressive international campaign against cannabis.

Former AIG of Nepal Police, Mr. Rabi Raj Thapa, as quoted by Dahal (2019), pores over the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act, 1976 with a sense of bewilderment. As a founding member of the Nepal Police's Narcotic Drugs Control Law Enforcement Bureau, raised in 1992, now converted into the Narcotic Drugs Control Bureau (NDCB), Thapa is no stranger to this piece of law. "Each time I go through it, I spot another unclear aspect", he comments, pointing to a specific section. "The Act separates medical cannabis and cannabis into different categories, yet both are classified as narcotics. What exactly constitutes medical cannabis? Why is it labelled as a narcotic, if the Act itself designates it as medical cannabis?", he retorts.

Thapa attributes much of this ambiguity to the fact that the law was not crafted primarily based on Nepal's own needs or traditions. He views the criminalization of marijuana as largely an external imposition, driven by the US since 1971 under the

President Richard Nixon's relentless "War on Drugs" campaign. "It appeared abruptly", Thapa explains. "A plant that grew freely throughout the country and was even used to soothe stomach pains in young children was suddenly equated with heroin and cocaine".

In his 1975 Chapter "Cannabis in Nepal: An Overview", US anthropologist James Fisher, as cited by Dahal (2019), describes the mounting pressure on the then Nepali government during the early 1970s to suppress the cannabis ecosystem. As Western hippies travelled the overland trail in the late 1960s and 70s, they created a commercial market and a heightened demand for local marijuana and hashish. These waves of young people, seeking escape from the fast-paced, post-war realities of the West, set off on journeys across the globe through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India to Nepal, along the so-called hippie trail. Nestled in the heart of South Asia the small capital city of Kathmandu quickly emerged as a prime destination for these travellers.

The city offered stunning natural beauty and serenity, but what truly drew the crowds was the easy, legal availability of affordable marijuana and hashish. Soon, Kathmandu began a magnet for tourists around the Western world. Word rapidly spread about this idyllic Himalayan nation, with its towering peaks and higher pleasures, turning it into a legendary haven for the pleasure-seeking bohemians. At the same era, The Beatles fled England for an ashram in India, while Jimi Hendrix composed a popular track "Purple Haze" that refers to a euphoric cannabis strain.

Concerned that Nepal was fuelling the international drug trade -and especially that some American youths were using the country as a refuge to dodge the Vietnam war draft -the US government pushed for stricter Nepali laws to curb drug use, which Nixon famously called "public enemy number one". With rising demand, the price of hashish (*chares*) surged from around USD 15 per kg to USD 70. To regulate the expanding market, Nepal had earlier introduced the Intoxicants Act in 1961 and the Intoxicant Rules in 1962, requiring the farmers to obtain licenses for commercial cannabis cultivation.

Fisher notes that the government shifted from its more permissive approach on 16 July 1973 when an ordinance revoked all existing licenses for cultivating, buying and selling marijuana. This crackdown was reinforced in 1976 by the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act, which formally proscribed the sale, cultivation, consumption of

marijuana, together with other natural and synthetic drugs. Authorities closed down the licensed shops, drove the hippy community underground and burned the farmers' crops in widespread rural crackdown (Williams, 2023).

Nepal acceded to the Convention in 1987, nearly a decade after India and two years after China. Experts like Rajiv Kafle, quoted by Dahal (2019), argue that Nepal stood as one of the last defenders of marijuana's traditional and medicinal value on the global stage. "Since no objections were raised to Nepal's reservation, the WHO should have reviewed our position, but that did not happen soon enough", laments Kafle. The long-awaited review came on 24 January 2019 when the WHO's Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) recommended removing cannabis from Schedule IV and reclassifying it under a milder Schedule I, acknowledging emerging evidence of its medicinal benefits. However, the INCB is yet to reclassify the plant, with influential nations like the US and UK still sceptical of the proposed move.

Legalizing cannabis cultivation in Nepal requires more than just amending the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act, 1976. The UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 classifies cannabis as a narcotic drug parallel to heroin and cocaine. As such, to enable cultivation, particularly beyond strictly medical and scientific purposes, the government would need to submit a formal application or seek approval from the relevant international bodies, such as the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), to align with or navigate the treaty's obligations.

Experts note that implementing cannabis farming is not as straightforward as suggested in the budget announcements. Nepal has fully accepted the Convention's conditions without reservations, unlike some countries that included specific exemptions. For instance, Canada signed the Convention on a condition that it exempts the use of marijuana for both medical and non-medical purposes (Karki, 2023).

In Nepal, cannabis (*Cannabis sativa*) has long been used traditionally in various forms of food, fibre and medicinal purposes. In ethnomedicinal practices, particularly in remote communities, the plant has been employed to treat ailments such as diarrhoea, constipation, common cold, gout, rheumatism and even snake bites. It is also used to treat infertility and cold among the animals also. Within the hilly regions of Nepal, cannabis is also used as a food for cattle and fibres, whereas few people used it for psychotropic effects (Pathak et al., 2024). It can be effectively intercropped with

maize in outdoor settings or farmed even in greenhouses, though outdoor growth remains the most natural and cost-effective method of growing.

For Nepali farmers, cannabis holds immense potential as "green gold". Nepal possesses ideal natural, geographical conditions and a strong competitive edge for cultivation. Legalization of its plantation, sale and consumption with potent oversight would therefore be highly beneficial. Programs promoting the farming of medicinal and recreational cannabis as well as industrial hemp should be actively encouraged. More research is also required to identify plants with the proper quantity of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) before allowing commercial cultivation (Kaini, 2020).

The western regions of Nepal offer particularly favourable conditions for cannabis cultivation. Some local communities have pushed for the right to grow the crop legally, arguing that it could generate employment opportunities, boost industrialization and stimulate economic growth through regulated production and export. That said, more robust scientific evidence is still required to fully assess the therapeutic benefits and potential risks associated with compounds like CBD and THC. The budget for the FY of 2023/24 included provisions to explore the feasibility of cannabis cultivation, especially for medicinal purposes. However, legal marijuana farming in Nepal not only requires amending the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act, 1976, but it is also necessary to send an application to convince the International Narcotics Control Board (Karki, 2023), and communicating the state's intent to that end.

In January 2008, the second largest physician group in the US, the American College of Physicians (ACP), released a position paper calling on the federal government to reclassify marijuana "given the scientific evidence regarding marijuana's safety and efficacy in some clinical conditions" (Christiansen, 2010). If legalization is to be considered, the government must prioritize strict policies on trade, adulteration, smuggling, and illegal export to address concerns about an open border between Nepal and India, and to be able to ensure that any beneficial impact will outsize adverse outcomes in the population through appropriate surveillance and regulated supply (Pathak et al., 2024).

To frame effective legislation that truly achieves its intended goals, lawmakers must base their policies on robust scientific evidence, while carefully accounting for prevailing social norms. If marijuana ban was enacted without regard to available social science evidence - or worse, in direct opposition to it - then the policy may be

outright misguided. At the very least, it should be carefully re-examined and revised in the light of objective and empirical research.

Traditionally, cannabis in Nepal has served 3 primary purposes: cultural, medicinal and recreational. Culturally, it aids yogis and sadhus in deepening their meditation practices. Devotees also use it as a symbol of camaraderie and fellowship, particularly during group bhajans, where it fosters a sense of shared devotion, often linked to Lord Shiva. Medicinally, the plant holds significant value in Ayurvedic and ethnomedical traditions, where it is employed to address a broad range of ailments, from pain relief to digestive issues. Recreationally, it is mainly consumed by elderly individuals who feel they are past the age of heavy fieldwork. For them, occasional use provides enjoyment, relaxation, pleasure or simply a way to pass the time leisurely.

Cannabis cultivation in Nepal has been described as the most profitable form of agriculture, since the production of hashish (*chares*) and marijuana (*ganja*) fully offsets the costs of growing the crops, which is bare minimum anyway.

In Nepal, experts have highlighted the multiple useful applications of cannabis which create only a fine distinction between its role as hemp (*bhang*) and marijuana (*ganja*). Farmers used to deliberately decide whether to treat the crop as hemp or marijuana, which leads them to adapt their cultivation methods accordingly.

For instance, when growing for fibre (*bhangra*), plants are placed close together and harvested before flowering. When growing for seeds (*bhang*), plants are spaced widely apart and allowed to reach full majority. When targeting resin for marijuana or hashish production, farmers likewise prefer wide spacing to maximise resin yield. The hemp seeds known as *bhang* or *bhang*o is used as a staple spice in everyday cooking in the western hill families of Nepal. This multifaceted use of cannabis in Nepal has existed through centuries-old learning to accommodate, regulate, and restrict Cannabis use within traditional and secure limits (Kloepfer, 2025).

