

**A STUDY OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN
SUNSARI DISTRICT OF NEPAL**



A Thesis

**Submitted to APF Command and Staff College,
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University,
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For Master Degree in Security, Development and Peace Studies**

Submitted by

Nar Bahadur Rawat

Eight Batch (2079-2081)

Roll No: 28MSDPS40023

TU Regd. No: 6-1-054-0475-96

**APF Command and Staff College
Sanogaucharan, Kathmandu, Nepal**

May, 2024

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**A STUDY OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN SUNSARI DISTRICT OF NEPAL** ” submitted to APF Command and Staff College, is entirely my original work under the guidance and supervision of Prof. Dr. Ramesh Raj Kunwar.

I have made due acknowledgments to all ideas and information cited and extracted from different sources in the course of preparing this research. The result of this research paper has not been presented or submitted anywhere else for the award of any degree or any other purpose. I assure you that no part of the content of this research paper has been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my research paper.

This thesis is being submitted to APF Command and Staff College, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University in partial fulfillment of Master Degree in Security, Development and Peace Studies.

Signature:

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Date: May, 2024



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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

I certify that this thesis entitled “**A STUDY OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN SUNSARI DISTRICT OF NEPAL** ” was prepared by Mr. Nar Bahadur Rawat under my supervision. The researcher has fulfilled the criteria prescribed by Faculty of Humanities and social Sciences, Tribhuvan University. I hereby recommend the thesis for the final evaluation and approval.

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LETTER OF APPROVAL

This Thesis entitle “**THESIS TOPIC**” submitted by **Nar Bahadur Rawat** to APF Command and Staff College, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University in partial fulfillment of Master Degree in Security, Development and Peace Studies has been approved by the undersigned members of the Evaluation Committee.

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Nar Bahadur Rawat

ABSTRACT

The recent study explores the intricate dynamics of ethno-religious conflict in Dharan, a diverse city within the Sunsari District of Nepal, noted for its multicultural population encompassing various ethnic and religious groups. This research aims to uncover the underlying causes, manifestations, and impacts of these conflicts, focusing on the balance between communal harmony and social tensions. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study draws on in-depth interviews, observations, and secondary data to offer a comprehensive view of the local socio-political landscape.

Dharan serves as a microcosm for examining broader national issues of ethnic and religious integration. With a backdrop of historical migration and modernization, the city showcases both the challenges and opportunities in managing diversity. The study highlights specific incidents, such as the controversial cow slaughter incident, which catalyzed significant social unrest and debates over religious freedoms and community rights. Such events punctuate the ongoing struggle between maintaining traditional values and accommodating modern secular principles.

Through interviews with various stakeholders including journalists, politicians, scholars, community people, doctors, religious figures, local leaders, security officers, and business persons, the research paints a detailed picture of the multifaceted nature of communal conflicts. The findings indicate that while Dharan exhibits a strong sense of community and cultural richness, there are palpable tensions fueled by economic disparities, political maneuvering, and social prejudices. These elements are often exacerbated by national political dynamics and global influences, as seen in the rise of religious nationalism and its impact on local conflicts.

The role of social media emerged as particularly significant in influencing public perception and exacerbating communal tensions. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to spread misinformation, rally support for divisive causes, and organize protests, often resulting in real-world violence and discord. The study underscores the need for greater digital literacy and responsible social media use to mitigate these issues.

Moreover, the research delves into the effectiveness of local governance in addressing such conflicts. Findings suggest that while there are efforts to promote inclusivity and peace, systemic biases and inadequate policy implementations often hinder progress. The study calls for enhanced governance mechanisms that not only prevent discrimination but also actively promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

In conclusion, this thesis provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between ethnicity, religion, and politics in Dharan. It offers a nuanced understanding of how communal identities can both enrich and complicate public life. Recommendations focus on strengthening local governance, promoting inclusive education and community programs, and leveraging the positive aspects of social media for community building. The findings and suggestions from this study contribute to the broader discourse on managing ethno-religious diversity, not only within Nepal but also in similar multicultural settings globally, aiming to foster a more inclusive and peaceful society.

Keywords: Ethno-religious conflict, Multicultural population, Communal harmony, Social tensions, Local governance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
DECLARATION	ii
LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION	iii
LETTER OF APPROVAL	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATION	xii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1-11
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	7
1.3 Research Questions	8
1.4 Objectives of the Study	8
1.5 Significance of the Study	9
1.6 Limitations of the Study	10
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE	12-16
2.1 Empirical Review	12
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	17-21
3.1 Research Design	17
3.2 Area of Study	17
3.3 Nature and Sources of Data	18
3.4 Techniques and Tools of Data Collection	19
3.5 Conceptual Framework	20
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	22-50
4.1 History and Culture of Dharan	22
4.2 Ethno-religious Conflict	28
4.3 Challenges	40
4.4 Measures	46
4.5 Findings	49
CHAPTER V SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	51-54
5.1 Summary	51
5.2 Conclusion	52

5.3 Implications	53
REFERENCES	55
APPENDIX A	57
APPENDIX B	61
APPENDIX C	62
APPENDIX D	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Respondent	19
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Ethnicity population of Dharna Municipality	6
Figure 2	Map of Sunsari District and Dharan	19
Figure 3	Conceptual Framework	20

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

APF	Armed Police Force
B.P.	Bishweshwar Prasad (Koirala)
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
KII	Key Informant Interviews
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
TU	Tribhuvan University
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Ethno-religious conflict is a form of conflict supposedly generated on the basis of real or imagined “difference” rooted in ethnic and religious identities. It is “supposedly” because of the need to avoid the essentialism that characterizes discourses on identity politics, especially the independent power assigned to these identities in shaping political consciousness (Jain, 2005). The notion of ethno-religious identity derives from the congruence and the mutually reinforcing relationships between ethnic and religious identities in the social and political process. As the situation has been well captured, sometimes religious identity becomes part of an ethnic group’s identity or vice versa, and presents a volatile social mixture coupled with the power of the ethnic group’s myth of common descent (Egwu, 2011).

Nepal, a nation nestled in the heart of the Himalayas, boasts a rich tapestry of ethno-religious diversity that has long contributed to its cultural mosaic. However, beneath the surface of this cultural richness, Nepal grapples with the complexities of ethno-religious conflicts that have emerged as a challenging and recurring facet of its contemporary history. Much like other nations facing the intersection of diverse ethnicities and religious affiliations, Nepal confronts the persistent threat of eruptions in the form of violent confrontations that strain its social fabric.

In the context of Dharan, the dynamics of centrifugal and centripetal forces play a significant role in shaping the social and cultural landscape of the city. Centrifugal forces, which drive groups apart, are evident in instances like the recent tensions arising from ethno-religious conflicts, such as the controversy over the cow slaughter, which exacerbated divisions among the Hindu majority and other religious communities. These forces promote discord by highlighting differences and fostering a sense of exclusion among diverse groups. On the other hand, centripetal forces in Dharan, which pull groups together, are manifested through various community activities and shared cultural festivals that promote unity and collective identity. Events like the multi-ethnic

Sakela festival and shared public spaces where people from different backgrounds interact daily, act as binding agents, strengthening social cohesion and fostering a sense of belonging. These forces work simultaneously, with the centripetal dynamics often serving to counterbalance and mitigate the divisive impact of centrifugal pressures, thereby maintaining a delicate equilibrium that sustains the city's diverse and vibrant community.

1.1.1 Ethno-religious conflict

Ethno-religious conflict refers to a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that arises within the intricate fabric of a society characterized by a diversity of ethnicities and religious affiliations. This form of conflict unfolds when the interactions between members belonging to distinct ethnic or religious groups become strained and contentious within the context of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment. The defining features of ethno-religious conflict include a palpable absence of cordiality, giving rise to an atmosphere marked by mutual suspicion and fear among the involved groups. This strained atmosphere tends to escalate, often manifesting in a troubling tendency towards violent confrontations (Fox, 1999).

The dynamics of ethno-religious conflict extend beyond mere differences in cultural or religious practices; they involve deeply rooted sentiments, historical grievances, and power struggles that intensify the discord. Within such a scenario, individuals or communities may perceive threats to their identity, resources, or socio-political standing, contributing to the development of animosities and distrust (Bercovitch et al., 2008). The lack of cordiality in these interactions becomes a fertile ground for the growth of mutual suspicion, as members of different ethnic or religious groups may harbor doubts about each other's intentions, leading to a breakdown in communication and cooperation.

The element of fear further exacerbates the tensions within the ethno-religious conflict, as individuals or groups may feel threatened by perceived challenges to their cultural or religious identity. This fear can be fueled by historical events, socio-economic disparities, or political maneuverings that have engendered a climate of insecurity among the affected communities. As a result, the inclination towards violent

confrontation becomes a manifestation of the heightened emotions and tensions that characterize ethno-religious conflict (Ukiwo, 2003).

The study of ethno-religious conflict, as elucidated by Salawu (2010), provides a framework for understanding the intricate layers of this phenomenon. By unraveling the complexities of relationships between different ethnic and religious groups, scholars and researchers aim to decipher the root causes, contributing factors, and potential avenues for resolution. In doing so, they seek to address the challenges posed by ethno-religious conflict and pave the way for fostering a more harmonious and inclusive societal coexistence (Salawu, 2010).

1.1.2 Characteristics of Ethno-religious conflict

The characteristics of ethno-religious conflicts, as outlined in the study, provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics that define these complex social phenomena. Ethno-religious conflicts, as conceptualized in the study, involve parties defined along religious lines in societies where religion holds a crucial role in social and cultural life, with religious institutions exerting significant influence and possessing moral legitimacy (Wimmer, 2003). The distinct features of ethno-religious conflicts include:

Centrality of Identity Issues: Ethno-religious conflicts primarily revolve around identity issues, where parties define themselves along ethno-religious lines. Identity, intricately linked with culture and religion, plays a pivotal role, and the denial of identity can lead to a sense of victimization and conflict. These conflicts are deeply rooted in human needs and values that constitute social identities.

Intra-state Conflicts: Ethno-religious conflicts predominantly manifest as intra-state conflicts, involving people from different religious and cultural traditions living in close proximity or brought together within artificial state boundaries. The historical mistrust and conflict contribute to negative enemy images and stereotypes.

Civilian Casualties: The majority of victims in ethno-religious conflicts are civilians, as unconventional methods and weapons, such as suicide bombings and ethnic cleansing, are increasingly employed. The intensity of these conflicts results in deep

collective traumas and injuries, fostering enduring negative perceptions among affected communities.

Intractability: Ethno-religious identity conflicts are characterized by their complexity and resistance to resolution. Often termed "intractable" or "protracted," these conflicts endure for extended periods, requiring specialized efforts for accurate definition, analysis, and effective resolution.

Centrality of Religion and Religious Institutions: Religion is a central identifying characteristic, and religious institutions hold moral legitimacy, with the capacity to mobilize adherents. Religious feelings can mobilize people faster than other identity elements, making religion a core component of ethno-religious conflicts.

Use of Religious Language, Texts, and Images: Religious beliefs, sacred texts, and images are frequently utilized and manipulated during ethno-religious conflicts to incite hatred and depict enemy images. These elements serve as interpretive lenses through which history and events are viewed, complicating reconciliation efforts.

Impact of Colonization: Many communities affected by ethno-religious conflicts have experienced the trauma of colonization and imperialism. The "divide and rule" strategy employed by colonizers, along with economic disparities, fuels bitterness, hostilities, and resentment among ethno-religious communities.

Crisis of Legitimacy: Societies grappling with ethno-religious conflicts often face a crisis of legitimacy, allowing attacks on the socio-political legitimacy and economic performance of incumbent governments, particularly with religious ideologies. Religious leaders leverage moral legitimacy to incite violence, using religious objects to evoke emotions that contribute to the perpetuation of conflict (Kadayifci, 2009).

1.1.3 History of Kirat and Unification of Nepal

Dharan, situated in the Sunsari District of eastern Nepal, bears witness to a multifaceted historical narrative shaped by the Kirat people's ancient presence and Nepal's unification under the Shah dynasty. Established as a municipality in 1958, Dharan's demographic tapestry reflects a mosaic of ethnicities including Rai, Limbu, Newar, Chhetri, and Tamang, among others, underscoring its cultural diversity. Its strategic

location at the crossroads between the hills and the plains has historically facilitated trade and cultural exchange. Despite rapid urbanization, Dharan retains its cultural integrity, with Kiratism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity coexisting harmoniously. Today, the city stands as a vibrant urban center, serving as a hub for education, healthcare, tourism, and commerce while preserving its rich cultural heritage and traditions.

