

**EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-ALTITUDE CLIMBING GUIDES
FROM MAGAR COMMUNITY IN NEPAL**

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For the Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts (MA) in Rural Development



Submitted by

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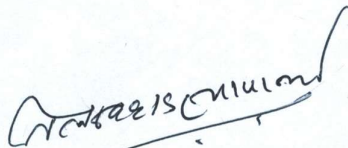
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I certify that the thesis entitled "**EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-ALTITUDE CLIMBING GUIDES FROM MAGAR COMMUNITY IN NEPAL**" is my own work, undertaken with the guidance and supervision of my supervisor.

This thesis has not been previously submitted to any university or institution for the award of any degree or academic qualification. Except to the extent of the work that has been referred to in the text, the writing herein has been prepared by myself. I will therefore refer to all academic sources for the information in this study, providing appropriate citations as well as including these sources in the reference section.

I affirm that all of this work was carried out according to accepted research guidelines and ethical principles. Respect is also given to the assistance and support I have received during the construction of the thesis. I accept responsibility for the contents of this thesis.



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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This is to certify that Mr. Tilak Bahadur Thapa Magar has completed the thesis entitled "**EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-ALTITUDE CLIMBING GUIDES FROM MAGAR COMMUNITY IN NEPAL**" independently under my guidance and supervision as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Rural Development.

To the best of my knowledge, this study is an original piece of research and provides valuable insights into the experiences, contributions, and challenges of Magar high-altitude climbers and guides within Nepal's mountain tourism sector. The research has been carried out following academic standards and research ethics.

Therefore, I recommend this thesis for final evaluation and approval.

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APPROVAL SHEET

This document verifies that the thesis entitled "EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-ALTITUDE CLIMBING GUIDES FROM MAGAR COMMUNITY IN NEPAL" authored by Mr. Tilak Bahadur Thapa Magar, has been evaluated and found satisfactory regarding its scope, originality, and academic standards. This thesis fulfills a portion of the requirements for obtaining a Master of Arts degree in Rural Development from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Tribhuvan University.

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This research entitled "**EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-ALTITUDE CLIMBING GUIDES FROM MAGAR COMMUNITY IN NEPAL**" has been undertaken as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Rural Development at the Central Department of Rural Development, Tribhuvan University.

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SELF-DECLARATION LETTER

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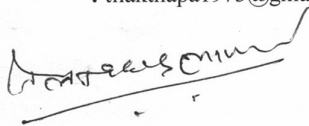
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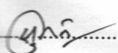
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ABSTRACT

The history of mountain tourism in Nepal is closely linked with the Sherpa community, mainly because of their strong reputation and success in climbing high mountains, including Mount Everest. However, in recent years, guides from various ethnic groups have also become active in this climbing sector. Among them, Magar climbers and guides have been involved in climbing high Himalayan peaks and helping clients reach the summit. They also play an important role in promoting adventure tourism and supporting Nepal's economy. Despite their hard work and contributions, they are not properly recognized for the real challenges they face in the mountains. This study explores their experiences by focusing on their career paths, challenges, and achievements so far.

The researcher used a qualitative method and an ethnographic approach to collect in-depth data. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 Magar guides who have climbed peaks above 6000 meters, including Dhaulagiri and Mount Everest. The main aim was to understand how their careers develop, the opportunities and difficulties they face. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, including career opportunities, professional identity, and access to training.

The findings show that Magar guides play key roles in ensuring safety, managing logistics, and supporting clients during high-Himalaya expeditions. For them, success means not only reaching the summit but also returning safely. However, many Magar guides struggle to access advanced training and certification, uneven job opportunities, and hidden cultural discrimination - a major challenge that deserves more attention in the future.

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ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

BA	:	Bachelor in Arts
BBS	:	Bachelor in Business Studies
BS	:	Bikram Sambat
CDRD	:	Central Department of Rural Development
DoT	:	Department of Tourism
FoHSS	:	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
IFMGA	:	International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations
ILO	:	International Labor Organization
MA	:	Masters in Arts
MoCTCA	:	Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation
NMA	:	Nepal Mountaineering Association
NNMGA	:	Nepal National Mountain Guide Association
TAAN	:	Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal
TU	:	Tribhuvan University
UNWTO	:	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USA	:	United State of America
BBC	:	British Broadcasting Corporation

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Adventure tourism in Nepal is linked with Nepal's economy, culture, and identity. It also highlights Nepal's rich indigenous heritage. The Sherpa climbing guides from the Sherpa community are well-known worldwide for their high-altitude climbing skills (Spoon, 2011). But in recent years, climbing guides from different ethnic communities, such as Magar, Rai, and Tamang, have played significant roles in promoting adventure tourism. They have played similar and responsible roles to Sherpa climbing guides. However, despite their hard work and struggles in the Himalayas, the research studies and media coverage have mainly focused on Sherpa climbers so far. The contributions of other mountain guides, such as those from the Magar community, remain largely unrecognized. Magar climbers are known for hard work, honesty, and dedication. They consistently provide exceptional and safe experiences for foreign climbers. Their service is comparable to that of Sherpa guides. Nevertheless, acknowledgment in academic and media coverage remains limited. The narrative, both nationally and internationally, is overwhelmingly Sherpa-centric.

The Magar are the largest indigenous group in Nepal. They account for about 6.9 percent of the national population (National Census 2078 B.S.). Traditionally, Magar people depends on agriculture, and animal husbandry for their livelihood. In addition, they are also involved in the military services. In recent years, many Magar youth have shown interest in adventure tourism. They now take part in trekking and climbing.

Climbing peaks above 6000 meters is risky and challenging. It demands physical fitness, mental preparation, and rope skills. Guides must know mountain routes and make quick, correct decisions. They must predict the weather and pick the right time to summit. Skillful training is crucial.

In Nepal, the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) and Nepal National Mountain Guide Association (NNMGA) offer such training. High-altitude mountaineering is a skill-intensive and high-risk job. It needs technical expertise, endurance, certification, and strong networks.

Hughes (1991) notes that advancement depends on more than skill alone. Social and institutional factors also matter. In Nepal, ethnicity can affect opportunities for training, leadership, and recognition. Magar guides get fewer opportunities due to a poor network. This means fewer economic options. It is also very expensive to complete all the required training for mountain climbing.

The story of Magar climbers mostly begins at the grassroots level, carrying trekking or climbing gear, and also serving as high-altitude porters. Over time, they advance their skills and experiences - learning by doing, supporting roles as assistant guides, and eventually leading roles as the climbing guides. Many have encountered indirect discrimination when seeking employment opportunities within the adventure tourism sector.

The core reason for this research study is also the researcher's personal experience. The researcher began working in Nepal's adventure tourism in 1992. He faced social discrimination, favoritism and nepotism- both in direct and indirect forms. He worked hard and was honest, but got fewer opportunities, even though he was capable. Many books and articles discuss Sherpa climbers and their legacy. Magar guides face hidden hardships, despite being equally capable and honest. The media do not cover their struggles. Literature covers Sherpa history in depth (Ortner, 1999). Coverage of Magar climbers' challenges is limited in both the national and international media and in academic research.

After long years of his own bitter experiences, the researcher seeks to explore lived experiences from Magar climbing guides. He focuses on those Magar climbers who have led clients above 6000 meters, up to 8848 meters. He aims to assess the opportunities, challenges, skills, training, and experiences of Magar climbing guides.

This research draws on the researcher's deep tourism experience. He has worked as a trekking guide, entrepreneur, and community leader. He has collaborated with high-altitude workers for more than two decades. Many Magar climbing guides handle base camp logistics, set up camps, safe climbing routes, and guide them safely to the summit.

Despite these contributions, research and formal recognition are lacking. This study explores the lived experiences, insights, achievements, and challenges of Magar high-altitude climbing guides in Nepal. It seeks to foster an in-depth understanding of Magar

guides and their lived Himalayan mountaineering experiences and to promote the development of equitable policies within Nepal's mountain tourism sector.

1.2 Research Problem

In discussions about Himalayan mountaineering around the world, Sherpas are now almost synonymous with high-altitude climbing. Ortner (1999) and Adams (1996) have outlined the process through which the Sherpa have acquired international publicity through years of exposure to foreign expeditions. This acknowledgment, over time, came to dominate a popular discourse in which high-altitude expertise is strongly correlative to an exclusive ethnic identity. The Sherpas people were certainly adding something quite important to Himalayan mountaineering. The workforce in mountaineering in Nepal is more heterogeneous than we might think. Other indigenous peoples such as the Magar have escorts and guides who join 6,000 to 8,000 meter expeditions. Despite this involvement, the other communities have received little documentation in the academic literature, although there has been significant discussion of the Sherpa legacy (Gurung, 2005, 2020). The past years have seen the international attention of many Magar people. Nirmal "Nimsdai" Purja Magar has brought Nepal into the spotlight on the international stage as he records the highest number of successful ascents to 8000-meter Mountains (BBC News, 2021).

The first Nepalese above-knee amputee mountaineer to reach the summit of Mount Everest was Hari Budha Magar who completed the Seven Summits challenge successfully (the highest peak in each continent) and this marked a great step forward which can be achieved by using adaptive mountaineering (BBC News, 2026).

One significant institutional development in Professional Mountain guiding is the IFMGA certification received by Nar Bahadur Astani Magar. These achievements indicate that the Magar climbers have gained institutional and symbolic presence. Individual success stories may not be always representative of the more general professional picture of the Magar guiding community. Understanding of how Magar high-altitude climbers and guides find access into training, become certified, enter training into leads and leadership roles, and find recognition within the Nepal mountaineering sector remains sparsely examined.

High-altitude mountaineering is a professional field whose technical skill, monetary commitment, certification, and professional networks are significant elements.

Occupations exposed to risks are characterized by the development of internal hierarchies (Hughes 1991). Ethnography framing of Nepal history, institutional support and network relationships can influence career mobility. Ethnic identity is involved in such a system as well as career growth. Instead, it is not a contest of the Sherpa legacy that is the primary research question, but what lies beyond it.

Specifically, we do not have any scholarly insight into how the profession of Magar climbing guides are viewed, and how systemic and other structural factors affect their opportunities and challenges. The mountaineering sector of Nepal cannot be discussed without taking into account these issues. In this sense, our research aims narrowly to learn about the experience, contributions, opportunities and obstacles of high-altitude mountaineering practitioners and guides in Magar. Through this, it hopes to contribute to the development of a more complete body of knowledge regarding Himalayan mountaineering work and professional growth that is both empirically based and inclusive of all staff employees.

To address the earlier research problem, these questions are asked:

1. How do Magar climbers and guides view their career paths and job succession in Nepal's mountain adventure tourism?
2. How do Magar guides and climbers see their roles in developing mountain adventure tourism in Nepal?
3. What challenges do Magar climbers and guides face with training, certification, and leading Himalayan expeditions in Nepal?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This research examines the experiences and work lives of Magar mountain-climbing guides from the Magar community in Nepal.

To reach this goal, the research has these specific objectives:

- 1: To explore and understand the lives work experiences of the Magar climbing guides in Nepal.
- 2: To assess how Magar climbing guides have helped develop mountain adventure tourism in Nepal.

3: To determine problems experienced by Magar climbers in terms of access to training, and certification,

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research is significant to academics, both in policy and community views. It is added to the body of literature in tourism workforce, ethnicity and professional identity in high risk jobs. The paper centers on Magar climbers and guides, which criticizes the dominant Sherpa-based account of the mountaineering knowledge. The findings also provide information that can be utilized in terms of policy to handle workforce diversity, availability of trained individuals, leadership mobility, and institutional constraints in the mountaineering sector in Nepal.

These findings can provide the groundwork to more accommodative institutional framework and professional competence development opportunities. In a community setting, the research recognizes, records and educates the lives and efforts of the Magar climbers by recognizing, making visible, and inspiring intergenerational lives within the community.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

This research study was limited to 20 high-altitude climbers and guides from the Magar community who had undertaken expeditions above 6,000 meters. Data consisted primarily of collecting in Kathmandu and specifically expedition-related settings. Being a qualitative research, the study is designed for depth of knowledge rather than statistics and statistical generalization. Thus, results are context-bound and cannot be applied universally among the mountaineering professionals in Nepal. There is no comparative ethnic analysis, but only on Magar experiences in the general mountaineering context.

High-Altitude climbers: People who have summited peaks above 6,000 meters.

High-Altitude Guides: People who have a recognized profession to assist or guide in expeditions in high levels of altitude.

Ethnic Identity: Participants' self-reported association with the Magar community.

Narrative Inquiry: A qualitative research methodology used to explain lived experiences through personal stories and anecdotes.

1.6 Operational Definitions of Terms

High-Altitude climbers: People who have summited peaks above 6,000 meters.

High-Altitude Guides: People who have a recognized profession to assist or guide in expeditions in high levels of altitude.

Ethnic Identity: Participants' self-reported association with the Magar community.

Narrative Inquiry: A qualitative research methodology used to explain lived experiences through personal stories and anecdotes.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized in seven chapters. Chapter one outlines the study and the background of the research, the research problem, objectives and organization of the study.

Chapter Two has explored mountaineering tourism, the ethnics, and professional identity literature in relation to the high-altitude labour relations.

Chapter three shows the research methods, the work implemented e.g. methodological research design, sampling, data collection process, analytical framework, and ethical considerations.

Fourth chapter covers the career alternatives of Magar guides and their careers in mountain climbing focusing on climbing experience and climbing career.

We enter here into the individual lives and inspirations that touched the Magar mountaineer. The chapter explains another factor to their careers in this high-risk business is how their roles are reformed with time.

Fifth chapter discusses how Nepal mountain tourism sector greatly depends on Magar climbing guides in order to uplift and safeguard it. Their understanding has been discussed with regard to their contribution to the safety of the expedition and the enhancement of foreign visitors in the cultural field. This chapter proceeds to state how they are critical in crisis governance and continuity in hard times in the sector.

Chapter six recognizes and maps systematic problems that Magar mountaineering professionals undergo during their career. It examines barriers to training access, qualification and transition to managerial roles. Some of the critical safety management

issues and the dynamics of structure that enable expedition participation are addressed in the chapter.

Lastly, chapter 7 involves the presentation of the findings, derivation of conclusions, policy, institutional and research perspective recommendations on the item that will be done in the future, and policy implementation recommendations.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This research employs Social Identity Theory, Occupational Sociology and Tourism Labor Studies techniques to examine the experiences of Magar climbers and tourist guides.

2.1.1 Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) can be used to explain how people perceive and mediate their ethnic and occupational identities within one of the Sherpa dominated industries. It also explains how Magar climbers bargain their ethnic and professional identities in a Sherpa dominated mountain climbing industry. The theory throws light on the intergroup relationships in which Sherpa identity plays the most significant role as a prototype of mountaineering excellence - and the perceptions of Magar workers to themselves and others.

This research paper shows how career paths and accomplishments of Magar climbers are tactics under which they are capable of attaining positive distinctiveness and claim their presence in the professional world appropriately. Their professional paths show efforts to gain Magar group a position in the hierarchy of mountaineering. It talks of complexity of the intergroup relations of the indigenous people who work in the mountainous tourism; Magar contributions to the mountain tourism is a major aspect of their economy, yet fame on the mountain is negotiated through ethnicity. In this regard, their in-group solidarity and identity-based coping mechanisms demonstrate their level of resilience in a crisis. It was also used to place systemic interests, such as limited access to training, certifications, and leadership positions in general, under social stratification in which Sherpa dominance grants structural benefits to one ethnic group and disadvantages to the others. These social identity relations still carry on the power disparities to create inequalities in expedition participation and safety management.

2.1.2 Occupational Sociology

The past work of Occupational Sociology (Hughes, 1991) assisted in the realization of humanized viewpoints and professional ranks and the division of labor which is useful

in high-risk work fields. Occupational stress theorems emphasize social roles and an increased or reduced technical application of professions.

An example of Hughes model is the explanation of how Magar guides manage to climb professional career ladder through informal apprenticeship, brand recognition and acquire tacit knowledge in the occupational community of mountaineering. The theory explains why Magar labour is anchored in the hierarchies of expeditions, according to which concepts such as dirty work explain the distribution of tasks, as to how their business connections help to create resilience in the tourism industry during a crisis. Lastly, occupational sociology looks at obstacles to qualification and disengagement of leadership as a license and mandate, formal or informal authorization to further a career, and safety concerns within the context of status differences to quash the voices of the less visible in high risk situations.

2.1.3 Tourism Labor Studies

There are other research studies on tourism labor which emphasize employment, recognition and professional growth in adventure tourism (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1988). So by so combining these perspectives a more global picture is revealed into the inclusion and professional and identity negotiation experiences of Magar climbers and guides in Nepal in mountaineering industry.

It also examined how the workers play and address themselves to such cultural identities in order to maintain tourist norms, and was premised on staged authenticity and tourist role theories, respectively, as proposed by MacCannell and Cohen to understand host-guest interactions. This framework describes the development path of the career of Magar that involves training in cultural mediation skills, which negotiates the issue of authenticity and the tourist demands as they acquire a professional trajectory.

It also has highlighted Magar contributions as cultural work that is not technical guidance, when sharing traditions enriches the experience of the tourists and adaptive cultural performance is part of the resilience of the sector at a time of crisis. It also had indicated the problem of the commodification of culture, a situation where the anticipation of assuming some kind of authentic identities to be consumed by the tourists conflicts with the demands of commerciality as well as the erosion of cultural

integrity, and the absence of control over the representation of the culture reflects the dynamics of power in general.

2.2 Policy Review

Social inclusion, equality in sharing of benefits and empowerment of the indigenous people are some of the policies towards sustainable tourism being pursued internationally. A universal, human interest framework like the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (Article 4) as a key framework of international development advances the tourism as a form of individual and collective satisfaction, without discrimination or prejudice (UNWTO, 1999). Similarly, the right to equal opportunity and active participation in decision making on development (ILO, 1989) as was the case with the International Labour Organization (ILO) was also present in Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

The constitution of Nepal provides a priority to the right to social justice of all communities on the national level and the mandate of the state to provide inclusive development. However, these general principles are converted into sector-specific actionable policies of mountain tourism in an uneven and shallow way.