A leading research firm Research and Markets forecasted in 2025 of a global legal marijuana market worth at USD 85.09 billion in the year 2026, highlighting the substantial economic potential of regulated marijuana industries worldwide. A 2003 report of Robert Gersony, commissioned by the Mercy Corps, argued that the 1976 marijuana ban ultimately backfired on the Nepali government. The report suggests that the resulting economic hardship in affected regions may have contributed, at least in part, to fuel the Maoist insurgency that erupted two decades later. Nepal continues

to miss a major economic opportunity to bolster its shrinking forex reserves due to the government's hesitation to legalize marijuana cultivation and trade.

At this premise, Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, cited by Mahat (2019), who was the Finance Minister at the time of 1976 ban, recalls: "Prior to the ban, the government issued contracts for cannabis plantations and exported the processed products. We were compelled to prohibit under intense pressure from the West, primarily the US. I remember explicit threats to withhold all aid if we refused. Politically, the West was also discontent with the King's regime, which they viewed as undemocratic. Ultimately, the government caved in".

In exchange for enforcing the ban, Thapa notes that the US provided only limited indirect compensation, such as promoting alternative crops and supporting certain development initiatives. Still, the Nepali authorities were reluctant to impose the ban rigorously. While official contracts ceased, enforcement remained lax towards farmers and users. Thapa mentions that resistance to the ban emerged first in the Terai region but was quickly subdued due to its disorganized nature. In fact, this needless ban devastated one of the Nepal's poorest communities by wiping out a vital cash crop. Pushing the trade underground bred a corrupt nexus between police and politicians and helped fuel the Maoist insurgency many years later.

The longstanding traditional and medicinal use of cannabis in Nepal is further corroborated by the state-run Singha Durbar Baidyakhana Bikas Samiti, one of the country's oldest Ayurvedic medicine producers. Bamshadip Sharma Kharel, cited by Mahat (2019), the managing director of Samiti explains: We possess traditional formulations dating back to the Malla era (13th century). Regrettably, we have not produced any marijuana-based medicines in the last 15-20 years due to a lack of raw materials. Our records indicate that marijuana was a vital component in remedies for medical conditions such as diarrhoea, sexual dysfunction, psychiatric issues, and as a general tonic".

As per the above Mercy Corps report, residents of the Rapti region - particularly in districts like Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan and Pyuthan - enjoyed prosperity before the ban, relying on abundant wild marijuana as a reliable cash crop. From the 1930s to 1970, the region prospered from stable income through marijuana cultivation, including exports of hashish and hemp to global market via India, even during the World War II. Locally, the plant was also used to make ropes and traditional costumes.

The report explains how the region's economic stability unravelled within 4 years of the 1976 ban, plunging communities into severe poverty and triggering widespread out-migration. The USAID's Rapti Development Program, which was offered as a sort of compensation for the marijuana ban, failed to provide an alternative source of income, hence turning the villages of the region into some of the poorest in the country (Mahat, 2019).

Nevertheless, the international market for cannabis is highly competitive. Ironically, the very countries that once pressured Nepal into banning the crop are now actively legalizing and decriminalizing it. However, these Western nations have to grow their plants in large-scale, climate-controlled greenhouses, due to their frequent subzero temperatures, driving up production costs appreciably. Nepal enjoys a clear natural advantage here. Its moderate climate and fertile soil allow for organic, outdoor cultivation at much lower cost and effort. Moreover, Purple Haze, a more potent type of marijuana which grows in the Himalayan region of Nepal, is extremely valuable and could be an important cash crop (Tamang, 2021).

If a national regulatory body is raised to oversee the cultivation and sale of cannabis for both medicinal and recreational purposes, Nepal has the potential of exporting high-quality products to overseas markets, attract foreign investment and create substantial employment opportunities in farming, processing and related industries. The government should introduce an active licensing regime to all the farmers and suppliers involved to curb potential misuse.

The long-held notion that cannabis serves as a "gateway drug" leading to harder substances has been debunked. On the contrary, it is an "exit drug", as controlled and prescribed marijuana use has proven to help people move away from substance abuse, including cigarette and alcohol addiction (Tamang, 2021).

Hence, we have sound scientific and cultural basis to believe that the UN will wake up to this newfound reality and move to legalize cannabis and actively promote its supervised cultivation worldwide. The plant's extensive medical, economic and industrial benefits are simply too significant to overlook any longer. In addition, our local and provincial governments could receive a share of the revenue generated from licensed production, further strengthening community-led development and also staving off any future conflicts or insurgencies based on popular discontent and economic marginalization.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

#### 5.1 Key Findings of the Study

The key findings of the current study may be divided into various relevant heads and discussed as follows:

##### 5.1.1 On the Major Reasons Behind the Popular Attraction to Marijuana Cultivation

1. Marijuana is a multi-use plant. Nothing goes to waste. Hemp seeds may be turned into spices and oil. The leaves, once decomposed, become a nutrient and organic manure. One respondent reported that the hemp stem is used in countries like Japan to make earth-quake resistant structures. It is also used to make paper and soundproof materials in the auditoriums.
2. Marijuana shares an indivisible bond with the indigenous ethnicities of western Nepal as it is so integral part of their everyday lives and culture. It is a matter of identity and financial self-reliance as well. Akin to apple for Mustang, paddy for Terai, cannabis and its products are synonymous for the westward population of Nepal.
3. The cannabis products are, in fact, prized for their economic, social and cultural relevance. The traders would reach doorsteps of locals to buy the produce. There was no problem for market or sales. Cannabis products could be stored for a long period time and are resistant to pests and insects.
4. The cannabis plant, from where the marijuana is derived, is a low-maintenance crop that needs no notable care or attention. No ploughing, tilling, irrigation or manure needed. No technical knowledge or big investment required. Even laymen and illiterate farmers may raise cannabis crops on their own.
5. Marijuana cultivation is favoured in the western hills of Nepal as it has got a suitable climate, soil and topography. One kg of hemp seeds still fetches two kgs of rice and one litre of cooking oil, thus highlighting its value in rural subsistence.
6. Staple crops like corn, barley, potatoes and millets are only for ensuring food security. However, marijuana brought instant money to the household coffers and at a lucrative scale also. Moreover, certain crops like paddy and wheat cannot be grown in the western foothills due to frigid climate. Besides, cannabis products have enormous export potential. It could be influential in raising the financial standards of local communities and transforming household and rural economies.

7. In the western highlands of Nepal, the peasants have to wait for months on end for other crops to ripen, due to the cold weather year-round. However, if they maintain marijuana for 6 months, it will support their livelihoods and expenditure needs for the next 6 months. The plants are not eaten by cattle, bear, porcupine or monkey that would ravage other crops.

8. Cannabis is a key to the utilization of barren lands. When the cannabis plantation was allowed until some 50 years ago, the fields used to be lush with vegetation, as reported by some local respondents, who were privy to the past developments. Now, most of these land plots are left high and dry.

### **5.1.2 On the Major Reasons Behind the Abrupt Government Ban on Marijuana Cultivation**

1. The global effort to regulate psychoactive substances originated mainly with opium, especially in the context of China, in the early 20th century. In the case of cannabis, several nations initially leaned toward regulation rather than outright prohibition. Although there was little agreement among participants at the initial drug conferences about incorporating cannabis into the regulatory framework, it was nevertheless included, particularly due to US pressure.

2. The WHO's expert committee never conducted a formal scientific assessment of cannabis to determine whether it satisfied the criteria for inclusion in the UN schedules of controlled substances. Still, under the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, cannabis was placed in the category of the most strictly controlled psychoactive substances, as having little or no recognized medical value.

3. Thus, cannabis first entered the realm of international control through the 1925 Geneva Convention, formally titled the Second International Opium Convention. Over the following years, countries that signed the agreement progressively enacted stricter national legislation to regulate the substance.

4. Once Nepal became a signatory to the Single Narcotics Convention of 1961 and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, it became mandatory for us to criminalize the production and consumption of items listed there as narcotics, and marijuana featured prominently in that list.

5. The Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act of 1976 draws a distinction between "medical cannabis" and "cannabis" by defining them in separate categories, yet both remain

classified under the broad umbrella of narcotics. Experts here question so what precisely qualifies here as medical cannabis? And if the Act explicitly labels it as "medical", why is it still branded a narcotic?