During the period of Nepal's unification, the Kirati people, as mentioned by one of the respondents, likely played a significant role in the eastern regions of the country, including areas like Dharan. Historically, the Kirati people were one of the indigenous ethnic groups inhabiting these regions, and they had their own kingdoms and cultural practices prior to the establishment of the Shah dynasty's centralized rule. Their presence and influence during the unification era would have been shaped by their socio-political structures, including their leadership, alliances, and interactions with other ethnic groups and rulers in the region. While specific details regarding the Kirati people's involvement in the unification process may vary, it is plausible that they contributed to the broader historical tapestry of Nepal's consolidation under a centralized authority, albeit within the context of their own distinct cultural identity and heritage.

One of the respondent stated that based on *Nun Pani Sandhi* Kirat was annexed to Nepal while providing the autonomy to the people living in the area. According to the Treaty, the relationship between the Kirat and rest of Nepal should be like salt in the water. Further the treaty barred the purchase of land by the outsider to the Kirat Community. However, during the reign of King Mahendra, the Land Act provided opportunity for the outsider to gain the land in this area, and hence the mass migration of the people from different part of the hilly area began.

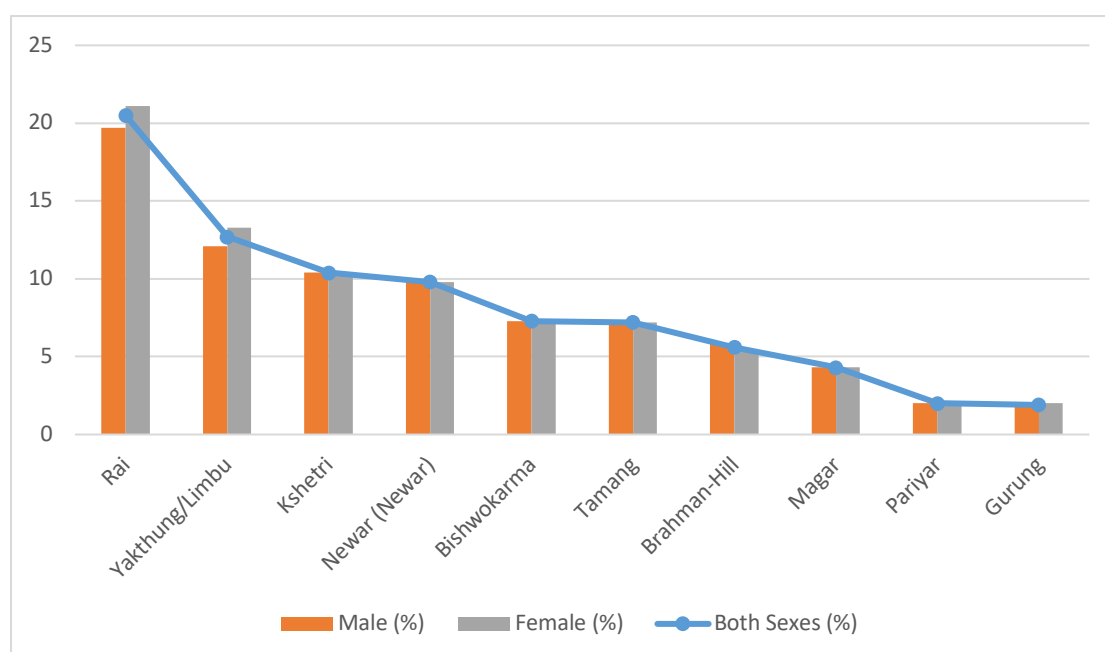
1.1.4 Ethnicity of the People

In Nepal, the ethnic composition reflects a diverse demographic with Kshetri being the largest group at 16.4%, followed by Brahman-Hill at 11.3%, Magar at 6.9%, and Tharu at 6.2%. Tamang and Bishwokarma each hold 5.6% and 5.0%, respectively, with Musalman representing 4.9%, Newar (Newar) at 4.6%, Yadav at 4.2%, and Rai at 2.2%. In Sunsari, the Musalman ethnic group leads at 12.1%, followed closely by Tharu at

11.2%, and Kshetri at 10.8%, with Brahman-Hill making up 7.5%, Rai at 6.7%, and Yadav at 4.1%. Other notable groups in Sunsari include Koiri/Kushwaha at 3.8%, Newar (Newar) at 3.6%, Yakthung/Limbu at 3.5%, and Musahar at 3.3%. Dharan Municipality presents a unique demographic profile with the Rai community dominating at 20.5%, significantly higher than the national average, highlighting Dharan as a cultural hub for the Rai people. The Yakthung/Limbu population at 12.7% also indicates Dharan's importance to this ethnic group. Kshetri (10.4%) and Newar (Newar) (9.8%) show substantial representation, reflecting a blend of traditional and urban influences. Bishwokarma (7.3%) and Tamang (7.2%) populations further underline the municipality's ethnic diversity. The Brahman-Hill (5.6%) and Magar (4.3%) populations suggest a broad spectrum of ethnic representation. Smaller groups like Pariyar (2.0%) and Gurung (1.9%) indicate the presence of various communities contributing to Dharan's cultural mosaic. The comparative analysis reveals distinct demographic patterns and concentrations of ethnic groups in Nepal, Sunsari, and Dharan, highlighting both the unique local characteristics and broader national trends. The ethnicity of the Dharan is highlighted in the figure 1.

Figure 1

Ethnicity population of Dharna Municipality



Source: CBS, 2022

1.1.5 Centrifugal and Centripetal force in Dharan

In the context of Dharan, especially considering the recent conflicts related to ethno-religious tensions, the concepts of centrifugal and centripetal forces can be applied to understand the social dynamics that either exacerbate divisions or foster unity within the city.

These forces are evident in the incidents that drive different ethnic and religious groups apart, contributing to social discord and fragmentation. The recent controversy over the cow slaughter, which is deeply offensive to the Hindu majority, acts as a significant centrifugal force, heightening tensions between religious communities. Such events underscore existing religious and cultural differences, leading to polarization within the community. Additionally, socio-economic disparities and competition for limited resources further exacerbate these divisions, highlighting the challenges in maintaining social cohesion in a diverse urban setting like Dharan.

On the other hand, Dharan also experiences centripetal forces that help in binding the community together. These include shared cultural events and public spaces where people from different backgrounds come together, fostering a sense of common identity and mutual respect. Efforts by community leaders and local governance to promote inclusivity and equitable representation in decision-making also serve as centripetal forces, enhancing solidarity and reducing the impact of divisive elements. These forces are crucial for promoting peace and unity in Dharan, helping to counterbalance the tensions brought about by centrifugal influences.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the town of Dharan, Nepal, religious tensions have flared up, exacerbated by recent events such as the construction of a church near a Hindu temple and the live-streamed consumption of beef by two locals celebrating their release from police custody. The simmering religious conflict has its roots in Nepal's complex transition from a Hindu kingdom to a secular state in 2008. Despite the constitutional declaration of secularism, there has been a resurgence of Hindu nationalist sentiments, with some political leaders openly supporting the idea of a Hindu state. This shift is influenced by domestic factors, including ethnic and caste dynamics, as well as external forces such as the rise of Hindu

nationalism in India, with the BJP expressing a preference for Nepal as a Hindu nation. The movement for a Hindu state in Nepal involves intricate ideological, political, and foreign policy debates, posing a significant challenge to the country's political landscape and future direction.

The study aims to investigate the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District of Nepal, delving into the intricate dynamics of communal tensions among various ethnic and religious groups within the region. Focusing on the historical context, migration patterns, and economic factors, the research seeks to comprehend the root causes of conflict, with specific attention to the interactions between diverse communities. By examining the impact of identity issues, intra-state conflicts, and the centrality of religion, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethno-religious conflicts in Sunsari District. Additionally, the research will explore the role of language, historical factors, and economic disparities in shaping the conflict landscape, aiming to contribute valuable insights that can inform potential strategies for conflict resolution and community cohesion in the region.

1.3 Research Questions

This research is guided by the following research questions:

- 1.3.1 How does the ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari District impact the security of individuals and communities?
- 1.3.2 In what ways does the ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari District shape individual and collective identities?
- 1.3.3 What are the challenges of ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari district and how could it be addressed.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follow:

- 1.4.1 To analyze the impact of ethno-religious conflict in security of individuals and communities.

1.4.2 To identify the impact of ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District shaping individual and collective identities.

1.4.3 To examine the challenges of the ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari and provide measures to address it.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study of ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District of Nepal holds significant importance for several reasons. Firstly, it addresses a pressing issue that has direct implications for the well-being and harmonious coexistence of diverse communities within the region. The Sunsari District, like many other areas grappling with ethno-religious tensions, serves as a microcosm of broader societal challenges related to identity, recognition, and security. By delving into the root causes and dynamics of these conflicts, the study aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform policymakers, community leaders, and practitioners working towards sustainable peace and social cohesion.

Understanding the ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari is crucial for promoting a more inclusive and tolerant society. It provides an opportunity to explore the complexities surrounding individual and collective identities, shedding light on how these identities are shaped and, in turn, influence the recognition of different ethnic and religious groups. This knowledge is fundamental for developing targeted interventions and policies that address the underlying issues fuelling tensions and fostering a sense of belonging and recognition among diverse communities.

Furthermore, the study's focus on mechanisms for conflict resolution and peacebuilding within the Sunsari District is significant in identifying best practices and gaps in existing approaches. By documenting and evaluating the effectiveness of these mechanisms, the research contributes practical insights that can guide the development of more robust and context-specific strategies for mitigating ethno-religious conflicts. This aspect of the study not only benefits the Sunsari District but also holds broader implications for conflict resolution practices applicable in other regions facing similar challenges.

In a larger context, the findings of this study may contribute to academic scholarship on ethno-religious conflicts, providing a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing such conflicts and the efficacy of different peacebuilding measures. Moreover, it has the potential to serve as a case study that informs comparative analyses, allowing researchers and policymakers to draw parallels and distinctions with similar situations globally. Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in its potential to foster positive change, promote social cohesion, and contribute to the broader discourse on ethno-religious conflicts and their resolution.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations of the study are as follow:

1.6.1 The study adopts qualitative data collection method only.

1.6.2 The study is limited to analysis of ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari district only.

The organization of the chapter in a typical academic or research study such as the one being described is structured to guide the reader through a logical progression of the research, from introductory concepts to findings and conclusions. Each chapter serves a specific purpose in the overall composition of the study:

This initial chapter sets the stage for the entire study. It typically includes the background of the study, stating the research problem and outlining the main objectives or questions that the research aims to address. It also provides a brief overview of the significance of the study, explaining why the research is important and to whom. The introduction may also present hypotheses or theoretical frameworks that will guide the subsequent analysis.

The literature review chapter serves to contextualize the research within the existing body of knowledge. It involves a critical analysis of previous research that is relevant to the research question, identifying key themes, gaps, and debates in the literature. This review not only informs the reader about the current state of research in the field but

also helps justify the necessity of the current study, showing how it builds on or diverges from existing studies.

In this chapter, the researcher details the methods used to gather and analyze data. It describes the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations), and analytical procedures. This chapter is crucial for ensuring the reliability and validity of the study, as it allows other researchers to evaluate or replicate the research process. It also addresses any ethical considerations involved in the research.

This is typically the most substantive part of the study, where the researcher presents the data collected and analyzes it in relation to the research questions or hypotheses established earlier. The findings are discussed in detail, often supported by tables, figures, or quotes from primary sources. The discussion interprets the findings, linking them back to the literature reviewed in Chapter II and considering the implications for theory, practice, and future research.

The final chapter summarizes the entire study, encapsulating the research objectives, methodology, main findings, and the conclusions drawn from the analysis. It reiterates the significance of the findings and suggests how they contribute to the broader field of knowledge. This chapter often includes recommendations for future research or practical applications based on the study's outcomes. It may also reflect on the limitations of the study, acknowledging any factors that might have influenced the results.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Empirical Review

Michael et al. (2021) stated that over time Clash of Identities in Kaduna North-west Nigeria often manifest into ethno-religious conflict in the state. This paper examines however the nexus between politics, ethno-religious and sharp identity question that formed the basis of ethno-religious conflict in the area. These however, affect sustainable development in Kaduna state. Historically, this conflict has played itself out in the contest for space, resources and access to power between different communities in the state; it also accesses how state failure and elite competition for power and resources in a multi-ethnic nation causes ethno-religious conflict and sharp identity question in Kaduna state. The paper adopts Human Needs theory. This theory explicates the reason to meet basic needs of man and if these needs are not met, conflict is likely to occur. The paper also adopts qualitative methods of data collection; this is drawn from both primary and secondary sources of data. It utilizes instrument of in-depth interviews with the key actors, community leaders and religious leaders. It is the finding of the paper that politics of identity and ethno-religious conflict have been the fundamental issue that poses security challenges to Nigeria. These challenges have taken the form of bombing, injury; killing and kidnapping that threatened Nigeria national security. The study recommends that government; ethno-regional and religious groups should adopt preventive diplomacy and dialogue to attaining cohesion and symbiotic relationship (Michael et al., 2021).