Nepal has the leading tourism policies -the Tourism Policy (2008) and the Tourism Act (1978) which offer a superseding framework of sectors to be developed. However, even with the encouragement of poverty reduction, employment generation and economic growth at the region, there are no certain clauses that address ethnic fairness in labour force in tourism.

They are trying to downsize the local communities as a unitary body, disregarding intrinsic hierarchies within the native communities of Sherpa, Magar, Gurung, and other people that are engaged in the industry (Adhikari, 2018).

The government of culture, tourism and civil aviation (MoCTCA) is the governing body of mountaineering of which is carried out by the Department of Tourism (DoT) and Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA). The following are important legal documentation:

Mountaineering Expedition Regulations (2002, amended): The regulations cover the permitting process, liaison officers and the minimum requirements needed to comply with the safety. They are much technical and administrative and do not contain

clauses to permit inclusiveness in the hiring procedures, or that guides of different ethnicities on expeditions ought to be sufficiently represented.

Mandate of NMA: NMA is a semi-autonomous organization that is specialized in promoting mountaineering, guiding standards, control of peaks and training and certification. Despite its promotion of the professionalizing of guiding which has been accredited, the critics have pointed out that such policies and leadership by NMA has been historically dominated by a Kathmandu-centric and Sherpa-affiliated elite and has arguably maintained a network-based system which has discriminated against climbers in other communities (Paudel, 2020).

Even though NMA training is officially open to everyone, practical factors such as distance, expenses, and lack of networks can limit opportunities and create barriers.. The latest planning documents, such as the Tourism Vision 2020 and the 15th Five-Year Plan (2019/20-2023/24) specifically referred to the terms of the inclusive growth and the community-based tourism.

However, when it comes to high-skill, high-income subsector like high-altitude mountaineering, there is no silence of policies on early actions to be taken on ethnic diversity. This too, needless to say, that there is no such training of guides of marginalized Janajati groups supported by the state through affirmative action or quota basis. There is no system of incentives to encourage expeditions operators to employ a diverse guiding team.

No mechanism of ethnic composition of the professional network guiding workforce exists within this system, and no acknowledgement and marketing of mountain climbing achievements and the knowledge of the histories of non-Sherpa people in any of the official tourism discourses and heritage marketing.

The social sustainability pillar (and especially the equity in employment and recognition) is left unaddressed, whereas almost all the policy focus is on safety, environmental sustainability and revenue-making (Gurung, 2019). This creates a policy structure where career opportunities are determined by the market and informal networks and not by fair principles. This hole is boosted by academic assessment. It has been proposed that Nepal has a generic communitarianism in its tourism policy

regarding the fact that intra-communities power relations are not considered (Bhattarai and Upadhyay, 2021).

Labor history of adventure tourism studies shows that absent certain policy interventions, preexisting social stratifications are recreated and enforced in new economic domains such as mountaineering (Brennan, 2022). Without a law that mandates recruitment to be transparent or offers other career options between Magar and Gurung climbers, they can mostly move up the ladder thanks to personal effort or occasional favoritism rather than a concerted, rights-based strategy (Bhandari, 2019).

To summarise, in Nepal, the overall mountain climbing adventure culture leads to the exclusion of local ethnic groups, including Magar, Tamang, Rai, Gurung, and many others. They are not receiving fair opportunities in employment, mountain training and recognition.

1.3 Empirical Review

Adventure travel revolves around mountain tourism, whose distinct flavor is evident everywhere, as the industry is based on local expertise, places tourists in challenging conditions, and creates close bonds between tourists and local people (Beedie and Hudson, 2003). Scholars have placed it within broader themes, including political ecology and the so-called risk society. In a more connected world, the rural landscape changes, new economies arise, and labor tends to be divided along ethnic and class lines (Gössling et al., 2021; Beck, 1992).

There are organizations like the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations (IFMGA) that set global standards in skill and prominence in the field. Not everyone is lucky enough to find themselves on these ladders - access to much of the Global South is unequal, so recognition and rewards are not evenly distributed (Carter, 2019). The local guide is heavily hyped, almost to the extent of a folkloric hero, but research continues to indicate that their actual economic capacity and power are limited by international tour companies and systemic inequalities (Brennan 2022).

Consider Nepal as an example. Not only are trekking and mountaineering valuable revenue streams, but they are also part of some communities. The industry evolved during the same period as traditional Western climbing and Sherpa operations in the

Solu-Khumbu. Sherpas offered invaluable experience and local knowledge on the high altitude (Ortner 1999). With time, Sherpa became an international brand itself, defining the look of Himalayan climbing to the world and ensuring the presence of Sherpas in expedition leadership, in the news, and even in scholarly literature (Adams 1996; Sherpa 2014).

The tourism industry in Nepal has relied heavily on the Sherpa name to attract foreigners, often marginalizing other mountain communities (Bhattarai et al., 2005). The thing is, mountain tourism has always attracted a diverse group of individuals. And then, post-1970s, when Nepal took over management of its trekking and mountaineering industry, which under foreign powers had been run like a puppet, other groups got a justifiable crack. However, as Spoon (2011) notes, a major issue persisted: professional recognition remained locked in a Sherpa monoculture. The term Sherpa is thrown around like a dime to someone who does high-altitude work, but the actual identity of a Sherpa is part of an infinitely wider context. That leaves climbers hailing from the Magar, Gurung, Rai, and other Janajati groups doing the same perilous work but relegated to the professional margins. They are less privileged, have fewer networks, and lack material gain (Furnbacher, 2020).

There is no single thing called the Sherpa legacy. It's a network of stories — plenty of memories, an ability to become entrepreneurially-minded, and a unique sense of adjusting to the worldwide stampede of tourism (Sherpa, 2022). But there are towers that have a glorious heritage. The Sherpa-led expeditions usually have a chairperson, known as the sirdar (chief), and personnel are recruited through family or close contacts to man the team. The incompetent non-Sherpas usually retire to the background without getting the full credit or promotion (Gurung, 2005). Everything in the training and infrastructure resources is concentrated around Khumbu, which entraps Sherpa centrality. However, other communities have not just been waiting. Gurungs, Magars, and others have blazed new trails into the industry. They had a reserve of discipline and hardiness in their history as the Gurkhas, renowned soldiers, which suited mountaineering well (Des Chene, 1991). In places like Annapurna, Manaslu, and Gurang, people have become power brokers. The majority of them are IFMGA-qualified and operate their own successful expeditions. Poudel (2021) illustrates how strong community support ecosystems enable new guides to find their feet, suggesting that although the Sherpa story remains eminent, it is not the only one that matters.

The Magar community is from the mid-western hill regions of Nepal, and its history is less known. Gurung (2005) observed that, in his investigation of Magar youth, many began guiding in Nepal by becoming apprentices: they started by working as kitchen help or porters and thus received their first initiation into the profession through on-the-job training, rather than through formal qualifications. In the recent past, the names of Magar climbers, such as Nirmal, also known as Nimsdai Purja (Purja, 2020), have taken Magar climbers to the international arena, boasting their incredible abilities and inverting earlier preconceived ideas. At home, things are not so simple, however. According to a study conducted by Bhandari, guides in the Dhaulagiri area feel there is a glass ceiling. They also struggle to reach the top positions, such as sirdar, on 8000-meter expeditions, even when they are equally up to the task, whereas Sherpa guides seem to reach them with less effort. The Sherpas are generally liked by clients, and these networks have made it difficult for Magars to break into them.

Such employment is a big break for the Magar and Gurung communities, which have a history in agriculture and the military, and is a move into service industry employment closely associated with globalization. But what does this mean to their home villages? You know how remittances are shaping life in the locality, how the aspirations of the youth are changing, and whether the traditional wisdom is fading away, yet it has not been tapped into much. These questions have only begun to be explored.

2.4 Research Gaps

These are the research gaps relevant to the aim of the study in relation to Magar climbers as well as guides. However, little hard data is available on the extent and nature of Magar participation in Nepal's mountain tourism labor force for each role (high-altitude guide, cook, porter/basecamp manager), also disaggregated by region and expedition type. The role that many played in improved safety records, successful summits or the introduction of modern guides and guidelines are anecdotal and not systematically recorded. Despite the known challenges, however, there has been little in-depth empirical survey of both structural and perceptual barriers experienced by Magar guides. This involves comparative studies of access to and outcomes of formal training institutes for Magar and Sherpa candidates (NNMGA, Khumbu Climbing Center, etc.). Data (the poor perceptions that clients have coming up to be guides, the hiring systems of guide agencies and institutional favoritism) preventing Magars from being assigned

as sirdar and expedition leader roles on some wealthy peaks i.e. Mount Everest and Mount K2.

The objective of this study is to explore the Magar guides' access to resources needed for safety and decision-making authority on trips as well as exposure differential risk. In socio cultural angle, the job position of Magar cultures has not been discussed much. Some of this has been done in current scholarship and early research, but didn't note how income from mountaineering benefits households, gender relations, educational choices or the thriving of Magar culture. We have no ethnographic, natively narrative-inflected academic studies to which we can appeal the lived experiences of Magar climbers, their personal narratives and professional identities.

To articulate their "Magar legacy", the analysis of non-Sherpa labour should extend beyond an identification based solely on being "non-Sherpa" and outward. This heritage includes their millennium tradition of association with the high mountains, their social and community motivations to continue living there and how they negotiate a tourism economy based on ethnicity. These are the factors to consider whether Nepal mountain tourism can be considered in a more inclusive and equitable perspective. This will assist policymakers and practitioners recognize and nurture talent within different communities.

2.5 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.5.1 Theoretical Framework

This research study is based on Social Identity Theory, Occupational Sociology, and Tourism Labor Studies to understand the situation of Magar Mountain climbing guides in Nepal.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is helpful to explain how ethnic identity plays a role in shaping inclusion, recognition, and relations within the adventure mountaineering tourism field, which is often seen as Sherpa-dominated. It gives an understanding of how Magar guides see their position and how they are viewed by others.

Occupational Sociology (Hughes, 1991) helps to understand the structure of the profession, including division of labor, career path, and hierarchy. In this context, many

Magar climbing guides start from basic roles and gradually move upward, but there are still difficulties in reaching higher positions, such as leadership roles.

Tourism Labor Studies also provide a broader understanding of how tourism work operates. It highlights issues like unequal opportunities, limited recognition, and the role of cultural interaction in guiding work (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1988).

These theoretical perspectives together help to explain both the structural conditions and lived experiences of Magar guides in the mountain adventure tourism industry.

2.5.2 Conceptual Framework

This study follows a qualitative approach. Therefore, the conceptual framework is presented in terms of key themes rather than fixed variables.

The main themes include training and certification, ethnic identity, professional hierarchy, recognition, and leadership opportunities. These themes are interrelated. For instance, access to training and certification influences skill development and career progression. At the same time, ethnic identity may affect trust, selection, and advancement within expeditions.

In addition, informal networks and existing industry practices also influence opportunities, which may create unequal outcomes among different groups. As a result, some guides face challenges in achieving recognition and leadership positions despite having similar experience and capability.

However, individual effort and community support also play an important role in shaping career pathways.

Overall, the conceptual framework shows that the experiences of Magar guides are shaped by the interaction of social identity, access to opportunities, and the structure of the tourism industry.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using focused ethnographic case study methodology. We deliberately chose this design since it facilitates a rich and contextual understanding of how social and cultural forces are influencing the way the Magar community thinks about high-altitude mountain tourism (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Of particular relevance, a qualitative approach was well suited for this study due to its consideration of the experience(s), meanings, and professional identities behind those employed within the Magar climbing industry. Qualitative research is better suited for exploring the “why” and “how” of social life, as opposed to numbers or frequency (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is an asset in studying ethnic identity, career paths and the legacy of a Sherpa-controlled mountaineering industry.

The included study was a discrete (or rapid) ethnographic case study. Focused ethnography enables intensified contact with a particular cultural group under time constraints, while preserving analytical depth (Handwerker, 2001; Knoblauch, 2005). While Magars are an ethnic group, they can also be seen as a high-altitude guiding community that is part of the broader professional subculture of Himalayan mountaineering. Ethnography was selected as the method — “to describe and interpret a culture-sharing group. The goal of ethnography is to understand a group’s shared values, professional practices, identity negotiation, and collective experiences” (Madden, 2017). Interviewing and contextual observation were carried out in professional settings—both were semi-structured.

The case was bounded by the perceptions and professional experiences of high-altitude climbers and guides from the Magar community in Nepal. Using a case study design allowed for in-depth exploration of this contemporary issue in its real-world context (Yin, 2018). The search was not for statistical generalization but analytical generalization — that is, insights may shed light on the same structural dynamics at play in other underrepresented Indigenous communities involved with adventure tourism (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

3.2 Reason for Selecting the Study Area

The selection of Kathmandu as the primary study area is due to its summit location in Nepal and because it is the geographical center for ascension activities. Most high-altitude guides (Magars included) spend the climbing season living in Kathmandu. City: Most expeditions begin in and return to the city, whether sets off towards Land of Everest where peaks such as Island Peak, Mera Peak Manaslu and Dhaulagiri. This approach enabled the researcher to have easy access to interact with the guides prior to or post their expeditions.

Kathmandu is also home to many expedition agencies, training organizations and mountaineering associations. Location in Kathmandu enabled the research study to include professional experiences from a large diversity of guides, while ensuring that the research work was feasible.

3.3 Nature and Sources of Data

This study utilized two primary data sources to create a well-rounded view of the subject. The main data were based on the in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 20 Magar high-altitude climbers and guides. The interviews were full of information about their lives in the job, their professional path, cultural identity, and recognition in the Nepalese climbing sector.

To contextualise the results of the interview, secondary data were used. These were policy papers, training protocols, publish from Nepal mountaineering association (NMA) etc. which were related to mounting expeditions. These records helped put into perspective the testimonies that the respondents gave with respect to the larger institutional and regulatory context that high-altitude mountaineering in Nepal is based on.

Most of the research work uses both, primary (interviews) and secondary data (historical/recurring statistics), which was essential in weaving individual stories into broader trends about tourism in Nepal. These combined to give a more detailed insight into the role of Magar in shaping plot their careers and the structural elements that affect the working aspects of their lives.

3.4 Population, Sampling Method, and Sample Size

The participants of the study were members of the Magar community, who are high-altitude climbers or guides and have already reached the 6,000-meter mark or more. To gather pertinent and exhaustive information to this study, the researchers selected the research respondents/participants through purposive sampling. Participants are required to be members of the Magar community, with professional experience in high-altitude expeditions over 6,000 meters and with experience as a climbing guide or climber in the present or recent past. After identifying this initial sample of respondents, additional respondents were identified by snowball sampling, based on the professional networks of the initial establishments.

The ethnographic case (or semi-structured) interviews consisted of a total 20 participants ([P1]–[P20]). The goal was to include participants of varying ages, experience levels, places of origin and degrees of participation in different specifics types (6,00-meter peaks and Everest) types of climbs and expeditions. This helped the study represent diverse perspectives in the Magar high-altitude guiding community. The sample size was deemed sufficient for this qualitative study as the goal was to gain an in depth understanding of experiences rather than representation by statistics.

3.5 Data Collection Methods, Techniques and Tools

However, in accordance with qualitative research methods, data were not collected using any single approach but by means of several to ensure consistency and thoroughness. Semi-structured interviews were the primary method (augmented through some observations and document reviews).

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 Magar guides of high-altitude climbing with varying levels of experience. The interviews delved into personal narratives about career paths, ethnic identity experiences, professional obstacles, and feelings of acknowledgement within the mountaineering industry in Nepal. An interview guide facilitated the discussion by identifying key themes, while still allowing for participants to narrate their experiences in their own language.

These systematic observations were intentionally conducted in various work settings, including guiding offices and casual meeting spots throughout Kathmandu. These findings helped provide context for how guides interact during the course of their day-to-day work. The relevant documents such as the tourism policies and publications of

the mountaineering associations were also studied in order to create the stories of the participants in the context of the larger institutional and regulatory framework applicable in each region. All these diverse sources contributed to the improved strength of the findings of the study and the credibility.

3.6 Quality Standard

The researcher chose a qualitative, exploratory approach and focused on trustworthiness to ensure the quality of the findings, instead of using traditional measures like validity and reliability. The analysis followed Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba's (1985) framework, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The researcher improved credibility by using several methods, such as triangulation and member checking. Triangulation meant collecting data through interviews, observations, and document reviews to support strong interpretations (Patton, 2015). Member checking involved sharing early findings with a few participants to make sure their views were represented accurately (Birt et al., 2016).

To improve dependability and confirmability, the researcher kept a detailed journal during data collection and analysis. The journal included notes on methods, reflections on the data, and thoughts about the researcher's role as a member of the Magar community. This helped make the process more transparent and reduced possible bias.

The researcher supported transferability by giving detailed descriptions of the research setting and the participants' experiences in high-altitude guiding and expedition work. This helps readers decide if the findings apply to other similar situations. Together, these steps made the study more trustworthy and rigorous.

3.7 Steps to analysis and interpretation of data

Data analysis was conducted using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach was selected specifically because it is appropriate for qualitative, ethnographic and case-based studies, where coding can be driven by the data as well as theory.

Before the analysis process began, each interview was read multiple times in detail to immerse with the data. Subsequently, we produced preliminary codes across the data

to represent significant themes and points raised by participants. Such codes were then clustered into higher-order classes and themes that reflected commonalities around members' professional experiences, ethnic identity, contributions to the industry, and challenges faced in the mountaineering profession.

Each theme was reviewed and reworked to ensure that it was precise and cohered, as well as that themes did not overlap with each other. Throughout, particular attention was given to how the themes interrelate with the main research questions. The categories that emerged were the basis for the analysis and discussion Chapters IV.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This research study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards. Before the interviews, all 20 participants were told about the study's purpose, how their data would be collected, any risks, and that their participation was voluntary. Each person gave written informed consent before the interviews and recordings started.

To protect privacy and confidentiality, all identifying details of all respondents in the research report were removed and replaced with codes like [P1] to [P20]. Data, including digital files and audio recordings, were kept securely with password protection, and only the researcher could access them. All participants were told they could withdraw from the participation at any time, for any reason, without negative consequences.