6. Observers attribute this inconsistency largely to the fact that the legislation was not shaped primarily by Nepal's own cultural practices, traditional uses or domestic requirements. Instead, many of them see the criminalization of marijuana plantation and consumption as predominantly an externally imposed measure, spearheaded by the US during President Richard Nixon's aggressive "War on Drugs" initiative, launched in 1971.

7. During the late 1960s and 70s, as western hippies journeyed along the overland trail to Nepal, they generated a thriving commercial market and drastically increased local demand for marijuana and hashish. Alarmed that Nepal was becoming a key supplier in the "global drug trade", and particularly worried that some young Americans were using the country as a haven to evade the Vietnam War draft, the US government exerted strong pressure on Nepal to enact tougher drug laws. It threatened to block all aid to Nepal emanating from the US if Nepal fails to heed to its demands, to which the then Panchayati government ultimately cowered.

8. In return for Nepal agreeing to enforce the marijuana ban, the US offered only modest and mostly indirect forms of support, such as encouraging the raising of substitute crops and funding select rural development projects. Even so, Nepali authorities showed considerable hesitation in applying the prohibition stringently. Although formal licensing arrangements for growing, buying and selling marijuana were terminated, actual enforcement against small-scale farmers and individual users remained notably tolerant at first.

9. Foreign scholars note that the Nepali government's stance towards cannabis and its produce became markedly stricter on 16 July 1973 when an ordinance was issued that effectively revoked all previously granted licenses for the cultivation, purchase and sale of marijuana. This enforcement action was further solidified in 1976 through the enactment of the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act.

10. The Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project (RIRD), having its head office in Tulsipur, Dang came soon after the ban was enforced in 1976 through the Anti-Narcotics Act, to shift people away from cannabis plantation to other legal enterprises

within their communities. However, it pulled its hands off after 15 years, thus leaving a development and livelihood void which the government could not fill.

11. As the Western powers, drove their pressure in countries like Nepal, due to concerns that their young population was quickly immersing into the hippie culture fuelled by rampant marijuana consumption, rather than being drafted into overseas wars like the Vietnam conflict, the then rulers had no other options but to oblige with their diktats. Thus, external pressure, spearheaded by the US, foreign intervention in law and policy-making, following the footsteps of India, China and Europe, etc. seem to be the compelling factor behind the enforcement of marijuana ban, despite the local rulers unwilling to do so. Submission to foreign influence rather than catering to national needs seems evidently visible here.

12. If the marijuana farming and business is set free, the then state authorities also feared that it would lead to ruckus and brawls in communities. Public health might deteriorate. Crimes and social violence might go up. There were also concerns of addiction and abuse among young adults.

13. There were reports that marijuana and hashish consumption led to a surge in crimes, family brawls, and social disorder. However, no plausible study or research has been made before initiating such a ban. It is a settled fact that most Ayurvedic medicines require marijuana to some extent in their making. We forgot this reality while banning it. Likewise, the impact of such ban on the economic prospects of locals was not factored in.

14. We were unaware of the merits and utility of marijuana beforehand. The good impacts of cannabis and its derivatives were explored worldwide only later on, especially after 2000. Back then, there was too little literature to back up the beneficial use of marijuana for the individuals, making the states defensive when forced to prohibit all forms of cannabis cultivation and trade.

### **5.1.3 On the Socio-Economic Impact Left by the Abrupt Ban on the Local Communities and Its Redressal Measures**

1. In course of fieldwork, many local informants reported that their economic condition was much better during the legalization period. Previously, their forefathers would exchange one kilo of hemp seeds, derived from marijuana, with two kilos of rice or a litre of cooking oil, a luxury considering the chilling climate unfavourable to

paddy or legumes farming. Thus, marijuana farming was essential to ensure food sovereignty.

2. The abrupt proscription of a legacy cash crop like cannabis has cast a detrimental impact. People would not have flocked abroad or in other inland cities for employment had they been allowed to grow marijuana in their farmlands and to become economically active citizens. Raising cereal crops such as millet and corn would not sustain families year-round. Thus, it has dealt a body blow to the rural economy.

3. Marijuana had been an important catalyst in the rural and family economy of the western hills. Hence, it is a matter of regulation rather than prohibition. The ban deprived the locals of a key and dependable source of income without offering any meaningful alternatives in return.

4. Today, it has become arduous for the villagers to earn hard cash as no other crop can grow here to an extent that it could offer adequate financial cushion. It also generated self-employment opportunities, thus lifting the burden off the government's head. Now, people have to migrate abroad or to inland cities just to eke out a living and fend for themselves.

5. As per global reports, the 1976 ban on marijuana cultivation, use and trade ultimately proved counterproductive for Nepal and its people. The severe economic distress it inflicted on vulnerable rural communities in the affected regions played a contributing role in igniting and sustaining the Maoist insurgency that broke out years later.

6. Even today, Nepal forfeits a substantial economic prospect by failing to capitalize on regulated marijuana cultivation and trade, an opportunity that could help replenish its dwindling foreign exchange reserves, if the government were willing to proceed with legalization.

7. Local and foreign studies have shown that before the 1976 ban, residents of Nepal's Rapti region experienced relative prosperity. They depended heavily on abundant and naturally-growing wild marijuana as a formidable cash crop. From the 1930s through the 1970s, the area enjoyed consistent income from cultivating and trading in marijuana, which included exporting hemp and other cannabis products to international markets, often routed through India.

8. This economic stability collapsed rapidly after the 1976 outright prohibition. Within just 4 years, the sudden loss of this key livelihood source drove widespread poverty across the affected villages and sparked a large-scale out-migration, as people sought work and income elsewhere.

9. The USAID-funded Rapti Development Program, introduced in part as compensation for the ban on marijuana, proved ineffective in delivering a viable alternative source of income. As a result, many communities in the region plunged into abject poverty.

10. Today, Nepali tourists come in the western highlands in droves and many of them ask for cannabis products. However, nobody there raises marijuana at a commercial scale. Farmers grow domesticated version of marijuana called as hemp only to meet their household needs of spices and medicines. They would earlier buy rice, lentils, oil, salt and sugar from the proceeds of marijuana sales, but not so today.

11. The proceeds raised from fast-selling marijuana and its derivatives were used to fund the education and marriages of children and healthcare of elders. The locals would also purchase lands, clear debts and build some savings from that reliable revenue stream. It also has a medicinal value. The locals use fried hemp seeds to cure common cold among humans and flu among the livestock. The fibre is used to weave different clothes and garments. Newar, Thakali and Madhesi Traders would flock the village from cities as far as Kathmandu, Pokhara, Butwal and purchase products from their doorsteps.

12. The funds and savings of local inhabitants have all but dried up. Hence, it also stirred the outbound migration and foreign employment trend, both documented and undocumented. Food insecurity has grown. Families are now saddled in debt and lack of financial options as traditional food crops would not generate that much of revenue, and are costly as well as laborious to raise also.

13. The prohibition was enforced primarily through force and coercion. Public concern and livelihood options were not considered. Most people transitioned to subsistence farming of foodgrains and animal husbandry. The government could not play a guardian role in this regard. Eventually, many farmers have turned from wild marijuana to domesticated hemp farming, with lesser benefits.

14. The ill-timed ban also induced food insecurity in the long run. It is because with other crops, food supply is guaranteed only for 6 months. They have to buy the rations for the next 6 months. Hostile geography and chilling climate do not allow for an abundant harvest. People lacked other skills to adopt an alternative mode of living.

15. The successive governments have only adopted a heavy-handed and restrictive approach. No single agency has been dedicated towards this cause. The RIRD Project did some work for the economic and social rehabilitation of past marijuana growers by offering them employment and training opportunities. It introduced other income skills such as weaving wool, raising sheep, weaving carpets and rugs, operating handlooms, etc. It also promoted the farming of other cash crops and hybrid livestock. However, as that Project phased out in the mid-1990s, no government program was introduced to take those works over.

16. One local respondent shared that faced with no better alternative, many locals have turned into selling liquor, both over and under the table. Alcoholic drinks worth around Rs. 4 lakhs are consumed in a single day in the Rukumkot town alone. Better, they would have consumed marijuana. At least that would be cheaper and less injurious.

17. Some local levels like the Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality have framed laws to regulate marijuana farming for domestic consumption purposes only in the form of hemp. However, dealing with hashish is still prohibited actively and for a good reason.

18. Most people do not bring up their grievances openly as many are farming marijuana discreetly. They fear that the secrecy will be blown if they become vocal with their resentments. The locals offer their written suggestions while framing the Rural Municipality level policies and programs. But there is less that the local representatives can do as it falls under the jurisdiction of federation, rather than the local levels.