Agbibo (2012) examined the elusive search for a true national identity in Nigeria amid persistent ethno-religious conflicts and violent attacks in Nigeria today. The finding is that political mobilization drawn along politicized ethno-religious lines has precluded the emergence of a true national identity in Nigeria. The analysis is historically anchored and foregrounds colonial policies that blocked the processes of nation building in postindependence Nigeria (Agbibo, 2013).

Adenuga et al. (2023) stated that the threats of ethnic, religious, and ethno-religious conflicts have endured in Nigeria and become increasingly alarming in the fourth republic, which started in 1999. Ethno-religious conflicts are hostile engagements where actors and their motivations reflect a combination of ethnic and religious interests. These conflicts are deeply rooted in colonial legacies, ethno-religious-based distributions of power and resources, and failure of the post-colonial state to advance unity in diversity and promote the welfare and security of all citizens without discrimination. Between 1999 and 2021, Nigeria recorded no fewer than 2811 incidences of ethnic conflict with 18,132 fatalities, 3703 incidences of religious conflict with 29,957 fatalities, and 117 incidences of ethno-religious conflict with 2420 fatalities. These conflicts have had negative consequences for the lives and properties of the affected population, political stability, national unity, integration, development, security, and the image of the country internationally. This article examines the threats of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria's fourth republic, their causes, manifestations, consequences, and possible ways forward (Adenuga et al., 2023).

Salawu (2010) examined the manifestations of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, their causes and provides proposals for new management strategies for the control of this social phenomenon, which is fast becoming a permanent feature of the Nigerian social map. There is a consensus of opinion among observers that Nigeria provides one of the best examples or case studies of ethno-religious conflicts. With over 400 ethnic groups, distributed among the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), Nigeria since independence, has produced a catalogue of ethno religious conflicts that resulted in an estimated loss of over three million. lives and unquantifiable psychological and material damages (Salawu, 2010).

Eferebo (2022) contended that ethno-religious conflicts are twin evils that always bedevils Nigeria, which tends to stretch the bounds of unity to a potentially snapping point. From about the beginning of the 21st century, the once centers of African civilization slides into ethno-religious crisis. What principally accounts for this unsavory state of affairs is the strong prejudice of the parallel forces of ethnicity and religion. For Nigeria to experience an appreciable and sustainable level of educational development with regard to the attainment of national unity, integration and sustainable democracy especially good governance, there must be a paradigm shift in emphasis

through adequate encouragement of ethno-religious education to achieve good governance (Eferebo, 2022).

Pariyar (2023) stated that the Manipur hills in India are engulfed in a crisis, marked by clashes between the dominant Hindu Meitei and the Christian-majority Kuki tribal group, posing the risk of transforming an enduring ethnic conflict into a religious one. The violence, including attacks on hundreds of churches by Hindu mobs, raises concerns about the conflict spreading across northeast India, with potential consequences in Myanmar and Nepal. The federal government's perceived indifference exacerbates the situation, leading to suspicions that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have contributed to the conflict, echoing similar historical and ethnographic parallels with Nepal. The article emphasizes the rejection of Hindutva, a highly politicized Hindu movement, as it has been linked to ethnic violence and tensions. Fearful of the divisive politics spreading in Nepal, the author warns against allowing vested interests to further strain ethnic and caste relations in a country still in transition post-Hindu monarchy abolition in 2008. The article underscores the importance of addressing grievances, advocating for Dalit freedom through peaceful means directed at the state and not against any religion or caste. It urges the government to listen to and settle grievances to prevent the rise of hate politics, akin to Hindutva, in Nepal (Pariyar, 2023).

Ngwoke and Ituma (2021) examines the extent to which ethno-religious conflicts have affected sustainable development in Nigeria. The destruction of lives and property by reckless ethnic and religious extremists has been a challenging key factor to sustainable development in Nigeria. This article aims to reflect on the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria from an epistemological point of view, ascertain the major causes of these conflicts and seek solutions to address the root causes. The article concludes that religious intolerance among Nigerians from different religious groups is the result of the misinterpretation of religious teachings of the leaders of terrorist groups to their followers and that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria affect sustainable development as they lead to loss of lives and destruction of property, among others. It is also indicated that the effects of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria lead to an increase in the unemployment rate, withdrawal of foreign investments and education imbalance. The article concludes by arguing that ethnicity and religious crises are unhealthy for the

nation's sustainable development and that no price paid in the direction of resolving these conflicts can be considered to be too much. It is recommended that religious leaders form the minds of Nigerians with the teaching of love and peace, as it is proclaimed in their various religious books and beliefs (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020).

Juergensmeyer (2023) explored the shifting dynamics of global conflicts post-Cold War. Juergensmeyer argues that future conflicts will be primarily religious, not ideological, challenging the secular dominance of nation-states, particularly in the Third World. He contrasts his perspective with Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations," proposing that the real conflicts will occur within nation-states rather than internationally. The book draws on interviews and writings of leaders from various religious groups including Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Jewish movements, to underscore a global trend towards religious nationalism. Juergensmeyer investigates the decline of secular nationalism in the Third World, suggesting that religious nationalism is perceived by its adherents as a defense against a Western-led global conspiracy against religion. This narrative is exemplified by the shift in Islamic political groups in Egypt during the Gulf War, who redirected their stance due to perceived Western aggression. The book critically examines whether religion can coexist with the concept of the nation-state, using examples from Sri Lanka and India to argue that some religious groups see their faith as a better foundation for national identity than secular nationalism. The analysis also covers the potential of religious nationalism to become violent and intolerant, yet it recognizes the positive aspects like the grounding of public institutions in morality and appreciation for tradition (Juergensmeyer, 2023).

Chatterji (1994) delves into the complex interplay between religious identities and political dynamics, particularly focusing on the historical and contemporary consequences of communalism in India. The book outlines how religious sentiments have often been manipulated for political gains, leading to communal tensions and conflicts. It explores the role of various political entities and leaders in fostering communal divides to consolidate power, and how these practices have affected societal cohesion and national unity. The narrative highlights significant historical events where religion and politics intersected, exacerbating communal tensions and sometimes leading to violence and societal disruptions. Through detailed analysis, the book emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of the historical roots of

communalism to address its persistent influence in contemporary politics and society. This study also underscores the challenges of maintaining secularism in a religiously diverse society, where political agendas often overshadow the secular ideals of equality and unity (Chatterji, 1994).

Allen (1992) provides an in-depth exploration of the significant role religion plays in shaping political landscapes across South Asia, focusing on India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka over the past two decades. It addresses the surprising emergence of aggressive political movements linked to religious ideologies, challenging traditional views and offering fresh interpretations through a collection of studies by renowned scholars. The text delves into India's issues with militant Hinduism and socio-economic disparities influenced by caste and religious minority dynamics, Pakistan's journey through economic shifts to Islamic fundamentalism, and the interplay of nationalism with gender in its Islamic state framework. Sri Lanka's political narrative is analyzed through the lens of Buddhist ideologies, highlighting contradictions between religious pacifism and political violence, and examining how race, class, and gender exacerbate these conflicts. This multidisciplinary compilation not only sheds light on South Asian political-religious conflicts but also provides a broader understanding of similar global phenomena, making it a valuable resource for political scientists, historians, and scholars of religion (Allen, 1992).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present work is primarily based on published books, online articles. For the study of the concerned subject, descriptive method is chosen. The collection technique for the study is based on primary and secondary data. The purpose of research is an explanatory and descriptive which has been done by employing mixed research design. Secondary data, documents and records, non-written records are used to develop research. The research paper is more inductive after applying mentioned methods.

3.1 Research Design

In the forthcoming research study on the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District of Nepal, a qualitative approach is adopted to delve into the intricate dynamics and multifaceted aspects of the conflict. This research, designed as a case study, will meticulously align with its primary objectives, aiming to comprehensively understand the impact of the conflict on security, identity, and recognition, while concurrently exploring the existing mechanisms for conflict resolution within the Sunsari District. Data collection will employ in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, community leaders, and religious figures, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives is captured. Thematic analysis is applied to interpret qualitative data, revealing recurring themes associated with the ethno-religious conflict.

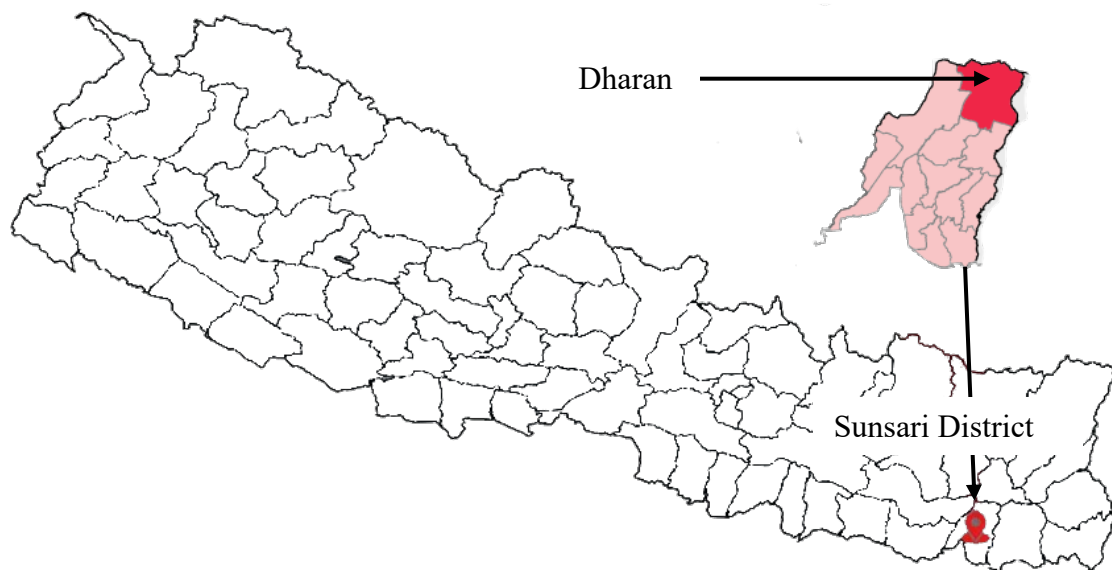
3.2 Area of Study

Situated in the eastern region of Nepal within the Koshi province, Sunsari District is part of the Outer Terai, encompassing an expanse of 1,257 km² (485 sq mi). Positioned at approximately 26.6514° N latitude and 87.2482° E longitude, Sunsari District holds a strategic location in the topography of eastern Nepal. The district, established in 1962 when Nepal underwent administrative restructuring, emerged as a distinct entity from Morang District. With a population of 753,328 according to the 2011 Nepal census, Sunsari encompasses significant urban centers like Inaruwa, Itahari, Jhumka, Dharan, and Duhabi, with its administrative headquarters situated in Inaruwa. Noteworthy religious sites within the district include the Budha Subba Temple, Ramdhuni,

Chataradham, Baraha, Bishnupaduka, Dantakali, and Pindeshor Babadham. The district's historical roots trace back to the ancient lowlands of Limbuwan, collectively known as Morang District during the reign of King Mung Mawrong Hang in the 7th century. Sunsari District is located approximately 427 kilometers (265 miles) east of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Within the Sunsari district Dharan was selected for the purpose of the study.

Figure 2

Map of Sunsari District and Dharan



Dharan, located in the eastern part of Nepal within the Sunsari District, is a vibrant and culturally diverse city that serves as a melting pot of various ethnicities and religions. It is known for its strategic geographical location at the foothills of the Mahabharat Range and the southern point touching the plains of the Terai, making it an important trade and transit hub between the hilly regions of eastern Nepal and the flat Terai plains.

3.3 Nature and Sources of Data

For the prospective study on ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari District, various sources and types of data was systematically employed to comprehensively understand the dynamics of the situation. Primary data was gathered through field surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with the local population, community leaders, and relevant

stakeholders. The list of the participant during the interview process are listed in the table below:

Table 1

List of Respondent

Role	Number of Participants
Journalist	11
Politician	4
Scholars	3
Community People	9
Doctor	1
Different Organization	3
Religious People (Priest)	3
Local Elected Leader (Wards)	2
Security Officers	5
Business Persons	4

These interactions provided firsthand insights into the perceptions, experiences, and grievances of the involved communities. Additionally, observational data were collected to grasp the on-ground realities and behaviors contributing to the conflict. Secondary data is sourced from existing literature, reports, and official documents related to the historical, social, and political context of Sunsari District. This include academic studies, government publications, and reports from non-governmental organizations, providing a broader contextual understanding. Geospatial data, including satellite imagery and maps, is utilized to analyze the geographical patterns and locations of significant events. The combination of primary and secondary data will facilitate a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari District.

