

Politics in Symbolization of Dharahara as National Monument

A Thesis

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis entitled "**Politics in Symbolization of Dharahara as National Monument**" submitted the Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University is an entirely original work prepared under the supervision and guidance of supervisor Guman Singh Khatri, PhD. I have made due acknowledgements to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources while writing this thesis. I am solely responsible if any evidence is found against my thesis.

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Letter of Recommendation

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Politics in Symbolization of Dharahara as National Monument**" was prepared by **Mr. Saurav Koirala** under my supervisor and guidance. I, hereby, recommend this thesis for final evaluation and approval by the Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "**Politics in Symbolization of Dharahara as National Monument**" was duly submitted by **Mr. Saurav Koirala** for final examination by the Central Department of Sociology, University Campus, Kirtipur, in partial fulfillment of Degree of Masters of Arts in Sociology. We, hereby, certify that the thesis is satisfactory and is, therefore, accepted for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

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Abstract

The Dharahara Tower, a historic and cultural symbol of Nepal, holds profound significance in the collective memory and identity of the nation. Constructed in 1832 by the first Prime Minister of Nepal, Bhimsen Thapa, Dharahara has been a monumental landmark in Kathmandu, embodying the legacy of Nepal's architectural and cultural grandeur. However, following its destruction in the 2015 earthquake, its symbolic meaning has undergone a profound transformation. This thesis explores the politics surrounding the symbolization of Dharahara as a national monument and how the discourse of heritage, memory, and nationalism is constructed, negotiated, and contested in its reconstruction.

Through an interdisciplinary approach combining historical analysis, cultural studies, and political theory, this study interrogates the socio-political dynamics that shape the symbolic reimagining of Dharahara. Central to this discussion is the question of how the state and various stakeholders—such as cultural institutions, architects, urban planners, and the general public—participate in shaping the narratives of national identity through the re-symbolization of the tower.

The thesis delves into the politicization of heritage, examining how the rebuilding of Dharahara has been instrumentalized by political actors to promote a specific version of national pride and unity. It further explores the tensions between modernity and tradition, urban development and heritage conservation, which are embedded in the tower's reconstruction. The design choices, public discourse, and political rhetoric surrounding the rebuilding project reveal deeper ideological currents about the role of monuments in defining national identity and the state's responsibility in preserving cultural memory.

Moreover, this study critiques the selective memory that is often reinforced through monumental reconstruction, arguing that the Dharahara's symbolization is not merely a restoration of a physical structure, but a highly charged political act that reflects contemporary aspirations, power dynamics, and the projection of an idealized national image. The reconstruction of Dharahara serves as a site where different political ideologies intersect—some advocating for the preservation of historical authenticity, while others push for modernization and globalization as part of national progress.

This research utilizes a range of primary sources, including government documents, media reports, interviews with key stakeholders, and architectural blueprints, to analyze the discursive strategies employed in the reconstruction process. The thesis also incorporates visual and

spatial analysis of the monument itself, offering insights into how physical structures function as sites of ideological production and contestation.

The thesis argues that the politics of symbolization surrounding Dharahara is not a static or neutral process but is deeply intertwined with broader issues of governance, identity, and power. The tower's re-imagination as a national monument reflects ongoing negotiations between preserving cultural heritage and embracing modernization, ultimately shaping the narrative of what it means to be Nepali in the 21st century. By critically engaging with the politics of symbolization, this study contributes to the broader discourse on monuments, memory, and national identity in post-disaster contexts, offering a nuanced understanding of how symbols like Dharahara are mobilized to serve political ends.

In Summary, this thesis explores the symbolic politics surrounding the Dharahara Tower, a prominent historical and cultural landmark in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Dharahara Tower, also known as Bhimsen Tower, has undergone significant transformations in its symbolic meaning from its original construction in the early 19th century to its recent reconstruction following the 2015 earthquake. This research examines how the Tower's symbolization as a national monument has been politically constructed, contested, and reshaped over time. It also delves into the role of various stakeholders, including the state, civil society, and international actors, in shaping the narratives and meanings associated with the Dharahara Tower. The study employs a sociological lens to analyze the intersection of heritage, identity, nationalism, and power in the context of Nepal's evolving socio-political landscape.

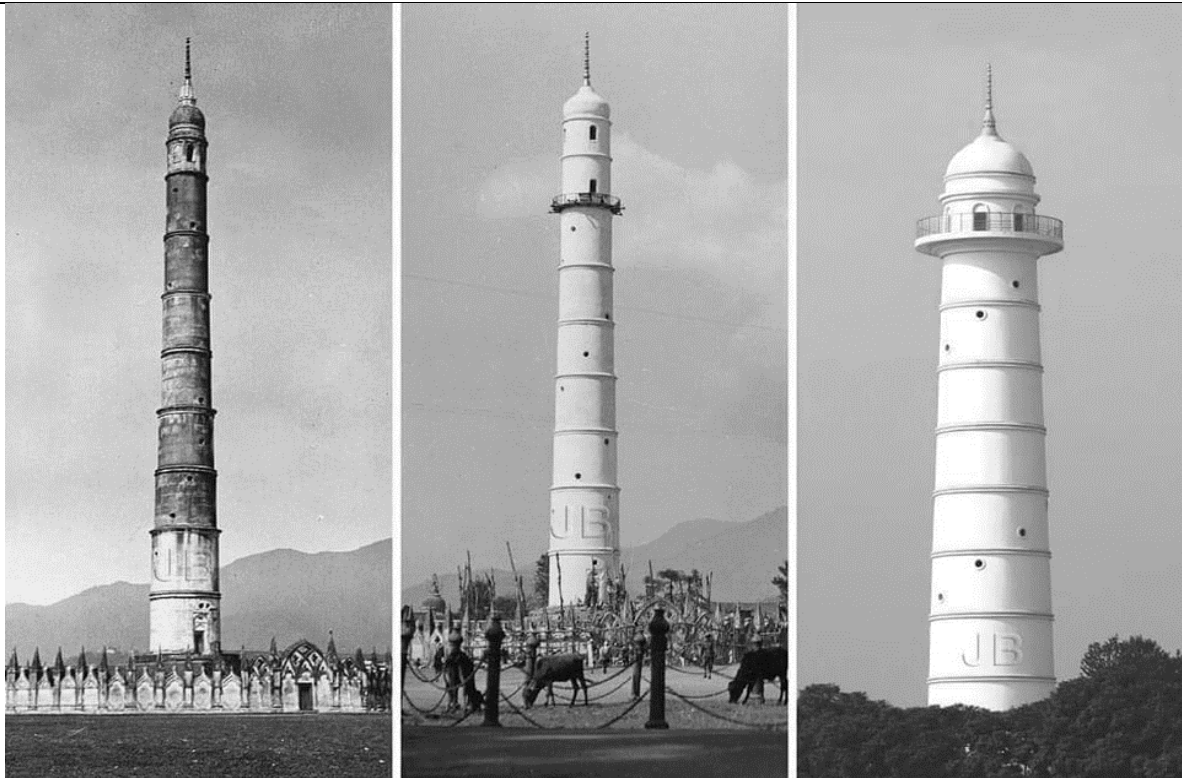
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Two Dharahara in single frame (Photo Source: Sagar Bickram Thapa)



Comparing snapshots of Dharahara from 1957 BS, 2007 BS, and 2078 BS, through which we can observe its transformation (Photo Source: Johannes Bornmann)

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Sociology is now being used to study internationally for a critical approach to the connections between the built environment field, political power, and the social construction of collective identities. At the front of these new discussions has been the question of national identity, which has become a key theme in much contemporary sociological literature. Key researcher such as Castells (1996, 1997), Habermas (2001), Elias (1982) and Beck (1992, 1999) have all focused their research to the changing relationship between the nation-state and collective identities. Collective identities constructed through social action emerged centering on the built environment is key for supporting the meaning of these relations (Jones, 2011). The simplest definition of collective identity is “the shared sense of belonging to a group” (Sterbling, 2019). It is also referred to as a socially constructed and reconstruced identity. There are many lenses through which Collective identity can be viewed (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015), but in the built environment example, philosophical and sociological frameworks can be combined to best define identity. The relationship between the built environment and the identity of the people surrounding is one of reciprocity.

According to Gary Steven, Sociologist and Architectural theorist, it only takes few time to read sociology's current contribution to the study of built environment and vice-versa (Stevens, 2002). Built environment projects can contribute to the cultural construction of a nation in so many ways, either explicitly or less so (e.g. relations between a building and a collective identity occur in a more reliant way; through how a building is perceived by the public, or how it is used). The production of the built environment and its interaction affects a sense of collective societal identity through its shared use and construction (Bridger, 1996). As new idea emerges the built environment forms replace outdated ones, user's collective experience of identity also shifts. While the shift in experience of identity through time is shifting with transformation of physical manifestations like architectural forms, thus provide tangible evidence of change in an abstract image. Thus, the built environment produces collective identity as well as product of collective identity both. Built environment such as landmarks, religious institutions, and embedded cultural symbols can contribute to a sense of shared identity among people in specific area (Schindler, 2015).

There is a crucial role of the built environment in shaping personal and collective identities by creating a sense of collectiveness with stories and narratives, that are shaped within common social settings (Bridger, 1996). The built environment provides a public space for people to perform and make perceptible memories bringing together individuals to question who we are, who belongs with us, and whose stories deserve to be told. Landmarks such as durbar squares, temples, and towers serve as visual symbol that we willingly draw upon when trying to symbolize the collective sense. Hence, the nation is recognized through its symbolically iconized built environment (architecture). These examples highlight some concerns concerning the relationship between the built environment and collective identity (Knox, 1982).

In his study, the built environment and its symbolic images were emphasized as significant by Kevin Lynch (Lynch, 1977). However, he focused that built environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the user and how user perceived. Either individual may create their image in their own way, there may be public images or common mental pictures carried by a large number of people, based on their perceptions, interactions and memories. Hence, the 'image' or in another word 'symbol' can be the result of an experiential process not only through visual process (Lynch, 1977). Monuments play crucial role in the dynamic of cultural memory, shaping collective dominant narratives (Loughran, 2016). Monuments are not only the symbols of meaning, but also hold their power and influence, shaping culture through their physical existence and social significance. Monuments have significant role in shaping personal and collective identities by generating a sense of community through stories and narratives that are formed within common social setting (Milligan, 2007). Monuments in the 19th century, were planned to be imposing and generate respect, been the focus of regime change and destruction (Loughran, 2016).

The built environment is historically been an important way through that states have pursued to shape collective identities (Lasswell, 1979). While many built environment have a 'landmark quality' within and for a given public, city, nation, etc., the intellectuals and elite are responsible for such built environments not to be forced by the nature of the commission to situate their work relative either to an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 19983), such as the nation, or to a key social or political change.

In clarification of 'landmark' building Lasswell (1979) suggests that a landmark building is one whose shape and form is recognizable to symbolize buildings that may or may not direct the surrounding site but that have a strong connection to place, be it city, region, or nation. This

could be concerned with an exploration of the relationship between major social changes and the built environment (a broader category than architecture as it includes housing, sculptures, public spaces such as squares and so on). For example, such an analysis may focus itself with urban planning, housing design, policy regeneration, or the use of space for political purposes. Generally, any 'sociology of architecture' should be concerned with understanding the built environment as one expression of more abstract images in broader social change and interaction.