As I'm the researcher from the Magar community for this study, I stayed aware of my own background and how it might influence my work. I often reflected on my assumptions and interpretations to keep some distance from my personal views. This helped me make sure the analysis was fair and focused on what participants shared.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Professional Journeys of Magar Climbing Guides

4.1.2: Socio-economic Characteristics

The socio-economic situation of the study participants, whose lives are significantly different than the geography and the livelihoods that they have acquired. The participants are mostly of rural districts but have since established themselves in the center of the urban areas of Kathmandu Valley. This change in the mountain towns to the city lifestyle is similar to a larger generational change in the way families are gaining their livelihoods. Their fathers and grandfathers traditionally had farming jobs often in combination with some military service. And the younger generation now has diversified in additional fields of work like tourism, local business and education which is certainly a move away of what their parents or grandparents did (Table 4.1.2).

Table 4.1.2 Characteristics of the Participants

Category	Response	Number
Age	27-35	12
	36-51	8
Gender	Male	19
	Female	1
Permanent Address	Solukhumbu	8
	Okhaldhunga	4
	Dhading	3
	Tanahu	2
	Dolkha	1
	Sindhuli	1
	Gorkha	1
Currently living	Kathmandu	17
	Bhaktpur	2
	Lalitpur	1
Livelihood	Agriculture	16
	Army	1
	Business	1
	Police Officer	1
	Trekking guide	1

Category	Response	Number
Primary occupation of forefather	Agriculture and Army	17
	Agriculture and Army	3
Present occupation of family members	Local business	4
	Studying	3
	Farming	3
	Expedition	2
	Hotel	1
	Tourism	1
	Tourism, farming	1
	Tourism, teaching	1
	Trekking	1
	Beautician	1
	Remittance	1
	Army	1
Total		20

Source: Field Survey 2026

The demographic information shows that participants are predominantly male with a large proportion of those aged between 27 and 35 years (12) and those who are male (19). The majority of participants are from rural places; most cases originated from Solukhumbu (8), followed by Okhaldhunga (4) and Dhading (3). But there occurred a definite shift; 17 respondents now reside in Kathmandu (urban migration).

This change is also associated with a greater intergenerational change in the economy. The majority of fathers (16) and grandfathers (17) used to be farmers, and in some cases, were still in the military. Currently, there is a variety of family types, with jobs in local business (4), study (3), farming (3) and other tourism professions. That depicts a clear shift of a largely agrarian history to a more diversified and service-based economy, with trekking and mountaineering employment possibly drawing people in to mountain areas.

4.1.3 Educational and Professional Status

The connection between the education and work experience of the participants to mountaineering study is shown in Table 4.2. Most of them had finished secondary

school, and English and others learnt more foreign languages to enable them to work in the international tourism business. Their career in climbing normally started in the lower level jobs, such as the porters or helpers and they underwent different training programs in order to climb the ladder. They gained a wealth of experience, climbing all sorts of peaks, including many of the world's tallest 8,000-meter mountains. The number of people actively climbing has increased in recent years and some of them have even been on international expeditions, which indicates their increased abilities as well as the expanded scope of the profession.

Table 4.1.3 Educational and Professional Status of the Participants

Category	Response	Number
Educational attainment	Primary	4
	Lower secondary	3
	Secondary	9
	Higher secondary	1
	BA/BBS	2
	MA	1
Language proficiency	English	17
	English, Chinese, French Hindi	3
Numbers of training attained	2-4	16
	5-7	4
Profession experience	3-9	7
	10-27	13
Entry experience	Porter	11
	Helper	7
	After training	2
Numbers of peak climbed	2-9	18
	10-11	2
Climbed frequency	2	1
	3-9	12
	10-26	6
	134	1
Climbed above 8000m: Everest, Lhotse, Manaslu	Yes	12
	Not yet	8
Climbed year	Before 2010	5

Category	Response	Number
	2010–2019	10
	2020 and after	5
Foreign expedition: China, France, USA, Singapore, Tanzania, Kirgizstan	Yes	9
	No	11
Total		20

Source: Field Survey 2026

This data gives a clearer view of the professional climbing sector and shows that many Magar guides began in entry-level jobs before becoming professional mountain guides. Seventeen respondents started as porters (11 people) or helpers (6 people), which suggests that hands-on work is a common way into this field.

Sixteen of these guides completed 2 to 4 training programs, showing a more formal path that builds on their practical experience. They are very experienced climbers. Thirteen have worked in the field for 10 to 27 years, and 18 have reached the summit of 2 to 9 peaks. Many have climbed mountains over 8,000 meters, such as Everest, Lhotse, Dhaulagiri, and Manaslu. The number of expeditions is also impressive: 12 guides made 3 to 9 trips, six made 10 to 26, and one climber reported 134 ascents.

Seventeen respondents speak English, and three know some Chinese, French, or Hindi, which helps them work in international tourism. While many have worked with foreign expedition teams, only nine have climbed outside Nepal, in places like China, France, and Italy.

Most climbing activity happened between 2010 and 2019, with 10 participants active during this time. This period was especially busy before the global pandemic.

Overall, the findings show that this workforce is skilled and experienced, and they keep building their abilities, mostly in Himalayan climbing. Their international experience is still limited but is slowly growing.

4.14 Origins and Entry Pathways

The mountain doesn't embrace all in the same fashion, and everyone has their own experience. In this case study, careers did not come as a result of big ambitions by the Magar guides. They began their careers as porters, who carried huge loads and slowly

got used to the dangers of breathing in high altitude, only to understand that strenuous labor might be a source of vocation as well.

Porter's Path. For most of the participants, their introduction to the mountains was not as climbers but as porters. One of the participants [P4] described that this was well explained by the following: *"I began with the job as a porter, where I would be carrying entire loads in Khumbu between Jiri and Lukla. Then I knew that this was no simple work when I spotted the mountains. It was difficult, my body ached and breathing took effort." But amid that challenge something changed. But, gradually, as I shot higher and higher, my confidence grew. And when I got to Base Camp, I was happy in a different way. That's when I realized —I need to do something impactful in this industry."*

[P6] describes a similar transformation. Employed as a porter on a seven-day trek, bearing loads he does not define but recalls their weight, he saw the mountains more closely for the first time; *"I kept thinking — how do people climb so high? From that moment, I knew — someday I needed to go up there as well. At the time, I had financial trouble, but the mountain was in a way pulling me."* The tugging turned to direction when a senior Sherpa guide in Langtang recognized him and extended an invitation — *"if you want to learn, come."* That moment redirected his life.

[P9] had started at seventeen or eighteen, perhaps too young to really understand what he was doing; *"I'm a porter — walking loads, kitchen stuff, tents and food from Jiri to Lukla and into the Khumbu region. The work was very hard. Village life was hard enough, but this was something else. There was little encouragement, in small ways — a good job from the team, tips at the end — but over time these small rewards added up."* One participant said, *"That's when I started thinking — maybe I can go higher too." Gradually, I started to have a genuine relationship with the mountains."*

The other two participants, [P12] and [P15] had similar career trajectories from kitchen porter to Base Camp cook to high camp cook. Neither of them had thought much about climbing at first. As [P12] said, *"At that time, climbing didn't ever pop in my head — I was just working to live."* But survival work put them on the precipice of something bigger. [P15] also remembers when they first got to Camp 2 low oxygen, heavy wind — *"I understood that mountains are serious. 'That's the reason why I'm still in this line."*

Trekking Guide Bridge. For others, the shift arrived via trekking work. [P1]’s turning point came once she arrived at Base Camp — working as a trekking guide; *"I saw the male guides fixing ropes and climbing higher. I was thinking, If they can do it, why not me? That became my turning point."* From there, she had free introductory rock climbing training, then Basic Mountain Training, then rescue courses. *"Bit by bit, I started moving forward alone."*

When [P10] took his first trek toward Annapurna Base Camp there was initial fear, but also an attraction; *"When I reached base camp for the first time and when the white snow, cold wind and big White Mountains were below me and above me, something changed inside. At first I was frightened — breathlessness, headache. However, that struggle taught me that I could do it. All I thought was, If I could get here, maybe I could go higher."* That confidence helped him get through basic training and his first summit, at Island Peak.

[P13] grew up in a Sherpa village, watching the elders head into the mountains. The difference between hearing and firsthand experience occurred after the initial trek to Everest Base Camp — and climbing Kala Patthar. [P13] remembered, *"Something started burning in me. I thought, I can probably do this too. From then on, I began contemplating climbing seriously, not just trekking."*

Military Pathway and Direct Aspirants. One participant took a very different path. [P2] had joined the British Army in 1991 and served for thirteen to fourteen years, training in Norway and the Arctic Circle for mountain warfare. *"Deep snow, glacier crossings, crampon and rope work — this experience led me to mountaineering,"* he said. After retiring, he returned to Nepal and took climbing assignments during the leave of his job. That military era discipline and careful risk management passed to his second career.

Others in the group traveled a more tortuous route. According to [P14], seeing tourists in the mountains when he was a child inspired him to become interested in climbing. *"My inspiration came from Pasang Lhamu Sherpa’s story,"* he added, *'a sign that even amid the Sherpa-focused history of Himalayan climbing other communities may find inspiration.'*

What all these stories share is a gradual journey. None of them spoke of one particular decision instance. Rather, the mountain was revealed bit by bit, bit by bit, with hard work and observation, with minor booster events. Porters turned into cooks, cooks turned into rope fixers and rope fixers turned into guides. They were slowly but steadily making progress in their careers as many participants indicated.

4.1.5 Step-by-Step Ascent

Magar climbing Guides and climbers tend to have a progressive, rather than a jump, in their career. They include training opportunities, obtain qualifications between expeditions and train their skills by means of repetitive training. This slow gradual development is characteristic of the character of the mountaineering work, and the financial limitations of such guides.

Training Journey. Unless the training travels as reported by participants comprised a straight line towards a high-altitude guiding, then they certainly took advantage of it. Rather, their narratives are marked by gradual improvements - based on the opportunity, finances and the desire to work. The majority of the respondents did not describe their career as a big break but as a product of time.

[P1], e.g., started with a free introductory rock climbing course. And then to Basic Mountain Training, and finally rescue courses.

When talking about her progress, she would honestly say: *'Step by step'*, which reflects not only her training process but the general reality of how guides form in this profession.

Other participants described similar experiences. [P3] said he started with rock-climbing training before moving on to basic then advanced mountaineering classes, followed by glacier training. Long journey with different roles as described in [P5]. His first job was as a porter, then he became a porter-guide and later a trekking guide. Only after he was exposed to this experience did he transition into technical climbing training, where he eventually advanced from assistant guide to lead climbing guide. For some, the opportunities were informal encouragement. His training only began when a senior guide thought he should undergo mountaineering training, [P6] explained. He has since then enrolled in formal classes, such as Basic Mountaineering Training in

2013 and advanced and rescue training thereafter. With his story, he demonstrates just how vital mentorship can be in getting a foot in the door.

One of the themes that were eminent in many of them was financial hardship. According to [P8], the first IFMGA guide in Magar community, there was no simple solution financially to engage in formal training. Yet, he elaborated, *'I forced myself into formal training'* in spite of these obstacles. There is struggle and determination in his words.

The experience of [P11] is a reflection of such struggle. *'None of them presented me an opportunity,'* he said, *'and I had to borrow it on my own juice and savings.'* Having been loaded and note-taking as long as he lived, he was at last entrusted to be in command. He described it as a mere - it was going step by step in retrospect of his career, which is a way of expressing the incremental accumulation of knowledge needed in this field.

[P14] also indicated that he had financial constraints towards formal training. Rather than halting, he claimed he continued to learn through the older climbers and experience on the field: *'I step by step.'* What becomes evident in glancing between these accounts, is that the career of a mountain guide is not usually the outcome of chance or immediate success. Rather, it at times requires patience, long term investment and the will to persevere in the face of meager resources. Some of them said they accepted such a slow pace as a nature of the profession.

From Porter to Leadership. The shift of the physical work to leadership is gradual, a product of experience. [P9] and his breakthrough: *"In 2023, I first fixed the rope myself. The thought that I could only carry 8-10 kg of rope on a four-five-day trip and still be able to reach the top all that was a breakthrough in my life."* What used to be an encumbrance was now vital to his profession.

[P13] claimed that after climbing summits of peaks up to 6,500 meters, he began to believe that he could be a proper climbing guide. [P16] began his career as a porter, and later climbed to assistant guide and took basic mountaineering and rescue classes. [P17] was trained through observing experienced guides, who taught him how to do it, before receiving formal training. [P18], [P19] and [P20] explained an analogous route of beginning as porters, then as assistant guides, joining climbing teams, getting additional training and ultimately becoming full guides.

IFMGA Achievement. Not merely does [P8] passing the IFMGA certification amount to highest professional achievement in the said cadres but it has a lot more to do than just personal achievement. *'I was very proud to be made an IFMGA guide'*, said [P8]. Not only to him, but also to the Magar community in Nepal, he said. It was like breaking through a wall - a wall that is more professional than ethnic, on the principle that some certifications or skills are exclusive to some communities.

Knowledge That Cannot Be Certified. It is only through formal training that guides acquire part of their skills. Lots of what you know about climbing is gained by watching and learning through more experienced climbers, such as reading the weather, how to handle clients, when to turn back. [P4] had also undergone forty five days of cook training, yet he claims that it was senior guides and trip leaders who had provided him with the discipline of timing and safety. [P9]: We have been taught by seniors and now we teach the juniors and that is the process.

This mix of the formal courses and the practical experience characterizes the career of a Magar guide. Training sharpens technical abilities, expeditions develop the sense of judgment and every season expands the net of relationships that opens new opportunities. Pace by pace, as the participants frequently utter it, they are advancing in their career.

4.1.6 Mentors Who Shaped Them

Behind every guide — is a person who taught, corrected or inspired it. Many of the mentors recalled in these interviews are Sherpas, which mirrors how much climbing knowledge has historically been focused in that community. But the lessons they share transcend ethnicity and help Magar guides understand and perfect their work

Safety Teachers. The greatest lesson all senior guides highlighted is safety. *"My mentors taught me discipline, reading the weather and dealing with clients,"* [P1] said. Most importantly — safety before the summit. [P3] learned about discipline, rope fixing, when to make safety decisions and when to turn back. [P5] also remembered being taught by senior Sherpas that what was important was life, not the summit.

[P6] reported that we learned about rope fixing, checking crampons, managing oxygen and maintaining discipline from mentors. One lesson became unforgettable — they had

a near accident: *“I almost slipped because I didn’t check my crampon properly. That’s when I realized that a small mistake can cost a life.”*

‘Summit is optional, but safe return is mandatory,’ [P8] said. The mentors of [P9] emphasized discipline, patience and maintaining safety above all else. By observing senior Sherpas in action, [P11] adapted to judging weather, managing loads and caring for clients.

Patience Instructors. Several participants noted patience as among the most important lessons learned from their mentors. [P10] remembers being instructed, *‘Never let ego lead you in the mountains. Weather changes fast, and decisions have to be taken in the moment.’* [P13] had learned from older Sherpa guides how to read the weather, when to stop paying clients and when to turn around. The most important lesson he learned- Patience—and that *“there is no rush in the mountains.”*

[P17]’s mentors instructed him on how to fix a rope, walk on a glacier and, most importantly, be patient — that hurrying can be hazardous. [P16] stressed that ego should remain at home, and humility is paramount in the mountains.

Inspirational Figures and Teaching Cycle. Some were motivated by people they had never met in person. [P14] drew motivation from the story of Pasang Lhamu Sherpa and [P9] admired seasoned mountaineer Furba Tenji. And even without teaching directly, these role models proved that it was possible to reach the mountains’ heights.

[P9] also narrated one of the most frequent ones: *‘I was educated by the seniors, and now we educate the juniors, that is how it works;’* That wisdom, which was passed down by Sherpa guides to Magar climbers is now being passed down to a new generation. It is growing the community of mountain knowledge bearers.

These narratives emphasize the fact that education in the mountains is inter-ethnic. The teachers are Sherpa guides, the learners Magar guides and now the teachers Magar guides. The mountains do not discriminate against ethnicities, that is, the colonization of one or the other, but the history of the first and the second to come continues to tell the paths of knowledge.

4.1.7 Defining Success at Altitude

What is the way a guide can be aware of that they have done a good job? To them, it is not just being at the top that counts as their success. The twenty interviews give a powerful comprehensive concept, which is to reach the top and return safely in mountaineering. They are both necessities and one cannot take place without the other.

Summit Alone Is Not Success. Success is not coming to the peak as alone, as [P1] puts it, but bringing everybody back safe. On Mera Peak and Ama Dablam, we encountered some issues, but the fact we came back safe is success.

[P2], using his background in the army, emphasizes *'discipline and safety rather than racing to the summit.'* [P3] says, *"Expeditions such as Island Peak and Ama Dablam were special because we summited and came back safe."*

[P4], who can speak from experience with real risks, says: *"From Base Camp to Camp 2, it's never guaranteed that you stay alive. But when the group gets to the summit and comes down safely, that feels like genuine success."*

[P5], who has summited Everest and climbed Manaslu, also defines success as simply returning safely. [P6], which has more than ninety peaks over 6,000 meters, also adds: *"Success isn't just taking summit photos — it's about everyone getting back down safely."*

When Safety Overrides Summit. Several participants said that it was about returning safely, even if no summit is reached. [P3] mentions one expedition when inclement weather caused the team to turn around: *"The next season we returned, and made it safely up to the summit. That patience and safe decisions — that's success for me."*

[P10] led a Chulu expedition on which clients did not summit, but all members of the team returned alive: *"That was success for me."*

[P12] recalls of a suspenseful moment when the summit team departed around 11 pm and reports of an avalanche came in. *"I was worried at Base Camp. When everyone returned safely, that was my true success."*

[P15] had a similar experience: *“A team leaving one night for the summit and avalanche news came. I was worried at Base Camp. When everyone came back safe, that was success for me.”*

Success beyond Summit. These expeditions can often have special meaning to the climbers. [P1] has a view of Mera Peak and Ama Dablam but [P3] only Island Peak and Ama Dablam. [P5] Everest and Manaslu ascents in the case were significant milestones in his career. The achievements of [P6] are thirteen successful ascents of Mera Peak, over thirty-five ascents of Lobuche and over ninety ascents of 6,000-meter and above peaks, are a continuum of success over time not a single event. [P7] remembers Everest 2024, and [P11] has been climbing Himlung Himal numerous times. The peak of Everest by [P14] in 2022 brought fame to the village.