3.4 Techniques and Tools of Data Collection

To conduct the study on ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari District, a variety of techniques and tools is employed for data collection. Interviews with key informants, including community leaders, religious figures, and local authorities, will provide in-

depth qualitative insights into the dynamics of the conflict. Focus group discussions is organized to encourage open dialogue among community members, fostering a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Observational methods is utilized to document and analyze visible behaviors, interactions, and events contributing to the conflict. Additionally, content analysis of relevant documents, such as historical records, official reports, and media coverage, is conducted to supplement the primary data. The combination of these techniques and tools will ensure a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to data collection, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the ethno-religious conflict in Sunsari District.

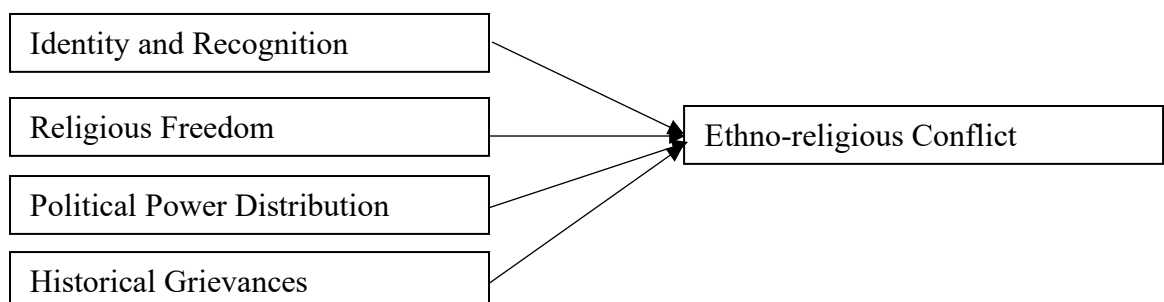
3.5 Conceptual Framework

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework

Independent variable

Dependent variable



Source: (Egwu, 2011).

Identity and Recognition: Identity and recognition refer to the acknowledgment and acceptance of distinct cultural, ethnic, or religious identities within a society. In the context of ethno-religious conflict, this involves how different groups perceive and validate their individual or collective identities, and how these perceptions contribute to tensions or harmonious coexistence.

Religious Freedom: Religious freedom encompasses the right of individuals and communities to practice, observe, and express their religious beliefs without any undue restrictions or interference. In the context of ethno-religious conflict, limitations on

religious practices, discrimination based on faith, or the imposition of restrictions can lead to heightened tensions and conflicts.

Political Power Distribution: Political power distribution refers to the allocation and sharing of political influence, representation, and decision-making authority among various ethnic and religious groups within a society. In the context of ethno-religious conflict, disparities in political power can contribute to grievances, marginalization, and fuel inter-group tensions.

Historical Grievances: Historical grievances involve past injustices, conflicts, or discriminatory practices that continue to impact present-day relations between different ethnic or religious groups. In the context of ethno-religious conflict, unresolved historical grievances, such as land disputes, violence, or systemic discrimination, can serve as underlying causes for contemporary tensions.

Ethno-religious Conflict: Ethno-religious conflict refers to conflicts or tensions arising from the intersection of ethnic and religious identities within a society. These conflicts often involve disputes over cultural practices, religious beliefs, political representation, or resources. Ethno-religious conflicts can manifest at various levels, from localized disputes to broader societal tensions, and may have cultural, political, or economic dimensions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 History and Culture of Dharan

Dharan, located in eastern Nepal, has a rich tapestry of history and culture that stretches back centuries. It sits strategically on the northern slopes of the Mahabharat Range, bordering the fertile plains of the Terai, making it a vital trading hub between the hilly and lowland areas. Historically, Dharan has been significant since the time when the ten Limbu kings of the region, ruling between the Arun and Teesta Rivers, convened here to form their respective kingdoms.

The rise of King Mawrong marked a turning point, as he established dominance over the region and renamed his kingdom Morang. His successors, however, saw a gradual decline in centralized power, leading to fragmentation and autonomy among local chieftains. This period of decentralization lasted until King Sirijonga ascended, unifying the region under his rule and implementing reforms that shaped the administrative structure of Limbuwan. His legacy includes the establishment of a unified script for the Limbu people and significant feudal reforms.

In more modern times, Dharan was formally established as a trading post in the early 20th century by Prime Minister Chandra Shamsheer to supply timber to the East India Company. The town saw substantial growth with the establishment of the British Gurkha Recruit Center in 1953, attracting recruits from across Nepal and fostering a diverse, multi-ethnic community. This diversity is reflected in the cultural fabric of the city, which celebrates various ethnic festivals and dances, showcasing the rich heritage of groups like the Limbus, Newars, Rais, and Gurungs.

Dharan's name itself, translating to "wood sawing location," hints at its historical roots in timber trading. Today, it remains a vibrant city, known for its soccer talent and as the home of the B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences. Its transformation over the years from a strategic meeting point for ancient kings to a bustling modern city underscores its importance in Nepali history and its role as a cultural melting pot.

Respondent 1 stated that

Dharan was historically a central area but witnessed a shift in importance with the establishment of a British Camp in Biratnagar. Migration patterns indicate that residents of Dharan have predominantly migrated from upper hilly and Himalayan regions, contributing to its diverse population.

Respondent 3 highlights the presence of 13 indigenous groups in Dharan and the growing awareness and advocacy for indigenous rights since 2007 B.S. The narrative suggests that these voices were silenced in 2017 BS, raising concerns about the suppression of indigenous voices. Post Democracy period i.e. after 2047 B.S. increased political openness, allowing indigenous issues to gain traction. However, the subsequently constitution of Nepal addressed secularism however there were challenges to indigenous identity and cultural practices.

Respondent 4 reflects on the historical trajectory of political polarization in Dharan. The narrative indicates that before 2047, there were significant divisions along political lines within the community. However, the respondent observes that these divisions have since been resolved, signaling a positive shift towards greater unity and consensus-building within the society.

Historically, the media in Dharan and broader regions of Nepal has been pivotal in documenting the multicultural aspects of the city. In earlier decades, particularly before the advent of digital media, local newspapers and radio were the primary sources of news and played a significant role in how communities understood their own diversity. These media outlets often provided extensive coverage of local festivals, traditional practices, and community gatherings, which helped to reinforce a sense of shared cultural heritage.

During times of political upheaval, such as during the 1990s with the democratization movements, media in Dharan increasingly reported on ethnic and political tensions. Coverage of these issues was crucial in bringing attention to the needs and voices of marginalized communities, but sometimes the lack of in-depth reporting led to oversimplified narratives. These narratives occasionally intensified local tensions, particularly when media outlets were perceived as biased towards certain groups.

In the past, sensationalism was perhaps less pronounced due to the slower pace of news cycles and the local nature of most media outlets. However, national issues sometimes received sensational coverage, which impacted local perceptions and reactions. For example, during national elections or significant political changes, local media in Dharan might have amplified conflicts or political drama, affecting community relations and perceptions of stability.

Over the years, there has been a noticeable shift towards more responsible journalism. This change has been driven by a combination of factors, including better journalistic education, greater awareness of media ethics, and the influence of global standards. Additionally, the introduction of the internet and digital media platforms has provided journalists and outlets in Dharan the tools to offer more balanced and diverse viewpoints, improving the quality of reporting and its impact on community cohesion.

Religious conflict and social media are deeply intertwined phenomena, particularly evident in contexts like Dharan, Nepal. While social media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for communication and community engagement, they also serve as potent vectors for the propagation of divisive rhetoric, misinformation, and extremist ideologies related to religious beliefs and practices. In Dharan, as in many other regions, social media exacerbates existing tensions by amplifying extremist voices, reinforcing echo chambers, and facilitating the coordination of discriminatory or violent actions targeting religious minorities. However, it's essential to recognize that social media can also be a force for positive change, enabling interfaith dialogue, promoting tolerance, and amplifying voices advocating for peace and coexistence. To address the negative impacts of social media on religious conflict, efforts must focus on promoting digital literacy, countering hate speech, and fostering online spaces conducive to respectful dialogue and understanding.

4.1.1 Religious Demography of the People

Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religions, is deeply intertwined with Nepal's social fabric, notably through the caste system, which historically categorized society into hierarchical groups based on birth. This stratification has perpetuated various forms of inequality, affecting access to resources, education, and social mobility. Although the caste system's rigidity has lessened in urban areas and among educated populations due

to legal reforms and social movements, significant disparities persist, particularly in rural regions where traditional practices are more entrenched. Discrimination based on caste can influence every aspect of life, from marital prospects and employment opportunities to religious practices and political power, making Hinduism a central element in ongoing discussions and reforms aimed at achieving social equity and inclusion in Nepal (Omvedt, 1992).

Religion	Percent (2011)	Percent (2021)
Hinduism	58.4	55.3
Kiraitism	23.1	26.9
Buddhism	11.4	10.9
Christianity	5.1	5.8
Others	1.9	1.1

In Dharan, the religious demography reflects a dynamic landscape with a plurality of faiths coexisting within the community. Hinduism remains the predominant religion, though its percentage decreased slightly from 58.4% in 2011 to 55.3% in 2021. Kiratism, representing the traditional belief system of the Kirat people, has seen an increase in adherence, rising from 23.1% to 26.9% over the same period. Buddhism maintains a significant presence, with 10.9% of the population identifying as Buddhist, while Christianity also shows a slight increase from 5.1% to 5.8%. Other faiths, including indigenous and minority religions, collectively constitute 1.1% of the population, down from 1.9% in 2011. This religious diversity underscores the pluralistic nature of Dharan's society, where individuals and communities uphold various religious traditions and practices, contributing to the city's rich cultural tapestry.

Regarding the religious conversation, respondent 1 stated that

There's a notable trend of Dalit and minor community members converting to Christianity, leading to potential conflicts within the Christian community regarding superiority. Additionally, many Rai and Limbu individuals also belong to the Christian faith, suggesting religious diversity within the region.

Respondent 8 further stated that

the rapid increase in the number of churches in Dharan, suggesting a significant shift in the religious landscape of the region. This growth is portrayed as a contributing factor to the escalating tensions, with religious organizations and media outlets exacerbating the situation through provocative actions and speeches. Additionally, the failure of local leadership, with the mayor depicted as ineffective in calming the issue. Furthermore, the involvement of individuals from outside Dharan aggravated the conflict.

4.1.2 Intercommunity Relations

Dharan reveal a complex tapestry of coexistence among various ethnic and religious groups, marked by both harmony and discord. The daily interactions between these groups are shaped significantly by community events, shared public spaces, and local governance practices. Here's an elaboration on these aspects:

In Dharan, festivals and communal gatherings often serve as significant points of interaction between different communities. Events like the Sakela-Ubhuali festival, celebrated by the Kirat community, and Dashain, predominantly observed by Hindus, usually see participation across communities, fostering a sense of shared cultural heritage. However, these events can also become points of tension, especially if they coincide or if one group feels that their traditions are being overshadowed or marginalized by another. The study highlights instances where community events have led to increased understanding and respect but also points where they have sparked conflicts, particularly when there are perceived inequities in how public resources are allocated for these events.

Public spaces in Dharan, such as parks, markets, and community centers, act as critical arenas for daily interactions among ethnic and religious groups. These spaces are generally seen as neutral territories where individuals from different backgrounds meet and engage in economic or social activities. However, the use of these spaces is not always conflict-free. For example, the construction of religious structures in shared public spaces has occasionally led to disputes, especially when the new structures are seen as encroaching on areas traditionally used by other groups. The study notes that

effective management and equitable allocation of these spaces are crucial in maintaining peace and avoiding conflicts.

4.1.3 Role of Local Leaders and Influencers

Local leaders in Dharan wield considerable influence over their constituencies, often shaping public opinion and community responses to various issues. Religious leaders, for instance, have the power to frame religious narratives that can either promote tolerance and peace among different faith groups or exacerbate tensions by emphasizing religious differences and grievances. Political leaders, on the other hand, might use ethno-religious identities to mobilize support, sometimes at the expense of community harmony. Community leaders, such as heads of local organizations or elder community members, often act as mediators in conflicts but can also take sides based on personal or group interests.