National cultural identities can be constructed in various ways, but it is most often through history or tradition. Such abstract narratives are collected culturally via flags, national anthems and, most importantly for present purposes, the construction of landmark buildings and monuments. The process of designating a building as a national monument is deeply embedded in the politics of identity, memory, and power. National monuments are more than only architectural structures; they are powerful symbols that embody the values, history, and aspirations of a nation. However, the selection and symbolic representation of these monuments are often influenced by political agendas, cultural narratives, and historical contingencies.

This thesis explores the politics involved in symbolizing buildings as national monuments, examining how political actors and ideologies shape the decision-making process and the resulting symbolic meanings. By analyzing specific case studies, this research aims to understand the political motivations and power dynamics that drive the designation of national monuments. It also considers the implications of these decisions for public memory, national unity, and cultural representation. In doing so, the thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how architecture and politics intersect in the creation of national symbols.

The Dharahara Tower, also known as Bhimsen Tower, stands as one of the most iconic landmarks in Nepal, embodying a rich history that spans two centuries. Originally constructed in the early 19th century during the reign of Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, the tower has witnessed the rise and fall of political regimes, natural disasters, and the transformation of Nepal's national identity. The symbolism of Dharahara has evolved, becoming a powerful emblem of resilience, unity, and national pride for the Nepali people. However, the designation and reconstruction of Dharahara as a national monument are far from purely cultural or historical acts. These processes are deeply influenced by the political landscape, reflecting the aspirations, power struggles, and ideological narratives of those in power. The tower's

significance has been continually redefined, particularly after its destruction in the 2015 earthquake and subsequent rebuilding, which became a focal point of national and political discourse.

This thesis examines the politics behind the symbolization of Dharahara as a national monument, exploring how political actors and agendas have shaped its representation and significance. It investigates the role of the tower in the construction of national identity and memory, considering how its physical and symbolic reconstruction has been influenced by political narratives and state-building efforts in Nepal. By analyzing the historical and contemporary significance of Dharahara, this research aims to understand complex interplay between politics, memory, and national identity in the symbolization of monuments.

In doing so, the thesis contributes to a broader understanding of how political power and ideology can influence the symbolic representation of cultural heritage, and how monuments like Dharahara serve as instruments of national narrative and identity formation.

Monuments, by their very nature, are not only physical structures; they are imbued with meanings that are shaped, contested, and reinterpreted over time (Leerssen, 2001). They act as focal points for national identity, collective memory, and political power (Lasswell, 1979). The Dharahara Tower, in this context, is no exception. It has been a site where various political actors, from monarchs to democratically elected leaders, have projected their visions of Nepali identity, unity, and resilience.

This thesis explores the various ways in which the Dharahara Tower has been appropriated and reinterpreted by different political regimes, from the Shah monarchy to the democratic governments, and how these reinterpretations reflect broader socio-political changes in Nepal. By examining the narratives surrounding the Dharahara Tower, this research aims to uncover the underlying political motives that shape national monuments and how these monuments, in turn, influence the social fabric of the nation. In doing so, this study contributes to the broader sociological understanding of how monuments function as tools of political symbolism and the role they play in the construction of national identity. The Dharahara Tower, as a case study, provides a unique lens through which to explore the intersection of politics, memory, and identity in Nepal, offering insights into how history and heritage are mobilized in the service of contemporary political agendas.

1.2 Statement of Problem

National monuments are not merely architectural structures; they are potent symbols of collective identity, historical memory, and national pride (Leerssen, 2001). The process of designating a building as a national monument is often influenced by political motivations, cultural narratives, and power dynamics. This symbolic act can serve to legitimize certain ideologies, celebrate selective histories, and marginalize other narratives. However, the political implications and contested meanings associated with such symbolization are often overlooked in public discourse and academic study (Jones, 2011).

This research seeks to address the problem of how political forces shape the designation and symbolization of buildings as national monuments. It explores the underlying motivations, the selection process, and the impact of such decisions on national identity, collective memory, and cultural representation. By analyzing specific case studies, this study aims to uncover the often-hidden political agendas that drive the symbolization process and to understand the broader implications for society.

The Dharahara Tower, a historic structure in Kathmandu, Nepal, has undergone multiple reconstructions and symbolizations, each reflecting the shifting political landscape and evolving national identity of the country. Originally built in the 19th century by the Prime Minister of Nepal, Bhimsen Thapa, the tower has come to represent resilience and the spirit of the Nepali people, especially after its destruction in the 2015 earthquake and subsequent rebuilding efforts. However, the decision to symbolize Dharahara as a national monument is deeply intertwined with political narratives, cultural ideologies, and power structures.

This thesis addresses the problem of how the Dharahara Tower's symbolization as a national monument has been influenced by political agendas, both historically and in contemporary times. The process of reconstruction and its portrayal in national discourse often reflects selective historical narratives and the political aspirations of those in power. This research aims to explore how these political motivations have shaped the tower's identity as a national monument, the impact on collective memory, and the implications for national unity and cultural representation.

Furthermore, the study investigates the tensions and contestations surrounding the monument's symbolization, particularly in the context of differing regional, ethnic, and political perspectives. By examining the case of the Dharahara Tower, this thesis seeks to uncover the complex interplay between politics, history, and architecture in the creation of national

symbols, contributing to a broader understanding of the politics of memory and heritage in Nepal. Monuments, as embodiments of cultural heritage, often transcend their physical existence to become potent symbols of national identity and political power. The Dharahara Tower, also known as Bhimsen Tower, is one such monument in Nepal that has undergone multiple phases of construction, destruction, and reconstruction, each phase laden with significant political and symbolic implications. This thesis posits that the process of symbolizing Dharahara as a national monument is deeply intertwined with the political narratives of Nepal, reflecting broader issues related to nationalism, state power, and collective memory.

The central problem this thesis seeks to address is the political instrumentalization of Dharahara's symbolization and the implications of this process on national identity and socio-political discourse in Nepal. While the Dharahara Tower is celebrated as a symbol of Nepali resilience and unity, especially in the wake of its reconstruction after the 2015 earthquake, this symbolization is not without controversy. The reconstruction project, spearheaded by the state, has been criticized for its focus on monumental nationalism, potentially at the expense of addressing more pressing socio-economic concerns and the needs of earthquake survivors.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of Dharahara has been framed by the state as a narrative of national revival, yet this narrative has been contested by various social groups who view it as a politically motivated effort to reinforce a particular vision of national identity. This vision often aligns with the interests of those in power, rather than representing the diverse identities and histories of all Nepali citizens. As such, the process of reconstructing and re-symbolizing Dharahara can be seen as a form of "statecraft" where political actors manipulate symbols to solidify their authority and shape public consciousness.

The problem extends beyond the immediate concerns of reconstruction to encompass the broader issue of how national monuments are utilized in the creation of a homogenized national identity. This homogenization often marginalizes alternative narratives and histories, particularly those of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups in Nepal. As Anderson (1983) suggests in his seminal work on nationalism, the construction of a national identity is often an exclusionary process, where the state uses symbols and monuments to create an "imagined community" that may not necessarily reflect the lived realities of all citizens.

In the case of Dharahara, its symbolization as a national monument raises critical questions about whose identity is being represented and whose histories are being erased. The state's

emphasis on Dharahara as a symbol of national unity may obscure the complexities of Nepal's diverse social fabric, where multiple identities and histories coexist. This thesis seeks to explore these complexities by analyzing the politics involved in the symbolization of Dharahara and its impact on the construction of national identity in Nepal.

In summary, the problem this thesis addresses is the politicization of the Dharahara Tower's symbolization and the broader implications of this process for national identity, memory, and socio-political discourse in Nepal. By examining the intersections of politics, memory, and identity in the context of Dharahara, this research seeks to uncover the power dynamics at play in the creation and manipulation of national symbols, offering insights into the complex ways in which history and heritage are mobilized in the service of contemporary political agendas.

1.3 Objective of the Study

This thesis has the following key objectives:

- To examine the historical and political significance of Dharahara as a national monument.
- To examine how its representation has evolved across different political periods and reflecting shifts in national identity and values.
- To analyze key political discourses surrounding the Dharahara, exploring how various political narratives have influenced its significance as a national monument in Nepal.

1.4 Research Question

The major question is not 'whether' the built environment constructs collective identity and stabilizes meaning being a symbol but major questions are 'how' and 'in whose interests' built environment construct collective identity; and 'why' there is a debate of acceptance for all.

RQ 1: How has the Dharahara been historically symbolized in Nepali politics, and how have these symbols evolved over time?

RQ 2: What are the key political discourses surrounding the Dharahara historically?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study on the "Politics in the Symbolization of Dharahara as a National Monument" holds considerable significance for various reasons, both in terms of academic research and real-world applications. The exploration of the political, social, and cultural dimensions of Dharahara's symbolization sheds light on broader issues related to nationalism, identity, and heritage conservation in Nepal. Below are the key aspects that highlight the importance of this study:

Dharahara, is one of Nepal's most iconic monuments. Its symbolization represents not just an architectural achievement but also a key element of Nepalese cultural and historical identity. By examining how the tower has been symbolized, this study offers insights into how historical monuments play a pivotal role in constructing national identity, particularly after its destruction in the 2015 earthquake and its subsequent reconstruction. Understanding this process is vital for preserving Nepal's cultural heritage.

This research will contribute to the understanding of how the politics surrounding national symbols like Dharahara influence collective memory and identity in Nepal. Monuments are often saturated with political meanings, serving as tools to legitimize power or promote certain narratives about the past. The study explores how Dharahara, in its different manifestations and symbolic reconstructions, has been used by various political actors to shape national identity. This research is significant in examining the underlying political motives that drive the creation and recreation of such national symbols.

The study will also examine the complex political narratives that emerge through the symbolization of Dharahara. It will explore how different political regimes in Nepal have appropriated the tower to support varying nationalistic, cultural, and political agendas. In doing so, this research will provide a nuanced understanding of how monuments are not just passive relics of the past but active instruments in contemporary political discourse.

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining history, politics, heritage conservation, and cultural studies. By focusing on the symbolization of Dharahara as a national monument, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which political power, cultural heritage, and national identity are interwoven. The study's findings will not only contribute to academic discourse but also offer practical insights for heritage conservation, public policy, and civic engagement.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Built Environment and Identity

The built environment includes all human-made physical surroundings where people live, work, and interact including different physical spaces like buildings, infrastructure, public spaces, and landscapes. To shape the way individuals, experience and navigate their surroundings, the built environment is used to be influenced by architectural design, urban planning, and construction (Schindler, 2015). This term is used in the area that discusses the impact of physical tangible spaces on communities, health, and overall quality of life.

The built environment is constructed through a human work that containing physical element and energy for living in material, spatial, and cultural aspects. The built environment can play a vital role in shaping collective identity. How individuals within a community perceive themselves and others is influenced by the physical spaces, architecture, and urban planning of a region. For example, landmarks, religious institutions, and cultural symbols embedded in the built environment can contribute to a collective sense of shared identity among people within a specific region.