19. Even in the past, not all households or communities were entirely dependent on marijuana farming or trade. As it grows only in highlands, people of lowlands were never reliant on the same. They have been growing staple crops such as paddy, wheat, potato, leafy vegetables, fruits, etc. instead.

#### 5.1.4 On the Alternatives the Local Communities Have Adopted to Offset the Negative Impacts of Ban

1. Post cannabis ban, many people turned towards traditional farming of cereal crops. However, they are vulnerable to the attacks of wildlife including bears, monkeys, boars and porcupines. Moreover, foreign employment and rural to urban migration has also surged manifold in search of better livelihood and income opportunities. The government tried to encourage the local growers toward apple and chilly farming by issuing their seeds and saplings, but this was only few and far between.

2. The government at first tried to diversify agriculture and encouraged farmers towards goats and cattle raising. Yesterday, sheep raising was popular which is now being replaced by rearing goats of a hybrid breed. Moreover, a few farmers have transitioned towards growing fruits such as apples, walnuts, oranges, lemons, etc. Other farmers tilted towards raising staple crops like corn, millet, wheat, potatoes, beans, buckwheat, soyabean, barley, etc. The hemp fibres are used to make a wide variety of clothes, ropes and outfits. Their ancestors also wore *dochas* (shoes) made of hemp fibre.

3. In the past, there was food scarcity in the study area as almost all farmers grew marijuana in their fields at the expense of other cereal crops. However, post prohibition, the trend was reversed. Now, people grow more cereal crops at the expense of a cash crop like marijuana. However, food security has not been secured still because the harsh climate and lack of irrigation facilities do not suit staple crops. So, they cannot be grown in quantity.

4. Post ban, the locals began raising corn and buckwheat in their distant fields, some 2 to 3 hours walk from their homes. Later, they began to grow them nearby. They have also tilted towards making organic paper (Nepali *lokta kagaz*) and Schezwan pepper (*timur*) plantation in the hilly slopes. Skills training such as tailoring, masonry and carpentry have also taken off. A good number of local farmers have shifted towards other economic activities such as weaving carpets and rugs and collecting *yarsagumba*, etc. However, a few of them also grow marijuana in a discreet manner, without assuming open ownership.

5. Previously, the locals would cultivate marijuana in nearby farms and other foodgrain crops far off. Whereas the produce of corn and potato rose, the output of

corn, buckwheat and barley dropped. Government and nongovernment organizations lent the locals training to farm tomatoes, cauliflowers, cabbages, leafy vegetables and apples. But these measures were too little and too late to offset the crippling losses induced by the abrupt marijuana ban.

6. Despite the presence of those alternatives, they were only marginally effective. A *pathi* (about 4 kgs) of corn fetches only Rs. 100. Considering the labour and cost of raising, this price is too modest. Hence, many farmers miss the economic surplus generated by cannabis plantation and the processing of its products.

### **5.1.5 On the Major Socioeconomic Changes and Challenges Introduced by the Ban**

The key socioeconomic changes and challenges introduced by the marijuana ban may be divided into the following segments for the sake of clarity and brevity:

**1. Financial Changes and Challenges:** Fall in household income and perpetuation of economic insecurity were seen. It has led to barren farmlands which would be lush with cannabis plantation until a few decades ago. The family economics has shaken badly pushing youth to cities and overseas. Now, shady marijuana deals are not made in homes or villages, but in jungles or ravines. Increase in underground deals and clandestine traders has been reported. Rise of middlemen with opaque dealings seems to be the new reality. The state is getting nothing in return. One informant revealed that once two marijuana porters were swept away when a makeshift wooden bridge (*Kathe Sanghu*), they were trying to cross over the Nisi River in Burtibang, Baglung snapped due to the heavy load of hashish that they were carrying on their backs in bamboo baskets (*doko*).

**2. Social Changes and Challenges:** There has been a simmering resentment from inside against the state establishment. There were altercations between the locals and enforcement officials during the earlier phase of implementation. Another respondent recalled the conflict and tension with the state authorities during the late 1970s, soon after the introduction of a new anti-narcotics law in 1976. When King Birendra paid a visit to Thabang in 1985, the then Maoist leader Burman Budha held his horse reins and submitted a written reminder seeking permission to grow marijuana as in the past. The ban later triggered rural to urban migration, foreign employment exodus and increasing depopulation in the villages. The state failed to generate enough employment opportunities. Yet, it also bans one of the key sources of rural livelihood. Women and children, Dalits and disabled were also able to make easy money without

compromising on their other daily duties. But the ban has taken off that opportunity also from them.

**3. Cultural Changes and Challenges:** Marijuana and its derivatives are identity markers in the daily lives of indigenous ethnicities in the western hills of Nepal. They are also consumed during popular Hindu festivals like the Maha Shiva Ratri and Fagu Purnima. Pickles, spices and chutneys are made from domesticated hemp seeds. Until a few decades ago, men and women would wear clothes and attires, primarily made from hemp fibre (*bhangra*). There were no textiles like polyester, nylon, Terri cotton back then.

**4. Health Changes and Challenges:** Marijuana and its byproducts have a great health dimension also. Fried hemp seeds are used to cure common cold, flu and rheumatism. They are also used to treat cold and infertility among the livestock. The hemp oil is used to massage newborn babies. Now, everything has become scarce and murky. Psychological fright of possible arrest and seizure also looms large. Locals are caught between the survival needs and fear of prosecution, thus eroding their mental health prospects.

#### **5.1.6 On the Connection between Marijuana Ban and Eruption of the Maoist Insurgency**

1. Our rulers fell prey to the harmful and unsustainable advice of foreign governments. As they warned that opening marijuana further would lead to a rise in crimes, blacklisting of country and blockade of foreign grants, the local rulers caved in. Marijuana farming had led to a self-reliant economy in the western hills of Nepal. Production of cannabis, marijuana and hemp brought rare financial resources to the otherwise disadvantaged households and communities. However, most of those benefits were removed from the scene following the sudden 1976 ban.

2. The RIRD Project was run in the 5 districts of Dang, Pyuthan, Rolpa, Rukum and Salyan of the erstwhile Rapti zone under USAID support and in collaboration with the then His Majesty's Government. Its head office was located in Tulsipur, Dang. It began around the FY of 1980/81, operated in phases, with its second phase launched in 1987. It involved technical assistance, infrastructure support and commodity procurement in its catchment areas. This Program was eventually phased out in 1995/96 upon having confirmation that the main goal of eradicating cannabis

cultivation has been met successfully. The phasing out also coincided with the eruption of Maoist armed struggle during the same timeframe.

3. A majority of respondents find a significant link between the prohibition and rise of Maoist movement. Marijuana farming and processing had created lucrative opportunities of self-employment. However, all that evaporated following the 1976 ban and subsequent crackdown. Consequently, public resentment gradually directed against the government and the Maoist leaders were able to rally the disgruntled masses behind them.

4. The local population was deprived of a tried and tested means of livelihood and income generation. As the marijuana ban was enforced, they had nothing to work for. Hence, that section of population got discontent with the state, which was mobilized by the Maoist leaders subsequently.

5. Public began to protest from around 1980 as bread and butter was being lost. Cash delivery into the locals' pockets was being cut off. The protest soon turned into disdain against the state and spurred anti-incumbency, which further fueled the Maoist insurgency when it broke out in 1996 and raged for the next 10 years.

6. Why is that the Maoist rebellion began only in the Rapti zone whereas there were more destitute and underdeveloped communities in Dolpa or Humla? It is because there was no marijuana cultivation in Dolpa or Humla, but it was a popular cash crop in Rolpa and Rukum. When Shankar Pokhrel was the Chief Minister of Lumbini province, he pledged at a Thabang program that he would try to decriminalize marijuana cultivation and trade, subject to certain conditions. However, nothing material has transpired afterwards.

7. During the fieldwork, 127 out of 150 respondents interviewed, making 85 percent of the total study population, noted that there has been a tangible and perceptible connection between marijuana ban and eruption of Maoist insurgency in western Nepal in the mid-1990s, thereby validating my hypothesis.

### **5.1.7 On the Role of the Marijuana Ban in Stoking the Maoist Conflict in Western Nepal**

1. Actually, marijuana cultivation and trade increased during the Maoist conflict period (1996-2006) under the cover of armed struggle as many villages were off-limits for most government agencies, creating an easy opening for such clandestine business.
2. The Maoist insurgents also made marijuana growing and trading one of their key sources of income, as evidenced by different domestic and foreign reports.
3. As the marijuana prohibition was enforced without adequate homework and offering alternative means of livelihood, the locals progressively gravitated towards the emerging Maoist struggle as they believed the government had deprived them of their key source of survival and economic assurance.
4. These initial sparks or protest and disgruntlement were later mobilized into the Maoist armed struggle. Even during the 10-year long insurgency, growing and trading in cannabis products did not cease. Rather, it created a conducive environment as the police personnel would not travel far beyond the urban centres.
5. During the fieldwork, 120 out of 150 respondents interviewed, making 80 percent of the total study population, observed that there has been a crucial or at least a partial role of marijuana ban in stoking the Maoist insurgency in western Nepal some 20 years later, thereby affirming my hypothesis.