The motivations of these leaders can vary significantly, influenced by factors such as personal beliefs, political ambitions, and the desire for community welfare. Some leaders may strive to promote inclusive policies and practices genuinely, aiming to foster a peaceful coexistence among diverse groups. Others might be motivated by the potential gains from polarizing tactics, such as increased political support from their base or control over communal resources. Understanding these motivations is crucial for assessing why certain leaders act in ways that either mitigate or incite tensions.

4.1.4 Migration of the People

The migration patterns into Sunsari District, particularly impacting Dharan, have significantly altered the area's demographic composition, resulting in substantial shifts in community dynamics. These shifts have transformed what were once majority groups into minorities, reshaping social and cultural interactions within the community.

The influx of individuals and families from rural areas of Nepal into Dharan, driven by the search for better economic opportunities, education, and healthcare, has led to an increase in the population of ethnic groups that were previously underrepresented. This internal migration has diluted the dominance of the traditional majority groups, creating a more balanced ethnic mosaic but also introducing challenges such as competition for

resources and employment. These changes have sometimes led to tensions as the original majority groups find their influence and representation diminishing, both in the workforce and in cultural prominence.

4.2 Ethno-religious Conflict

The recent controversy in Dharan centers around a sensitive issue involving the public slaughter of a cow, which is considered sacred in Hinduism. This incident came to light through a viral video showing people feasting post-slaughter, sparking significant communal debate and seen by some as an affront to Hindu beliefs. The situation escalated when two individuals were arrested and later honored with a beef feast by certain groups, intensifying the communal rift. The beef feast, supported by organizations like the Nepal Tribal Federation and the Dharan Sub-Metropolitan Coordinating Council, seemed to challenge Hindu cultural dominance, leading to protests by Hindu groups and support from tribal communities.

Amidst these tensions, the local administration intervened by imposing a prohibition order under the guise of public health concerns to prevent potential religious conflicts. Additionally, the construction of a church near a temple added to the strife, with allegations of obstruction and escalating disputes. Mayor Harka Sampang's involvement and statements further polarized opinions, contributing to a politically charged atmosphere. The controversies culminated in a planned harmony rally by Hindu leaders, which faced opposition and administrative pushback, reflecting Dharan's deep-seated religious and cultural divisions. The ongoing discord underscores the complexities of managing such diverse viewpoints within the community.

Ethno-religious conflict in Dharan, Nepal, has emerged as a complex issue shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. The region, characterized by its diverse population comprising various ethnic groups and religious communities, has witnessed tensions and disputes revolving around identity, faith, and cultural practices. One significant aspect of ethno-religious conflict in Dharan is the intersection of ethnic identity with religious affiliation. The population includes diverse indigenous groups such as the Rai, Limbu, and Tamang, alongside other communities practicing Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Kiratism. These diverse identities have sometimes led to clashes, particularly concerning religious conversions, cultural

practices, and competing claims over sacred spaces. Historical factors also contribute to ethno-religious tensions in Dharan. The region's complex history, including the unification of Nepal and subsequent political changes, has influenced perceptions of identity and belonging. Grievances stemming from historical injustices, marginalization, and unequal treatment have occasionally fueled resentment and animosity between different ethnic and religious groups. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities exacerbate ethno-religious tensions in Dharan. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality intersect with identity politics, exacerbating social divisions and fostering resentment. Economic disparities may also lead to competition for resources and opportunities, further fueling mistrust and conflict among different communities. The rapid pace of modernization and urbanization in Dharan has also played a role in shaping ethno-religious dynamics. As traditional ways of life collide with modern influences, tensions arise over cultural preservation, religious freedom, and societal norms. Additionally, the proliferation of social media platforms has amplified voices and facilitated the spread of misinformation, contributing to polarization and conflict within the community. Efforts to address ethno-religious conflict in Dharan require a multifaceted approach. This includes promoting dialogue and understanding among different ethnic and religious groups, addressing socio-economic disparities, and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for all communities. Additionally, measures to safeguard cultural heritage, protect religious freedom, and foster inclusive governance are essential for promoting peace and harmony in the region. Ultimately, fostering mutual respect, tolerance, and coexistence among Dharan's diverse population is crucial for mitigating ethno-religious tensions and building a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Respondent 7 recounts the beef incident in Dharan as a novel occurrence, indicating that it was unprecedented in the respondent's lifetime. The narrative underscores the rapid construction of a church near a temple, sparking immediate controversy within the community. This suggests a sudden and unexpected disruption to the religious landscape of Dharan, prompting strong reactions from Hindu believers who voiced objections to the proximity of the church to their sacred site.

The constitution of Nepal 2072 has declared as a secular country to promote religious neutrality in governance. However, the issue of beef consumption emerges as a point

of contention, indicating tensions between religious groups. The conflict between a "cow worship group" and "beef eaters" underscores the clash between religious beliefs and cultural practices. Additionally, the involvement of the Mayor of Dharan, Harka Sampang, suggests that these tensions have reached a level of public controversy, potentially exacerbating divisions within the community.

Respondent 7 mentioned the arrest of two Janajati individuals on allegations of selling beef, reflecting the legal ramifications of the beef controversy. Although they were released by the court after a few days, the incident exacerbated tensions within the community. Notably, the release led to a celebratory display of beef consumption by some members of the community, captured in a video that further fueled the conflict. This sequence of events underscores the legal and social complexities surrounding the beef issue in Dharan.

Respondent 1 stated that

While ethno-religious conflicts do not appear prevalent, the emergence of issues like beef consumption signifies potential cultural tensions. This is notably the first instance of such an issue in the area, indicating shifting social dynamics.

4.2.1 Religious Conflict and Social Media

Religious conflict and social media are deeply intertwined phenomena, particularly evident in contexts like Dharan, Nepal. While social media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for communication and community engagement, they also serve as potent vectors for the propagation of divisive rhetoric, misinformation, and extremist ideologies related to religious beliefs and practices. In Dharan, as in many other regions, social media exacerbates existing tensions by amplifying extremist voices, reinforcing echo chambers, and facilitating the coordination of discriminatory or violent actions targeting religious minorities. However, it's essential to recognize that social media can also be a force for positive change, enabling interfaith dialogue, promoting tolerance, and amplifying voices advocating for peace and coexistence. To address the negative impacts of social media on religious conflict, efforts must focus on promoting digital literacy, countering hate speech, and fostering online spaces conducive to respectful dialogue and understanding.

Respondent 2 narrative revolves around the theme of religious tension exacerbated by recent events and the role of social media in amplifying these tensions within the community of Dharan. A major Hindu festival, following a declaration by Gore Bahadur Khapangi. However, the narrative takes a turn with the construction of a church adjacent to the Gopal Temple, indicating a clash of religious spaces. The delineation of a 15-foot road further symbolizes the physical and metaphorical divide between the two religious sites. This spatial proximity likely sparks controversy and stirs emotions within the community. The respondent notes the emergence of the beef issue, previously kept secret but now becoming a contentious topic, suggesting a shift in cultural norms or increased scrutiny.

Respondent 8 also stated that the contentious issue of the construction of a church near a temple, which initially caused confusion among the residents of Dharan. As the purpose of the building became known, tensions escalated, leading to a division within the community along religious lines. The narrative suggests that communal ego, or a sense of group identity and pride, played a significant role in exacerbating this division, leading to the formation of two opposing groups: those supportive of beef consumption and those dedicated to cow worship.

Similarly, Respondent 4 draws attention to the role of social media in exacerbating issues within Dharan. While acknowledging the provocation of issues by social media, the respondent suggests that the severity of these issues is exaggerated when viewed from outside the community. This underscores the influence of external perceptions and the potential distortion of local realities through digital platforms.

4.2.2 Cultural Practices and Conflict

In diverse communities like Dharan, Nepal, where various ethnicities, religions, and traditions coexist, conflicts often arise due to differences in cultural practices. These conflicts may stem from misunderstandings, perceptions of disrespect, or competition for resources or recognition. For example, disputes over religious rituals, land use, or language preservation can escalate into larger conflicts fueled by historical grievances or political agendas.

In the Kirat Limbu culture, oxen hold a substantial role not just in the agricultural sphere but also in religious and spiritual practices. This significance is particularly evident in the rituals associated with various spirits, categorized as Mang (god), Sammang (good spirits), and Chyang (bad spirits). Among these, the practices involving Pitchamma Sammang and Sing Sammang, who are revered as benevolent spirits, traditionally required the sacrifice of a Karang-pit (heifer). These sacrifices are believed to appease the spirits, ensuring protection, fertility, and prosperity for the community. The use of cattle in these rituals highlights their cultural importance, linking them to themes of fertility and sustenance.

Kappo Sammang, another significant spirit within the Kirat pantheon, traditionally received offerings of an ox's head. This practice underscores the ox's esteemed status, reflecting its strength and vital role in agriculture, making it a worthy tribute to a powerful spirit. The ox, through these rituals, transcends its physical utility to embody a spiritual essence, crucial for the community's engagement with their spiritual beliefs.

However, the cultural landscape for the Kirat Limbu people shifted significantly following the unification of Limbuwan into the Gorkhali State, which later evolved into the modern nation of Nepal. This unification brought about a legal and cultural imposition guided by Hindu philosophy, which reveres the cow as a sacred animal and prohibits its slaughter. In response, the Kirat community adapted their ritual practices due to these restrictions. The phedangma (shamans), pivotal in conducting these rituals, began substituting the traditional sacrifices of oxen and heifers with pigs, goats, or he-buffaloes. In these adapted rituals, the phedangma chants that these substitute animals are, symbolically, the traditional offerings of heifers or ox heads, thereby maintaining the ritual's integrity under the guise of legal and cultural conformity.

Respondent 3 narrative touches upon the cultural significance of beef consumption among the Rai and Limbu communities, presenting it as a longstanding tradition claimed by these groups. However, the undisclosed slaughter of male cows and the subsequent controversy suggest that cultural practices are not immune to scrutiny and conflict. The involvement of Hindu gurus, both verbally and physically, in asserting their power further highlights the complexities surrounding cultural practices and the potential for conflicts to escalate beyond discourse.

Respondent 5 highlighted the perspective of a Kirat religious leader, shedding light on the values and beliefs inherent in Kirat religion. Central to Kirat beliefs is the principle of equality, as emphasized by the assertion that "human are all equal." This suggests a fundamental egalitarian ethos within Kirat spirituality, where all individuals are regarded with equal respect regardless of social status or background. The respondent emphasizes the importance of respecting individual beliefs and traditions. This underscores the value placed on cultural and religious diversity within the community, acknowledging the significance of various belief systems and customs in shaping individual identities and community cohesion.

Respondent 5 further asserted that individuals are inherently free by birth, implying a natural entitlement to certain rights and freedoms. Specifically, the mention of beef consumption as a "birth right" suggests a belief in the autonomy of individuals to make choices regarding their dietary practices, aligning with broader principles of personal liberty and autonomy.

4.2.3 Identity and Recognition

Ethno-religious conflict in Dharan is often intertwined with issues of identity and recognition. Different ethnic and religious groups may vie for acknowledgment and respect for their cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions. Historical marginalization or discrimination based on identity exacerbate tensions and contribute to feelings of resentment and insecurity among certain communities. The struggle for recognition of cultural identity and the assertion of group rights become flashpoints for conflict, particularly when perceived as threatened by other groups or government policies.

In Dharan, activists are deeply committed to advocating for the rights and well-being of minority and indigenous communities. Their approach encompasses several strategies to ensure these groups are treated equitably and respectfully within the broader societal framework.

Activists in Dharan provide crucial legal support and representation, helping individuals from minority groups who face discrimination or have their rights infringed upon. This legal aid covers a variety of issues, including disputes over land rights, access to public services, and protection against ethnic discrimination. Beyond legal

support, there is a strong emphasis on policy advocacy, where activists work to influence both local and national policies. They strive to include provisions that protect minority rights, promote equality, and ensure that these communities receive a fair share of public resources and opportunities. Additionally, community mobilization plays a significant role in their approach. Activists organize workshops and meetings within minority communities to educate them about their rights and how to advocate for themselves, thereby empowering individuals and strengthening the community's ability to engage effectively with both governmental and non-governmental entities.

Activists utilize public campaigns to raise awareness about a variety of critical issues affecting Dharan. Educational campaigns often focus on informing the public about the historical injustices faced by certain communities, the importance of social equity, and the roles individuals can play in fostering a more inclusive society. These campaigns also highlight the current economic challenges facing different sectors of Dharan's population, advocating for economic policies that ensure a more equitable distribution of resources. Considering Dharan's diverse makeup, activists frequently promote messages of peace and cultural integration. They organize events that bring different communities together, fostering understanding and mutual respect. These activities are crucial in maintaining the social fabric of a city as diverse as Dharan, promoting a cohesive community environment where all residents can thrive.