Social interactions, community cohesion, and the overall well-being of residents can be impacted by the design of public spaces and infrastructure influencing their collective identity. The built environment shape collective identity through various mechanisms. Buildings, monuments, and landmarks often carry cultural significance and historical meaning. The architecture and design of these buildings and landscapes can strengthen a shared identity by representing a community's values, history, and heritage. The layout of cities, neighborhoods, and public spaces can influence social interactions and community dynamics.

Well-designed public spaces can inspire a sense of community and shared identity, while poorly planned environments may contribute to social fragmentation. The presence of communal spaces like parks, gathering areas, and community centres intensifies a sense of belonging because these spaces provide opportunities for people to come together and interact. The functionality of the built environment, including transportation infrastructure and public facilities, can impact people's daily lives. Accessible and well-designed infrastructure contributes to a sense of inclusivity and shared experience. Government buildings, educational institutions, and other symbols of authority within the built environment can influence

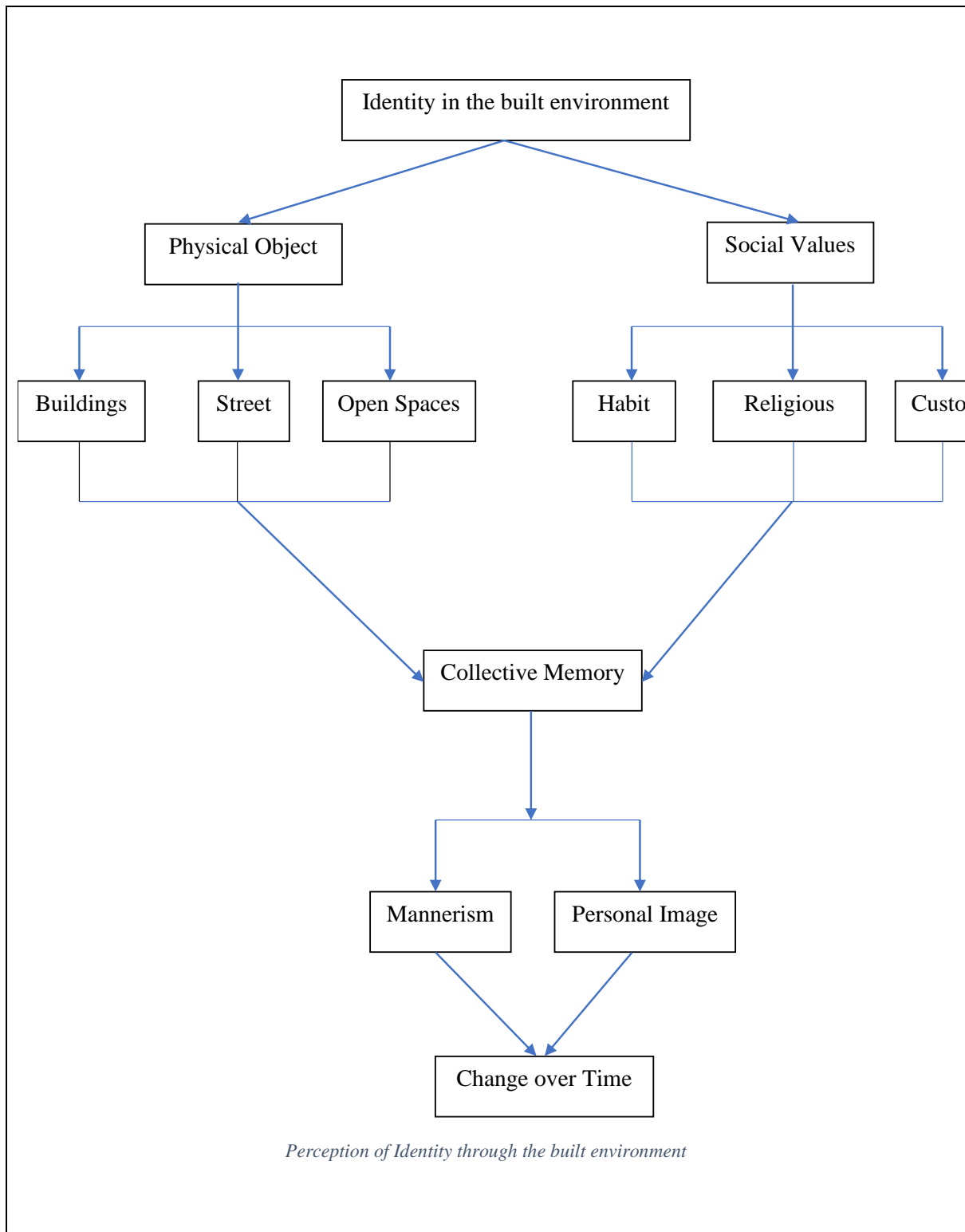
perceptions of power and governance, contributing to a collective identity related to civic responsibility and shared governance.

The distribution and exercise of political power play a significant role in shaping the dynamics and structure of societies ultimately to create a collective identity. Politics can play a significant role in shaping the collective identity through the built environment. Government decisions, policies, and political ideologies can influence the design, planning, and development of urban spaces. Government policies related to urban planning and development can impact the layout, zoning, and design of cities. These policies may reflect political priorities and values, influencing the overall character of a community.

Political decisions regarding investment in public infrastructure, such as transportation, parks, and community facilities, can shape the accessibility and quality of these spaces. This, in turn, affects the way people interact with their surroundings and form a collective identity. Political authorities often have a role in deciding which monuments or memorials are erected in public spaces. These structures can represent certain narratives or historical perspectives, contributing to the collective identity of a community. Political processes that encourage or discourage civic engagement can impact how communities participate in decisions about their built environment. Inclusive decision-making processes contribute to a sense of shared responsibility and identity.

Built Environment possesses a single identity that remains consistent over time. Traditional ideas and representations of architecture theorize and signify architectural identity as an unchallengeable and historically stable entity. These notions of identity are problematized when projecting sociological and post-structural concepts on the cultural formation and historical transition of meaning into the context of architecture.

Social Theorists Bourdieu (1977; 1993; 2002) and Foucault (1989; 2009) propose an another way of understanding built environment in terms of cultural, contextual, and historically specific relations. It is suggested that the nature of collective identity shaped by architecture is culturally, and historically flexible and transformative. Identity can be taken as an integration of the value and meaning by which built environment is defined and distinguished. Architectural identity is perceived and symbolized as a historically stable entity in conservative areas of architectural design, heritage conservation, history, and literature.



2.1.1 Casting Pierre Bourdieu's Idea on Built Environment

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts and notion of habitus discuss how people interpret and respond to their environment and are framed by their knowledge, familiarized ideas, and personal habitual experiences within the socio-cultural context of their surroundings. He

elaborates that the knowledge that people hold and the practices that they exercise are informed by their past encounters and everyday experiences of being within the socio-cultural conditions of their environment. That is, from their individual experiences, people develop familiarity or feel of socio-cultural norms and accepted ideas practiced within the particular context of their environment. In doing so, people unconsciously internalize aspects of prevailing norms and practices through their habitual encounters or experiences. Bourdieu claims that it is this familiarity and internalization of existing contextual norms, ideas, and practices, intertwined with knowledge held and shaped from past, personal socio-cultural encounters, which influences the particular way people react and make sense of their environment. Therefore, Bourdieu's concepts suggest that people's interpretation of the reality of their surroundings, and the meanings that they perceive of it, depend on individual aspects of experience and perception, which are related to particular social, cultural, and contextual conditions of their experienced environment.

Casting Bourdieu's ideas into the context of architecture implies that the specific meanings that people interpret of the built environment are shaped and limited by what they know from their socio-cultural background of experiences and past encounters, as well as their familiarity with accepted ideas, practices or conditions prevailing within their contextual surroundings. The value and meaning of any built environment differ among various groups of people from dissimilar socio-cultural backgrounds, with different ideas and encounters of the site.

Extending on Bourdieu's concepts, multiple examples of the meanings and significances perceived of the built environment around the world demonstrate how its identity varies among different socio-cultural groups bearing dissimilar forms of knowledge, familiarized ideas and experiences of the site. This concludes identity of the built environment itself is influenced by specific social, cultural and contextually informed ideas familiar by individuals and their particular encounters of the built environment. Additionally, the role of people's past experiences, memories and ideas in shaping architectural meaning is also reflected.

Drawing on Bourdieu's notions of the formation of meaning reveals how people's memories, past experiences or ideas, and their sociocultural association with the built environment, play a pivotal role in the construction and transformation of identity.

We can take note from Bourdieu's theories that, the identity of built environment is a transitional entity that is culturally, perceptually, and contextually flexible. Furthermore, these theories and examples draw attention to the role of people in forming and altering architectural

identity, by highlighting how people associate built form with socially and culturally constructed meanings, values or ideas.

2.1.2 Casting Michel Foucault's Idea on Built Environment

Michel Foucault's post-structural theories and particular notion of discourse emphasize the cultural, historically specific formation of meaning and ideas. In 'The Order of Things' (1989), Foucault explains that people make sense of reality and the wild profusion of existing things by ordering or assigning it with meaning that has been discursively shaped within the specific context of their time. He asserts that a particular socio-cultural context produces its specific order of knowledge, or discourse (all forms of knowledge, accepted ideas, meanings and practices), which informs, entails and limits the possibilities of what ideas are thought; what meanings are perceived of things; and what is considered to be true within a certain historical period. In this regard, Foucault stresses that particular meanings, ideas and practices do not form or exist in isolation, but rather, their construction and existence are made possible through their relation to a web of other prevailing forms of knowledge or practices, which inform and rationalize them within a given historical context. As such, Foucault exclaims that certain meanings and ideas exist only within the specific historical context and discursive conditions that inform and allow them to be possible. In particular, he argues that the meaning of things is not historically continuous since they are specifically formed and rationally understood according to particular discursive, contextual conditions at a given time.

By applying Foucault's theories to the built environment, these ideas infer that architectural identity is unstable over time, as it is shaped according to historically specific discursive and contextual conditions. The identity of any built environment during the specific period can be found associated with civic, and political functions of capital punishment and strategies of social control, and linked to socio-cultural, communal experiences of the urban environment at the time. Comparatively, the built environment's contemporary significance within a changed present context of norms, values, practices, and ideas be shifted, as it could commonly regarded as a place of cultural and heritage value.

Taking on a Foucauldian perspective of meaning, the disjunction recognized between the identity of the built environment during a specific period, to that within its contemporary context, suggests that identity is discontinuous across time as its formation is influenced by prevailing ideas, practices, or discursive conditions, that are specific to a given historical

period. In considering Foucault's theories suggest that interrelated factors of existing cultural norms, practices, accepted forms of knowledge and perception play significant roles in shaping the meaning or value of the built environment at a specific time. In particular, this also reveals how the identity of the built environment culturally and contextually alters across disparate contextual periods, as opposed to being historically continuous or stable over time. As such, this undermines and contradicts teleological or definitive notions of architecture advocated within existing traditional meta-histories of the built environment.

In this regard, these ideas and analyzed changes in identity not only contradict current trans-historical depictions of buildings, but also suggest that in approaching identity in absolute terms, timeless notions of built form seem to discount significant socio-cultural, perceptual and contextual aspects of architecture, and project idealized impressions of the built environment. This implies that conventional static concepts and representations of identity are misleading illusions of the built environment that have been taken for granted, and highlight existing gaps in the current state of knowledge surrounding architecture and the nature of identity.