Success is also the objects of their command to others. [P3] recalls guiding a terrified client to the top of Ama Dablam: *“I felt proud when he thanked me.”* [P4] is proud of the fact that clients enjoy his cooking at high camp. [P13] published that it felt competent after and the successful handling of loggers to High Camp for the first time.

[P2] offers a different kind of success — an epiphany at 7,000 meters, during political turmoil in Nepal: *“There was a curfew in the country but when you are on the mountains, there you are alone with nature. I understood that nature has a black-and-white essence. It takes you in if you're ready; rejects you if you're not. That gave me pride.”*

Success is neither straightforward nor entirely personal from these stories. It includes safely reaching the summit, expertly guiding clients, learning what works and what doesn't — all building a record over time. Success ultimately is returning to share the story — and returning with something meaningful to tell.

4.1.8 The Qualities That Matter at Altitude

What then does it take to be a really competent guide at 8000m? The participants say it is a question of mind and not muscle. Dwells rather on patience than on speed, calmness than on emotional reactions. Participants further highlighted of the challenge that mountain poses, and they claim it is a mind battle, not a body battle.

Primacy of Mental Strength. According to the guides, being a good high altitude performer is more a psychological task. [P1]: *'you must have mental strength*

and patience, and to keep still making decisions what to do-up there the emotions are dangerous.' [P2] has army experience: risk assessment, keeping a cool head, reading weather and navigation patterns- and discipline; panic is not an option. [P5] stresses mental strength, patience and physical conditioning, and explains that guides must make decisive choices and motivate clients as well. [P6] emphasises patience, integrity and courage, both physical and mental, and dealing with clients as relatives. Panic is the killer of an expedition, [P8] observes, hence he mentions that it is important to be mentally controlled, disciplined, fit, patient and able to communicate effectively. [P10] teaches the disconnection of body and mind and the influence of one to another: Strong body, strong mind. When clients freak out, the guide should not freak out. And according to [P11]: at high altitude, mental strength is the most important factor in any physical capacity, and guides must have the capacity to cope with risks.

Discipline as Foundation. Discipline was a common theme in the qualities of high-altitude guides. [P3] is discipline, dedication, communication skills and technical knowledge. [P9] focuses on endurance, honesty and discipline and notes that ego, has no place in the mountains, you have to go slowly and safely. Discipline, patience, control of the body and mind can be learned even by cooks who climb to the mountain, [P12]. [P16] stresses on the power of the mind, emotions and willpower and the ability to be patient not to hurry a process; it teaches us that a guide has to remain composed when a client panics. The same thing with [P17] and [P18] that also lay stress on the power of the mind, discipline and collaboration. The fact that these characteristics were stated multiple times indicates an agreement among the respondents.

Humanity and Rejection of Ego. Humility is the most mentioned quality. [P2] says, in the mountains, preparations helps but ego does not. This is also echoed in [P9] which explains that it is always better to take the time to move safely and not in a rush and with pride. [P10] recalls words of caution given by mentors, Never bring ego to the mountains. [P16] also discovered that humility is important; arrogance kills at high altitude. Guides never fail to write the mountain rewards patience, prepare- and the intelligence to walk away when the time is right. Ego, a good quality elsewhere, is a dangerous one in the mountains.

Practical Skills and Character. These traits are not merely abstractions - they result in real abilities. Stability of the mind and discipline are the most important: weather reading, risk assessment, motivating the client. [P2] is only capable of computing risk and reading the weather insofar as he can hold it together when it gets better. [P5] makes the client take action, through empathy without panicking the clients. [P13] emphasizes physical fitness, a relaxed mind and responsibility, that the life of a client must be your own responsibility. Guides who employ this individual approach make other decisions than those who consider safety simply a professional duty. In other words, the skills to perform well at altitude require a combination of technical expertise, psychological sensitivity and awareness, leadership and moral judgment. Mental strength, patience, discipline and humility are developed through experience, and it teaches you this by making thousands of decisions that put your very existence to the test.

4.1.9 Family Ties and Risk Balancing

Any climbing guide is walking around with his family in mind, not because it is in but because it is his duty. At home, participants report that they are always juggling between the dangers of climbing and being aware of what it means to lose. The inescapable tension between professional responsibility and family commitment carries with it the decisions they make and how they go about leading.

Sacrifices Named. It happened that when asked about sacrifice, the respondents were much more consistent. There were numerous accounts of the family cost and the individual cost of work. [P1]: *'I sacrificed money and time with my family. I had to hear people ask me questions.'* [P3] said that he was out of home a lot. [P4] discussed physical difficulties and the absence of family. [P5] talked about the money expended in training and absence of home.

Monetary sacrifices were prevalent as well. [P3] spent a considerable sum on training. [P8] has been working hard to train years. [P14] struggled to find the balance between the cost of household and training costs. There were sacrifices that were forever. [P12] and [P15] said that pursuing mountaineering was abdicating school. [P6] has a terrible accident of 2020 to tell: *"I had fallen at 30-35 meters, and spent approximately 17-18 days in the hospital, I did not even have money to enter the hospital. I thought about*

my family, and I decided I would come back." Such instances show that obedience to the mountains is often accompanied with obedience to family.

Managing Family Concerns. Participants were also asked how they deal with family issues. [P1] informed his family members about it and prepared well to reduce the risk; being single is of help. [P2] arranged insurance and emphasized on preparation to reassure family. [P5] was not closed off to his family, as he attempted to be the least risky. [P8] explained that family and community have obligations towards even unmarried guides. [P13] explained that he feared his family but added that focusing on safety helped him to cope. During the interviews, it observed that guides are engaged in an unending negotiation between business and family issues.

Limits of Preparation. Still, with the planning, participants said that it is impossible to be sure that risk will be eliminated. [P4] replied, Family says not to go, but this is more dangerous of a nature. Life first. The insurance comes in handy when there is a financial loss but cannot replace life. [P6], having fallen, emphasized the need to prepare but there remains the risk. [P9] and [P12] were of one mind: insurance may provide some security, but a prudent planning, collaboration is what is important. [P15] replied that they are not the only ones in this balance.

Rewards That Justify Sacrifice. In spite of these risks and difficulties, participants continue to realize high returns. [P1] was confident and was a representative of the Magar community. [P2] stresses leadership and discipline and pride in the community. When you are up there at last and the feeling of excitement and joy! [P3] explained. [P4] and [P5] had respect, achievement and self-confidence. [P8] said it was in honor of the profession, fame and promotion of his people in the world. Ultimately, there are rewards at a personal, societal and community level: a sense of achievement at having made it despite the challenging conditions, being an example to other people and being proud to be a member of the Magar community. And these are rewards that are not just the money; there is something deeper, a sense of identity and of purpose.

4.1.10 The Pride They Carry

Pride in personal accomplishment, pride in client accomplishment, pride in professional accomplishments and breakthroughs.

Summit Pride. [P5] reached Everest and said he felt tears of joy: *“I came from a village and reached here. “That pride I will never forget.”* Ama Dablam — mushroom ridge, [P1] felt proud. [P6] also spoke of bringing the name of his community to high altitude, making the pride personal and communal.

Pride in Client Success. Through helping clients, pride can also be felt. With a terrified client on Ama Dablam, [P3] encouraged a summit reach feel proud. [P4] took pride in clients applaud-ing his cooking at high camp. [P13] celebrated the successful movement of its clients to High Camp. [P9] recalled finishing the rope fixing and getting congratulations at Base Camp was a loop that would get closed when they called home with news of success.

Pride in Professional Milestone. [P8] spoke of the pride not only in becoming an IFMGA-certified guide, but also for the Magar community: *“It felt like breaking a barrier.”* When he and his clients made it to the summit, [P7] experienced pride. [P14] "summit in 2022" Everest and village recognition is achievement by village.

Pride in Crisis Management. [P11] describes the pride of going through a helicopter accident outside Base Camp, safe rigging and teamwork! [P2] had a deep-cleaning moment at altitude, around 7,000 meters; during political unrest and instability in his land of origin he learned that nature accepts those who are prepared and rejects the ones who are not.

Pride, in these narratives, is social, before it’s individual. It occurs when those with whom we are close (families, clients or others in a professional context) have values that resonate with our own effort. The phone call home, village welcome, or thanks from a client says the guide’s work matters beyond the individuals. In that sense, pride is a reflection of impact and responsibility and collective success.

4.1.11 Magar identity in the mountains

Before responding to the summit, participants were asked how being Magar intertwines with being a mountaineer or climbing guide. Their answers betray a quiet resolve to recast who belongs in the high mountains.

Challenging the Sherpa-Mountain Equation. Over the across of 20 interviews, one theme emerges strongest: Magar guides want to combat the popular perception that the mountains belong only to Sherpas. [P1] said simply, *‘I am proud to*

be Magar. You might think only Sherpas are mountain people. I want to prove it that even Magars can do great things.' Likewise, [P2] placed pride in their community and the need to show that *'Magars can also climb and lead'*, opposing the prevalent notion that Sherpa equals mountaineer.

Many participants connected their mountaineering skills to cultural values. [P3] stated, *'The Magar community has hardworking and disciplined people. Those values help in mountaineering.'* [P4] encapsulated this idea in noting that: *'Some people think Sherpas do this, but we can do it too'* suggesting they wished to demonstrate that Magars are equally able and skilled in such challenging work.

Others reiterated the message of pride and capability. Earlier, people used to think that Sherpa means mountain. It shows that Magars can do it, too," [P6] further stressed the need to prove that *"Magars can also ascent into the big mountains, not only Sherpas."* [P7] talked about qualities he thinks are part of Magar identity, like hard work, endurance and resilience, and proposed they become a central element in what constitutes success as high-altitude guide.

To some degree the feelings of those who contributed to this effort reflect an aspiration for something bigger than the individual; they represented a campaign of raising awareness that mountaineering is not exclusively by any means anyone domain, and Magars have as much right to it as anyone.

Breaking Barriers. For [P8], this realization was more than just a personal achievement; it resonated closely with what they wrote as earning their IFMGA certification—a mantle of representation. *"And I feel proud that I represent the Magar community. "I want to prove that mountaineering is not an ethnic thing."* It is talent that counts not caste and background. The last is a key thought that resonates throughout the community: Climbing should be based on ability, not gender.

The [P9] has a similar vision: *'I want to show that Magars can also reach the peak and lead- you know that it's not just one community.'* [P10], Abstract Magars also mentions their persistent underrepresentation in mountaineering: *'Magar representation in climbing is still low. I want to show that we can also do it just as well.'* Even confirmed by the people, *'Magars can do but representation is still less.'* [P11] says *'I want to show the skill level is more important than ethnicity.'*

Participants link this mission with personal experience. [P12] notes: “*Magar originates from that place, we are less familiar in the tourism sector. I want to demonstrate that we can move not just from the farming life to mountain profession.*” [P13], who was raised in a Sherpa-dominant area, writes that he wishes to challenge assumptions: “*I want to prove that we Magars also can climb and lead.*” [P14] speaks to a mindset: “*People think only Sherpas can climb mountains. I want to break that mindset. Magars can also succeed.*” This builds on [P15] who said, “*We have high Magar population but our name is not so heard about the ability. I want to demonstrate that you can get from farming life to mountain profession.*”

Whether Magar or not, these voices come together in one accord: Magars will be seen, they will be recognized and respected as mountain people; skill and dedication are what determines who belongs in the mountains — not ethnicity.

Burden of Proof and What They Bring. What these statements have in common is an increased consciousness of being seen, of representing something larger than the individual. The Magar guide goes not just for personal achievement, but to show what’s possible. [P1] says that as a woman, there is the extra added challenge in it: They should also portray our struggles too like by how much women need to compensate. But there’s no bitterness to this; the tone is resolute, proud and forward-looking. These guides aren’t asking the mountains to respect their identity — they’re demonstrating, one successful ascent at a time, that identity isn’t determinant in who reaches the top.

It’s evidence that accumulates with every summit attained, each successful descent and every client who gives a Magar guide a tip at the base of the mountain to express appreciation for getting him down safely. Some participants connect Magar cultural mores and proficiency in climbing. The hard work, discipline, endurance and resilience that farming and military service cultivate translates beautifully to high-altitude labor.

For the guide who sees these values in his own background, it is not an abandonment of Magar identity but rather its expression in this altered setting. The mounts become a world for this imply enhancing what it means to be Magar. It is not like someone replaces the farming or military service with climbing, it adds another layer, another dimension, another way to be Magar in an analogs world, another kind of outlet for community pride, and a chance where we prove ourselves.

4.1.12 Recognition They Seek

When participants were asked what they wish for the media and tourism industry to truly listen to, their responses repeatedly began with a singular focus: This can be on Sherpa guides while little to no visibility is given to the labor and risks faced by Magar as well as other ethnic groups.

Visibility Gap. The media need to show struggles particularly of women — gender and ethnicity combine with greater obstacles, [P1] noted. [P2] said the coverage had to also reflect what happened behind closed doors, not just images inside the summit. [P3]–[P15] expressed similar sentiments. The Magar guides were strong with all the skills and deserved equal level as Sherpas, they said. A few participants commented on the less glamorized aspects of guiding—[P7] described, for example, that it is about high level of risks and personal sacrifices. [P8] reflected on how the primary role of Magar guides, in particular, is often rendered invisible in media reporting: [P12] and [P15] remarked that the labor behind summit images — years of experience as a porter followed by costly training, missing time with family, physical pain — remains a base note to public narrative.

Beyond Representation. And it was not tokenism, it was a request for proper representation of what guiding is. They wanted to see the whole story: the prep, the struggles, the risk. The work should expose behind-the-scenes pain at the same time as [P12] and [P15] said, guiding life is no glamorous affair, is much more acute for both [P2], [P6] and [P10]. This is precisely what [P7] proved: the task is hard and demanding, but the final images rarely reflect that reality.

Industry's Role and Recognition. Participants also mentioned the role of the tourism industry in acknowledgment. [P8] demand equal recognition of Magar and other ethnic guides, which [P11] agreed. Most importantly, their tone wasn't antagonistic: They didn't want Sherpas to get less exposure; they wanted Magars to be visible next to them. Recognition itself is important as a matter of pride but also for very practical reasons — visibility matters when it comes to hiring, client selection and professional advancement. When Sherpas are in the media, it further cements that mountain work “is” theirs (by virtue of their identity), underpinning opportunities for these guide workers to build reputations and attract clients in ways that this rarely happens for guides like Magars.

The participants' asking is straightforward: They wish to be noticed. (The next generation, the Magar youth in their village say, should believe that we can work in the mountains). They want clients to understand that Magar guides are skillful and capable. They would like the industry to reflect the diversity of its work force. This request for acknowledgement is simply asking of them what all professionals want: to be recognized for their contribution, that they have a fair shot to compete, and find in the story of mountains that they help others summit a rightful place.

4.1.13 Discussions of Findings

It is essential to examine the interplay between ethnicity, professional organization, and a country's tourism industry to understand the lived experiences of high-altitude Magar guides and climbers. The accounts of 20 interviewees provide evidence of how Magars establish themselves within an occupation that has belonged to Sherpas for several decades and change people's perceptions of ethnic groups involved in mountaineering in the Himalayas.

From a perspective of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the mountaineering industry in Nepal might be viewed as a professional field in which Sherpa guides serve as a historically intertwined core group based on their continuous exposure to foreigners and tourism media attention. Earlier research works like Ortner (1999) and Adams (1996) demonstrate how these factors helped construct a myth of Sherpas being authorities in Himalayan mountaineering.

Magar guides' desire to become visible reflects their attempt to challenge these myths and gain recognition. They strive to prove that Magars are also qualified mountaineers, which can be noticed in statements like "I want to show Magars can also succeed" ([P1], [P2], [P5], [P14]). It shows that participants are aware of their position in the hierarchy and that they feel an obligation to prove it through actions, not just arguments.

Still, personal initiatives are performed against the background of a professional system that leaves little room for alternative views. According to Spoon (2011), Sherpa is a common term used to refer to all high-altitude workers despite other ethnic groups, including Magars, Gurungs, and Raies. All participants confirmed that it contributes to the perception of other ethnic groups as inferior workers by clients, companies, and media.

As [P1] noted, the majority of people think that only Sherpas are real "mountain people." It affects the career growth of other ethnicities since they cannot compete for visibility. Furbacher (2020) refers to non-Sherpas' careers as occupying the professional periphery despite performing similar work under equally dangerous conditions. This research provides examples that support the author's opinion. [P6] has been on more than 90 summits over 6,000 meters, and [P11] has been climbing Himlung Himal repeatedly, but their achievements often go unnoticed.

Moreover, participants made it clear that their career accomplishments are important to their communities. Several of them stated that it felt as if their accomplishments served the purpose of showing off their villages. [P6] believes that reaching high altitudes is a way of lifting up his village name. Similarly, [P14] feels pride in returning to the village as the Everest summitter. Thus, career success can enhance the status of ethnic groups too.

As a case in point, the accomplishment of being the first Magar IFMGA guide ([P8]) might serve the interest of the whole community. His statement about feeling like breaking a barrier indicates how the progress of particular members of society can help achieve a larger goal.

Occupational Sociology (Hughes, 1991) also allows for understanding better how people enter the mountaineering field and grow into professionals. Participants stated that they began their carrier as porters or kitchen assistants and eventually became guides. As Gurung (2005) identifies informal apprenticeship as one of the pathways to learn a profession, these stories prove that most of the participants entered the profession informally.

The encouragement provided by a Sherpa guide ([P6]) exemplifies how often it starts not due to formal training but happens casually through mentoring relationships. It means that it takes luck to be offered such guidance and opportunities.

Many participants emphasized the importance of making steady progress in the occupation. Statements like "step by step I moved ahead" ([P2]) and "step by step from assistant guide to lead guide" ([P6]) imply that one should earn the necessary reputation before gaining experience. However, such a process usually takes many years. It was also mentioned by [P11] who worked as a porter for 7 years before getting a chance to

be the leader of his team. In other words, to be promoted, one needs to put in a lot of unfair paid or even unpaid work.