4.2.4 Religious Freedom

Religious freedom, or the lack thereof, plays a significant role in ethno-religious conflict in Dharan. Conflicts arise when religious practices or symbols of one group are perceived as encroaching upon or challenging those of another. Additionally, restrictions on religious freedom imposed by state or societal actors can fuel grievances and contribute to inter-group tensions. The construction of religious buildings or the celebration of religious festivals become contentious issues, especially if they are seen as infringing upon the rights or beliefs of other religious communities.

In a secular nation like Nepal, where Hinduism is the majority religion, accommodating other religious groups involves a delicate balance of constitutional rights, cultural tolerance, and policy-making that respects the diversity of its population. The constitution of Nepal declares the country as a secular state, aiming to ensure freedom

of religion and equal rights for all citizens, which theoretically supports the peaceful coexistence of multiple religions, including Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and various indigenous faiths. However, challenges arise in the practical implementation of these ideals. Issues such as the dominance of Hindu festivals and symbols in public life, biases in government policies, and occasional societal prejudices can make it difficult for minority religions to feel fully integrated and respected. Furthermore, the political influence of religious groups, inter-religious conflicts, and the misrepresentation of minority groups in media and governance also pose significant challenges. These issues are compounded by the need for more extensive educational efforts to promote a deeper understanding and acceptance of religious pluralism, which is crucial for fostering a truly inclusive and cohesive secular society.

As, Juergensmeyer (1993) has stated in his book

As, secular national's unhappy attempts at accommodating religion have shown, religion is not easily placated. Religious activities are well aware that if a nation is based on the start on the premise of secular nationalism, religion is often made marginal to the political order (p. 39).

In the case of Nepal, the challenge lies in ensuring that the secular character of the state does not overshadow the cultural and religious practices of its diverse population. While the state aims to maintain a neutral stance on religion, ensuring equal treatment and freedom for all religious groups, the practical implementation of these ideals can be complex. The dominance of Hindu festivals and symbols, for instance, might be seen as contradicting the secular promises of the state, thereby creating feelings of exclusion among non-Hindu communities.

This scenario underscores the difficulties that secular states face in accommodating religion. It's not just about granting freedom of worship but involves the intricate balance of integrating diverse religious practices and symbols into the public and political spheres in a way that is seen as equitable by all religious communities. Failure to achieve this balance can lead to religious discontent and can fuel religious nationalism, where marginalized groups may seek greater recognition and influence, potentially at the expense of the secular framework of the state. Thus, Juergensmeyer's

insights are crucial for understanding the ongoing dynamic in Nepal and similar secular nations where multiple religions coexist.

4.2.5 Political Power Distribution

The distribution of political power among different ethnic and religious groups is a crucial factor in ethno-religious conflict in Dharan. Perceptions of political marginalization or exclusion lead to feelings of resentment and alienation, particularly among minority groups. Competition for political influence and resources exacerbate inter-group tensions, with marginalized communities seeking greater representation and decision-making power within governance structures. Political actors exploit ethnic or religious identities for their own gain, further polarizing communities and fueling conflict.

Dharan, as a microcosm of Nepal's broader societal structure, experiences its own complexities related to religious and ethnic diversity. The city's historical and contemporary challenges in managing Hindu majority sentiments while accommodating minority religions (such as Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and indigenous faiths) reflect the broader national struggle for secular governance amidst deep-rooted religious identities. Political entities in Dharan might leverage religious sentiments to rally support, potentially heightening communal tensions. This scenario underscores the importance of promoting genuine secularism and multicultural respect, aiming to prevent religion from becoming a tool for political manipulation that could disrupt the social fabric and peace within such a diverse community.

Ethno-religious conflicts provide a potent, albeit risky, tool in the arsenal of electoral strategies for politicians in Dharan. Some politicians might focus on resolving these conflicts, presenting themselves as peacemakers who can bridge communal divides and foster harmony. Their campaigns might emphasize dialogue, integration initiatives, and policies aimed at equitable resource distribution. Conversely, other politicians might exploit these tensions, using divisive rhetoric to solidify their base by appealing to the fears or biases of one group against another. This strategy can be effective in mobilizing voter bases during elections but often at the cost of increasing social divisions and undermining community cohesion.

4.2.6 Historical Grievances

Historical grievances stemming from past injustices or conflicts contribute to ethno-religious tensions in Dharan. Memories of past discrimination, land disputes, or religious persecution can linger within communities, shaping their attitudes and behaviors towards other groups. These grievances may be passed down through generations, perpetuating cycles of inter-group animosity and mistrust. Moreover, unresolved historical grievances resurface during times of social or political upheaval, serving as catalysts for renewed conflict and violence. Addressing these historical injustices and promoting reconciliation efforts are essential steps towards fostering peace and social cohesion in Dharan.

4.2.7 Community Identity and Pride

The general mass in Dharan has historically cultivated a strong communal identity, which is largely attributed to the city's rich tapestry of cultures and traditions. This communal pride is prominently displayed during local festivals such as Dashain and Tihar, where diverse groups come together to celebrate. These events not only reinforce shared cultural norms and values but also serve as opportunities for different communities to showcase their unique traditions and crafts, thereby strengthening intercultural bonds.

Local events such as the Sakela dance during the Ubhauri and Udhauri festivals (significant to the Kirat community) also play a crucial role in fostering communal pride. These events are platforms for transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations, ensuring that the heritage of Dharan's diverse populations is preserved and celebrated.

Public discussions, often organized around cultural preservation or historical remembrances, further bolster a sense of identity. These discussions can be particularly vibrant during anniversaries of significant local or national events, where community members reflect on their shared history and aspirations.

The alteration of traditional practices due to modern influences is another significant concern. For instance, the younger generation's drift towards global culture might dilute

the traditional practices that have been a hallmark of Dharan's cultural identity. This includes traditional crafts, local dialects, and communal farming practices, all of which are perceived to be under threat from the spread of urban lifestyles. There has been high number of religious conversation in the Dharan.

4.2.8 Insider vs Outsider

In the past, Dharan's intricate tapestry of ethnic and religious diversity has often been at the center of both conflict and cohesion, influenced strongly by the roles of insiders and outsiders. Local politicians and activists, deeply rooted in the community, worked tirelessly to address and mitigate ethnic and religious tensions. They were often seen advocating for policies and initiatives that emphasized social harmony and cultural preservation, tailoring their approaches to resonate with the specific needs and histories of Dharan's diverse communities. On the other hand, outsiders, including national policymakers and international NGOs, sometimes introduced strategies that did not fully align with the local socio-cultural dynamics. Their well-intentioned efforts occasionally overlooked the subtleties of ethnic and religious interactions, leading to policies that were sometimes perceived as inadequate or insensitive by the local populace. This mismatch could exacerbate existing tensions, especially when external interventions failed to recognize the historical grievances and cultural practices unique to Dharan's communities. Such scenarios underscored the complex interplay between local desires for self-determination and the broader objectives of national unity and development, often reflecting the delicate balance needed to manage and resolve ethnic and religious conflicts in a multicultural urban setting like Dharan.

The state's approach to managing the dynamic and diverse environment of Dharan is structured around several strategic areas, focusing on establishing a regulatory framework, addressing socio-economic disparities, and promoting national unity. These efforts are aimed at ensuring the city's development while respecting its cultural diversity and addressing the needs of all its residents.

The state's involvement in Dharan often revolves around implementing regulatory frameworks and policies designed to foster social harmony and stimulate economic growth. This includes comprehensive land use policies that not only regulate urban expansion and protect green spaces but also ensure that development does not encroach

on culturally significant sites. Investments in infrastructure are critical as well, with the state prioritizing the improvement of roads, public transport systems, and utilities to enhance the quality of life for residents and make the city more attractive for investments. Additionally, educational initiatives are crucial, with the state supporting programs that not only provide quality education but also incorporate the city's rich multicultural heritage into the curriculum. This helps foster a sense of pride and belonging among students from diverse backgrounds and promotes mutual respect and understanding among the younger generations.

Recognizing the challenges posed by socio-economic disparities in Dharan, the state has been proactive in launching targeted social programs designed to ensure equitable access to resources. These programs focus on improving healthcare access, offering employment opportunities, and supporting small businesses, particularly those owned by members of minority communities. Efforts are also made to provide social security and assistance to the most vulnerable populations, including the elderly, disabled, and economically disadvantaged families. By addressing these disparities, the state aims to uplift all segments of the population, reducing poverty and improving overall socio-economic conditions within the city.

At a broader level, the state's approach to Dharan is integral to its strategy for promoting national unity. By emphasizing Dharan's role as a microcosm of the country's ethnic and cultural diversity, the state promotes a narrative of unity that transcends ethnic and religious divisions. Initiatives might include state-sponsored cultural festivals that celebrate the traditions of various ethnic groups, intercultural dialogues facilitated by government agencies, and public campaigns that highlight the benefits of diversity. These efforts are not only aimed at strengthening social cohesion in Dharan but also at reinforcing the city's significance in the national context as a model for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among diverse communities.

Ethno-religious conflict in Dharan, Nepal, has emerged as a complex issue shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. The region, characterized by its diverse population comprising various ethnic groups and religious communities, has witnessed tensions and disputes revolving around identity, faith, and cultural practices. One significant aspect of ethno-religious conflict in Dharan is the intersection of ethnic identity with religious affiliation. The population includes diverse indigenous groups

such as the Rai, Limbu, and Tamang, alongside other communities practicing Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Kiratism. These diverse identities have sometimes led to clashes, particularly concerning religious conversions, cultural practices, and competing claims over sacred spaces. Historical factors also contribute to ethno-religious tensions in Dharan. The region's complex history, including the unification of Nepal and subsequent political changes, has influenced perceptions of identity and belonging. Grievances stemming from historical injustices, marginalization, and unequal treatment have occasionally fueled resentment and animosity between different ethnic and religious groups. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities exacerbate ethno-religious tensions in Dharan. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality intersect with identity politics, exacerbating social divisions and fostering resentment. Economic disparities may also lead to competition for resources and opportunities, further fueling mistrust and conflict among different communities. The rapid pace of modernization and urbanization in Dharan has also played a role in shaping ethno-religious dynamics. As traditional ways of life collide with modern influences, tensions arise over cultural preservation, religious freedom, and societal norms. Additionally, the proliferation of social media platforms has amplified voices and facilitated the spread of misinformation, contributing to polarization and conflict within the community. Efforts to address ethno-religious conflict in Dharan require a multifaceted approach. This includes promoting dialogue and understanding among different ethnic and religious groups, addressing socio-economic disparities, and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for all communities. Additionally, measures to safeguard cultural heritage, protect religious freedom, and foster inclusive governance are essential for promoting peace and harmony in the region. Ultimately, fostering mutual respect, tolerance, and coexistence among Dharan's diverse population is crucial for mitigating ethno-religious tensions and building a more cohesive and inclusive society.

4.3 Challenges

Rapid urbanization and poverty are identified as key challenges facing Dharan. To address these issues, the respondent suggests fostering understanding between political parties, implementing social awareness programs for cohesion, and ensuring the involvement of all ethnic groups in development initiatives. Secularism is advocated as

crucial for respecting diverse beliefs, and the management of beef consumption is proposed as a means of cultural sensitivity. Additionally, socio-psychological factors may play a role in migration patterns, warranting attention from a security standpoint.

4.3.1 Security Challenges

Respondent six highlights the specific impact of the beef incident in Dharan on vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. The security challenges in Dharan, particularly following incidents such as the controversial beef slaughter, highlight significant societal vulnerabilities that disproportionately impact certain demographic groups, such as women and children. During such periods of heightened communal tension, these groups often experience increased levels of fear and anxiety, reflecting the broader insecurity that pervades their community environment. This is particularly concerning as it not only affects their mental well-being but can also restrict their mobility and access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and even daily shopping needs.

Women and children, often seen as more vulnerable even in stable times, face compounded risks during conflicts or social unrest. For instance, the beef incident in Dharan likely exacerbated existing societal tensions, leading to a more charged atmosphere where the risk of verbal and physical harassment could increase. Such situations can lead to a heightened state of alertness among women and children, fearing potential harm or violence that might arise unexpectedly in public spaces or even within the perceived safety of their communities.

Moreover, these security challenges extend beyond immediate physical safety and affect the social fabric of Dharan, influencing how communities interact and coexist. The fear and mistrust generated by such incidents can lead to more segregated living and interaction patterns among different ethnic or religious groups, which undermines community cohesion and can have long-term detrimental effects on social integration and harmony.

Addressing these security challenges requires a multifaceted approach. It is essential for local authorities and community leaders to work together to restore trust, perhaps through community dialogues aimed at reconciliation and understanding. Additionally,

ensuring that law enforcement is sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations during times of tension is crucial. Public awareness campaigns can also be beneficial, promoting messages of unity and providing information on support services available to those who may feel particularly threatened during such periods.