2.2 Built Environment and Politics

Built Environment, especially heritage, is a highly politicized process that is subject to contestation and bound up in the construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of memory and identity (Whelan, 2003). Memory always represents a struggle over power and is thus implicated in the 'who decides?' questions about the future. Power, as Voltaire noted, can be understood as making others act as one person or group chooses (cited in Arendt, 1986). Russell (1975), meanwhile, defines power as the production of intended effects, believing, for example, that it can be measured in terms of achievement, in how successful one person is over another at a particular thing. He questions whether or not power constitutes the actual production of effects or the capacity to produce them. Building on this, Foucault suggests that power needs to be examined at the 'point where its intention is completely invested in its real and effective practices' (Foucault, 1987, p. 239). There is a difference, then, between those who are perceived by others to hold power and those who see themselves as powerful (Lukes, 1987).

Notions of power are central to the construction of heritage (built environment), and consequently identity, giving weight to the argument that heritage is not given; it is made (Harvey, 2001; Brett, 1996). Those who exercise the greatest power, therefore, can influence, dictate or define what is remembered and consequently what is forgotten. Anderson and Gale

contend that: our built environments are valuable document of the power plays from which social life is constructed, both materially and rhetorically (Anderson & Gale, 1992), illuminating their potential to reflect struggles within the building process.

Many academics have written extensively on the specific capacity of sites of built environments to represent power. Whelan, for example, argues that memorial icons of identity such as monuments, memorials, and buildings that have been invested with meaning, carry conscious and subconscious messages and are subject to competing interests. Their very public visual presence translates powerful ideological messages that are never apolitical, and ensures that the messages they convey are open to contested interpretations (Whelan, 2003). Notions of power, therefore, are paramount to our understanding of the representation of memory onto built environment. As Harvey notes social practices may invoke certain myths and push for certain spatial and temporal representations as part and parcel of their drive to implant and reinforce their hold on society (Harvey, 2001).

Heritage is often defined by a dominant group within a particular society which, in many cases, tends to be national governments. Sites of memory such as monuments, plaques, museums and symbolic built spaces, as static and permanent reminders of the past concretized in the present, are often constructed by national governments to represent hegemonic values that cultivate notions of national identity and frame ideas and histories of the nation. Monuments, for example: mark the great pinnacles of human achievement selected from the past, they give an edifying sense that greatness was once possible, and it is still possible. They provide present generations with inspiration (Leerssen, 2001). Heritage, then, not only serves to reinforce narratives of national identity but often works to suppress the identity of minority or less powerful groups.

Sites of memory and power are often constructed in public spaces, where they can operate as dichotomous sites of unification and sites of division. It is unlikely, therefore, that everyone in a community or within a nation gives equal support to the remembering of a particular aspect of the past. Meethan has argued against notions of collective identity to think of communities as homogeneous entities is to assume that everyone in a specific locality will have the same wants and needs and expectations, and while some people may have a clear sense of attachment, others may not (Meethan, 2001).

While many national governments use space by constructing symbols to consolidate national identity and legitimize power, many other groups who contest the use of space and the memory

being evoked (or forgotten) will work to undermine or manipulate the memorial site or create their own separate important place which is indicative of their own heritage.

Built heritage is not then solely all things to all people (Brett, 1996), devoid of any definitive definition. It is a process that draws on the past and which is intimately related to our identity requirements in the present. We manipulate it for validation, legitimization and unity and we call on it in order to challenge, refute and undermine. Heritage is political and often territorial, serving certain agencies and groups through communicating narratives of inclusion and exclusion, continuity and instability. All in all, it is a complex concept which cannot be separated from the interrelated concepts of memory and identity.

Politics in Built Environment

In the last two decades, scholars from various disciplines such as political science, sociology, history, and geography have produced a vast and rich body of knowledge that examines the production of national culture. Beyond the differences and often disagreements among the writers, they have all contributed to an understanding of national space as a product of power relations. However, beyond the socio-historical dimension of this discussion, there is a significant importance in analyzing the processes by which the built environment and open landscape were approached, physically shaped, and socially constructed. Despite the extensive academic discourse mentioned above, the significance of spatial practices (architecture, planning, and landscape design) to the very act of constructing national space in both tangible and symbolic dimensions has been generally neglected.

An example of the link between architecture and the representation of national identity can be found in 18th century Germany, with the rise of romanticism that represented an essentialist attitude to German nationalism. Indeed, it can be argued that, similar to other cultural representations, architecture is first and foremost a statement of an ideological program that concisely symbolizes the political power of the state which imposes a certain collective identity and not another.

The critical discourse of the built environment remains trapped within obvious boundaries in which it is supposed to take place, namely relying on the hegemonic political debate as binary opposites that determine power relations as well as the formation of culture and space.

Modern architecture and planning are the means to create new collective associations, personal habits and daily life. It also belongs to an ideology that perceived the formation of modern

space as a means of constructing a sense of collective belonging. It should be very important to keep in mind the fact that these structures should be significant in both cases, considered as symbols on one side and functional for people who use them, on the other one.

Built environment in the city is a political and cultural construct related to the formulation of new time and space created by communal imagination processes twine past, present, and future. This of course is a manifestation of culture, which frames the place while intervening and generating transformation, using architecture as an instrument. Thus, it forms the rhetorical landscape, the spatial fabric that us about our past and our identity, and within which the built environment assumes its structured symbolic significance, being justified representative of the collective wish and thought.

Built Environment as Political Expression of Identity

Architecture, which is all about designing the built environment, like every other art serves to express and keep world's development in motion, taking care of the identity of the structure to be built and the identity to be constructed around after the completion of the structure.

Identity as an issue has various approaches, but it is very important to find it in the built environment and its structures as well. Identity in general could be defined as individuality and something that distinguishes a person, a building, or an object, having a detail as a fragment. When all these details are put together, compositions are created thus easily identifying somebody or something.

Identified built environments within this particular analysis have their characteristics; they represent the identity of each nation in this contemporary world, and each of them every day leads more toward globalization. There are great possibilities that very soon diplomatic buildings might remain the only possibility where nations will have to represent themselves through their architecture and design.

Even though identity as a notion fit into different spheres, the architecture follows the identities in focus: national identity, collective identity, and a kind of regional identity.

Architecture is especially reasonable for uncovering the fleeting part of identity since buildings residue the historical past and uncovers desires for an imagined.

In managing the identity question in architectural practice and hypothesis, the talk of the symbol winds up central, architecture as the outflow of the very being of societies.

The discourse of the symbol recommends that Architecture turns into an instrument to comprehend the identity of a culture. While the utilization of traditional materials and procedures, in the symbol discourse are likened with a declaration of a regionalist identity, the utilization of imported glass and steel is related to a mission for looking for a global identity. There is by all accounts here a somewhat oversimplified connection between the architectural symbol and the comparing claim of a specific identity.

Architectural symbols stay deficient in depicting an identity since every symbol can all the while signifying contradictory implications and contradictory symbols can propose comparative implications.

2.3 Built Environment and Symbolism

It has long been recognized that social life is an important repository of symbols, whether in the form of totems, golden ages, flags, heroes, icons, capitals, statues, war memorials or football teams, which are - at the core - symbolic markers of social groups. Symbols of a community provide shortcuts to the collectivity it represents, and symbolism is by nature self-referential, subjective and boundary-creating.

Myths and symbols can be found in art, architecture and emblem and are, as a general rule, characterized by persistence in time and diffusion in space. They have persisted because they make group members aware of their commonalities. The symbolic elements produced by verbal and non-verbal language - art, music and graphic symbols - are incorporated into this mythic structure, which subsequently turns its components into 'constructive and constitutive myth' that systematize, legitimize and define identity in relation to the specific polity.

This desire to represent memory through the marking of place is a feature of all modern societies and is prevalent after every conflict or tragic event. Places constitute significant sites which have been invested with meaning (Kuusisto, 1999), often representing the heritage of a particular individual, group or community. They are locations with which people connect, either physically or emotionally (Cresswell, 2004), and are bound up in notions of belonging (or not belonging), ownership and consequently identity. As Rose suggests: One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place. It's a place that you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place (Rose, 1995). Moreover, a sense of place relates

to the socially constructed perceptions and beliefs that individuals or groups hold about a particular location (Sumaratojo, 2004).

Inherent to visual symbols is the context in which they are placed and the environment by which they are affected. It is, therefore, important to consider the wide range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used (Rose, 2001). Thus, the way in which a visual symbol is received by its audience is largely determined by the current social, economic or political climate. As such, visual icons are paramount to our understanding of relationships within local communities and their subsequent relationships with the state. Forester and Johnson (2002) believe that by contesting, supporting, ratifying or ignoring symbols in the landscape, political elites and communities engage with one another through symbolic dialogue.

Through this analysis of symbolic dialogue, we can map meaning in the cultural landscape (Whelan, 2005). Cohen has argued that symbols do not carry meaning inherently, but give their audience the capacity to take meaning (cited in Buckley, 1998). That meaning is ever-changing:

There are so many symbols, from which one can choose; each symbol can be interpreted differently; a symbol can become ossified and can fail this year to evoke a reality, which it evoked last year; and the realities to which any social group refers are themselves subject to change. And above all, each social group and each individual is likely to shape reality in a different way, bending the symbolism to their particular desires (Buckley, 1998, p. 14)

Hence, populations reinvent signs and symbols and read them in different contexts, transforming their reference and meaning. Landscapes, then, are consequently open to interpretation (and subsequently contestation). The visual features of the cultural landscape such as public buildings, monuments, plinths, graffiti, and street names, which find tangible representation in the landscapes around us, map selective interpretations of the past and present onto public places. As such, they articulate heritage and can be read as icons of identity and spatializations of history. The cultural landscape, therefore, is a fundamental resource for understanding the complex connections between heritage, memory and identity.

National memory, meanwhile, is frequently thought of in conjunction with official memory that, in most societies, emanates from the state and its institutions, often representing the hegemonic needs and values of the general public (Koshar, 1998). Nation-states play leading

roles in the construction of heritage as they subscribe to a set of ideas that are consequently embedded through socialization and education. As a result, the state is usually the official arbitrator of public commemoration and, therefore, of national heritage, and as such, it assumes responsibility over planning, maintaining and funding memorial monuments, programs and events.

Collective beliefs play a fundamental role in securing a sense of togetherness and cultural solidarity which is vital in the formation and legitimization of any national identity (Lowenthal, 1985). National cohesion, in other words, requires a sense of collective awareness and identity endorsed through common historical experience. Unofficial memory is often seen as a binary opposite to national or official memory, but it remains a somewhat unambiguous and dangerous term. If official memory is linked to national memory, then unofficial must be equally applicable to anything that is not state-structured. This is, of course, not the case, as many groups and individuals regard their own individual, local or communal heritages to be just as valid and official as that of the state or other officially sanctioned forms of remembering.