### **5.1.8 On Whether the Marijuana Cultivation and Trade Should be Legalized Again**

1. A majority of informants agreed that the marijuana cultivation and trade should be legalized with certain terms and conditions, and with a robust monitoring framework. Limited marijuana consumption is a mainstay of our festivals and social events. It is a way of life as marijuana seeds are used as spice, medicine and animal feed, both for regular consumption as well as therapeutic purposes.
2. Lifting the ban will ultimately close the underground and opaque business that is enriching the dubious brokers and preventing the farmers from getting their fair share.

The government may collect billions of rupees in taxes and revenue, and consolidate the financial indicators of nation.

3. The rural economy of erstwhile Rapti zone was notably dependent on marijuana cultivation and its trade. Hence, legalizing it could check the unrestricted flow of people under foreign labour migration - both legal and illegal. It may also control rural to urban migration in the hilly districts. Even the workers from Nepal toiling abroad may return to their homes, if we are to free marijuana farming.

4. If the cannabis cultivation is to be legalized, the local industries and supply systems may also flourish. Its farming should be brought under tax and monitoring regime. Self-employment opportunities shall abound. There are more opportunities with fewer risks. The local climate and soil are also conducive to marijuana cultivation, more so than any other cash crop.

5. If open, at least there will be fair price for the growers and transparent deals. Nepal's marijuana is preferred in global markets because it grows in western Nepali highlands and is considered of being pure, tasteful and of top quality compared to the foreign or Terai-based species. Foreign brands, despite being substandard to Nepali produce, are flooding the global markets. Then, why not reap that opportunity for ourselves? If we could brand our cannabis products and send them to foreign markets under the Himalayan brand, then it might usher in an endless stream of foreign reserves.

6. If done so, the local, provincial and national economies shall also get stimulus. People are consuming substandard foreign marijuana brands. So, why not promote our own pure and high-quality produce here and abroad? Meanwhile, we should also be wary towards the possible misuse in the form of hashish production and consumption.

7. Despite the official ban, the consumers are consuming it, the growers are growing it and the sellers are selling it discreetly. Better we legalize it and bring things to light. An underground business will be more detrimental to the societal interests than a transparent one.

8. Cannabis is the easiest crop to grow. One can sow the seeds in May and harvest it in October. In many places like Gurja of Myagdi and Taka of East Rukum, one does not need to plant a cannabis plant. It simply grows on its own. The locals travel to India to cultivate the same marijuana. So, why not allow them here? It also has an enormous

export potential, creating jobs galore and introducing lush foreign reserves. The barren farmlands may be green again if marijuana farming is to be permitted. Production and consumption of hashish should be sternly checked however.

9. Some respondents also noted that in their villages, they have treated some Corona patients through hemp seeds and oil during the 2020 pandemic. If the marijuana trade were open, then even the women, elderly, minors and disabled could have made their living on their own, without compromising on their other routine commitments. Hence, it is a missed opportunity for them.

10. Clothes, soaps and oils are being made from marijuana which are adored by the youth and elderly alike. The oil is sold at a whopping price of Rs. 10 thousand per litre. The cannabis plant exudes a lot of oxygen. Hence, opening it is better for the environmental cause also.

11. Legalizing marijuana might work as a catalyst in lifting thousands of rural families up from the poverty line. It might stimulate the local economy in a big way, bringing cash and comfort to thousands of households. Wild marijuana produce is already rotting out. If allowed to harvest and utilize, it would work wonders on the individuals and communities alike. The medicinal use of marijuana is widely understated. It is used as a potent medicine for curing typhoid, common cold, rheumatism, etc. and its oil is prized for massaging newborn babies.

12. The legislation part should be dealt with the federation while the implementation part should be totally devolved to the local and provincial levels. When the Thabang Rural Municipality tried to frame bye-laws on marijuana regulation, the effort had to be aborted as it came into conflict with the federal narcotics law. The bye-laws were intended to regulate the cultivation and processing of hemp seeds. However, as it is much difficult to separate hemp seeds from other wild cannabis seeds, they are in a fix now.

13. People should learn using it as a spice or medicine and not as an addiction. Marijuana tourism will be the next big thing. Many western countries which banned marijuana earlier are now gradually opening the market. So, Nepal should also not fall behind.

14. When liquor, cigarettes and tobacco are being consumed unabatedly, then what is the point in banning marijuana which is far more cultural, healthful and an integral component of highland culture? Even below-the-counter marijuana trade is going unchecked. Many people believe that cigarette manufacturers pushed for banning marijuana deeming it as a direct competition to their sales.

15. As reported by a few informants in course of field study, a single plant of wild marijuana is being sold at Rs. 5 to 6 thousand. A stick of marijuana costs Rs. 200 now. If made legal, then the price will go down, abuse can be detected and the farmers as well as consumers will get a fair price. The neighbouring Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand permit the selected farmers to grow marijuana having a certain element or compound. This practice is imitable here also.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

In 1976, under international pressure, especially from the US as part of the global "War on Drugs," the Nepali government outlawed the cultivation, production, and trade of marijuana. This unprecedented ban was implemented with little consideration for its socioeconomic consequences, particularly in the impoverished rural areas like Rolpa, Rukum, Myagdi, Baglung and other parts of the mid-western hills. The impacts of the prohibition have been profound. It not only disrupted a major source of income for rural farmers, pushing many into abject poverty, but also with limited access to alternative markets, the farmers faced falling living standards.

The state's failure to provide alternative livelihoods or compensate for the loss of marijuana income led to widespread resentment. This indifference underscored the perception of a government insensitive to the plight of rural populations. The loss of marijuana cultivation intensified existing vulnerabilities, such as food insecurity and lack of access to basic infrastructure like roads, schools, and healthcare facilities. All these conditions created fertile ground for popular dissent, manifested in the form of a violent leftist uprising.

The Maoist insurgency, which broke out in 1996, drew heavily on the discontent of rural populations in western Nepal. The Maoists cadres capitalized on the economic frustrations of marginalized communities and framed the government's marijuana ban as an example of Kathmandu's usurpation and disregard for rural interests. By

pledging economic justice and land reforms, the Maoists attracted sizeable support among those let down by the prohibition.

The enforcement of marijuana ban further estranged rural communities from the central government. Many perceived these state authorities as punitive and extractive rather than supportive, creating an opportune environment for anti-state rhetoric. The mid-western hill districts, especially Rolpa and Rukum, became the epicentre of Maoist armed struggle. These regions had been economically hamstrung by the marijuana ban and were already suffering from state inattention. The rugged terrain also offered a strategic advantage for hit-and-run style guerrilla warfare. The cannabis ban was largely influenced by international anti-drug campaigns, especially from the US under its relentless "War on Drugs" campaign that was declared in 1971. This external pressure showed how global policies could have inadvertent local consequences, disproportionately hurt the vulnerable communities and destabilize the already fragile regions. The ban brought to the fore, the disconnect between international priorities and local realities, further sparking anti-globalization and anti-establishment sentiments among the Maoist leaders and their rural support base.

In fact, the ban of marijuana cultivation in western Nepal imparts crucial lessons about the undesirable outcomes of top-down policymaking, especially in fragile, far-flung regions. The marijuana ban failed to consider the explicit economic realities of rural Nepal altogether. All development policies have to be tailored to the needs of local populations to avoid worsening existing vulnerabilities. When transitioning from one economic activity to another, governments must offer viable alternatives and ample preparation time to prevent economic collapse and social unrest. The 10-year-long Maoist violence in Nepal underscores how economic deprivation and state indifference can usher in armed rebellion, particularly when there is a persuasive ideological framework, such as Maoism, to channel discontent.

The abrupt ban, enacted in a haste without any organized homework or transition time, led to the forthright economic destabilization of many rural households. With marijuana being one of the few viable cash crops available to these communities, its ban essentially removed a key source of steady income. Farmers who had been depending on this crop since generations faced financial ruin, pushing them deeper into abject poverty. Many struggled to find alternative livelihoods while the absence

of government support or workable alternatives further compounded their economic difficulties.