Ultimately, the security challenges following incidents like the beef controversy in Dharan highlight the need for proactive community engagement and responsive governance to protect the most vulnerable and ensure that all residents can feel safe and supported, regardless of the underlying tensions within the community.

4.3.2 Role of Social Media

The role of social media in shaping community dynamics, particularly during times of crisis or controversy in Dharan, is profound and multifaceted. As indicated by the findings from Respondent 6, social media platforms have a significant impact in exacerbating fear and apprehension among the population, especially impacting vulnerable groups such as women and children. During incidents like the beef controversy, social media can act as a powerful amplifier of fear, rapidly spreading information—and misinformation—that contributes to a heightened sense of unease and insecurity among the community members.

Social media's capacity to quickly disseminate a wide range of narratives and information allows it to shape public perceptions at an unprecedented speed and scale. This can be particularly problematic during tense situations where rumors or unverified information can spread without the usual checks and balances found in traditional media outlets. In the context of Dharan, where diverse communities coexist, the rapid spread of inflammatory content can reinforce divisions and stir up communal tensions, thereby increasing the atmosphere of fear and potentially leading to real-world consequences.

Moreover, the visual and emotional nature of content shared on social media can have a direct impact on the psychological well-being of individuals. Graphic images, aggressive rhetoric, and sensationalized accounts of events can cause distress and anxiety, particularly affecting women and children who might feel more vulnerable to the implied threats. The constant exposure to such content can create an environment

of fear that goes beyond the immediate context of any single incident, affecting daily behaviors and perceptions of safety within the community.

To counteract the negative effects of social media during such crises, it is crucial for community leaders, local authorities, and informed citizens to engage actively in providing accurate information and calming narratives. Initiatives could include digital literacy programs that educate the public on how to critically evaluate the credibility of online information and encourage responsible sharing practices. Additionally, official channels could be more proactive in using social media for timely and transparent communication during crises, helping to stabilize the public sentiment and counteract misinformation.

4.3.3 Social Division and Identity Politics

The narrative of respondent 7 highlighted the emergence of distinct groups within Dharan, characterized by their stance on beef consumption. The community appears to be divided into two psychological factions: those who support beef consumption and those who oppose it. This division reflects broader identity politics within the community, with individuals aligning themselves based on cultural, religious, and dietary preferences. The respondent suggests that issues such as poverty, religious conversion, unemployment, and economic disparities contribute to the underlying tensions and conflicts in Dharan, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the social dynamics at play.

4.3.4 Religious Nationalism

Religious nationalism can have a profound impact on security within a region like Dharan, which is known for its diverse ethnic and religious makeup. The rise of religious nationalism tends to accentuate differences and can lead to increased tensions and conflicts that directly affect regional security.

Religious nationalism emphasizes a particular religious identity over others, often aligning with specific ethnic groups that share the same faith. In a multicultural city like Dharan, where various religious and ethnic communities coexist—such as Hindus, Kiratis, Christians, and Buddhists—this can lead to a heightened sense of in-group

versus out-group, creating divisions within the community. Such divisions can exacerbate existing grievances or perceived inequalities, leading to tensions that can escalate into conflicts.

Dharan has experienced its share of tensions over religious spaces and practices, which can be intensified by religious nationalism. For example, conflicts may arise over the construction of religious buildings, public religious celebrations, or even the use of public spaces for religious purposes. Religious nationalists might push for dominance of their practices and spaces, potentially at the expense of other groups, increasing the likelihood of conflicts that can disturb public order and security.

Religious nationalism can affect local governance by influencing policies and the allocation of resources, which may favor certain religious groups over others. This can lead to a sense of marginalization and injustice among those not aligned with the dominant religious group. In Dharan, if religious nationalists were to gain significant influence, this could shift local policies in ways that might prioritize specific groups' needs and rights, potentially igniting or exacerbating conflicts between communities.

The rise of religious nationalism can lead to challenges in maintaining law and order. For instance, if religious tensions escalate, it can result in public disturbances, protests, and even violence. Law enforcement agencies might find themselves under pressure to handle situations that are highly charged with religious sentiments, which can complicate their response and effectiveness, especially if the police are perceived to be biased towards one group.

On a broader scale, religious nationalism in Dharan could contribute to regional security dilemmas, especially if similar movements gain momentum in nearby areas or across the nation. This could lead to a situation where groups across different regions arm themselves or organize defensively against perceived threats from other religious or ethnic groups, further destabilizing the region.

To mitigate these risks, it is crucial for Dharan's local government and community leaders to engage in continuous dialogue and to implement inclusive policies that respect and protect the rights of all ethnic and religious groups. Efforts to promote understanding and cooperation among different communities, alongside education campaigns that emphasize the values of diversity and coexistence, can be effective in

countering the divisive effects of religious nationalism. Additionally, maintaining a neutral and effective law enforcement body that operates without bias is essential for upholding security and order in the face of rising nationalism.

4.3.5 Communal Tension

Dharan, a city known for its cultural and religious diversity, faces significant security challenges, particularly in the wake of incidents that heighten communal tensions. One such incident involved the controversial public slaughter of a cow, an act deeply offensive to the Hindu majority, which views the cow as a sacred animal. This event not only sparked immediate outrage but also exposed underlying fractures within the community, reflecting broader societal tensions between religious practices and secular laws.

The reaction to the cow slaughter incident was multifaceted, involving legal actions, public demonstrations, and significant social media activity, all of which contributed to escalating tensions. The arrests and subsequent honoring of those who participated in the slaughter intensified the situation, leading to polarized responses from different community groups. This polarization was evident in the community's divided support for the individuals involved, with some viewing their actions as a stand for religious freedom and others seeing it as a direct attack on Hindu beliefs.

Moreover, the local administration's handling of the situation, which included a prohibition order citing public health concerns under the guise of preventing dengue, was perceived by some as a superficial attempt to control the situation without addressing the deeper issues of religious intolerance and discrimination. This administrative response highlighted the challenges faced by local authorities in maintaining public order while also respecting the cultural and religious sensitivities of all community members.

These incidents in Dharan underscore the complex interplay between religion, law, and community relations in a multicultural setting. They reveal how deeply rooted religious values are in shaping community reactions and the difficulties in managing such diverse viewpoints within a single administrative framework. The ongoing challenges for Dharan lie in fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding, while also

implementing policies that ensure the security and rights of all its citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations.

4.4 Measures

The state is responsible for the protection of every individual and should protect all the people within its territory, whether such individuals belong to minority and majority group. Respondent 5 called for proactive measures by the state to safeguard indigenous beliefs and customs. This reflects a recognition of the vulnerability of indigenous cultures and traditions to external pressures and the importance of state intervention in preserving and protecting these aspects of cultural heritage. It also underscores the role of governance in upholding the rights and interests of indigenous communities within broader societal frameworks.

4.4.1 Dialogue and Mediation

Dialogue and mediation efforts are essential for fostering understanding and resolving disputes peacefully. Facilitated discussions between different ethnic and religious groups allow them to voice their concerns, express grievances, and seek common ground. Trained mediators can help guide these discussions, ensuring that they remain constructive and focused on finding solutions. Additionally, mediation processes can provide a safe space for parties to address sensitive issues and build trust. By promoting open communication and mutual respect, dialogue and mediation contribute to long-term conflict resolution and reconciliation.

4.4.2 Promoting Religious Tolerance

Initiatives aimed at promoting religious tolerance and understanding play a crucial role in mitigating ethno-religious conflict. Educational programs in schools and communities can teach about different religions, their beliefs, and practices, fostering empathy and respect for diverse faiths. Interfaith dialogues bring together members of different religious communities to engage in respectful discussions, share perspectives, and find common ground. Furthermore, community events that celebrate religious diversity, such as interfaith prayer services or cultural festivals, provide opportunities

for people to come together, build relationships, and foster a sense of unity amidst diversity.

4.4.3 Addressing Socio-Economic Disparities

Socio-economic disparities often exacerbate ethno-religious tensions by fueling feelings of injustice and marginalization within communities. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions aimed at reducing poverty, improving access to education and healthcare, and creating economic opportunities for all segments of society. Job training programs, microfinance initiatives, and small business development projects empower marginalized groups economically, reducing their vulnerability to exploitation and discrimination. By promoting social and economic inclusion, these measures contribute to greater stability and resilience within communities, reducing the risk of conflict.

4.4.4 Strengthening Political Inclusivity

Political inclusivity is essential for ensuring that all members of society have a voice in decision-making processes and access to opportunities for political participation. Electoral reforms that promote fair representation and proportional representation can help ensure that marginalized groups are adequately represented in government. Additionally, affirmative action policies and quotas can increase the representation of ethnic and religious minorities in elected bodies, ensuring that their concerns are heard and addressed. By strengthening political inclusivity, governments can build trust and legitimacy among diverse communities, reducing the likelihood of ethno-religious tensions and conflicts.

4.4.5 Resolving Historical Grievances

Addressing historical grievances is essential for healing past wounds and building trust between different ethnic and religious groups. Truth and reconciliation processes provide platforms for victims and perpetrators of past injustices to share their stories, acknowledge wrongdoing, and seek forgiveness. Memorials, museums, and educational initiatives that commemorate victims of past atrocities raise awareness about historical injustices and promote dialogue about shared history. By acknowledging and

addressing past wrongs, societies can move towards reconciliation and build a foundation for peaceful coexistence in the future.

4.4.6 Strengthening Rule of Law

Upholding the rule of law and ensuring equal protection and rights for all citizens are fundamental for preventing ethno-religious conflicts. Strong and impartial judicial institutions enforce laws fairly and hold individuals and groups accountable for their actions. Law enforcement agencies maintain public order and protect vulnerable communities from discrimination and violence. Additionally, legal reforms that promote equality and prohibit discrimination based on ethnicity or religion contribute to a more just and equitable society. By strengthening the rule of law, governments can create an environment where all citizens feel safe, secure, and protected, reducing tensions and preventing conflicts.

4.4.7 Community Empowerment

Empowering local communities to take ownership of conflict resolution initiatives fosters resilience and promotes social cohesion. Community-based organizations play a vital role in identifying and addressing the root causes of ethno-religious tensions at the grassroots level. Participatory decision-making processes allow community members to contribute their perspectives, knowledge, and resources to conflict resolution efforts. Furthermore, capacity-building programs provide communities with the skills and resources they need to resolve conflicts peacefully and build sustainable peace. By empowering communities to take charge of their own destinies, governments and civil society organizations can create lasting solutions to ethno-religious conflicts.

4.4.8 Promoting Cultural Exchange and Cooperation

Cultural exchange programs, festivals, and collaborative projects promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures, reducing stereotypes and prejudices that fuel ethno-religious tensions. These initiatives bring people from diverse backgrounds together to share experiences, traditions, and values, fostering mutual respect and solidarity. By promoting cultural exchange and cooperation, societies celebrate diversity as a strength rather than a source of division. Furthermore, cultural

initiatives that highlight commonalities and shared heritage among different ethnic and religious groups build bridges of understanding and empathy, paving the way for peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

4.5 Findings

The study on ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District of Nepal, particularly in Dharan, brings to light several key findings that help understand the underlying issues and tensions affecting the region. The research underscores the complex interplay of historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political factors that contribute to these conflicts.

Historically, Dharan has served as a significant trading hub, characterized by diverse migrations and settlements that have shaped its multi-ethnic composition. The region's history, marked by leaders like King Sirijonga who unified the area and implemented reforms, still influences local governance and cultural cohesion. Despite the forces of modernization, Dharan has maintained its rich cultural integrity, displaying a vibrant tapestry of traditions from various ethnic groups such as the Limbus, Rais, and Newars.

The religious landscape of Dharan is dynamic, with Hinduism remaining the predominant faith but experiencing a slight decrease in followers, while Kiratism and Christianity have seen increases. These shifts reflect broader social transformations and have sometimes led to tensions, exemplified by the growing number of religious conversions and conflicts over new religious constructions, sparking disputes over sacred spaces and community identities.

Recent incidents, including the controversial cow slaughter and the subsequent legal and public reactions, highlight the sensitive nature of ethno-religious tensions in Dharan. These events are symptomatic of deeper issues involving cultural dominance, religious freedoms, and community rights. Responses from local authorities, such as prohibition orders, underscore the challenges of managing a diverse and occasionally polarized community.

Socio-economic disparities significantly exacerbate ethno-religious tensions in Dharan. Issues like poverty, unemployment, and unequal economic opportunities breed resentment and mistrust among different community groups, complicating efforts to

maintain social cohesion and peace. The rapid urbanization of Dharan has introduced significant lifestyle and cultural changes, threatening traditional practices and creating new social divisions.