2.3.1 Durkheim and Symbolism

We may say that national phenomena, referring to Durkheim's statement on religion, naturally order themselves into two fundamental categories: beliefs and rites (Durkheim, 1976). On this basis, the general framework for the discussion can be outlined by looking at what he considered to be the elementary forms of social life. Even if Durkheim wrote little directly on national communities, his major contribution - which highlights 'religion' as a system of beliefs and practices of rites constituting how the community constantly worships and reaffirms itself:

"There is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results." (Durkheim, 1976, p. 427)

Durkheim later defines this eternal something as the cult (a system of practices, rites and feasts) and the faith (a system of ideas explaining the world) (Durkheim, 1976). Applying a Durkheim approach to the modern world, the eternal dimension and characteristic of religion in other forms and appearances can be revealed. Continuing in some ways the forms of the ritually

active religious communities of the past, we can observe similarly active national communities. Giddens confirms this, stating that what is eternal in religion is not the religious beliefs themselves, but, rather, the symbols of collective unity, which in other circumstances and forms are used in a more secular vein as the celebration of political ideals (Giddens, 1991). Thus, social life, in all its aspects and every period of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism (Durkheim, 1976).

Every society is a moral community in need of continuous moral remaking. In modern societies, affirmation of collective values and identity takes place through collective ceremonies and the use of symbols. In line with this approach, and the statement that a society's symbols are determinants of its conduct (Durkheim, 1976), it can be suggested that symbols are expressions of collectivity and raise and reinforce awareness of the collectivity. In this capacity, they constitute essential building blocks in the creation and maintenance of collective identity.

2.4 The Meaning of Built Environment as a Monument

The built environment is not only a discipline that is related to the field of construction but it contains all of the cultural, traditional, social, and historical values of a civilization. In the current scenario, the influence of the built environment on society is being studied scientifically and it is believed that the built environment possesses symbolic importance, influencing the communities in social, physical, and psychological aspects. Built Environment encompasses a variety of elements, from giving a vivid impression of the long-term objectives of the premises to the daily life requirements of the facility.

Monumental built environments are forms erected to confer dominant meanings on space. They present an aesthetic value as well as a political function. Often, political elite erect monuments to promote selective historical narratives that focus on convenient events and individuals while obliterating what is discomfoting. While representing selective historical narratives, monuments can instruct specific conceptions of the present and encourage future possibilities. As such, monuments become essential for the articulation of the national politics of memory and identity through which political elites set political agendas and legitimate political power. However, once erected, monuments become social properties and users can reinterpret them in ways that are different or contrary to the intentions of the designers. Monuments as either

aesthetic objects presenting historical and artistic values or as political tools in the hand of those in power.

This is particularly evident in the post-socialist city. During transition, political elites in post-socialist countries established new monuments to celebrate the kinds of ideals they wanted citizens to strive toward. Often, this process was simultaneously supported by the reconstruction, relocation and removal of monuments erected during Communism (Kattago, 2015). These interventions on Communist built environment are still going on in some post-socialist countries: for example, in April 2015 the Ukrainian government approved laws to enable the removal of Communist monuments (Tamm, 2013).

The controversies around the meanings of monuments in post-socialist cities first show that monuments are not neutral urban decorations, but rather important sources of cultural identity and memory. Moreover, these controversies demonstrate that political elites cannot fully control how individuals and social communities interpret monuments. Once erected, monuments “can be used, reworked and reinterpreted in ways that are different from, or indeed contradictory to, the intentions of those who had them installed” (Hay, Andrew, & Tutton, 2004).

The study of monuments has so far remained rather marginal within the humanities and social sciences. One reason for this may have been that a multitude of disciplines have studied monuments from different points of view. As a consequence, the term monuments have become vaguely defined, ranging from purely aesthetic built forms to powerful tools to reproduce authority and control. Urban and art history have explored monuments as aesthetic objects, focusing on their immanent historical and artistic values. Human and cultural geography has analyzed monuments as political tools to legitimize the power of political elites. While urban and art history has largely underestimated the political dimension of monuments, human and cultural geographers have rarely explored how the material and symbolic aspects relate to the political dimension of monuments.

Proposing a holistic approach to describe how these various aspects overlap and reinforce each other in the meaning-making of monuments. The study of monuments has so far remained rather marginal within the humanities and social sciences. However, there have been a significant number of studies focusing on different aspects of monuments. Urban and art historians have considered monuments as physical and aesthetic objects presenting historical and artistic value. In this context, researchers have investigated the stylistic context in which

monuments are erected with great emphasis on the visual dimension of monuments, describing in detail materials of construction, size and colors. Iconography has been broadly used to identify the conventional symbols represented in monuments. Other approaches have called for a more interpretative understanding of monuments using “iconology” to explore the “intrinsic meanings” that reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion (Panofsky, 1955).

Sociological and anthropological literature has mainly focused on the commemorative functions of monuments drawing attention to the practices of commemoration of the users. In this context, monuments have been considered as built forms erected to commemorate the events and the individuals that are significant for a group or for a community.

Built environment as text anticipates a set of interpretations and uses while resisting others. Designers use several spatial strategies to create interpretative habits and pull users along a specific understanding of the built environment. In an architecture essay, Eco (1997) argues that, through specific design choices, designers can persuade users to interpret architecture the way they wish. Hence, architecture itself gives instructions on its “appropriate” use.

The meanings of monuments are hardly fixed and depend on the complex relations between designers, users and monuments themselves. Political elites use design strategies to generate interpretations that conform to their political purposes. Nevertheless, users may interpret monuments following their own opinions, beliefs, feelings and emotions. As a consequence, different and even contrasting interpretations often challenge the officially sanctioned meanings of monuments.

The knowledge embodied in monuments is inevitably biased. As every narrative selects some events while omitting others (Cobley, 2001), monuments necessarily focus on some histories while obliterating others. Since every remembering, nevertheless, involves a forgetting (Dovey, 1999), it is natural that monuments represent only specific events and individuals. Yet political elites can deliberately plan to obliterate certain histories (Massey, 1995). They can articulate specific national politics of memory to educate citizens toward what to remember and what to forget of the past (Tamm, 2013). In doing so, political elites seek to promote dominant historical narratives to accommodate their political purposes and to encourage future possibilities (Dovey, 1999).

However, users may interpret the knowledge embodied in monuments according to their views and needs. Different interpretative communities have different ways of identifying and interpreting the representation of monuments. The knowledge users have about monuments affect how they value the events, ideals and individuals represented in monuments. In practice, each user has a different emotional response to monuments: in different users the same monument may elicit pleasant emotions or it may recall uncomfortable memories.

The situation, political debates that may result in forms of conflict and resistance at a social level, occurs when there is a gap between the meanings promoted by political elites and how users differently interpret, contest and resist them. Some monuments are peacefully integrated into the everyday practices of users that perceive them as ordinary built forms. This is the case with monuments that have turned into neutral landmark or mere meeting points.

Originally, monuments are not erected as accepted or controversial; accepted monuments can turn into sites of resistance as well as controversial monuments can increasingly become accepted and mindlessly experienced during the routine of daily life. The evaluations and emotional responses of users toward monuments vary as social and political conceptions change over time. The visual dimension of monuments refers to monuments as material-built forms beyond their political implications. It examines both the material features and the representations of monuments. The visual aspect can be divided into two autonomous but related levels: the plastic and the figurative, respectively describable as the material and symbolic levels. The material level considers shapes, colors and topological distribution of monuments as independent from their visual representations. The list below shows the categories that we consider pertinent for the analysis of the material level of monuments (Dovey, 1999).

1. Dimensions: large/small, wide/narrow, tall/short;
2. Location: degree of elevation, distance/proximity, angle of interaction;
3. Materials of construction: solidity/hollowness, texture of the surface;
4. Topological organization: form, shape;
5. Representative organization: regularity/irregularity, curvature;
6. Chromatic organization: colors, brightness/opacity, lighting.

The symbolic level regards the visual representation of monuments. Since monuments stage specific scenes, the symbolic analysis of monuments focuses on the represented objects, characters and actions. It looks at the iconographies and the symbols that monuments embody.

Monuments and memorials are built forms deliberately erected to promote selective and dominant historical narratives. Memorials and monuments are political constructions, recalling and representing histories selectively, drawing popular attention to specific events and people and obliterating or obscuring others (Hay, Andrew, & Tutton, 2004).

Monuments are essential for the articulation of the national politics of memory and identity. Along with other legal, institutional, and commemorative means, political elites use monuments to educate citizens about “what is and what is not to be remembered of the past” (Tamm, 2013). Since memory is the basis of any identity building, monuments play an essential role in “shaping a given community’s basic values and principles of belonging” (Tamm, 2013). Hence, the establishment of selective monumental landscapes can help political elites to promote a single national identity and to reinforce sentiments of national distinctiveness.

Political elites use monuments to set political agendas and to legitimize or reinforce the primacy of their political power. Therefore, monuments can be used as tools to establish the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Hershkovitz, 1993) (Hay, Andrew, & Tutton, 2004). While political elites erect monuments seeking to convey dominant worldviews, the meanings of monuments are always “mutable and fluid” (Hay, Andrew, & Tutton, 2004). Once erected, monuments become “social property” (Hershkovitz, 1993) and they “can be used, reworked and reinterpreted in ways that are different from, or indeed contradictory to, the intentions of those who had them installed” (Hay, Andrew, & Tutton, 2004). The interpretations of monuments can also dramatically change over time with the change of social relations, concepts of nation and opinions on past events.

... the original meaning is not really written in stone at all. Instead, it might be remembered completely differently later on or become the unexpected site of controversy. The memorial may even become invisible and unnoticed. (Kattago, 2015, p. 185)

In some cases, monuments legitimizing the authority of political elites can turn into sites of oppositional and resistant political practices. Memorials and other forms of heritage are created in a social/political context where culture, location, class, power, religion, gender and even sexual orientation will influence what is considered to be worthy of preserving as heritage. Because heritage, national identity, and memory are socially constructed, they are also inherently contested (Benton-Short, 2006).

Monuments cannot be analyzed apart from their cultural context. Cultural context largely affects monument interpretations. Culture is the socially constructed signifying system that a group of people actively produces and maintains. It consists of the basic and shared meanings that guide behavior and channel interpretations of individuals and social communities. Due to its complexity, culture includes different interpretative communities. Each interpretative community has a particular way to frame social reality based on specific cultural traits such as language, race, ethnicity, class, religion, political views, socio-economic interests and needs.

As part of the broader cultural context, the spatial settings in which monuments are located largely affect their interpretations. Often the location of monuments has site specific connection to events and people commemorated (Benton-Short, 2006).

In some cases, monuments are erected in locations they themselves contribute to symbolically and ideologically charge. Frequently spatial settings are reconstructed or redesigned to provide appropriate location for future monuments. In other cases, the manipulations of spatial surroundings can affect the meanings of already existing monuments.

2.5 Built Environment as Monument for Unity

In every community, conflict and disputes have become an inevitable part of life. It appears the elements of conflict are deeply embedded in the human psyche. Conflicts have been known to exist in several countries across the globe. Yet, the recognition and appreciation of art as a peacebuilding approach is beyond rhetoric. In this domain, art does not only function as a didactic symbol of peace but a peacebuilding weapon that evokes or prompts community change or action. Several studies have shown that the arts can respond to, transform, or prevent the occurrence and the negative impacts of conflict and violence.