Another issue that emerges from participants' statements is the financial burden. Participants [P3], [P8], and [P14] mentioned that they could not afford education because of having to take care of their families. At the same time, the mountaineering training is theoretically available to all, but its accessibility depends on a person's connections and financial stability, according to Paudel (2020). Therefore, statements about skills being more important than ethnicity can be regarded as desirable, rather than reality.

In earlier research, such as that conducted by Bhandari (2019), there is mention that the mountain guides may face barriers when seeking leadership positions on expeditions. While none of the 20 Magar guides participants spoke about glass ceilings, their accounts of needing to overcome incredible obstacles to reach a goal resonate with the idea of having barriers. The example of [P8]'s IFMGA success shows that it is achievable, but that the number of such pathways is minimal.

Earlier research conducted in the framework of tourism labor (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen 1988) explains why visibility is so crucial for this field. Media tend to report only on 'Sherpas' accomplishments, which affects job opportunities, as clients often choose guides according to their reputation. According to Brennan (2022), this visibility is directly related to economic benefits.

Participants also argued with the popular image of mountaineering that is promoted by the media. They wanted the latter to recognize their hard work, years of preparation, dangers, risks, sacrifices, and family separations. Their accounts provided a picture of the mountaineering occupation, which includes such events as [P6] falling from a rock and having to go to hospital without the financial safety net.

There is also evidence that the Nepalese government needs to improve policies regarding ethnic inclusion within the tourism industry. Policy analysis demonstrates that there are no means to ensure such inclusion in this industry. The experience of participants suggests that there are very few opportunities for ethnic minorities that are not intermediated via informal networks.

Nonetheless, the findings of this research demonstrate a clear pattern of Magars growing contribution to Nepal's mountaineering industry. Participants discussed successful expeditions, professional certifications, and mentoring activities. Moreover, most of them emphasized how the practice of mountain work improves their living conditions by helping to build houses and educate children.

Thus, both participants' career paths and status as members of the profession change. On a larger scale, their experiences are also connected to discussions related to opportunity and representation issues of historically disadvantaged ethnic groups in various occupations.

The dynamics of the aforementioned experiences have been examined based on the three theoretical perspectives reviewed in this research study. Social Identity Theory helps analyze the issues of ethnicity and visibility in the mountaineering profession. Occupation Sociology allows for tracing the dynamics of professional evolution. Finally, tourism labor studies provide context for the examined experiences.

All together, these theories explain why Magar guides are able to create career opportunities not only for themselves but also improve the professional environment for other members of their community.

4.2 Contributions of Magar Guides to Mountain Tourism Growth and Resilience

4.2.1 Skills Carried from Hills and Home

While describing the skills they have acquired through time, participants seldom started with the mountaineering training they received. Instead, they discussed their background, earlier jobs, and experiences that gradually equipped them with necessary skills for mountain climbing and guiding. It appears that in case of Magar climbers, the acquisition of skills is just as much an outcome of their growing up in hills as of formal mountaineering training.

Strength Acquired from Ordinary Life. Endurance was a quality which came up as the most important among all 20 participants. Moreover, several people directly associated it with their childhood. For instance, [P1] noted that growing up in hilly regions contributed to their development of endurance and physical strength. Other interviewees associated endurance and strength with their experience as porters. Thus, according to [P4], years of experience of carrying loads contributed to their physical

strength and confidence at altitude. Likewise, [P9] and [P11] indicated that their work as porters was when they first acquired practical knowledge about high altitude mountain tourism.

In some cases, strength had its roots not in mountain climbing but in people's ordinary activities. For example, [P12] traced the origins of his physical ability to agricultural labor, because he believed that farmers have to exert themselves daily to get good yields. Similarly, [P15] believed that farming makes one physically strong as well as disciplined enough to do hard and exhausting work.

It appears that their physical training for mountaineering often starts much earlier than they ever consider the idea of climbing high peaks. While walking through forests or hills in order to fetch firewood, tending farmlands, or hiking in village trails, they acquire physical strength which will be useful to them when they start climbing mountains.

Learning Practical Judgments. Another characteristic mentioned by participants was practical judgment which was sometimes referred to as practical mountain judgment ([P2], [P8]), practical climbing skills ([P6]), practical mountain sense ([P10], [P19]), and field knowledge ([P16], [P17], [P18], [P20]). It is obvious that here practical judgment means experience which can be acquired only through the actual interaction with nature.

Thus, while training teaches one certain techniques, it is the accumulated experience of dealing with risky situations, dangerous weather conditions, and rough terrains that helps in assessing a situation in a proper manner. For instance, [P6] indirectly expressed this idea in his explanation of the necessity for climbers to be able not only to tie the rope but also to assess the weather properly and decide whether it is safe or not to climb at that moment. In addition, weather reading is another skill that involves experience-based judgment.

It means that their contribution to mountain tourism is not only due to various certificates but also due to their vast practical experience.

Discipline and Work Culture. Discipline was also another trait mentioned by some participants. Some related discipline with their military background, stating that

their experience in the army helped them acquire traits such as discipline, cooperation, and accountability, which they applied to their mountain climbing adventure.

It is interesting to note that even the individuals who had no military background mentioned discipline as one of the traits found within the Magar community's work culture. Participants including [P1], [P4], [P6], [P8], [P9], [P10], [P11], [P13], [P16], [P17], [P18], [P19], and [P20] all mentioned discipline in some form. These included being dependable, procedural, team-oriented, and accountable.

[P8] summed up the combination of the three attributes quite nicely when he/she mentioned having great endurance, sound judgment in the mountains, and good work ethic. If we look at all the answers taken together, these three attributes can be found throughout.

By considering the answers as a whole, it seems like the participants feel that the contribution of the Magars is not one skill alone but a combination of several aspects gained through years of living and working. These include endurance, which allows them to persist in harsh conditions, judgment, which makes them make the right choices, and work ethic, which makes them dependable workers.

4.2.2 Life First, Summit Second

One of the most evident trends throughout all the interviews was how participants stressed that getting to the top must never be prioritized above saving lives. Although every mountaineer used different words, their message was the same – summits do not outweigh lives. The key point here is not only the message conveyed but its consistency, which speaks volumes about the profession itself and the ethics developed through practical experience.

A Shared Safety Philosophy. A common theme that emerged in interviews is the one presented below. This idea was stated almost identically by many participants: Safety must always be the most important thing. Summit comes after you have ensured that your clients are safe. Safety must come before the summit. Life is more essential than any summit. Success is less important than well-being and survival in the mountains. Health must come before anything else. Such consistency of answers is worth noting since it shows that this philosophy is learned gradually during one's career as a guide in the Himalayas rather than learned from training materials in the beginning.

In particular, some interviewees pointed out why exactly such a philosophy became a cornerstone for guides. Being in the mountains themselves, guides understand that they will face many dangers and unpredictable conditions. As a result, they learn that success does not mean reaching a peak but ensuring safe return of everybody involved. [P1] gave an example from her experience, stating that, regardless of the challenges encountered while climbing Mera Peak and Ama Dablam, successful completion of the route meant getting down in good health. It represents an understanding of success that is quite different from the achievements seen in summit photographs.

Building a Safety Culture. This safety-first attitude is not only an idea; it is the way the guides operate in practice. The interviewees described how they strive for promoting cautious decision making during the tour. They mentioned encouraging patience, thorough planning, and realistic assessment instead of taking risks unnecessarily.

[P2] and [P8] elaborated on the positive role of structured planning and rational thinking in enhancing mountain climbing safety. [P3] and [P6] focused on risk assessment and the importance of recognizing unfavorable conditions. Other respondents emphasized patience and self-control as components of safe guiding operations.

The respondents also considered team work and customer care as a part of this safety culture. According to [P7], such practices as close customer monitoring and strong collaboration have been increasingly perceived as common standards in many mountain climbing. This observation implies that, besides adhering to safety culture, guides contribute to its development through regular practice.

In sum, these responses indicate that the Magar guides participate in adventure tourism in Nepal not only with their labor force but also by promoting certain professional attitudes that are crucial for its sustainable development.

The Importance of Knowing When to Turn Back. One other critical safety measure that came out strongly through some participants included the importance of turnaround decisions. Being able to know when to stop and make a descent can be quite challenging, particularly when the clients are highly committed to getting to the top.

Turnaround times and the need to get into them, even when there is just a little doubt about the situation, were stated by participants like [P3], [P17], [P18], and [P19]. Such

decisions go beyond having the technical skills required in guiding. They also require the confidence to do so, experience in doing so, and the ability to communicate difficult decisions to the clients.

A good guide must always find the balance between the wishes of the clients and ensuring that they do not risk their lives. This will involve paying attention to weather conditions, physical situations, and sometimes making decisions that might not please the client.

Accordingly, as many of the participants have pointed out, it is not necessarily the guide that climbs the mountain successfully each time that makes a good guide, but rather one who understands when he/she should not.

4.2.3 Client in Their Hands

Finally, apart from technical proficiency and safety awareness, there was yet another dimension of professional work mentioned by the participants – the client experience. Thus, in addition to the actual climbing, they mentioned care, interaction with clients, communication, motivation, and cultural awareness.

Building Trust and a Sense of Safety. It is worth noting that most of the respondents highlighted that the sense of trust can be built via different measures. In particular, participants noted that professional behavior and open communication, providing sound advice and care, is a great way to increase trustworthiness. For example, [P1] mentioned respect, safety, and leadership as important aspects. At the same time, others stressed the significance of professionalism and effective communication.

At the same time, participants noted the significance of some of the simpler aspects of care and client treatment. In particular, several of them noted that such basic aspects as food, care, and overall safety were essential. Other respondents added that being friendly, responsible, and approachable also helped. Such answers clearly indicated that client satisfaction would be impossible without technical proficiency alone.

At the same time, honesty was noted as an important aspect of client management and experience. Specifically, the participants said that being open with clients concerning their condition and possible risks contributed to developing trust and respect in the long

term. Although in some cases, it could lead to dissatisfaction, the respondents believed that it would eventually pay off.

Thus, taking into account all of the above, one can conclude that guides see their profession not only in helping clients reach the summit.

Motivational Role. [P3]'s story about encouraging a frightened client on Ama Dablam shows that guiding is also a job that requires much more than just physical efforts but also emotional involvement. Thus, [P13] stated, *"When we arrived at the summit, he thanked me and I was very proud,"* explaining how such occasions were important for guides. Moreover, the issue of motivation was highlighted by [P5], whereas encouragement and keeping the safe pace were mentioned by [P10] and [P14].

There is one remarkable aspect of the job discussed by participants that cannot always be noticed by people from outside the profession. These emotional efforts will never be seen in the photographs of the summit or expedition. Yet, participants claim that these efforts might determine success in many cases. For instance, if a client gets afraid or simply exhausted, the guide needs to make decisions whether to encourage him or her or take a rest.

All of these factors combined imply that the job of a mountaineer involves not only skills of guiding but also patience, ability to make judgments and understand people's behavior.

Health Monitoring and Pacing. [P14] brings out the need for keeping close watch on the health of the clients, encouraging them, and maintaining a reasonable speed. Observing such things as signs of altitude sickness, dehydration, and tiredness enables the guides to be able to avoid major issues from happening. [P12] and [P15] are high altitude cooks who ensure that the clients are healthy by providing proper meals that sustain them. Through provision of physical and psychological care, as well as sincere communication with their clients, Magar guides make sure that their clients are successful in their expeditions.

4.2.4 Passing the Rope

Another important theme to emerge from the interviewees is their belief in mentoring the upcoming generation in addition to guiding tourists. Virtually all interviewees spoke about imparting the necessary skills to young workers for conducting work in the

mountains. The training that takes place does not necessarily take place within formalized programs; rather, the training occurs in the field, in camps, and through experiences gained while on the job.

Teaching Through Demonstration. It is not officially stated that there exists a system of training new guides; however, experienced people try their best to impart essential skills in this matter such as ropes repairing, proper use of crampons, etc. This fact is very important as it makes one believe that guidance takes place through demonstration, hands-on instruction, and correction of mistakes made.

Moreover, mentors teach rope work and glacier technique and skills of safety practices informally. Teamwork is also included in the list of practices used in mentoring. Thus, in [P3] the author shares an opinion that junior climbers learn the art of rope manipulation and skills of being safe from their senior companions. The same goes for people responsible for cooking meals. For instance, [P4] says that as a chef he teaches junior guides everything he knows – from making food to maintaining camp safety regulations.

There were many others who shared similar views. They emphasized the need for imparting skills related to rope manipulations and safety measures as well as other technical aspects. For instance, [P5] talks about the first, [P6] focuses on rope fixing, crampon testing, and glacier moves while [P7] shares an opinion on sharing of practical experience gained during years of climbing. [P8] describes the process of teaching juniors in details.

In conclusion, it should be said that all the above mentioned people share the same opinion that mentorship lies in sharing wisdom acquired through years of practice. In addition, they impart their experience in the field.

Many of them said something similar in respect of guiding juniors in safety habits, teamwork practices, and technical basics which could be learned only by taking part in expedition processes. Young guides observe how their seniors conduct themselves and how they interact with other people involved in expedition activities.

According to several participants, this way of learning could prove to be more beneficial as far as imparting certain skills to young guides is concerned as everything could be applied immediately in practice and this, in turn, increases confidence level.

Kitchen as Classroom. Two respondents, [P12] and [P15], claim that kitchen serves as a classroom where they could transfer their experience in managing kitchen issues to junior guides. [P12] says that he teaches junior members how to perform kitchen duties at a high altitude properly paying attention to such aspects as hygiene and teamwork.

According to [P15], junior guides acquire these skills when they are taught how to cook at high altitudes by respecting all requirements concerning hygiene and teamwork.

Being engaged in cooking at a high altitude, one needs special skills. It implies knowing the ways of preparing proper food and saving resources while observing hygiene requirements.

[P9] provides a different perspective on mentorship in the kitchen as he had been a member of a kitchen staff prior to engaging in climbing activities. According to him, he received 45 days of training as a cook first and then was introduced to climbing practices.

Cycle of Knowledge. In [P7], it is clearly seen that through sharing experiences, Magar guides are able to teach their successors the lessons they have learned throughout their climbing journey. It is not only about teaching some tricks to young guides but ensuring that they will continue to exist in future. The knowledge that senior guides gain during their long career is not lost once they decide to retire; it is transferred to the next generation.

It is also worth noting that sharing the experience with others does not mean showing young people how to tie knots and use equipment properly. Experience implies transferring that practical knowledge that a person acquires when he or she is involved into the process and faces some problems and failures. The experience cannot be fully captured in a curriculum for certification purposes.

The guide who received his or her knowledge from more experienced colleagues and teaches less experienced guides now is the part of an ongoing process of knowledge transfer.

4.2.5 Architects of Safety

In addition to the safety measures in their personal activities, Magar guides contribute to shaping the overall safety strategies employed by all expeditions. As they gain experience dealing with difficult decisions such as turning around, navigating dangerous terrains, and handling their clients, their acquired knowledge gradually turns into general safety practices that will protect future climbers.

Safety-First as a Cultural Contribution. According to [P1], it is necessary to adopt a "safety-first" approach in mountain guiding. However, he further elaborates that in addition to being a mindset, the safety-first strategy involves practical decision-making skills. The decisions should be practical, rather than merely bureaucratic.

According to [P2], the combination of safety-first thinking and well-planned actions impacts more than just one guide. Eventually, it affects the routine of an entire expedition. This cultural practice is highlighted again in [P3].

Lastly, [P7] mentions that some of the practices, such as thorough client management and cooperation, developed by Magar guides have become common in many teams. While initially, they were implemented only in individual cases, over time, they have influenced the way expeditions are managed.

Practical Decisions and Risk Calculation. [P6] discusses the need for promoting a culture of safety above all else, and taking risks after careful deliberation and planning. This process of risk evaluation does not come easy. The skill to do so must be developed through experience—through exposure to instances that require sound judgment to avoid dangers.

The disciplined manner of making decisions, coupled with the focus on safety as discussed in [P11], is an important aspect. Patience becomes an integral component as mentioned in [P13] as it becomes crucial when making safety-related decisions during a turnaround. Here, patience becomes an act of safety by being aware of when it is necessary to stop, delay, and even backtrack.

[P16] also mentions the importance of safety-first thinking and patience in such matters. Careful decision-making and strict adherence to turnaround discipline as mentioned in [P17] are both equally vital.

Structured Planning and Decision-Making. [P8] shows the significance of having a well-designed process in guiding. This emphasis on the structuring process in [P2] demonstrates the importance of pre-expedition planning. Hence, the concept of safety in climbing goes beyond reactive measures.

A guide who is able to plan rotations, assess weather prior to the trip, and decide about routes in a calculated manner creates safety at a higher level which can be termed as the art of expedition design.

This can be seen in [P5] when he describes his responsibility in assessing weather, rotation planning, and route decision making. In [P10], there is also an indication of weather assessment and route adjustments. In [P14], weather planning and managing the route are included in responsibilities.

This is a kind of behind-the-scenes job that ensures safety for climbers.

4.2.6 Guardians of the Mountain

A recurrent theme during our conversations with these guides was the dedication they showed toward ensuring that the mountains were protected. The participants saw themselves not only as employees, but as custodians of the environment, without which their occupation would be impossible.

This attitude shows a combination of pragmatic necessity and profound reverence for nature. Caring for the mountains is intrinsic to their occupation and way of being.

Following Waste Rules. One of the most common practices discussed by the guides is adhering to proper waste management guidelines. As [P1] noted, “*I strictly adhere to waste management practices and use poop bags. Nature conservation is one of the aspects of my culture.*” For [P2], respecting nature is very important and waste management needs to be observed. The same view was shared by [P3], [P4], [P5], and [P6] who reiterated that they strictly observe waste management practices and conserve the mountains.

For [P7], there is an added aspect of educating tourists about responsible behavior when climbing in the mountains. As noted by [P8], waste management practices go hand in hand with conservation of the mountains.