Social media in Dharan acts as a double-edged sword, amplifying both the positive and negative aspects of community interactions. While it facilitates the mobilization of support for community issues and promotes awareness, it also serves as a platform for misinformation and conflict exacerbation, particularly evident during sensitive events like the beef controversy.

The study proposes various measures to address the complexities of ethno-religious conflict in Dharan. Key recommendations include promoting dialogue among different groups, safeguarding cultural heritage, protecting religious freedoms, and fostering inclusive governance. Addressing socio-economic disparities, ensuring equitable access to resources, and strengthening the rule of law are also essential for building a cohesive and inclusive society.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

Ethno-religious conflict in Dharan, Nepal, is deeply rooted in complex socio-cultural and historical dynamics. Identity plays a central role, with various ethnic and religious groups seeking recognition and respect for their unique cultural practices and beliefs. Marginalized communities often experience feelings of exclusion and discrimination, leading to grievances regarding their socio-political status within society. This sense of identity-based injustice can fuel inter-group tensions and contribute to conflict escalation.

Religious freedom is another critical aspect of ethno-religious conflict, as differing religious practices and beliefs may clash, leading to disputes over sacred spaces, rituals, and symbols. Restrictions on religious freedoms imposed by state or societal actors can exacerbate these tensions, amplifying perceptions of injustice and inequality among religious minorities.

Political power distribution further complicates the situation, with disparities in representation and access to resources often exacerbating existing grievances. Marginalized groups may feel disenfranchised and marginalized within the political system, leading to distrust and resentment towards dominant power structures. Political actors may exploit ethnic and religious identities for their own gain, perpetuating divisions and perpetuating conflict for personal or political gain.

Historical grievances add another layer of complexity to ethno-religious tensions, as unresolved conflicts and injustices from the past continue to shape contemporary dynamics. Memories of past discrimination, land disputes, or religious persecution linger within communities, perpetuating cycles of mistrust and animosity. Efforts to address these historical injustices and promote reconciliation are essential for fostering lasting peace and social cohesion in Dharan.

Ethno-religious conflict in Dharan is a multifaceted issue influenced by identity struggles, religious freedoms, political power dynamics, and historical grievances. Addressing these complex dynamics requires comprehensive approaches that prioritize recognition, inclusivity, and justice for all communities. Efforts towards reconciliation, dialogue, and equitable representation are crucial for fostering lasting peace and harmony in the region.

5.2 Conclusion

Ethno-religious conflict in Dharan, Nepal, is a complex issue with deep-seated roots in the region's socio-cultural and historical fabric. At its core, the conflict revolves around identity struggles, with various ethnic and religious groups seeking recognition and respect for their unique cultural practices and beliefs. Marginalized communities often experience feelings of exclusion and discrimination, leading to grievances regarding their socio-political status within society. These identity-based tensions are exacerbated by disputes over religious freedoms, as differing practices and beliefs may clash, leading to conflicts over sacred spaces, rituals, and symbols.

Furthermore, disparities in political power distribution play a significant role in exacerbating ethno-religious tensions. Marginalized groups may feel disenfranchised within the political system, leading to distrust and resentment towards dominant power structures. Political actors may exploit ethnic and religious identities for their own gain, perpetuating divisions and perpetuating conflict for personal or political gain. Historical grievances add another layer of complexity to the conflict, as unresolved injustices from the past continue to shape contemporary dynamics. Memories of past discrimination, land disputes, or religious persecution linger within communities, perpetuating cycles of mistrust and animosity.

To address ethno-religious conflict in Dharan effectively, comprehensive and inclusive approaches are needed. Promoting recognition, inclusivity, and justice for all communities is paramount. Efforts towards reconciliation, dialogue, and equitable representation are crucial for fostering lasting peace and harmony. Additionally, initiatives aimed at promoting religious tolerance and understanding, along with measures to address socio-economic disparities and promote social cohesion, can contribute to long-term conflict resolution.

In conclusion, ethno-religious conflict in Dharan presents complex challenges that require multifaceted solutions. By addressing issues of identity, religious freedom, political power dynamics, and historical grievances, the region can move towards a future of peace and harmony. However, achieving sustainable peace will require sustained efforts from all stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and community members. Ultimately, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among diverse communities is essential for building a more inclusive and prosperous society in Dharan.

5.3 Implications

The findings of the study on ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District of Nepal, specifically in Dharan, carry significant implications for government policy, local community actions, and further research. These implications can help guide effective strategies for managing and resolving conflicts within the region.

Implications for Government

- The government needs to consider policies that foster inclusivity and equitable distribution of resources. Addressing socio-economic disparities through targeted economic and educational programs can reduce the underlying tensions that contribute to ethno-religious conflicts. The establishment of fair and transparent governance practices that ensure all ethnic and religious groups are represented can improve trust and reduce grievances.
- Strengthening the rule of law and ensuring consistent and impartial enforcement of laws are crucial. Legal frameworks should protect religious and cultural rights, helping to prevent conflicts over religious freedoms and cultural practices. Implementing stricter regulations against hate speech and misinformation, particularly on social media, could mitigate one of the primary exacerbators of contemporary conflicts.
- Enhancing community policing efforts by involving diverse community representatives can improve relationships between law enforcement agencies and local communities. This approach can help in early identification and resolution of tensions before they escalate into broader conflicts.

Implications for Local Community

- Local communities should be encouraged to engage in dialogue and peace-building activities that promote understanding and reconciliation. Initiatives like interfaith dialogues, community forums, and cultural exchange programs can enhance mutual respect and reduce misconceptions among different groups.
- Efforts to preserve and celebrate the unique cultural and religious identities of all community groups can foster pride and reduce the feeling of cultural threat among minorities. Local festivals and cultural events that involve multiple ethnic and religious groups can promote unity and a shared community identity.
- Developing local mechanisms for conflict resolution, such as peace committees or mediation boards that include diverse community representatives, can provide platforms for addressing grievances locally and promptly. Training community leaders in conflict resolution and mediation skills is also vital.

Implications for Further Research

- Future research could focus on longitudinal studies to track changes in ethno-religious dynamics over time, providing deeper insights into the efficacy of implemented policies and interventions. Understanding the long-term trends in community relations and conflict can aid in adjusting strategies accordingly.
- Conducting comparative studies with other regions experiencing similar issues can provide valuable lessons and innovative strategies for managing ethno-religious conflict. Learning from the successes and failures of other multicultural and multi-religious societies could be highly beneficial.
- Further studies could explore how modernization and globalization affect traditional communities, focusing on both the challenges and opportunities they present for social cohesion and identity preservation.
- Researching the impact of educational programs on promoting tolerance and understanding across different ethnic and religious groups can offer insights into how education can be a tool for peace. Studies could focus on curriculum development that includes multicultural education and history teaching that is inclusive of all community narratives.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Can you describe your experiences regarding the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
2. How has the security situation been affected by the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
3. In what ways have individuals from different ethnic and religious groups been impacted by the conflict in terms of their safety and security?
4. Have there been instances of violence or discrimination against specific ethnic or religious communities in the Sunsari District?
5. How do you perceive the role of local authorities and law enforcement agencies in addressing ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
6. Have there been any efforts made by community leaders or organizations to mitigate the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
7. Can you share any personal anecdotes or stories related to ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
8. How do you think the ethno-religious conflict has affected social cohesion and trust within communities in the Sunsari District?
9. Have there been any instances of displacement or forced migration as a result of the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
10. What are some of the main grievances or sources of tension between different ethnic and religious groups in the Sunsari District?
11. How has the perception of security differed among individuals belonging to different ethnic and religious groups in the Sunsari District?
12. Have there been any efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation between conflicting ethnic and religious groups in the Sunsari District?
13. In what ways have government policies or interventions impacted the dynamics of ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
14. How have religious institutions or leaders influenced the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?

15. Can you describe any instances of cooperation or solidarity between members of different ethnic or religious communities in the Sunsari District despite the conflict?
16. How do you think the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District has affected economic development and opportunities for residents?
17. Have there been any attempts to address the root causes of ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District, such as socioeconomic disparities or political marginalization?
18. How do you think the media has influenced perceptions and attitudes towards ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
19. Have there been any initiatives or programs aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding in the Sunsari District?
20. How do you perceive the long-term implications of ethno-religious conflict for the future stability and development of the Sunsari District?
21. Can you describe the ways in which ethno-religious conflict has shaped individual identities in the Sunsari District?
22. Have there been instances of identity-based discrimination or prejudice as a result of the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
23. How do you think the ethno-religious conflict has influenced the formation of collective identities within different communities in the Sunsari District?
24. Can you share any examples of cultural or religious practices that have been affected by the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
25. How have perceptions of belonging and citizenship been impacted by the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
26. Have there been any efforts to preserve or promote cultural heritage and traditions amidst the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
27. How do you think the younger generation in the Sunsari District is affected by the ethno-religious conflict in terms of their identity formation?
28. Can you describe any instances of resistance or resilience displayed by communities affected by the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
29. How do you perceive the role of education in addressing ethno-religious conflict and promoting tolerance in the Sunsari District?
30. Have there been any changes in intergroup relations and social interactions as a result of the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?

31. Can you share any insights into the narratives and discourses surrounding ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
32. How have political ideologies or movements influenced ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
33. In what ways have external factors, such as regional tensions or international influences, contributed to the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
34. Can you describe any efforts made by civil society organizations or grassroots movements to address ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
35. How do you perceive the role of gender dynamics in the context of ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
36. Have there been any instances of collaboration or conflict between different generations within communities affected by the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
37. How do you think the ethno-religious conflict has influenced perceptions of trust and cooperation between communities in the Sunsari District?
38. Can you describe any instances of symbolic violence or cultural appropriation related to the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
39. How have religious narratives or symbols been used to justify or perpetuate ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
40. Have there been any attempts to promote intergroup reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of ethno-religious violence in the Sunsari District?
41. How do you perceive the role of art, literature, and media in shaping perceptions of ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
42. Can you share any insights into the role of memory and historical narratives in perpetuating ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
43. In what ways have legal frameworks and institutions addressed ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
44. How do you think the representation of ethno-religious conflict in mainstream discourse has influenced public attitudes and perceptions in the Sunsari District?
45. Can you describe any instances of trauma or psychological distress experienced by individuals affected by the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?

46. How do you perceive the role of religion in fostering reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts in the Sunsari District?
47. Have there been any initiatives or programs aimed at promoting interethnic and interreligious dialogue in the Sunsari District?
48. Can you share any insights into the role of transnational networks or diaspora communities in influencing ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District?
49. How do you think the ethno-religious conflict in the Sunsari District compares to similar conflicts in other regions or countries?
50. Can you provide any recommendations for addressing ethno-religious conflict and promoting peace and reconciliation in the Sunsari District based on your experiences and observations?

APPENDIX B

Population by major ten caste/ethnic-groups and sex of Nepal

Ethnicity	Both Sexes (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Kshetri	16.4	16.2	16.7
Brahman-Hill	11.3	11.3	11.3
Magar	6.9	6.7	7.1
Tharu	6.2	6.2	6.2
Tamang	5.6	5.6	5.6
Bishwokarma	5.0	4.9	5.2
Musalman	4.9	4.9	4.8
Newar (Newar)	4.6	4.6	4.6
Yadav	4.2	4.1	4.5
Rai	2.2	2.2	2.2

Source:- National Population and Housing Census 2021

APPENDIX C

Population by major ten caste/ethnic-groups and sex of Sunsari

Ethnicity	Both Sexes (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Musalman	12.1	12.0	12.2
Tharu	11.2	11.1	11.3
Kshetri	10.8	10.4	11.1
Brahman-Hill	7.5	7.5	7.5
Rai	6.7	6.3	7.0
Yadav	4.1	3.7	4.3
Koiri/Kushwaha	3.8	3.8	3.8
Newar (Newar)	3.6	3.7	3.6
Yakthung/Limbu	3.5	3.5	3.5
Musahar	3.3	3.1	3.3

Source:- National Population and Housing Census 2021

APPENDIX D

Population by major ten caste/ethnic-groups and sex of Dharan Municipality

Ethnicity	Both Sexes (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Rai	20.5	19.7	21.1
Yakthung/Limbu	12.7	12.1	13.3
Kshetri	10.4	10.4	10.3
Newar (Newar)	9.8	9.8	9.8
Bishwokarma	7.3	7.3	7.4
Tamang	7.2	7.2	7.2
Brahman-Hill	5.6	5.9	5.4
Magar	4.3	4.3	4.3
Pariyar	2.0	2.0	2.0
Gurung	1.9	1.8	2.0

Source:- National Population and Housing Census 2021