Monuments as artworks have been used severally as symbols of unity and peace. In the United States of America, the first memorial to Abraham Lincoln was built in 1868 to remind a once deeply divided country about the man who brought it together. The Statue of Liberty was and remains the United States' symbol of unity as a nation.

After World War II, Japan erected numerous monuments for unity and peace around the country and the world. For example, a peace tower built in Osaka in 1948 was dedicated to peace and the victims of World War II. Banerjee claims that the tallest statue in the world, the 'Statue of Unity' is dedicated to the Iron Man of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel for being the

architect of modern India and his role in uniting more than five hundred princely states in India. Monuments, such as statues, constitute important platforms on which different versions of peace and social justice are implicitly narrated and discussed.

When there is unity, everything is beautiful. You see how unity has made this year's celebration beautiful. People come here to admire the sculptures and just take pictures because the place is nice to them. They do not care about the meaning of the monument. Owing to the magnitude of the transformation of the space and its apparent aesthetic connotations, the monument has become an espousal for compatibility between commerce and commemoration. We have begun to collect a token from people who come here to see what we have. It is just a way of keeping the place running. On the other hand, the statue shows not just an aesthetically astute display of artistic ingenuity but also, embodies a sense of political and dynamic history. It reminds the natives of their past and the need to foster unity going forward. This is just a structure, so until the natives accept to live in peace, this is just built. Without the conscience of the people, there will be nothing like peace.

This monument is not ephemeral, it makes permanent, the narratives that surround it. The permanence of statues and large-scale memorials in many ways make permanent the discourses and ideologies that statues or memorials carry traces of. The message of unity portrayed statue translates into an indelible quest for a possible end to the political complexity. Monument conveys a sense of its eternalness by being in materials associated with a withstanding of the passage of time. The central theme of the monument was clear and without ambiguity. It emerged that viewers could easily identify with the monument and relate to its meaning. It defies the contemporary approach to art as being more conceptual than being a tangible piece that its audience easily assimilates its meaning. Because they are crafted from a common experience, monuments lend themselves easily to articulating collective identity. They are here explored as a bridge between collective memory and national identity.

A people's identity is showcased in their public monuments. These reflect who they are, that which defines and constitutes them, the 'common union' that binds them. Should a community's monuments be taken away, its identity or principle of union is also interfered with. Monuments, as manifestations of the collective, create a common actual and remembered experience. They knit individuals together while delineating their unique commonality. A city's monuments provide a foundation upon which a civic identity can develop. This identity

is a significant ingredient in transforming a collection of disparate peoples into one unified culture.

Monuments inscribe the citizens' life into urban space. The life of the community, its history and achievements, its aspirations and goals are metaphorically captured in these monuments; the old ones preserve the memory of the people while the contemporary ones perpetuate the memory of great (and smaller) men and their great accomplishments. This is precisely what makes monuments artifacts, vehicles of the citizens' culture and history, symbols of identity – and a consequent component of human rights. Public monuments, seen as works of art, often contain a narrative that is told in images as stories are in words. Narratives, in turn, are accounts of events both true and imagined that shape us as individuals or as society. They are containers of ideas and emotions; memories and hopes; aspirations or frustrations, beauty or lack of it. All of these inform our sensibilities, our appreciation, our understanding, and consequent expression of who we are (our authentic selves). This is why the aesthetics and politics of public monuments stand for the collective national script.

2.6 Sociological Thinking of Built Environment

The application of a critical 'sociological imagination' (Wright-Mills, 1959) to intellectuals/professionals (such as architects, urban planners, engineers, infrastructure intellectuals, developmental sociologists, etc.) and their work is one way in which the tensions associated with the political mobilization of culture can be revealed. The interest is to interrogate both how particular political regimes have used intellectuals/professionals to materialize their power and simultaneously to help legitimate it and also how architects respond to the constraints and opportunities associated with major commissions in their designs and their wider discourse (Jones, 2011). The role intellectuals/professionals have in codifying and reproducing social identities requires analysis; where built environment is one cultural space in which political projects attempt to become socially meaningful, and where particular visions of the public are forged.

As states continue to mobilize built environment as part of a repertoire of cultural symbols that serve to present the category of the nation as a natural and inevitable social category, then traditionally understood 'sociological' concerns addressed to the relationships between culture, politics and ideology become highly relevant. Built environment has historically been an important way that states have sought to codify collective identities, such as the nation

(Lasswell, 1979). From the point of view of states, the promise is in its potential to connect citizens into political projects through material forms of built environment, which can resonate sufficiently with lived social experience. Everyday buildings – such as houses and flats, factories, shops, offices, bus stations, hospitals, universities, prisons, schools, pubs etc. – that provide the background to the vast majority of social life. Although such built environments do have a crucial role in giving spatial form to broader social relations, and reflect the hierarchies and assumptions of social order, they are seldom legitimated in ‘sociological’ terms relative to collective identities or major political-economic shifts by intellectuals/professionals and politicians. In other words, while many built environments outside the formal canon do come to have a ‘landmark quality’ for a given public, city, nation etc., the intellectuals responsible for such built environments are not compelled by the nature of the commission to situate their work relative either to an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 19983), such as the nation, or to a major social or political change.

Ship of Theseus and Identity Discourse

As the planks of Theseus' ship needed repair, it was replaced part by part up to a point where not a single part from the original ship remained in it, anymore. Is it, then, still the same ship? If all the discarded parts were used to build another ship, which of the two, if either is the real Ship of Theseus (Williams, 2021). The Ship of Theseus, also known as Theseus' Paradox, is a fascinating thought experiment that has intrigued scholars for centuries. It raises thought-provoking questions about the concept of identity over time. The concept applies to any object. The Ship of Theseus thought experiment has held a strong place in identity metaphysics and calls into question the boundaries and flexibility of identity (Williams, 2021). According to Noam Chomsky, this paradox arises from extreme externalism: the assumption that what is true in our minds is true in the world (Williams, 2021). Science repeatedly points out that human intuition, our personal perception and estimates of human beings are often wrong. Cognitive science would treat this thought experiment as the object of an investigation into the workings of the human mind, even though it tells us little about the real world.

Cultural Perspectives to see Ship of Theseus

Douglas Adams, radio writer and scriptwriter and famous author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* recounts this experience in his book *Last chance to see* (Adams & Carwardine, 2018): This philosophical perspective on the preservation of historical buildings, as exemplified by the dialogue at Kinkaku-ji in Kyoto, summarises the essence-over-form ethos.

Despite the physical changes shaped by time and disasters such as fire, the continuity of the building's purpose and design reflects its enduring identity. The notion that it's always the same building emphasizes the primacy of the idea behind the structure, transcending the mere material components. In essence, it highlights the importance of preserving the heritage and intentions of the original builders, rather than fixating solely on the tangible remnants of the past. The narrative advocates for a deeper appreciation of historical significance beyond sentimental attachment to physical artifacts, emphasizing the timeless essence that defines the true essence of a monument.

2.7 Research Gap

While there is substantial literature on the architectural and historical significance of national monuments, there is a notable lack of comprehensive analysis that critically examines the political dimensions of their symbolization. Existing studies often focus on the aesthetic, cultural, or heritage aspects of these monuments, with limited attention given to how political agendas, power dynamics, and ideological narratives influence their designation and symbolism.

Moreover, the interplay between national identity and the selective historical narratives promoted through these monuments remains underexplored, particularly in contexts where political regimes have used architecture to assert dominance, unify diverse populations, or marginalize dissenting voices. Additionally, there is a scarcity of case-specific studies that delve into the localized political, social, and cultural factors that shape the symbolization of individual monuments.

This research seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed investigation into how political forces shape the symbolization of buildings as national monuments, with a particular emphasis on the processes, motivations, and consequences of such actions. By exploring specific case studies, this thesis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of politics in the construction and reconstruction of national identity through architecture.

The Dharahara Tower in Kathmandu has been extensively discussed in terms of its architectural significance, historical context, and cultural value, especially following its destruction in the 2015 earthquake and subsequent reconstruction. However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the political dimensions of its symbolization as a national monument.

Existing studies primarily focus on the technical aspects of its reconstruction, heritage preservation, and its role as a symbol of resilience in the face of natural disasters. These analyses often overlook the underlying political motivations, power dynamics, and ideological narratives that have shaped the tower's identity as a national monument.

Furthermore, the discourse surrounding Dharahara's reconstruction and symbolization tends to marginalize the diverse regional, ethnic, and political perspectives that exist within Nepal. The interplay between these perspectives and the broader national narrative promoted through the symbolization of Dharahara remains underexplored. Additionally, there is a lack of critical examination of how the symbolization of Dharahara as a national monument has been used to construct and promote a particular version of national identity, and how this process might exclude or diminish alternative narratives.

This research seeks to fill this gap by critically analyzing the political forces and motivations that have influenced the symbolization of Dharahara Tower as a national monument. By examining the historical and contemporary contexts, this study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how political agendas shape national symbols and the implications for collective memory, cultural representation, and national identity in Nepal.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

Historical Sociology serves as a valuable theoretical framework for examining how historical processes, social structures, and power dynamics have shaped the symbolic meaning of the Dharahara Tower in Nepalese society. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of the Dharahara Tower's evolving political and cultural significance over time, revealing how broader historical and social forces inform its symbolism.

Within the Historical Context, colonial and post-colonial influences are pivotal. The meaning of Dharahara has transitioned from the Rana regime's symbolism to its present-day interpretation, reflecting influences from British colonialism and regional political shifts. Disasters, such as the 2015 earthquake, and subsequent reconstruction efforts have further transformed the tower's symbolic value, marking it as a monument of resilience and continuity.

Social Structures and Power Relations also impact the Dharahara Tower's symbolism. Elite versus popular narratives underscore how political elites, ordinary citizens, and marginalized communities interpret and utilize the symbol differently. Moreover, the tower has been

appropriated as a nationalist icon, reflecting and reinforcing ethnic, cultural, and political identities within Nepal's nation-building efforts.

In terms of Cultural Symbolism, the Dharahara Tower stands as a repository of collective memory and a marker of national identity, embodying a shared cultural memory. Processes of myth-making and monumentalization have reinforced its symbolic status, aligning with various political agendas that emphasize or reshape its meaning to serve different purposes over time.

Temporal Dynamics within Historical Sociology allow for tracing the Dharahara Tower's changing symbolic significance, as shaped by historical events, political regimes, and social transformations. Instances of continuity and rupture—whether enduring symbols of national pride or shifts in meaning following disasters or political changes—highlight how the tower's role in society evolves.

An Interdisciplinary Approach enriches this analysis by incorporating insights from anthropology, political science, and cultural studies, adding depth to the sociological perspective. A comparative analysis with other national monuments globally allows identification of both commonalities and unique aspects in the politics of symbolization, further illustrating the complex role of Dharahara as a national symbol.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

On the background of the above-mentioned discussion, the main aim of this study is to understand how the built environment becomes a symbol of collective identity, how the built environment becomes the center of construction and re-construction of collective identity, while the built environment itself goes through many transformations according to time and context.