Beyond Compliance: Cultural Respect. Environmental stewardship is not always confined to the observance of laws among most guides. As [P1] remarked, “Respect for nature is in our culture,” indicating that the motivations behind their actions stem from within rather than from external pressures. Both [P12] and [P13] stressed that reverence for the mountains is equally critical as adhering to the proper waste disposal protocol, whereas [P16] noted that reverence for the mountains is linked yet separate from the observance of rules.

It is significant to note that there is a difference between a guide motivated by punishment and one motivated by reverence. The former will comply with the rules only to avoid punishment; on the other hand, the latter will advocate for the environment and even go above and beyond the call of duty.

Educating Clients and Making an Impact. A majority of Magar guides believe that another aspect of their job is to teach the clients about taking care of the mountains. According to [P7], he not only disposes of garbage in the mountains himself, but he also educates his clients on the same. In other words, he makes sure that his clients learn about the importance of waste disposal and why they should protect the mountains during their stay in Nepal. Other guides have expressed similar views regarding environmental protection.

According to [P11], the respect towards mountains is an important environmental practice. [P14] believes that following waste disposal rules is important, and [P15] mentions that it is important to keep the camp sites clean. [P20], on the other hand, mentions both the disposal of waste and protecting the mountain environment.

The cumulative effect of these practices results in several peaks being kept waste free. The client not only learns to reduce their ecological footprint, but also takes away lessons that help them in reducing their impact on the environment during their future visits.

4.2.7 Flow of Rupee and Respect

The impact of guide work on their communities goes much farther than what the guides themselves earn. The Magar guides explain how their wages feed back into their own villages, helping not only their families but the village as a whole. Thus, mountain tourism is not merely employment; it functions as a catalyst for economic development.

Village Connection and Multiplier Effect. The Magar guides explain the way their earnings return to their villages. As [P1] states, "Income comes back into the village—house, education, health." For [P2], income helps families, finances housing, education, and healthcare. [P3] talks about village development while [P4] mentions family care and education for children.

It appears that the income helps construct modern houses instead of traditional ones. The earnings help finance education, offer new possibilities, and provide healthcare. As mentioned by [P7], the income of the guide improves the local tourism as well.

The result is evident—mountain tourism does not affect only a particular guide but helps improve life within an entire village.

Tourism Sustainability through Economic Impact. [P7] makes emphasis on the role of local economic effects in the sustainability of the tourism industry. In other words, the earnings of the guides help finance the development of the region. When villagers observe the construction of houses and education of children thanks to the tourist business, the locals invest into it themselves. Thus, they motivate family members to remain employed in the mountains.

Many participants—[P1], [P2], [P3], [P4], [P5], [P6], [P8], [P9], [P10], [P13], [P14], [P16], [P17], [P18], and [P20]—note that professional, safe service leads to repeat clients and stronger tourism. Service quality becomes important on several levels. A satisfied customer will become a loyal one, and companies with qualified guides retain their good name. The entire industry profits from the positive buzz.

[P7] captures this point well: As there are more and more professional services provided by Magar guides, Nepal's reputation as a mountaineering destination will only improve. Both [P12] and [P15] highlight the fact that quality services ensure customer loyalty and trust. Such reputations cannot be achieved with any marketing campaigns; they must be earned.

4.2.8. Invisible Architects

Apart from assisting their clients climb the mountain, Magar guides have other roles that remain unseen by clients, yet they are vital for successful mountaineering. It entails strategic planning, decision-making, and problem-solving skills to achieve smooth operations on climbing.

Weather reading and decision-making. Magar guides attach significance to paying close attention to weather while planning an expedition. [P1] states, “We check weather trends, read online reports, and decide to begin or postpone.” The guides use traditional methods together with technology in making the said decisions.

[P2] outlines weather reading, decision-making, and route planning as some of the key roles played by Magar guides. [P3] notes checking weather and route planning while climbing. [P4] notes being mindful of the weather and coordinating camps. [P5] mentions planning rotations, routes, and paying attention to weather conditions.

[P6] includes emergency response in addition to weather judgment. [P7] mentions oxygen management, problem-solving, and weather decisions. [P8] highlights strategic route planning, risk assessment, and weather reading.

Therefore, the above statements depict how Magar guides utilize experience and technology in making informed decisions in the mountainous terrain.

Coordination and Problem-Solving. Magars guides have a crucial contribution in ensuring the success of each expedition. Coordinating the camp is discussed in [P4], and [P9] covers coordinating ropes together with making weather choices. Weather decisions and route changes are covered in [P10], and in [P11], the focus lies on utilizing previous experience in making weather decisions.

Cook Magars are also involved in logistics: in [P12], they plan meals and coordinate supplies at high camps, while [P15] repeats this idea. Coordination of camps and weather conditions is mentioned in [P13], route planning and camp management in [P14]. Weather monitoring and instant route decisions are discussed in [P16] and [P17]. Similarly, weather monitoring combined with planning the route comes up in [P18], [P19], and [P20].

Emergency management comes up in [P6], and problem solving occurs in [P7]. [P8] discusses assessing risks in logistics.

All these competencies usually show their importance when problems occur, such as unexpected weather, an ill client, or malfunctioning equipment.

Accumulation of Operational Wisdom. Here we witness a kind of expertise that certification cannot measure. The guide, who observes nature, plans camps, and

selects the proper route based on experience, applies skills that only come with many years of experience in the mountains.

The acquisition of such operational knowledge takes place through mentorship, like that described above. Such an addition to mountain tourism is more than just individual expertise; it contributes to the creation of infrastructure needed for success in this field. Expeditions do not become successful by virtue of individual heroism alone, but rather through thousands of correct small choices that nobody pays attention to. The guides belonging to the Magar community are involved in such decisions.

4.2.9 Quiet Weight of Contribution

Another issue that emerges through the interviews is the visibility that Magar guides have compared to Sherpa guides. This is due to the fact that the latter group of guides are well-known in the media and mountaineering literature. It was repeatedly pointed out by the participants that although both groups of guides offer similar levels of expertise in their services, Magars do not attract much attention. Nevertheless, the participants of the interview were proud of their role as guides and believed that they are vital for Nepalese mountain tourism industry.

Equality of Contribution. However, all of them stress the equal importance of their contribution compared to that of others such as the Sherpas, whose contribution is better recognized. Thus, [P1] asserts, "Equal contribution. Less publicity, but big impact." At the same time, [P2] and [P3] stress that their contribution technologically and operationally is as good as that of others. Both [P4] and [P5] also confirm that there is no difference in contribution, although it might be less well-known to the public. In particular, [P6] claims a strong contribution technologically and physically, whereas [P8] emphasizes the same point: their contribution is as important as that of others, although they are less known for it. Finally, [P9], [P10], and [P11] assert that their contribution is equal; however, their contribution is less acknowledged than that of others.

Overall, one can conclude that there is a disparity in the mountaineering industry. Namely, the contribution of Sherpa guides is often better acknowledged due to media attention. However, the Magar guides claim to provide the same level of technical, operational, and physical contribution. The findings indicate a problem of ethnic representation in the mountains of Nepal.

Support Role and Its Visibility. It was pointed out that some contributions were not always recognized, especially when it came to the support roles. For instance, [P12] stated that he had played a strong support role, although this role remained hidden. Clients enjoyed his cooking, but they did not recognize how much effort was needed to prepare food at high altitude.

This was a recurring theme among participants, who emphasized their roles, including technical or operational functions, regardless of their lack of recognition. [P13] mentioned that their contributions involved similar efforts, although such efforts might not be recognized equally. Similarly, [P14] pointed out that there was a comparable level of technical and operational skills, although these skills might not attract any publicity.

The same applied to [P16], [P17], [P18], [P19], and [P20], all of whom pointed out that their contributions were significant; however, such contributions could remain unrecognized. Therefore, it seems clear that some types of contributions are not always recognized, whether these contributions involve technical or operational work or both.

Meaning of Recognition. In interviews, the lack of visibility emerged as a common topic for discussion among participants. As such, the problem does not appear to be a private concern of only a few participants, but rather an issue affecting most Magar guides. Most participants noted that although they are equal in their contribution to the technical, safety, customer service, and economic aspects of climbing expeditions, they do not feel appreciated enough compared to, for example, Sherpa guides.

Recognition also plays a practical role beyond mere vanity. For example, participants noted that being more visible may result in getting hired by the climbing company, receiving better assignments, or being preferred by clients who rely heavily on reputation when selecting their guide for the climb.

Furthermore, some participants argued that focusing media reports predominantly on one particular group of guides gradually creates the perception that mountain guiding is mainly the field of those guides. Again, it was noted in a neutral tone, rather than being perceived as a hostile act, since this is something the participants notice as a trend

through time. As claimed by some guides, this perception hampers career development for many Magar guides.

Contribution That Persists. While not feeling adequately recognized, participants did not report feeling any reduced motivation or effort on their part. The majority reported continuing to do what they were doing just as before. This includes teaching new guides, ensuring safety, supporting their families, and protecting the environment of the mountain.

The term "big impact" by [P1] holds significance in this regard. It denotes that contribution may not necessarily require visibility. A house gets built regardless of its depiction in media news. Similarly, education and safety can be secured regardless of coverage in media.

One thing made abundantly clear through the analysis is that the contributions of Magar guides tend to add up over time. This could be seen from improved standards of living for the villagers because of income from tourism. Or from safer expeditions. It could also be seen from more junior guides being mentored by the more experienced ones.

At the same time, this research itself could be seen as a form of visibility as it contributes to highlighting the role of people other than well-known mountaineers.

4.2.10 Discussions of Findings

As seen from the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel & Turner (1986), there is a distinct hierarchy of recognition in the mountaineering business. As such, Sherpa guides have been identified as professionals in this field. This identification is based on numerous years of interaction with Western climbers, significant media exposure, and the promotion of tourism on Everest. In fact, previous research by Ortner (1999) and Adams (1996) already identified Sherpas' dominant position in Himalayan climbing.

However, it can be assumed that Magar guides are trying to find their place in this hierarchy. Most importantly, many participants highlighted a necessity to prove themselves through skills and performance. In particular, [P1], [P2], [P5], and [P14] mentioned wanting to show that Magars can also succeed. Such observations indicate knowledge about existing hierarchies as well as a need to present one's skills in order to be accepted in the professional milieu.

Similarly to Bhandari (2019) who notes that Magar guides try harder due to ethnic stereotypes, one should note that participants did not see their professional endeavors solely as a means to combat those stereotypes. For some participants, success meant representation of a bigger group as well. For example, [P6] stated that he felt like he was carrying the name of his village up here. [P14], having reached the top of Everest, said that he brought glory to his village.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognize that these individuals' successes operate within a Sherpa monoculture of recognition described by Spoon (2011). Specifically, the term Sherpa is often used to identify all kinds of high-altitude workers regardless of their actual identity. Magar, Gurung, Rai and other Janajati climbers remain invisible in this case. It is evident that participants were aware of this issue. For example, [P1] mentioned the assumption that Sherpas are the only mountain people.

The assumptions mentioned above have important implications for the mountaineering industry as well. It impacts expectations of clients. It affects hiring practices. Furthermore, it leads to different visibility in the media. As shown by Furmbacher (2020), non-Sherpa climbers who do similar dangerous job receive little or no recognition for that. Findings from this study partially confirm this hypothesis. For example, [P6] had climbed over 90 peaks above 6000 meters. However, this information remains unknown to many people.

Finally, some participants also tried to make connections between Magar culture and mountaineering. For example, [P3] mentioned that Magars are known for diligence and discipline, and these characteristics are beneficial in mountains. In fact, the mentioned observation could serve as an example of social creativity proposed by Tajfel and Turner – changing the basis for comparison as opposed to competing on established stereotypes.

Indeed, instead of traditional "mountain ethnicity" the emphasis has been made on such characteristics as discipline, endurance, and hard-working nature. It could partially be influenced by military background of Magars, discussed by Des Chene (1991).

4.3 Challenges Faced by Magar Mountaineering Guides

4.3.1 Training & Certification Financial Barriers

The cost of formal training and certification was one of the most common challenges noted by participants across all 20 interviews. Almost all the respondents mentioned this issue and described the expenses as quite challenging to navigate in their financial circumstances.

Participants noted that money spent on training can mean the equivalent of years of personal saving, while opportunities for financial support or sponsorship tend to be few and far between, as well as hard to access. While these financial specters do not always prevent entry into the profession, participants repeatedly described how they slow career advancement.

A few said that they had to postpone their training for years until they could save up the money, others spoke of not being able to complete additional certification because of financial pressure. This has proven that financial means continue to be a critically important factor in remaining an influential player in Nepal's mountaineering industry.

Numbers They Carry. These connections are described by [P1], who informs that “training costs twenty to twenty five lakh, sponsorship is hard and the financial hurdles feel a huge obstacle.” This particular amount – twenty to twenty-five lakh rupees – is cited again and again by other interviewees like [P6]. In Nepalese households, this amount constitutes several years of income, which has to be covered out-of-pocket despite household expenses incurred simultaneously. [P2] states that “training is costly. Financial obstacles are very large.” [P3] agrees saying that “training is costly. Sponsorship is scarce.” [P4] says, “*training is costly. Financial obstacles are huge.*” Finally, [P5] remarks that “training is costly. Sponsorship is scarce.” To illustrate [P7]'s opinion on this matter, one can say that “financial obstacles is the main obstacle in our profession. You need to spend a lot of money (certification from IFMGA internationally is expensive).” He explains that “*I needed to earn money along with saving.*”

As one can see, financial obstacles beat career progress in this profession. Such a high price is always stated, showing structural barriers for all those trying to get certified as a guide.

Sponsorship Gap. However, gaining sponsorship is difficult; therefore, the financial burden of mountaineering training is higher for the FinancialIg_. Many of the

participants including [P1], [P3], [P5], [P6], [P9], [P10], [P11], [P14]-[P20] state that sponsors are hard to come by. As opposed to those from communities in which mountaineering has a stronger presence or connection to mainstream tourism industries, Magar candidates have to finance their own professional training.

It took [P8] quite a bit of time and money to attain his IFMGA license. On one hand, it is personally satisfying to see his accomplishment; however, on the other hand, this accomplishment demonstrates another financial constraint that makes certification out of reach for so many people. Similarly, [P11] focuses on the financial burden of mountaineering training. [P14] points to this issue again emphasizing both factors.

Cumulative Effect. While financial barriers delay progress, they dictate the entire professional future of these people. Many guides are unable to get certified because they will be employed in supportive roles for much longer periods, and people who manage to collect money during their employment in such roles lose time that can be used for experience gain and establishing their name in roles that require certification. Economic constraints are a kind of filter where rules benefit people who have access to certain resources or possess exceptional patience. [P7] talks about chipping and saving gradually to get certification, about how important it is to take the slow and fragile way of reaching one's goals due to financial constraints. Contrary to guides who are sponsored or helped by their families in achieving certification, many Magar guides find themselves alone in this fight against economic obstacles.

4.3.2 Indirect Wall – Exclusion without Accusation

The issue of discrimination is another aspect of participants' experiences. Almost everyone who participated in the interview states that they have never faced any form of explicit or direct discrimination. However, indirect barriers are mentioned constantly. The difference is important as it suggests that exclusion from the profession doesn't always come in the form of direct attacks – quite often, it is expressed through the accumulation of various challenges that shape one's professional path.

Language of Indirection. According to them, in interviews, participants always say that there is no direct discrimination, but at the same time, they talk about indirect impediments. “There is no direct discrimination, but indirect difficulties arise,” [P1] argues. “Direct discrimination is prohibited, but sometimes there may be indirect inconveniences,” [P2] adds. [P3] states, “there is no direct discrimination in any strong

sense, but indirect differentials persist.” However, both [P4] and [P5] also mention some indirect obstacles. Direct discrimination is excluded here ([P5]), whereas indirect inconveniences remain intact, [P6]. Language skills, along with weak professional networks, may make them disadvantaged sometimes because Sherpa mountain guides have stronger social networks that help them access more opportunities, [P7]. According to [P8], even if there is no overt discrimination, impressions are in favor of those groups that have been already established in the industry for many years.

Mechanisms of Indirect Exclusion. Various types of indirect exclusion in the mountaineering industry have been identified by our participants. [P7]: Provides an example where her experiences involved communication barriers and less professional networks. [P8] mentions how perceptions were inclined towards those who were considered legitimate in the industry. [P11] refers to indirect challenges without identifying specific mechanisms, but the emergent patterns across interviews indicate that exclusion compounds through a constellation of network access limitations (see [P3]), recognition limitations (see [P8]), and more heavily laden relationships with trust building taking slower trajectories as discussed in later themes. It notes that despite the indirectness of the phenomenon, perceptions remain in favor of already established social categories ([P14]). [P15] note that discrimination does not exist openly but still leads to under-representation. Indirect discrimination may sometimes play a role in access opportunities as well, [P16], [P17], [P18], [P19], and [P20] suggest. Thus, all of these perspectives demonstrate how indirect discrimination works in order to influence access quietly.

Significance of No Direct Discrimination. This emphasis on the lack of discrimination being a direct one is important. The participants explain that there is no official restriction on the participation of Magar guides in trainings, leading, and work based on their ethnic origin. Rather, they live in a situation where most chances come through pre-existing networks in which they only gradually integrate ([P7], [P8]), where trust takes more time to establish among people who don’t possess high-level social and academic credibility ([P11], [P14]), and where recognition occurs based on outstanding achievements and not everyday efforts ([P15], [P16]). Indirect discrimination can be seen as very subtle, difficult to define, and impossible to address through policy. However, its impact is tangible, manifesting itself in delayed career growth and less chance to become leaders, with the impression that for the Magar guide,

there is always more to do than for other members of more successful communities to receive the same recognition.

4.3.3 Network Ceiling – From Support Role to Leader Role

During interviews, the participants were consistent in stating that having a network was essential to making the shift from supporting role to leadership role. They highlighted that just having technical knowledge would not get anyone there; they needed connections, recognition, and referrals as well.