The immediate downturn of the prohibition was widespread economic decline in the affected areas. Farmers began to face increased poverty levels, reduced purchasing power, and, subsequently, diminished living standards. With limited access to alternative crops that could ensure similar income, many families experienced acute financial hardships. This economic marginalisation served as a fertile ground for resentment against the state establishment. The government's swift and inflexible enforcement of the ban fostered a sense of alienation among the rural populace. Many locals saw the prohibition as an arbitrary imposition by a distant government, which failed to appreciate or address their unique needs and circumstances. This disconnection was further provoked by the lack of state investment in development initiatives for these sidelined communities.

The Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) successfully rallied this discontent against the government, positioning themselves as guardians of peasant interests. They argued that the prohibition was not only a transgression on traditional farming practices but also a symptom of a larger system of subjugation and inequality imposed by the elite urban powers. The narrative of resistance struck a chord with those who felt shortchanged by the state. The ban on cannabis cultivation was emblematic of a larger pattern of political neglect vis-à-vis the rural, agrarian issues in Nepal. The state's failure to provide adequate support or development initiatives contributed to a pervasive sense of exclusion among the rural peasantry. The Maoist movement capitalized on public complaints stemming from marijuana ban by highlighting the state's role in perpetuating rural poverty and disengagement. The loss of livelihood was framed as part of broader systemic exploitation under a feudal, extractive and semi-colonial regime.

By lobbying for land reforms, redistribution of wealth, and the protection of traditional practices, the Maoists situated themselves as champions of rural, underserved communities. This narrative resonated strongly with those who had suffered economically and culturally due to the ban.

Similarly, international drug control policies, especially from the Western nations, often fail to take into account the local contexts that they are going to impact. In

Nepal, the imposition of these measures disrupted local economies without providing genuine solutions or livelihood support, exemplifying how external influences can perpetuate internal conflicts. In many parts of western Nepal, specifically in remote and underdeveloped regions, the cultivation of marijuana had long been a traditional and staple source of income for the farmers. It was especially valuable in areas with limited access to markets and other alternative cash crops.

Marijuana cultivation also has profound cultural and historical roots in many parts of Nepal, especially the western hills and among the tribes of Mongolian origin such as the Kham Magars and Chhantvals. Its ban was perceived not only as an economic loss but also as a form of cultural imposition by an external authority, furthering discontent against the state.

Though the prohibition of cannabis cultivation was not the sole cause of the Maoist conflict in western Nepal, it served as a vital trigger that exacerbated existing socio-economic inequalities and political resentment. By depriving marginalized communities of their livelihoods without offering viable alternatives, the state inadvertently fuelled discontent and revolt, which the Maoists adeptly harnessed. This issue highlights the importance of understanding local economic practices and grievances in the context of broader structural inequalities while addressing conflict or fostering development.

Amid this backdrop, the mid-western highlands of Nepal offer remarkably suitable agro-climatic conditions for cannabis cultivation. The local communities and leaders have actively lobbied for legal permission to grow the crop, arguing that regulated production could create jobs, foster industrial development and drive broader economic progress through controlled domestic use and harnessing export markets.

Nepal's mid-western hills produce some of the world's top-quality marijuana, widely celebrated for its exceptional purity and taste. For this reason, cannabis is frequently dubbed as the "green gold" in recognition of its significant untapped economic value. The national budget for the FY of 2023/24 included measures to study the viability of cannabis farming, with a special focus on its medicinal applications. However, nothing material transpired from the announcement.

That being said, permitting legal marijuana cultivation in Nepal demands more than amendments to the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act, 1976. The government would also

need to file a formal application to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), in order to reconcile domestic policy changes with Nepal's obligations under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961.

Quite ironically, many of the same Western countries that once pressured Nepal to ban cannabis cultivation are now moving toward full legalization of the plant. Still, these nations face major climatic limitations: their harsh, cold environments require large-scale energy-intensive indoor greenhouses with controlled conditions, which markedly inflate the production costs. By contrast, Nepal holds a distinct natural edge. Its temperate climate, copious sunshine and rich, fertile soils allow for low-cost, organic outdoor cultivation with minimal inputs and effort.

Further, the Himalayan strains grown in Nepal, especially the famous Purple Haze variety, known for its exceptional potency and distinctive qualities, fetch high value on global markets. If correctly regulated, this could emerge as one of Nepal's most profitable and sustainable cash crops.

Similarly, the longstanding belief that cannabis acts as a "gateway drug" driving the users toward harder narcotics has been thoroughly discredited through modern research. In fact, a growing body of evidence positions it as an "exit drug". When used in controlled and monitored settings, marijuana has helped individuals lessen or remove dependence on more harmful substances, such as tobacco, cigarettes and alcohol.

This corpus of scientific evidence, fused with centuries of cultural acceptance in many societies worldwide, lends a strong impetus for expecting the UN to ultimately recognize this emerging consensus. The world body could then take measures to reclassify cannabis, remove it from the strictest schedules of control, and support regulated global cultivation. The cannabis plant affords far-reaching advantages that are growingly difficult to ignore. These benefits include, among others, proven therapeutic applications in medicine, extensive revenue potential through legitimate trade, and varied industrial uses ranging from textiles and construction materials to biofuels and food products.

Moreover, by creating a transparent licensing and taxation regime, Nepal could outlay a meaningful portion of the revenue generated directly to local and provincial governments. This would empower community-driven development initiatives,

upgrade rural infrastructure and services, and help address underlying grievances concerning economic exclusion. These steps would go a long way in diminishing the risk of future social unrest or insurgent movements grounded in poverty and marginalization.

### **5.3 Key Suggestions**

Certain suggestions may be drawn from the findings and conclusion derived above which may be useful not only for policy reforms but also for conducting future inquests into this area. So, they may be correspondingly divided into inputs for reforms and interventions, and for future research purposes, as follows:

#### **5.3.1 Policy Suggestions**

1. The federal government should proceed with removing the cannabis plant and its produce, except hashish, from the negative list of Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act, 1976. It should frame another set of law to legalize and regularize the plantation, processing and trade in cannabis products, save for the hashish output. Laws should be remodelled in tune with the growing world trend of opening marijuana to recreational and medicinal use.
2. Experts point out that permitting cannabis cultivation is more complex than the recent budget statements might imply. Nepal has fully committed to the provisions of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs without lodging any reservations in contrast to certain other nations like Canada who acceded to the Convention with an explicit condition that it reserves the right to allow marijuana use for medical purposes.
3. The government should also correspond to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) expressing its reservation to include cannabis and its products, other than hashish, in Schedule-I, which places them on par with other high-risk drugs like opium and heroin. Instead, Nepal should push to list it under a milder Schedule-IV, which allows for a regulated cultivation and processing thereof.
4. Then, through a scientific on-site study, the potential areas fit for cannabis production should be designated together with their area, climate and topography. The composition of two compounds of THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (Cannabidiol) found in cannabis should be determined in advance. While the THC is chiefly responsible for the psychoactive (intoxicating) effects of the cannabis plant,

the CBD is recognized for its relaxing, calming properties without causing inebriation. Since the risk of abuse or dependence is typically associated with higher THC levels relative to CBD, commercial cannabis farming should prioritize cultivation of strains rich in CBD and low in THC, while eliminating or excluding plants with a significant THC content. Later, pocket areas for cannabis cultivation should be designated together with their 4 boundaries, and no plantation of the crop should be permitted elsewhere.

5. If the marijuana business is made open with proper oversight, then much of the anomaly associated with its consumption and trade will fade away. Any illegal and unauthorized output should be quickly impounded. Marijuana cultivation should be allowed to farmer groups, private companies and cooperatives rather than to natural persons so as to better ensure compliance and supervision, and the produce may be bought by the local levels by way of competitive bidding. The local levels may then sell the output in markets where there is demand for such products.

6. Our focus should be on regularization rather than prohibition. We should encourage who utilize marijuana and its derivatives in a productive way and censor those who misuse them. Laws and policies should be remodelled to that end. Both medicinal and recreational marijuana should be permitted with suitable controls.

7. Public awareness should be raised on the merits and demerits of marijuana cultivation and trade. Local levels may play a meaningful role in this process. They may provide manure, subsidies, seed plants, training, financial and technical support to the prospective farmers.

8. It is essential to detach marijuana business from the business of hashish. If so done, then we need not fear about the marijuana part. Various ethnic outfits and coats, pants, shoes, socks, caps, bags and scarfs are also produced by the locals from cannabis parts with little investment and technology, and they are in high demand. There is no empirical proof that marijuana leads to addiction among young adults. Instead, it is found as per the latest researches to be an "exit drug" unlike an "entry drug" like opium or cocaine.