To support the discussion mentioned above, a comparative and historical approach has been chosen, since the symbol of collectiveness relies on reference to the past to justify the existence of that symbol in the present. In other words, the past is in the present. A comparative and historical approach also allows for a study of the origins and the development of symbols and narratives around symbols, as well as for comparison between different periods in history.

Collective identity is recognized by some crucial elements in empirical example. At the level of the nation, there are many symbols like national flag, national flower, national anthem, national emblem. It is not possible to discuss all of these in research. So narrow focus and consideration to examine the phenomena that construction of collective identity focusing around built environment at national level. For this study, Dharahara is taken as the empirical example of the built environment as Dharahara is (or was) a modern heritage and a popular monumental landmark known to all within Nepal.

This comparative and historical approach consists of exploring Dharahara and drawing exploration about its origin, the cause of its construction, purpose, and significance. The choice of empirical case is comparatively straightforward as a built environment. Dharahara has become the center of attraction from its construction in 1881 BS by then Mukhtiyar Bhimsen Thapa. Moreover, there have been no previously published empirical discussions about the role of Dharahara as an expression of collectiveness being a symbolized monument.

This research has used purely the qualitative research method that is subjective in nature to assess the role of Dharahara as a symbol and collect the data required for analysis. During the study, to support the discussion mentioned above, historical as well as contemporary, data has been collected from published article, books, news and reports about Dharahara till now. As Dharahara is taken as an empirical example of the built environment, the field of research was centering around Dharahara. The required data have been collected by collecting the content

about Dharahara, such as non-sociological case studies, literature, narratives from history, architectural works, catalogs, and key documents of Nepali history (mentioning Dharahara).

To collect the content related to Dharahara following four themes was developed:

- (i) History of Dharahara and Construction of Meaning Making around Dharahara,
- (ii) Comparing the Response about Dharahara (mainly before and after demolition by 2072 BS earthquake),
- (iii) Debate about New Dharahara, and
- (iv) Politics in Symbolization of Dharahara as a National Symbol.

The collected data have been processed for analysis using the Content analysis i.e., qualitative method mainly considering the nature of collected data.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically using a case study approach to explore the politics involved in the symbolization of the Dharahara Tower as a national monument. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of the Dharahara Tower within the specific sociopolitical context of Nepal. By focusing on this single, yet complex case, the study aimed to uncover the underlying political dynamics that have shaped the symbolic meaning of the Dharahara Tower over time.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The research has utilized multiple methods of data collection to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. These methods include:

Document Analysis: A detailed study of historical documents, government records, architectural plans, media reports, and other relevant literature was conducted. This helped to trace the evolution of Dharahara's symbolic significance, its reconstruction, and its political connotations.

Field Observations: Direct observations of the Dharahara site and its surrounding areas was conducted to capture the physical and symbolic transformations of the monument. This included observing visitor interactions, ceremonies, and events held at the site, which may reflect the tower's symbolic role in national identity.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

Purposive Sampling: The study employed purposive sampling to select documents that have relevant information related to the Dharahara Tower and its symbolic significance.

Theoretical Sampling: As the research progresses, theoretical sampling was used to identify additional information based on emerging themes and gaps in the data. This iterative process ensured that the research captures a wide range of perspectives and fully explores the political symbolism of the Dharahara Tower.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: The qualitative data gathered from documents and observations was analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves coding the data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and categories related to the political symbolism of Dharahara. Themes include nationalism, cultural heritage, historical memory, and the politicization of monuments.

Discourse Analysis: Given the political nature of the research topic, discourse analysis was employed to examine how language and narratives around the Dharahara Tower were constructed and used by various actors. This helped to reveal the power dynamics and political agendas embedded in the symbolization of the tower.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research was sensitive to the cultural and political contexts of Nepal, avoiding any actions or interpretations that could be considered disrespectful or harmful.

3.6 Limitations

This research is inherently limited by its focus on a single case study, which restricted the generalization of the findings to other national monuments or contexts. Additionally, access to certain historical documents or interviews with key political figures was challenging, potentially limiting the scope of the data. Despite these limitations, the study aimed to provide a detailed understanding of the politics involved in the symbolization of the Dharahara Tower.

Chapter Four

The Historical and Political Context of Dharahara Tower

4.1 Dharahara: Creation of meaning historic overview

The term Dharahara in the Nepali language came from the Sanskrit language. In Sanskrit, white building is called "Dhawal Griha" (Manandhar). Traditionally, tall pillars erected for military purposes are called 'Dharahara'. In Nepal, Mukhtiyar General Bhimsen Thapa built a Dharahara to inspect military activities and rally soldiers by playing bugles. It is a tall, hollow structure with a staircase leading from inside to the top, Kirtistambh and Minar Dharahara.

At that time, the concept of national defense was contemplated during the development work related to social reform along with the restructuring of the Nepalese army for the construction of the nation of Nepal (Shiwakoti, 2076). Nepal-English war During 1871-1873 BS, the most powerful Daffa of the British army crossed the Bagmati and reached Jurjure on Falgun 20, 1872 BS. As a result of the last invasion war with the Nepali side in the Hariharpur and Makwanpur areas, both Nepal and the British were forced to sign the Sugauli Treaty.

Dharahara was built as a symbol of taking back the Terai after nine years of the Sugauli Treaty (Thapa & Thapa, 2078). Mukhtiyar Bhimsen Thapa built the first Dharahara with 11 storeys of 124 *haat* in height in the garden complex of his private residence 'General Bagdarbar' in Shrawan 1881 BS. A year after the construction of the first Dharahara, Queen Rajmata of King Ran Bahadur Shah, Lalitripurasundari Devi, wished to tie the knot with the first Dharahara. In 1882 BS, through Mukhtiar General Bhimsen Thapa, another then 90 *haat* high 11-storey Dharahara was built (Shiwakoti, 2076). The first Dharahara was built in 1881 BS. The earthquake of 1890 BS destroyed it, after which the first tower was not rebuilt. The second tower built in 1882 BS was destroyed after 108 years by earthquake of 1990 BS. During the reconstruction of Kathmandu city damaged by the earthquake by the then Prime Minister Juddhashamsher Rana, two floors of the second tower were lowered and Bardali was also rebuilt (Nepal, 2015).

Dharahara tower is (or was) a modern heritage and a popular landmark known to all within Nepal. In this way, the archeological 'Bhimsen Pillar' (Dharahara) standing as a symbol of national pride and keeping the sovereign nation of Nepal intact is an integral and dynamic step in the process of making Nepali history. It is also a national archaeological heritage at the center of choice for domestic and foreign tourists. Such modern reconstructions built on traditional

foundations are also considered important from a strategic-tactical point of view. Such a historical man-made structure is beautiful not only for the people of Kathmandu but also for the people of the entire country and the international world.

The original construction by Bhimsen Thapa and its historical significance.

The Dharahara Tower, also known as Bhimsen Tower, was originally constructed in 1832 by Nepal's first Prime Minister, Bhimsen Thapa, during the reign of King Rajendra Bikram Shah. This nine-story tower stood as an iconic architectural feat of its time, measuring 61.88 meters in height and built in the Mughal and neo-classical style. Bhimsen Thapa, a visionary statesman, commissioned the tower as part of his broader efforts to strengthen Nepalese autonomy and symbolize the nation's ability to match modernity with tradition.

Dharahara wasn't only a landmark. It stood as a evidence to Nepal's growing architectural and political desire in the early 19th century. At the time, Nepal was experiencing rapid shifts in its internal and external dynamics—most notably its relations with the British East India Company. The construction of Dharahara was part of a series of projects aimed at reinforcing Bhimsen Thapa's position of power, symbolizing a strong and modernizing state capable of engaging with the global order while protecting its sovereignty.

The Tower as a symbol of power and authority in early 19th-century Nepal.

During the 19th century, architecture often mirrored political authority, and the Dharahara Tower became a physical manifestation of Bhimsen Thapa's control over the nation. It was a bold statement of both personal and national grandeur, designed to elevate Nepal's international stature and reflect the state's centralized authority.

The tower's towering presence over Kathmandu also signified a bird's-eye view of the burgeoning nation, symbolizing Thapa's vision of overseeing and controlling the landscape. For Thapa, the Dharahara was not just an architectural endeavor but a way to leave an indelible mark on the city's urban fabric and reinforce his legacy as a ruler who safeguarded the nation's independence in an era when imperialist pressures were mounting in the region.

By situating the tower in the heart of Kathmandu, Bhimsen Thapa elevated the city as the political and cultural nucleus of the nation. The tower served a strategic function as a military watchtower, but it also carried an ideological significance as a statement of the unyielding strength and enduring resilience of Nepal.

Timeline showing history and its evolving nature over time according to the record of National Reconstruction Authority in bulletin Rebuilding Nepal:

1824 AD (1881 BS) – Dharahara was originally built by General Bhimsen Thapa at Lagan Tole in his name as Bhimsen Stambha.

1825 AD (1882 BS) - New 61.88 meters tall 11-story Dharahara built at Sundhara by General Bhimsen Thapa according to the order of Queen Lalita Tripurasundari.

1833 AD (1890 BS) – First Dharahara at Lagan Tole destroyed by earthquake but not reconstructed. Second Dharahara at Sundhara not destroyed by earthquake.

1856 AD (1913 BS) – Second Dharahara got damaged by lightening.

1866 AD (1923 BS) – Damaged Dharahara get repaired and reconstructed.

1934 January 15 AD (1990 Magh 2 BS) – Dharahara destroyed half by massive earthquake

1936 AD (1993 BS) – The 11 storey Dharahara reconstructed to 9 storey by adding bardali by Prime Minister Juddha Shamsar Rana.

2015 April 25 AD (2072 Baishakh 12 BS) – In devastating earthquake Dharahara was completely destroyed.

2017 February 14 AD (2073 Falgun 3 BS) – Prime minister KP Oli announced the campaign "I will construct my Dharahara" *Ma Banauchhu Mero Dharahara*

2018 September 30 AD (2075 Aswin 14 BS) – Government started to reconstruction of Dharahara with the initiation by National Reconstruction Authority.

2021 April 24 AD (2078 Baishakh 11 BS) – Reconstruction of Dharahara completed and PM KP Oli inaugurated newly constructed Dharahara

2024 September 19 AD (2081 Aswin 3 BS) – Newly reconstructed Dharahara opened to general public as celebration of Constitution Day

4.2 Political Context of original construction of Dharahara

In 1816, after two years of periodic fighting in Nepal's foothills, the troops of the British East India Company achieved victory over the army of Gorkha, the rapidly expanding hill kingdom whose Shah kings assembled the modern nation-state now known as Nepal (Thapa S. , 2079). This military defeat marked the end of some 70 years of rapid Gorkhali expansion, during which the Indo-Aryan elites of the hills extended their domination of west and central Nepal to new territories in the east. The political and cultural ascendancy of this elite endures today, and is reflected in its disproportionate representation in public office, land ownership and economic activity.

From 1806 until his dramatic fall from power in 1837, the mukhtiyar [Commander-in -Chief of the Army] Bhimsen Thapa was the most powerful man in Nepal. Sources differ on whether the Dharahara he built in the grounds of his mansion, the Bagh Darbar, was the first or second of two similar structures. In 1832 the British Resident in Kathmandu, Brian Hodgson, recorded the existence of two minarets in this locality.