Leadership as an Outcome of Networking. The participants reiterated that leadership roles are hard to achieve. According to [P1], representation is low, and networks make a significant difference. [P2] stated that visibility and networking are essential for leadership roles. In Posts 3 and 4, it is clear that leadership opportunities depend on representation and networking (Post 4 adds that it can be limiting). For [P5], stepping into the leadership world requires a robust professional network. According to [P6], effective networks are integral to achieving leadership roles and making them readily available: According to [P7], experience, opportunity, and networks are key to making the transition from assistant role to leader role; it takes time (building up the confidence of the guide also involves some trust on the companies' part).

Trust and Recognition. Trust is an essential component of leadership, bearing in mind that you cannot have responsibility based on certification alone. A guide should build trust in organizations, clients, and other guides before having leadership positions assigned. This trust can only be gained through a reputable record and authority guidance as a proven record. In communities where the practice of mountaineering has not been as developed as in other areas, such trust will take much time to build and must include demonstrations of competence, including some exceptional performances. [P9] points out the necessity of networks and recognition for any leadership position. To assume that leadership positions come easily will be rather foolish, especially bearing in mind that networks matter ([P10]). [P11] points out the importance of integrity and networks in relation to leadership.

Network Limitation Consequence. Where there is no way to connect with professional networks, those having the same abilities and background progress at very varied rates. According to [P12], limited networking capacity means difficulty in attaining leadership positions. [P14] points out that attaining leadership roles required

network connections and visibility, [P15] also stresses this point, stating that without networks it is hard to access leadership positions. [P16] All three of these reinforce that leadership is based on whether others are in your network and then, how much you're recognized or exposed ([P20]). This "network ceiling" functions irrespective of technical know-how. Completing training, gaining experience and enough demonstrations of vigilance in safety will still not expedite the years-long delay before leadership opportunities become available as trusted networks tentatively open up, trust builds, and recognition appears.

4.3.4 A Trust Deficit —Whose Judgment Carries Weight

Many of the interviewees referred to how trust develops over safety decisions at high altitude. Several guides explained that increasing acceptance is given to the judgment of guides from traditionally recognized groups, especially Sherpas. In contrast, Magar guides described requiring many more years of performance and experience in the field before being granted the same level of trust. Trust derives from skill, but also familiarity and reputation within the industry;

Speed of Trust and Performance. The responses mixing when participants were asked if there was equal trust given. [P1] explained that guides who are more widely accepted can gain trust more quickly, while others need to establish a reputation through their work. [P2], [P3], [P4], [P5], [P6], [P8] and [P9] also stated that guides provided by significant or known groups tend to receive trust on priority.

[P7] considered that, in certain circumstances, judgments may not be equally weighted and the views of Sherpa guides included as more valid: Others noted that trust can still be established through consistent performance and experience.

[P1]'s further comment that in Magar, "the trust must be earned through performance," resonates with most of the Magar guides experience. Many said they had to prove themselves over and over before earning the same confidence from companies and team members. While some guides have the advantage of an established reputation or community recognition, others described a slower path to gaining similar trust through time in the field.

Participants indicated this disparity sometimes emerges in crucial decisions made when assessing the weather, making route choices, or facing scenarios around clientele safety.

In those rare moments, some felt they had to justify their decisions more carefully or prove their résumé before their judgment was fully accepted

Safety Implications. Some of the respondents also tied this issue of trust together with potential safety concerns. In high-altitude situations, quick and informed decisions are vital,” they said. Some guides will be trusted sooner than others, which may have an effect on the discussion of decisions across the team.

A handful of participants noted that when guides have to validate their credibility before communication can happen, it leads to slower communication during crucial moments. Instead of simply reporting on route conditions or changing weather, they may also have to justify their opinions. In an ideal situation, participants believed that decisions should rely on experience and knowledge of the case, not reputation alone.

[P8] explained that faster trust is placed on more recognized names, and [P14] expressed a similar opinion. Since this idea came up in more than one interview, it indicates that this may be a pervasive experience rather than some outlier opinion. The participants agreed that equal trust that emerges out of experience and competence is necessary to facilitate teamwork as well as expedition safety.

4.3.5 Safety Concerns and Pressure to Summit

Participants also offered up examples in which safety concerns did not always receive adequate attention. Some said that this pressure can come from clients who are fiercely focused on the summit, while others said that decision structures on expeditions can create an environment in which raising safety concerns is not really possible.

A few of the respondents talked about how getting tempted to summit may make one lose track. In cases where customers invest huge amounts of money and time, the situation may become challenging and may prompt them to carry on regardless, according to the participants. Guides who participated in the interviews explained that such cases made it hard for safety talks to become secondary.

Nonetheless, the guides tried to make sure that safety was prioritized.

Clients Who Aren’t Always Following Safety Advice. Clients are not expected to follow all of the safety information given to them immediately, according to a few sources. For example, according to [P1], nothing happened because customers

did not pay attention to the weather predictions initially. [P2] and [P5] added that certain customers take the chances with weather conditions lightly. Meanwhile, [P3] and [P4] argued that weather information is not taken into account at first. [P6] said that some clients marked as [P7] underestimate the risk in the mountains.

Group members described how this can create challenges for guides. Guides might identify changing weather, route challenges or health issues sooner than clients do but clients may still want to go on because they have already invested so much in the expedition, they said. As a result, guides must sometimes work harder to explain risks and persuade clients when it is safer to cease or turn back.

Hierarchy and Summit Pressure. Some discuss challenged expedition hierarchy and summit pressure and its ability to affect decision-making. [P7] talked about what he saw on Everest, saying that in one case oxygen decisions were based not just on safety concerns but also logistical planning and the expedition hierarchy.

Similar experiences were reported by other participants. Individual summit pressure can sometimes sway decisions, according to [P8], [P9], [P11], [P12], [P13] and [P14]. The heavy emphasis on summiting, especially in commercial expeditions, can at times make decision-making more difficult when it comes to safety concerns, they said.

But participants also noted that guides strive to strike a balance between their summits and safety duties. Experienced guides understand that despite the growing pressure to continue on, the best option may actually be saying no.

Safety Consequences of Summit Pressure. It may happen that at times the summit pressure overrides safety concerns, the participants have stated to The Times. It is their view that in some circumstances an expedition may be continued even when weather conditions may change, clients start getting extremely exhausted or even when it is more sensible to turn back.

Participants [P15], [P16], [P17], [P18], [P19] and [P20] have made it clear that in some cases the summit pressure affects judgment and decisions. As one can understand from what the participants said, this is not only a rare occasion but something that happens to guides occasionally during their expeditions.

Moreover, participants have revealed another aspect of this situation – that this kind of pressure makes the work of guides more complicated, especially when it comes to making decisions under exceptional circumstances.

4.3.6 Barriers to Recognition and Sponsorship

However, in the interviews, most participants argued that failure to recognize the guides' talents and little or no sponsorships make career advancement very challenging for them. Different people highlighted that lack of media coverage, poor professional networks, and difficulty getting sponsorships have made things worse.

Some participants argued that identifying and nurturing the guide's talents and sponsoring him along his career path will be beneficial for Magar guides. Failure to get such chances makes it difficult for the guides to train, become leaders, and establish their professional identities.

Limited Exposure and Sponsorship Challenges. Lack of exposure and sponsorship were discussed as some of the obstacles that Magar guides were encountering; this point was always raised by the participants. According to the participants, it was very difficult to progress professionally without having good connections, visibility, and financial means.

[P1] stated there is no way to organize your own climbing events without money: [P2] also raised the issue of lack of exposure, media coverage, and financial backing. Nonetheless, lack of exposure and finances, obstacles that were raised by [P3], [P4], [P5], and [P6], were also mentioned.

Limited media coverage and weaker professional networks can make it harder for Magar climbers to attract sponsors, or even get the kind of recognition they might deserve, [P7] explained. Limited exposure and financial difficulties were also common challenges reported by [P8] and [P9].

Common challenges described by some other participants included lack of exposure (K), limited networks (M, N) and financial support. Participants' responses indicated that the challenges faced are widespread.

Effects of Limited Visibility. *“Limited recognition and career opportunities for Magar guides is also an issue due to limited visibility,”* participants explained. Some

said that even when they made contributions that were similar, their work was not always given the same level of public attention.

Equal recognition is awarded to Magar guides where they share an identical position; however, they are less favored, according to [P1]. Similarly, [P7] mentioned that Sherpa guides enjoy better professional networks, making their career growth easy.

This implies that recognition also depends on how exposed people are to someone and/or their professional network. It was observed by participants that lack of exposure may hinder career growth.

4.3.7 Lack of Representation in Decision-Making and Leadership

Another topic that participants mentioned was the under-representation of Magar guides in leadership positions within the mountaineering industry. Some participants mentioned that this can affect individual careers as well as having the effect that the Magar guides' problems and experiences might not be considered when making decisions.

Representation and Policy Decisions. The participants mentioned one problem that arises due to lack of Magar guide representation in the industry. One participant ([P1]) mentioned that “without representation, our voice is weak on policy decisions.” Another participant ([P2]) also expressed the same view, arguing that “most often [the policy] doesn't reflect what we actually have going on.” Likewise, another three participants ([P3], [P4], and [P5]) agreed on this matter and added that this results in Magar voices or perspectives not being reflected in decisions made. Two other participants ([P6] and [P7]) added that the lack of representation also creates an environment where there are fewer chances for Magar guides and because of this, policy decisions are made without taking them into consideration.

Other participants ([P8], [P9], [P10]) also explained that lack of Magar representation also means having less chance of having policies that address the challenges (financial barriers, networks, certification, etc.) that they face. There would not be a strong possibility of addressing these things because Magar guides would not be able to present their case in decision making forums. [P11], [P12] and [P13] further emphasised that the limited representation of Magar leaders has resulted in a weaker influence on policy and slow change to enhance their advancement.

The problem of such representational discrepancy was clear throughout our interviews as the effects extend beyond symbolic issues; there are also material implications. As the lack of representation within the positions in which one can address the issues that face the community of Magar guides, there are fewer chances for policy changes that will benefit the community equally.

Cycle of Exclusion. The absence of Magar leadership (above) creates a self-perpetuating cycle where individuals do not see leaders from their community. The participants said that if only few voices of Magars reach policy-makers, then the policies will show that effect — therefore, there is no provision to support training opportunities, sponsorships, or address recognition issues. Such initiatives play an important role in ensuring that the majority of Magar guides qualify and gain the experience needed for leadership positions — without such support, fewer Magar guides could fulfill those roles.

Participant 14 said that “*Without Magar leadership, certain things happening in the community may not be addressed,*” while Participant 15 stated that policies are not reflecting the needs of Magar communities. Participants 16 to 20 made similar statements about the effect of lack of representation among policymakers, which results in issues faced by the community going unnoticed or being ignored. In this regard, it becomes difficult for individuals to receive opportunities and resources since they lack connections in the community.

4.3.8 Language of the Mountains – Communication as Obstacle and Bridge

Communication was one of the most commonly raised concerns among all participants, particularly in terms of English fluency. Several participants pointed out that language barriers might create misunderstandings with the clientele or fellow workers. However, it is important to mention that the professionalism, consistency in performance, and high level of trust were sufficient to overcome any language obstacles. Despite having a limited vocabulary, guides can successfully handle situations of safety, teamwork, and customer assistance based on instructions, skillful behavior, and proper judgement. It seems to be evident that although language is significant, experience and reputation alone are sufficient enough to provide effective communication.

Language Barrier. It is true that not all the Magar guides may be proficient in English language, but trust is earned by doing excellent work repeatedly. No matter how primitive the language is, the clients will rely on performance and reliability.

Although most guides are well-educated professionals, the only thing required for communication is to trust not knowledge but service – [P3] marches on here. Language issues become negligible when compared with professionalism and attention – [P4] says so. The language is different, but trust will be gained by demonstrating competency – [P5] tells us. It might be the most primitive language, but trust will be formed by delivering results – [P6] reveals it. [P7] claims that proficiency and experience in performing the medical job and the demonstration of skills will help overcome the language barrier. [P8] emphasizes once again the significance of professionalism and constant behavior in closing the gap between languages, making sure that expeditions can be conducted safely and smoothly.

Education Dimension and Trust Beyond Words. Most Magar guides do not have much education and proficiency in English ([P1]-[P3]), and, as highlighted by the participants, the education levels of rural and indigenous people are lower overall. Nevertheless, language barriers are not considered a problem regarding professionals' competencies since fluency is useless if one cannot deliver competent service to a client. As [P1] and [P2] observe, a client can gain confidence through a high level of commitment and consistency in safety procedures, while [P3] and [P4] stress skills rather than fluency.

Professionalism and expertise become the key here as they help overcome any language barriers. Experience and professionalism, in particular, can help overcome language barriers by ensuring competent demonstration of skills. » It becomes evident that what matters the most for a client is ownership and professionalism in actions. It can be seen from the responses provided by [P5], [P6], [P7], and [P8]-[P10]. Language barriers will never affect professional performance and competence ([P1]-[P13]).

4.3.9 Price of Passion — Risk, Family and the Limits of Protection

The motif encompasses both the personal and institutional pressures on high altitude guides. Worrying about their families, inadequate insurance, and lack of clarity regarding pay are common motifs among the interviewees. From their narrative, it

becomes apparent that risk is not only something that needs to be mitigated when climbing mountains but also part of the safety protocols set up for them.

Family Concerns and Insurance Challenges. Concerns regarding the family revolve around two broad questions: one, the relative danger of working in the mountain area and social pressure related to marriage and family life. In particular, [P1] mentioned the concern of their family over personal security and marriage. [P2] noted how social pressures overlap with occupational dangers. [P3], [P4], [P5], and [P6] stated that there were concerns from families over the safety of guides and when the marriage should happen, showing a certain level of conflict between occupational and family matters. For instance, [P7] said that it is natural for a family to be concerned initially but trust would build up gradually by demonstrating their competence and reliability.

Furthermore, concerns over insurance and compensation exist among guides. Issues related to insurance, insufficient compensation, and the problem with the payment process are expectedly complicated. Similar problems were reported by [P2] and [P3]. In contrast, [P4], [P5], and [P6] mentioned difficulties in obtaining compensation, while [P7] discussed inconsistencies with coverage and payments in cases of injury and death. Finally, [P8] noted that due to their occupation's hazardous nature, these problems are of greater concern. Meanwhile, [P9] indicated that it could be inadequate or late. Hence, these data reveal a wide gap between the risks involved in being a guide and the current level of protection offered to them.

Gap between Risk and Protection. There is an obvious disparity between the risks that guides face and the protection they receive through insurance policies. Although insurance could possibly cover the losses incurred, participants generally described the processes as convoluted ([P1], [P3]), compensation as inadequate at times ([P4], [P7], [P9]) and overall system improvements were needed ([P8], [P14]). Those guides who expose themselves to such risks must cope not only with the actual risk of being hurt but also the potential uncertainty associated with whether their families would be taken care of in the event of something unfortunate. As stated by [P10], the process of compensation is rather lengthy and as mentioned by [P11], it is complicated as well. The delay in processing claims was mentioned by [P12] while the mismatch between the risk and compensation was highlighted by [P13].

Policy Hope. And when probed on the policy that could best resolve the issues, their responses invariably referred to measures to solve these problems. On the other hand, [P1]-[P20] suggested policy measures revolving around equal opportunity policy (i.e., trainings scholarships) and systematic frameworks. The core of the message conveyed through [P1]’s statement can be summarized as “equal opportunity policy based on skill & experience not ethnicity.” It does not ask for any special privileges but is merely seeking to remove indirect barriers that stand in the way of elevating the status of Magar guides.

4.3.10 Discussions of Findings

Analysis of Challenges and Solutions for Magar Guides

The experiences of the twenty high-altitude Magar guides and climbers point to a convergence of barriers that impact their financial, organizational, structural, social, and institutional components of their livelihood as mountaineering professionals. Through the examination of the identified barriers and relevant literature, this paper provides evidence for how systemic barriers influence the career trajectory of Magar guides.

A prominent issue that was raised throughout the interviewees' narrative was the expense of the formal training and certification. The fellowship holds little value, and sponsorships are rare and financial barriers are often unreachable given the range of twenty to twenty-five lakhs required for IFMGA certification. There are similar issues in the political economy of professionalization in mountaineering, as described by Carter (2019). Specifically, access to international certification remains unequal and difficult to attain, particularly in the Global South. While theoretically, the Nepal Mountaineering Association offers training to all individuals, Paudel (2020) argues that access remains restricted by geographic distance, financial capacity, and informal networks, thus imposing structural barriers on guides who belong to emerging mountaineering communities. Hughes (1991) identifies this practice as social closure, in which resource-based filters hinder equally qualified individuals belonging to impoverished backgrounds from attaining membership in organizations. The [P7] story on working and saving to afford formal training exemplifies financial barriers imposed on Magar guides. Unlike the Sherpa community, the kinship network offers them greater access to training (Gurung, 2005). This further confirms the critical standpoint

of Bhattarai and Upadhyay (2021) regarding state-sponsored programs that fail to include affirmative measures for Janajatis.

The second pattern concerns the difference between open and latent discrimination, as illustrated by Furmbacher's (2020) concept of "the professional periphery." Non-Sherpa climbers perform their hazardous labor through a comparable manner to Sherpas, yet encounter systematic disadvantage that is not necessarily outright exclusions. For instance, according to Spoon (2011), Pflstone's "The Road the along the way," and other professional recognition through entrenched Sherpa networks builds reputational capital and grants uneven opportunities. As [P7] stated, it provides

Sherpa guides the upper hand, considering their larger networks. In addition, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) reveals that in-group network capital facilitates access to such opportunities, whereas Magar guides who are viewed as members of out-groups experience indirect exclusion. Indirect exclusion takes place through: slower accumulation of trust, reduced recognition, and the requirement to be exceptionally skilled to receive a chance, which might otherwise be attained through networks. As Gurung (2005) emphasizes, recruitment through kinship networks that are not intentionally exclusionary results in systematic privilege.