9. In India, the government itself lends seeds to the farmers who grow marijuana in designated zones or pocket areas. Later, the government itself buys the produce and makes its use as it deems fit. Such a model may be emulated in our case as well. The

enforcement officials may be strict during the hashish harvesting time during October/November. In other months, the cannabis plant does not release the resin (*chob*) which is the main precursor to hashish. Hence, we can be rest assured in other times.

10. A litre of marijuana oil costs around Rs. 10,000 in big cities. However, it is sold locally at Rs. 2,000 only. So, in order to really enrich the actual growers and offer quality goods to the consumers at a fair price, legalization with certain standards remains the only option. We should be harsh on hashish production, but be permissive towards other cannabis derivatives.

11. Public discourse and engagement should be carried out on the ill impacts of overdose of cannabis products. The local levels should issue recommendations and permits for land utilization within their geography to be meant for marijuana farming. Suitable policies and procedures should be framed in this regard by the provincial and local levels. Ample subsidies and guarantee of minimum price for cannabis products, other than hashish, should be offered.

12. Cannabis plantation should be permitted in a parcel of land tenure while dividing other segments to grow staple crops like millet and corn, as well as fruits and vegetables. If we grow marijuana together with other species, then it not only brings cash to the households, but also removes the threat of other regular crops being dominated or eliminated by the same.

13. The government should commission an independent inquiry to look at the pros and cons of allowing marijuana farming. It should issue separate permits for farming, collection, processing and selling purposes. Nepal can promote its own Himalayan brand of marijuana and promote it overseas where there is a ripe market for the same. India has already registered patent of the local cannabis species typically grown in Nepal and India. Hence, we should not lose time in registering patent of other species of cannabis which are available in our hills and plains before time runs out.

14. If Nepal establishes a dedicated national regulatory authority to govern the cultivation, processing and sale of cannabis for both medicinal and recreational use, the country stands to gain significantly. To prevent misuse, diversion into illicit channels or unchecked overproduction, the government should activate a robust and transparent licensing system. This would cover all participating farmers, cooperatives,

processors, distributors and suppliers, ensuring strict compliance, traceability, quality control and adherence to national and international standards.

15. The efforts of Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality may be considered as a model in this connection. In January 2025, the Rural Municipality framed and passed An Act for the Conservation and Management of Hemp Related Products, soon followed by its Rules. This legislation might be the first of its kind across Nepal. The preamble of the Act speaks of conserving, producing, management and marketing of the hemp-based products and to bar the production and use of hashish and other undesirable organic drugs. Designation of separate areas for hemp cultivation based on soil, climate, water resources and other natural resources, permits for hemp plantation, processing and industrial use of hemp products, market management and distribution system of those outputs, exports management and the special use of hemp-based products form the key provisions of this Act. Likewise, the Act also provides for a Hemp-Related Products Conservation and Management Committee at the Rural Municipality level led by its Chairperson, and having multisectoral representation to oversee the conservation and management aspects of hemp produce inside its jurisdiction. Other local levels with cannabis potential should also follow this lead.

16. Domestic and foreign markets for cannabis products should be meticulously explored. Everything should be run as per a structured system. Illegal cannabis products are already flooding our streets. Then, why cannot we bring our own organic produce to the market and create an income stream out of it? We should fix the minimum age for marijuana consumption, preferably at 21. The collection and sales points should also be determined in advance.

17. Today, Nepal is going through a rough patch economically. Hence, rather than banning it altogether, the enormous potential of marijuana should be exploited in our favour. Export and marketing of cannabis produce should be regulated. Collection and processing centres should be established. The facilitation part should be looked after by the local levels, the law and policy part by the federal government and the enforcement part by the police.

18. Nepal experienced many political revolutions but not a single economic revolution. Marijuana farming could be a driver of such revolution. It is a "green gold" for us if employed well. However, proper tracking should be done from the

cultivation to the consumption stage. How much of marijuana is produced, how much is used and how much is left, there should be an inventory for everything that changes hands.

### **5.3.2 Suggestions for Future Researches**

Nepal's attachment with marijuana is deeply entwined with its cultural heritage, yet marked by a strict prohibition since the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act of 1976, enacted under foreign and especially the US pressure. This inorganic ban outlawed its cultivation, possession and trafficking outright. Still, enforcement for minor quantities is lax during festivals like Maha Shiva Ratri where cannabis use is said to pay homage to the Lord Shiva.

In 2024, the government publicised plans to legalize medicinal cultivation, signalling potential reform. But as of 2026, nothing novel is introduced amid ongoing debates in economic benefits versus social risks. Today, there seems to be a near undivided political consensus for reopening marijuana cultivation, processing and trade subject to certain preconditions. However, the police and bureaucracy seem to be suspicious of the same, citing law and order and addiction risks.

In this light, future researchers have to prioritize Nepal-specific studies to direct evidence-based policies, addressing gaps in long-term effects on culture, economy, community and society. In economic terms, prohibition has stifled a vast, untapped potential. Prior to the 1976 ban, cannabis was a lucrative cash crop growing effortlessly in hilly regions, supporting livelihoods and local economies until the ban induced mass poverty, out-migration, and even contributed to socio-political unrest like the Maoist insurgency.

Timely legalization could generate huge tax revenue, create jobs and infrastructure in agriculture and tourism, and cut trade deficits through export of hemp and medical products, possibly boosting the GDP and per capita in a low-income nation like ours. Nonetheless, risks also include market oversaturation and unequal benefits favouring the urban elites.

As such, future researchers should undertake longitudinal analyses of revenue allocation, comparing pre-and post-reform scenarios, across the aforesaid parameters. Whereas legalization might reduce trade in the black-market, it could also increase accessibility, raising concerns over youth imitation and addiction. Legalization could

also revive Ayurvedic medicine and festival tourism, promoting cultural identity while attracting global visitors nostalgic for Nepal's hippie-era legacy.

Researchers are also expected to investigate evolving attitudes through media analysis and surveys, probing how global shifts influence local practices, both for prohibition and permission. Hence, any future academic study on marijuana, its ban and allowance from a sociological perspective is required to shine light on certain key issues and debates, including:

- i) Cultural preservation versus commodification: Effects of legalization on traditional Hindu practices involving marijuana.
- ii) Racial and ethnical disparities in the implementation of marijuana ban in western Nepal.
- iii) Longitudinal health outcomes of cannabis use among the youth after legalization in the Himalayan regions.
- iv) Environmental sustainability of large-scale cannabis plantation on the Nepal's alpine ecosystem.
- v) Tourism prospects from reviving Nepal's hippie-era cannabis heritage under controlled frameworks.
- vi) Intergenerational effects of the 1976 ban on family structures and community cohesion in the former cultivation belts.
- vii) Gender dynamics in marijuana use and abuse among the Nepali households under prohibition and potential reforms.
- viii) Comparative study of Nepal's medical legalization with Thailand's model on public health metrics.
- ix) The case between medicinal marijuana and recreational marijuana and the socio-cultural implications of both of them.
- x) Social equity in licensing: Efficacy of programs for indigenous farmers in the marijuana pockets of western Nepal.
- xi) Cultural shifts in media depictions of marijuana use before and after the repeal of prohibition.

xii) Ecological impacts of large-scale cannabis cultivation on local communities in Nepal's Terai region, etc.

By handling these potential themes, future social science researchers may steer equitable, evidence-based reforms that allay harms while harnessing the benefits. Empirical studies with ample fieldwork seem worthwhile on discovering evolving attitudes, media illustrations and intergenerational effects in apprising these global societal shifts.

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**ANNEXURE**

Annex-1

**Interview Schedule (A)**

**To be filled by the local inhabitants and former marijuana cultivators**

Interview Schedule No:	Name/Codename of the Respondent:
Filled on (Date):	Gender:
Address/Location:	Age:

**Section A: Objective Questions (Tick the appropriate option)**

**1. What is your primary occupation?**

- Agriculture
- Animal husbandry
- Wage labour
- Other (Specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

**2. How long have you been living in this region?**

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

**3. Have you ever been involved in marijuana cultivation?**

- Yes
- No

**4. Do you believe the prohibition of marijuana cultivation has impacted your livelihood?**

- Yes, significantly
- Somewhat
- No impact Unsure
- Unsure

**5. How would you rate the government's support for alternative**

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Poor

## **Section B: Open-Ended Questions**

6. Can you describe how marijuana cultivation influenced your economic condition before the prohibition?
7. What were the main reasons for engaging in marijuana cultivation prior to its prohibition?
8. How has the prohibition of marijuana cultivation affected your household's financial stability?
9. What alternatives did you or others in your community adopt after the prohibition?
10. How effective were these alternatives in sustaining your livelihood?
11. Did the prohibition on marijuana cultivation lead to any significant social changes in your community? If yes, please elaborate.
12. How did local authorities enforce the prohibition on marijuana cultivation?
13. Were there any conflicts between farmers and the authorities during the enforcement? If yes, what were the main causes?
14. What role, if any, did the Maoist conflict play in shaping farmers' reactions to the prohibition?
15. Do you think the prohibition contributed to increased support for the Maoist movement? Why or why not?
16. How did the prohibition affect women and marginalized groups in your community?
17. What were the key challenges faced by your community during the prohibition period?
18. Do you feel that marijuana cultivation should be legalized again? Why or why not?
19. What would be your suggestions to policymakers regarding balancing prohibition and livelihood sustainability?
20. Do you have any additional thoughts or experiences related to the prohibition, its enforcement, or its impacts on your community?