Furthermore, participants expressed the importance of networking as a factor that enables the transition from the supporting role to a leader. Occupational sociology posits that hazardous professions establish hierarchies wherein leadership position depends on relationships, reputation, and trust within the existing power structure (Hughes, 1991). [P7] and other participants described the perceived glass ceiling for Magar guides on major peaks because gaining leadership roles depends on skill and rapport building with firms. By comparison, the leadership position is limited to three interdependent dimensions: access to networks for opportunities, exposure to build esteem, and trust to take safety-critical decisions. Thus, the 'network ceiling' does not require skills, and competent guides have to wait for years before getting assigned to leadership roles. These findings are consistent with Gurung's (2005) observations and support the need for a policy intervention that ensures transparency and meritocracy.

Another safety concern was raised by participants as the judgments of their knowledge were valued less than those of other guides despite knowing as much or more. It is a sign of trust deficit with safety implications, consistent with Brennan's (2022) analysis

of constrained decision-making in the hierarchy of expedition. Similar to Beck's (1992) concept of risk society, the decision-making process prioritizes status above expertise. They narrated instances in which logistical and organizational considerations prevail over safety, such as decisions made in Everest expeditions. Combined with the summit pressure, it illustrates that guided Magar face increased safety disadvantages.

As a key disparity, media exposure is low, professional networks are weak, and sponsorship remains scarce. Visibility is the currency of climbing: recognition brings sponsorship, which leads to achievements, thereby forming a virtuous cycle for individuals featured on the screen. The notion of staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1976) helps to understand the effect of media representations on public perceptions—when the Sherpa guides are predominantly portrayed as mountaineering support workers, it contributes to the associational linkage between aspiration towards mountaineering achievement and Sherpa identity, whereas Magar achievements lead to low visibility. Accounts of participants revealed that reduced visibility hinders career development and sponsorship opportunities.

Underrepresentation in leadership and policymaking is yet another area of key disparity. Without the presence of Magar in decision-making bodies, policies addressing disparities in terms of finances, networks, and recognition will never be developed. Therefore, Bhattarai and Upadhyay (2021) criticized Nepal's tourism policy concerning the homogeneous treatment of local communities that obscures intra-community dynamics. According to Paudel (2020), the governance of mountaineering remains centered on and dominated by Sherpas in Kathmandu, thus promoting structural exclusion.

Language barrier was recognized yet did not seem insurmountable to participants. Not all Magar guides have English proficiency, yet the trust between the client and guide is established through demonstrated competence and professionalism, not language proficiency. It reflects the educational disparity seen among the rural and Indigenous population (Maroko, 2020), as well as the adaptation strategy found by Hughes (1991) for professions in which performance-based trust could offset the absence of formal credentials.

Lastly, there are gaps in insurance and compensation leaving guides and their families vulnerable to systematic risks. Participants mentioned that it is often insufficient,

processes are complicated, and compensation is not always provided. It represents systemic failure in occupational risk management (Beck 1992). Insurance and compensation gaps also coincide with governance gaps, as although regulations cover permits and basic safety, they do not ensure sufficient insurance or compensation.

In summary, the challenges described by participants form a cumulative system of disadvantage: financial barriers, factors of limited networks, trust deficit, recognition gap, underrepresentation in broader cultural conversations and within particular industries and fields (e.g., academia), communication barrier caused by worldview/value differences, and inadequate protection mechanisms. Practical solutions related to policy include training scholarships, equal opportunity policies, and structured support systems. Recommendations focus on eliminating indirect barriers via a meritocracy approach instead of needs-based or special treatment.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The majority of Magar mountaineers and tourist guides begin their profession in the mountains as porters and then progress to cooks, rope setters, and assistants before becoming guides. Very few enter via trekking work or the military. Their career path is generally slow, combining the cost-sharing of formal education and certification, which occurs during breaks from expeditions, with an apprenticeship under experienced guides, primarily Sherpas. However, these mentors do not instill in their mentees an obsession with reaching the summit; rather, they focus on teaching only two principles: safety comes first, and patience in the mountains is essential. This apprenticeship approach has slowly evolved into a cycle of teaching, as senior Magar guides impart their skills and knowledge to younger groups.

Success is often measured by reaching the summit and safely returning to the ground because several guides point out that coming back alive outweighs standing on the top of the world. For climbing to success at high altitudes, key personal qualities include determination, patience, discipline, sound decision making, and the ability to control ego. Family disconnection emerges as a substantial sacrifice of those departing from their homeland, with suggestions provided for coping — through communication, training, insurance — although the guides admit that few preparations eliminate all risks.

Professional satisfaction stems from the positive contribution one makes to society, including praises from local communities, handshakes from clients, nice words from colleagues or achievements that reflect one's ethnic identity as Magar. The issue contradicts the idea that mountaineering can be practiced exclusively by the Sherpa people. The participants stated that qualities that Magar young men develop in themselves, such as hard work and perseverance, patience, discipline and dedication, translate easily into mountaineering expertise. Media representation and industry recognition of guides of any ethnic group have been requested, stressing the importance of acknowledging the process, rather than just results.

Magar guides demonstrate unique abilities shaped by the way they were raised and trained. Firstly, their endurance is tempered by childhood work on hills and porting

experience gained years ago. Secondly, their practical sense is built on real-life experience accumulated during the years. Finally, cultural heritage and military service for some participants have cultivated discipline and work ethic in them. An attitude "life before the summit" adopted by all interviewees promotes the security of expeditions through the disciplined turn-around decisions and risk assessment.

A holistic approach to taking care of the customers includes considerations regarding physical fitness and its role in providing psychological support throughout employment, constant communication, and regular health monitoring. Experienced guides teach juniors practical skills such as rope handling, glacier navigation, camp organization and cooking at a high altitude while training in the right decisions making to improve the former two factors. Apart from outstanding individual skills, Magar guides strengthen their influence on the whole expedition process by designing safety procedures, educating about environmental conservation, and encouraging responsible tourism practices.

The contribution of Magar guides to local economies is enormous. Through earning money from tourism they finance costs of accommodation, schooling, and healthcare, thus creating positive impacts on the economy. The guides carry out complex logistical activities including weather tracking, routing decisions, camp organization and rescue management – all of which serve as the basis for the expedition logistics. However, despite such substantial contributions, they complain of being overlooked compared to other representatives. Their motivation consists of constructing houses for the sake of their family, giving their children good schooling, and protecting their clients' lives.

Several problems mentioned by the participants include a high price tag of formal training and certification (~20-25 lakh rupees for courses like IFMGA). Sponsorship opportunities seem few, thus forcing many guides to use the money saved for their whole life for training. There are indirect forms of exclusion, such as poor networking opportunities, language barrier, difficulty building relationships with the customers, and prejudice about certain ethnic groups. Leadership in engineering is rarely about technical expertise but more about access to network, thus imposing a sort of "network ceiling".

For Magar guides, the credibility of safety-critical decisions involves revalidation and verification of them over and over again ("performance tax") that may actually reduce safety. The management of risk requires balancing clients' interests and summing ambitions with safety measures, while insurance and lack thereof is another obstacle of gaining recognition as well as sponsorship through poor coverage of the news. Because there are no Magar representation in leadership and decision making, the exclusion happens because of lack of inclusion in questions of how to train guides or certify them. Yet, language barrier does not prevent them from demonstrating their professionalism.

Lack of sufficient insurance coverage and compensation policies for the guide puts a heavy burden on them. Concerns include family worries, social pressure, insufficient protection, and untimely compensations for the risks taken in the course of the job. All participants emphasize the need for policy interventions including the establishment of skill-based equal opportunity system, training sponsorships, and supportive structures.

5.2 Conclusion

The guides among Magars usually advance through their careers gradually, beginning from porter stages to becoming guides through experience, mentorship, and self-investment in training. As professionals, their values prioritize safety over mountain peaks, psychological endurance over physical strength, and the mission to serve the customers and community over self-interest. Moreover, they are also responsible for a unique string of mountaineering records that discredit the misconception that peak bagging is exclusive to Sherpa ethnic group members.

Their contribution to the mountain tourism sector in Nepal is considerable yet often underestimated. Through stamina, good judgement, and discipline, they help improve the safety levels of the tour groups, mentor the next generation of mountain guides, offer comprehensive customer services, organize expeditions, and boost local economies. However, they face some structural issues, such as expensive training fees, insufficient sponsorships, lack of networking capabilities, slower trust building with customers, underrepresentation among leadership roles, and inadequate insurance and compensation schemes. Therefore, although Magar mountain guides contribute equally to the mountain tourism industry, they receive less attention than they deserve, and they have the right to bargain about skill-related job openings and scholarships.

5.3 Implications of the Study

Even though Magar guides have helped to develop the mountain tourism sector in Nepal, their role remains unacknowledged equally. Several initiatives taken by individual guides and agencies can be considered to solve this issue:

Magar Guides and Magar Community. They need to continue developing their strengths—pragmatic judgment, discipline, and safety-oriented mindset. Magar guides clearly need to network professionally, and build informal networks that simply work as the industry connections they are not getting. It is time for the magar guides to document their achievements and share those more actively because media visibility still plays a key role in building recognition, even sponsorship. Moreover, part of the responsibility of experienced Magar guides is to formalize their mentorship towards the younger generations through sharing their knowledge and skills. Understandably, prohibitive costs may prevent the ability of a single family as opposed to the magar community at large to fund aspiring guides and so funding should be given through community-based initiatives.

Only for Travel/Trekking Agencies and Expedition Companies. A diligent Magar workforce is going in vain of travel/trekking agencies. They are not involving Magar guides as leaders either. Those guiding agencies who employ a diverse set of guides are perfectly positioned to take advantage of the unique attributes possessed by Magar guides, including their excellent safety practices, client-oriented attitude, logistics, and deep connections with the local community. Hence, the recruitment of these guides must be skill-based rather than ethnic-based. Furthermore, this recognition deficit touches the agencies as well because through social media platforms and communication with the clients, they have the ability to use Magar guides in a way that better represents the diversity of Nepal's guiding community.

For Mountain Tourism Development Stakeholders. The NMA needs to review their training and certification programs with regard to possible challenges that might prevent Magars and other ethnic minorities from joining the programs. There could be mentorship programs where senior guides of respected backgrounds can partner with emerging Magar guides and mentor them in acquiring technical skills as well as making contacts. For the NMA, there can be guidelines for expedition

companies on how they should hire employees and promote them on grounds of meritocracy and not ethnicity such as Sherpas. Likewise, for the TAAN, there could be diversity guidelines for member travel agencies, encouraging them to employ independent guides of various ethnicities. This will resolve the issue of networking, which is highlighted in the study, as the networks will be provided on the website. NMA, TAAN and the concerned government bodies need to work hand-in-hand to make standardized safety training available for all the guides so that whenever they are subjected to scrutiny about competence, there would be acceptance based on documented competency rather than ethnic recognition thereby retaining public trust.

For the Governments. Mountain tourism has been seen as a way to develop Magar populated parts of the country, and local governments there now have an opportunity both to support it and benefit from it. It can recognize Magar guide community as being good role models in the community and thus encourage them by setting up local scholarships for training purposes, creating awareness regarding careers in mountaineering, and providing facilities for basic mountaineering training. Provincial governments could come up with their own funding for mountaineering training for their respective minority ethnic communities, allocating scholarship proportions within training institutes, and helping improve their communication abilities. It could openly appreciate the contribution of all ethnicities in mountain tourism and research the same. The Federal Government needs to address the problem of existing systematic discrimination within the mountaineering industry of Nepal. The Ministry of Tourism needs to examine the certifications process and the related training costs with a view to making it possible for all guides from different ethnic backgrounds to benefit from professional development programs. The federal system itself is deficient when it comes to regulating insurance and compensation policies for injured mountaineering guides; policy changes will be needed to ensure minimum standards of coverage.

5.4 Areas for Future Research

Nevertheless, in order to improve the understanding of Magar guides and, hence, other topics in relation to the mountain tourism industry in Nepal, further comparative studies between ethnic minorities could be considered. The comparative approach would help establish whether the trends towards indirect exclusion, network disadvantages, and the

lack of recognition are unique to the case of Magar guides operating in the mountain tourism industry. Using a comparison of survey instruments across different groups would make it possible for researchers to determine the magnitude of particular issues in a greater sample. Alternatively, a mixed-methods approach could be used to confirm and further explore patterns revealed during the process of qualitative research. Another study may consider the experience of women magar entering the tourism industry. The economic impact of guide work on local communities, as well as their educational and housing outcomes, could be examined. Additionally, policy-related research could be conducted in relation to Nepal Mountaineering Association's training processes. Also, it can help identify systemic barriers in admission criteria, delivery of course or examination process that disproportionately affects candidates from Magar and other under-represented communities. Studies may also examine hiring practices in expedition agencies, probing which kinds of networks we are recruiting from and if networked-based bigotry sustains existing ethnic concentrations. Analysis of expedition coverage and documentary films, promotional materials could be explored. The study can examine in what ways tourist guides are presented and how ethnic identity is depicted, correlating more empirical evidence of the gap in visibility participants reported.

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ANNEXES

Annex I: Interview Guideline

Section A: Personal Background

Participant Code: _____ Date of Interview: _____ / _____ / _____

1. Full Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
4. Place of Birth (Village/VDC/Municipality, District):

5. Current Residence: _____
6. Languages Spoken (list in order of proficiency):

7. What was the primary occupation of your parents/guardians?
Father: _____ Mother: _____

8. What were the traditional occupations of your forefathers? (e.g., agriculture, military service, livestock, others)

9. Please list your siblings and their main occupations:
10. What is your educational background? ☐ No formal schooling ☐ Grade 1-5 ☐ Lower Secondary (Grade 6-8) ☐ Secondary (SLC/SEE), ☐ Higher Secondary (+2) ☐ BA ☐ MA ☐ Other (specify): _____
11. Do you hold any professional mountaineering certifications? (e.g., NMA, NNMGA, IFMGA) ☐ Yes ☐ No (Please list certification, issuing body, and year) _____
12. Total years of experience in mountaineering/guiding: _____ years
13. How did you first enter the profession? (e.g., as a porter, kitchen helper, through family, training program) _____
14. List all training programs you have attended (Institution & Year): _____
15. Peak Climbing Record: Please list significant peaks you have summited or guided, indicating the year and your role (Climber/Guide).

Peak Name (and Mountain Range)	Altitude (m)	Year(s)	Role (C=Climber, G=Guide)
1.			☐ C ☐ G
2.			☐ C ☐ G
3.			☐ C ☐ G
4.			☐ C ☐ G

16. International Experience: Have you participated in expeditions or climbing work outside Nepal? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, Countries: _____ Peaks/Activities: _____ Year(s) _____

Section B: Perceived Professional Experiences and Career Journey

1. Can you describe your earliest memory of being in the mountains and how it shaped your desire to climb?
2. What was your personal pathway into professional mountaineering or guiding? What was the first step?
3. Who were the most influential figures in your climbing development, and what specifically did you learn from them?
4. How do you define a "successful" climb, and which expedition in your career best fits that definition?
5. In your view, how is the climbing profession perceived by older generations within your Magar community, and has that changed over your career?
6. Beyond technical skill, what personal qualities do you believe are most critical for a successful high-altitude guide or climber?
7. Can you describe a moment on a climb where you felt a strong sense of pride in your profession or your heritage?
8. How do you balance the physical dangers of this work with your personal and family responsibilities?
9. What are your personal career aspirations for the next 5-10 years? What role do you ultimately wish to hold?
10. How does your identity as a Magar person intertwine with your identity as a mountaineer? Do they ever feel in conflict?

11. What do you wish outsiders (clients, the media, the tourism industry) understood about the life and work of a Magar climber/guide?
12. Looking back, what is the most significant sacrifice you have made for this career, and what is the most significant reward?

Section C: Contributions of Magar Climbing Guides in Mountain Tourism

1. From your perspective, what are the unique technical or environmental skills that Magar guides are known for on the mountain?
2. Can you share a specific example where cultural knowledge from your Magar background directly contributed to expedition safety or decision-making?
3. How do you contribute to creating a positive and memorable experience for international clients, beyond just getting them up the mountain?
4. In what ways do Magar guides act as cultural ambassadors, bridging Nepali mountain culture and foreign climbers?
5. What role do Magar guides play in the informal training and mentorship of newer guides, regardless of their ethnicity?
6. How have you seen the practices introduced or championed by Magar guides become adopted as standard safety or operational procedures?
7. What is your role in environmental stewardship (waste management, clean-up) on expeditions, and is this influenced by community values?
8. How does the work of Magar guides support the local economy in your home villages and key mountain tourism hubs?
9. Do you believe the presence and reputation of skilled Magar guides have helped Nepal maintain its status as a premier mountaineering destination? How?
10. How do you contribute to logistical innovation, problem-solving, or resource management during complex expeditions?
11. What is your perspective on the contribution of Magar guides to the *collective knowledge* of Himalayan mountaineering in Nepal?
12. How do you see the guiding philosophy of Magar differ from or complement that of other ethnic guiding communities?

Section D: Challenges related to Mountaineering Tourism Occupation

1. What were the biggest obstacles you faced in accessing and affording formal mountain training and international certifications (e.g., IFMGA)?
2. Have you ever felt excluded from or disadvantaged within a training program due to your ethnicity, language, or economic background?
3. What challenges do Magar guides face in moving from a supporting role to a certified guide role, and then to an expedition leader or *sirdar* position?
4. In safety-critical decisions (like turn-around time), do you feel your judgment is given the same weight as that of guides from other, more publicly recognized ethnicities?
5. Can you describe an instance where you felt a safety concern was overlooked or dismissed, and what do you think influenced that?
6. What are the barriers to Magar climbers gaining recognition and sponsorship for independent, record-setting, or exploratory climbs (as opposed to guided work)?
7. How does the lack of representation in the leadership of mountaineering associations or large agencies affect policies relevant to Magar guides?
8. What specific challenges do Magar guides face in communication with clients and team leaders, and how do you navigate them?
9. Are there challenges related to securing life and health insurance, or obtaining fair compensation in case of injury or death?
10. What is the role of family pressure or community expectation in the career challenges of a Magar climber/guide?
11. How do informal networks and referrals for expedition jobs work, and do Magar guides have equal access to these networks?
12. If you could change one policy, rule, or common practice in the Nepali mountaineering industry to better support Magar guides, what would it be and why?

Annex II: Field Photo Gallery



Data Collection with respondents in Kathmandu



In-depth interview with respondent No. 12



Magar Climbing Guides on the top of Mountains