Thanks for your time and cooperation. The privacy of your responses shall be adequately ensured.

Annex-2

**Interview Schedule (B)**

**To be filled by the local level officials and law enforcement authorities**

Interview Schedule No:	Name/Codename of the Respondent:
Filled on (Date):	Gender:
Address/Location:	Age:

**Section A: Objective Questions (Tick the appropriate option)**

**1. What is your current role in relation to policy-making or law enforcement?**

- Policymaker
- Law enforcement officer/Administrator
- Local level official
- Other (Specify:                    )

**2. How long have you been involved in this role?**

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

**3. Were you directly involved in the implementation of the marijuana prohibition?**

- Yes
- No

**4. How do you perceive the effectiveness of the prohibition policy?**

- Highly effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not effective

**5. Did you witness any increase in conflicts or tensions after the prohibition was enacted?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

## **Section B: Open-Ended Questions**

6. What were the main reasons behind the prohibition of marijuana cultivation in Western Nepal?
7. How was the policy on marijuana prohibition communicated to the local population?
8. What measures were taken to ensure the prohibition was effectively enforced?
9. What challenges did you or your team face during the implementation of the prohibition?
10. How did local farmers respond to the prohibition when it was first introduced?
11. Were any alternative livelihood programs introduced for the affected farmers? If yes, how effective were they?
12. Did you observe any connection between the prohibition and the rise of the Maoist movement in this region?
13. How did law enforcement handle instances of resistance or non-compliance by farmers?
14. Were there any efforts to address grievances raised by the farmers during or after the prohibition?
15. What role did local political or social leaders play in the enforcement or resistance to the prohibition?
16. Do you think the prohibition policy unintentionally contributed to the growth of the Maoist movement? Why or why not?
17. What strategies were adopted to mitigate the economic impacts of the prohibition on local communities?
18. How did the prohibition affect the overall socio-political stability of the region?
19. In your opinion, was the prohibition policy implemented fairly and equitably across all communities? Why or why not?
20. What lessons can be learned from the prohibition policy to inform future decision-making on similar issues?

Thanks for your time and cooperation. The privacy of your responses shall be adequately ensured.

**Focus Group Discussion Form**

**Study Title:** Prohibition on Marijuana Cultivation and Its Role in Sparking the Maoist Conflict in Western Nepal: A Sociological Inquiry

**1. Participant Information**

- Date:
- Time:
- Location:

**Participant Details:**

- Name (optional):
- Age:
- Gender:
- Occupation:
- Education Level:
- Area of Residence (District/Village):

**Group Composition:**

- Total Number of Participants:
- Gender Distribution:
- Occupation Distribution:
- Ethnicity/Caste Distribution:

**2. Objectives of the FGD**

- The primary purpose of this discussion is to understand:
- The impact of marijuana cultivation prohibition on local livelihoods.
- Perceived links between the prohibition and the escalation of the Maoist conflict.
- Socio-cultural, economic, and political implications of the prohibition in Western Nepal.
- Possible solutions and recommendations for addressing grievances related to the prohibition.

**3. Discussion Guidelines**

- The discussion is confidential, and your identities will remain anonymous.
- There are no right or wrong answers -everyone's opinion is valuable.

- Respect other's viewpoints and allow everyone an opportunity to speak.
- The session might be audio-recorded for accuracy, with your consent.

#### **4. Key Discussion Themes**

- A. Socioeconomic Impact of Marijuana Prohibition
- B. Linkages to the Maoist Conflict
- C. Governmental Policies and Enforcement
- D. Socio-cultural Dimensions
- E. Recommendations and Way Forward

#### **5. Notes and Observations (To be filled by the facilitator)**

- General mood and tone of the discussion:
- Key points raised by participants:
- Observations on group dynamics:

Facilitator's Name:

Facilitator's Signature:

**Field Notes**

**Study Title:** Prohibition on Marijuana Cultivation and Its Role in Sparking the Maoist Conflict in Western Nepal: A Sociological Inquiry

**1. Basic Information**

- Date of Observation:
- Time of Observation:
- Location (District/Village):

**2. Context and Setting Description of the Environment:**

- Physical environment (e.g., rural, urban, agricultural, mountainous, etc.):
- Weather conditions:
- Key features of the area (e.g., government presence, visible economic activities):

**Demographics of the Area:**

- Approximate population characteristics (e.g., caste, ethnicity, age groups):
- Main economic activities observed:

**General Observations:**

- Community mood or tone (e.g., cooperative, tense, indifferent):
- Any visible signs of activism or conflict related to marijuana cultivation or prohibition:

**3. Observations of Activities**

**Description of Key Events:**

- Activities observed (e.g., farming, trading, local meetings):
- Specific mentions of marijuana cultivation or its prohibition

**Interactions Observed:**

- Interactions among community members:
- Interactions between community members and local authorities:
- Notable mentions of Maoist influence or activities:

**4. Interviews and Conversations**

**Summary of Informal Conversations:**

- Individuals spoken to (use codes for anonymity, e.g., Participant A, B, etc.):
- Key statements or opinions shared:
  - On marijuana cultivation and its historical significance:
  - On the prohibition and its impacts:

- On connections to the Maoist conflict:

**Reactions and Emotions Noted:**

-Visible emotions during conversations (e.g., frustration, nostalgia, anger):

**5. Reflections and Insights Personal Reflections:**

- What stood out the most about the observation?
- Surprises or contradictions observed:
- Preliminary interpretations of findings:

**6. Challenges and Limitations**

- Barriers faced during observation (e.g., language, access issues):
- Possible biases or influences affecting the observations:

Observer's Name:

Observer's Signature:

Annex-5

**Photographs of the fieldwork and other phenomena**



(Primary data collection with the local participants at Niseldhor, Baglung)



(Research associate Ms. Aakriti Chaulagain interacting with a female respondent in Lulang, Myagdi)



(With a local guide while trekking from Gurjakhani to Gurjaghat in course of fieldwork)



(A local artisan at work in the Taka village of East Rukum)



(After filling interview schedules with Mr. Bishnu Prasad Sharma, Chief Executive Officer and other officials at the Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality, Myagdi)



(Research associate Ms. Supriya Aryal interacting with an elderly respondent in Lulang, Myagdi)



(After collecting primary data from the Ward Chairperson of Gurja, Myagdi and other informants)



(Upon interacting with the officials of Dhorpatan Wildlife Reserve at Niseldhor, Baglung)



(Conversing with a local entrepreneur in Dhorpatan, Baglung)



(Self-grown cannabis thicket in Niseldhor, Baglung)



(Research associates eliciting first-hand information from elderly females in Gurja, Myagdi)



(Filling the fieldnotes in Niseldhor, Baglung)



(An elderly local carrying plough to till the farmlands in Sera village of East Rukum)



(Locals moving on horsebacks in Dhorpatan, Baglung)



(A local woman in Sera village of East Rukum clad in traditional attire)



(Risky local transportation in the villages of East Rukum)



(Upon interacting with the officials at the Thabang Rural Municipality, Rolpa)



(A heap of cannabis fibre useful for making ropes and cloths seen in Thabang, Rolpa)



(A local woman threading from sheep's wool in Sera, East Rukum)



(A makeshift house with wooden tiles roof in Thabang, Rolpa)



(Corn being dried in the houses of Thabang, Rolpa)



(Interacting with a college faculty in Libang, Rolpa)



(Upon conversing with the Chairperson of Sisne Rural Municipality, East Rukum)



(Upon interacting with the Deputy Mayor of Rolpa Municipality)



(Police party destroying illegal cannabis plantation in Makwanpur district. Source: Nepali Times weekly of 13.01.2021)



(A cannabis plant. Source: cannabisstraininguniversity.com)