According to Hodgson, the smaller of the pair was named after Bhimsen Thapa and built in the garden of the Bagh Darbar, and the taller one, a structure with a broader base known as the upper or upallo dharahara, was built by or for the junior Shah queen Maharani Lalit Tripura Sundari, just to the north. The towers are said to have been built in 1824/5 and 1832, but there is some uncertainty about which was built on which date. During a major earthquake in 1833, one of the two Dharaharas collapsed completely and was not rebuilt, while the other was only partially damaged and was quickly restored. It was most probably the larger of the two towers (the one named for the Queen) that was rebuilt, and not the smaller one, because at this stage of Nepali history Bhimsen's political star was waning.

It is widely believed that the original towers were modelled on monuments in India such as the minarets that stand at the four corners of the Taj Mahal complex at Agra, or the Qutb Minar in Delhi. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing what the creators of the Nepali versions of these monuments intended in terms of their meaning and purpose. Sidewalkers (P) Ltd, the company which has managed the Dharahara site since 2004/5, erected a number of information signboards in both English and Nepali around the base of the tower which recorded a version of its history (Hutt, 2019).

On these signboards (which remained in situ for three years after the 2015 earthquake) it is stated that the Dharahara's main purpose was to enable the state and city authorities to summon

people to gather on the Tundikhel (the military parade ground to the north-east of the tower) to hear government announcements, and that it showed 'the religious harmony between Hindu, Muslim and Christian faiths'. It offers as supporting evidence for this latter assertion the fact that the topmost floor contains a Shiva shrine, that the tower is built in Mughal style, and that the railings around its base are in a European style. While the historical function of the tower as a public gathering-point is well attested in historical sources, this does not shed much light on the originally intended symbolism of the structure; and the conception of the Dharahara as a symbol of religious unity is not a notion in any other source (Hutt, 2019).

4.3 Politics in Symbolization after Earthquake of 2015

Nepal got hit by a powerful earthquake of 7.8 magnitude on Baishakh 12, 2072 BS followed by many other aftershocks. It destroyed many buildings of Kathmandu Valley including historic Dharahara and the lives of 60 people, leaving only a stump measuring 10 meters of tower. Headlines on the front page of the national newspaper on the following day of earthquake read (translated) -Strong earthquake in Nepal, Dharahara collapsed, large destruction (Annapurna Post) -Dozen shocks, thousands injured with a front-page photograph of collapsed Dharahara (Nagarik Daily) (Gautam, 2015). This is how the effect of the devastating earthquake portrayed on a popular national newspaper.

"Dharahara is identity of all Nepali people, it is the symbol of our unity and strength. It will be reconstructed with the funds collected from each Nepali" (Neupane, 2016) Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli announced reconstruction of historic Dharahara tower on its own in the inauguration program of laying the foundation stone for the reconstruction of Dharahara in Kathmandu on Poush 12, 2075 BS. The down of the nine-storey Dharahara at the core of Kathmandu was one of the biggest losses caused by the 2072 BS earthquake (Ojha, 2016). That is why Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli announce the 'Mero Dharahara Ma Banauchhu' (I will construct my Dharahara') public fundraising campaign in Magh 2072 BS at a time when most of the heritage reconstruction actions was not kickstarted (Ojha, 2016).

On 'Mero Dharahara Ma Banauchhu' campaign for the reconstruction of the historical monument, the National Reconstruction Fund managed to collect as much as Rs 140.29 (Ojha, 2016). Civil servants, various government agencies, and people give donations to rebuild Dharahara. Oli's message elevated hopes in the public to forget the loss of earthquake having thought of getting back the destroyed Dharahara. For the campaign like 'building back better' and 'we shall rise again', an image of the old Dharahara became the symbol.

But, after the National Reconstruction Authority started planning, they decided to shift the “new Dharahara” instead of reconstructing the old one on same location, and it reduced all the hopes. Furthermore, activists for heritage conservation see it useless arguing new one could not hold any historical and cultural significance. But the construction work is gained motion and the authorities completed it soon. The activists’ voices have not heard. Now, activists say people should call the new building, a view tower, not a Dharahara.

What the newly constructed tower should be called was the first debate after reconstruction. ‘Historic Dharahara Reconstruction’ was the official title of the project named by national reconstruction authorities. However the concern of activists was that it is not the ‘reconstruction’ of the old Dharahara that people saw, rather it is a construction of a completely new tower which exists next to the leftovers of Dharahara destroyed by earthquake. Heritage activist Alok Siddhi Tuladhar articulating his thought says, “Prime minister visioned this project; it is not our wish. It was already named ‘Bhimsen folly’ when Dharahara was originally constructed, as it seemed very opposite to the architectural styles of Kathmandu and even Nepal, and now we are reiterating the same error” (Bajracharya, 2021).

Sushil Bickram Thapa, founder and treasurer of Bhimsen Thapa Memorial Foundation, said that “Newly constructed is not Dharahara. It is Oli Tower” (Bajracharya, 2021). In the meantime, several other people are also naming it as a jhilke (flashy) tower. “The fund invested in the construction of the tower can be used for other things such as reconstruction of other important project such as public housing or providing relief to the people in covid period” (Bajracharya, 2021) speaks heritage activist Alok Sidhhi Tuladhar.

Similarly, Yadav Lal Kayastha, who is heritage activist, articulates, the priorities should have shifted from the Dharahara reconstruction project to the reconstruction of Kumari Chhen which is go to see and respected by many people because it also has cultural and historic importance more than Dharahara. “When it was being proposed, authorities did not even study its long-term impact and understood about the heritage conservation,” (Bajracharya, 2021) that is queries of Kayastha.

Activist Alina Tamrakar says that, in duplicating historic monuments there are some conditions and guidelines. “In the situation of debate about Dharahara and the new tower, the reconstruction authorities have increased the size of the old Dharahara and added the commercialized facilities. This only justifies the intentions of money-making” (Bajracharya,

2021). She advocates that, “Dharahara as a memorial park using leftovers in same condition could be enough. It would have been remembered as a memory of the people we lost” (Bajracharya, 2021).

On the one hand, the image of the Dharahara, quickly became symbol for many Nepali not only of the disaster but also of a general determination to recover and rebuild. On the other hand, Dharahara was unloved by the generations of cultural historians who have documented the tangible and intangible riches of the Kathmandu Valley’s heritage because of its non-native or imported architectural design. Any heritage over a century old is considered of importance by archaeology, under Ancient Monument Preservation Act, 2013 BS.

As a tall building and a popular landmark, Dharahara received much greater attention in public. Furthermore, public media used it as a symbol for all heritage buildings that were partially damaged or completely destroyed, also new, old, popular, public and elite. Above all, Dharahara tower seemed as huge in the imagination of Nepali people in immediate result of the Baishakh 2072 earthquake, rather than the other damaged World Heritage sites, and it became symbolization of build back better from the grief of earthquake. The destroy of Dharahara had a greater and more instant emotional impact upon Nepali public more than the loss of the any other temples and monuments.

4.4 Public and media reactions to the fall of the Dharahara

The Dharahara collapsed for the second (or possibly third) time between 11.56 and 11.57 a.m. on Saturday 25 April 2015, killing and injuring a large number of people, many of whom were inside the tower when the earthquake struck. The news of its destruction had a powerful emotional impact on many Nepalis, including people living outside the capital, many of whom knew it only from photographs.

The journalist Sarala Gautam, who at the time of the earthquake was travelling in Jajarkot, a western hill district that was largely unaffected by it, reported that it was when local people heard that the Dharahara had fallen that they understood the scale of the calamity: they then realised that ‘the disaster was not small’ (Gautam, 2015). It became clear to Gautam that for many Nepalis in the western hills, almost regardless of their ethnicity, caste or gender, the Dharahara was still the pre-eminent symbol of their capital city’s, and therefore their nation’s, identity. Gautam recalled many conversations with people whose first comment when they

heard she had come from Kathmandu was ‘Oh, I hear the Dharahara fell down (e, dharahara dhalyo re)’:

‘It’s so sad’ she said, ‘The Dharahara has fallen.’ I asked her if she had ever visited Kathmandu. No, she said, she’d seen it on Facebook. Nowadays Facebook shows everything. She was Kalpana BK, aged 27. Her husband was working in Malaysia. They talked on a mobile when she went to a shop in Chaurajahari that had the internet running. She told me that she had been planning to go to Kathmandu and see the Dharahara when her husband returned from Malaysia. But now her wish had collapsed (Gautam, 2015).

The hundreds of first-person accounts of the 2015 earthquake that appeared in Nepali-language newspapers, magazines and social media in the aftermath typically contain an early and very specific reference to the moment when their authors received the news that the Dharahara had fallen (Rajopadhyaya, 2019). For these people too, this was the moment when the sheer scale and gravity of the disaster first impressed itself upon them. Writing less than three weeks after the earthquake, the senior journalist Kishor Nepal argued that the collapse of the Dharahara had had a massive psychological effect on the people of the capital city, most of which escaped the disaster comparatively unscathed (Hutt, 2019).

Although some important places, bazaars and settlements in Kathmandu suffered extensive damage and saw a major loss of life and property, most parts of the inner city remained secure. Even so, the level of fear among the people of Kathmandu is very high and very dense. The main psychological reason for this fear is the shattering of the Dharahara, a tall minaret erected as a show of power in imitation of the Islamic empire. If the Dharahara had not broken and if there had not been damage in and around Hanuman Dhoka, the centre of state power, the current level of dread would not have spread through people’s minds (Nepal, 2015).

All quarters of the Nepali news media understood this quickly, regardless of their political leanings, and gave more coverage to the collapse of the Dharahara than to the destruction of any other building. Thus, the Dharahara quickly became the icon of Nepali resilience and determination to rebuild, many young people seen wearing T-shirts bearing the image of the Dharahara and various versions, in both English and Nepali, of the slogan ‘we will rise again’. The iconic image of the tower also became a popular design for tattoos on arms and legs in the growing number of tattoo parlours across the city: some young Nepalis had clearly been affected by its destruction so much that they were willing to have its image inscribed permanently on their bodies (Hutt, 2019).

Chapter Five

Analysis of Politics and Symbolism of Dharahara

5.1 Political Narratives Surrounding Dharahara Pre-2015

The Tower's role in Nepalese national identity before the earthquake.

By the 20th century, Dharahara had evolved from a political symbol into a cultural icon and an integral part of Nepal's national identity. It was a symbol not only of Bhimsen Thapa's legacy but also of the nation's history and survival. It witnessed significant historical events, including the downfall of the Rana regime, political revolutions, and the country's journey toward democracy. Over time, Dharahara became more than just a remnant of the past; it represented a continuous thread in the fabric of Nepalese statehood, linking various political regimes with a collective cultural identity.

Pre-2015, Dharahara was a point of pride for the Nepalese people. Its appearance on postcards, currency, and various cultural representations elevated it to a level of national reverence. Visiting Dharahara became synonymous with experiencing the core of Nepal's history. It became a place of personal and collective memory, where individuals could interact with the tangible representation of their heritage.

Competing narratives of heritage, modernity, and tourism.

As Nepal opened up to the global world in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, competing narratives began to form around Dharahara. On one side, the tower was seen as a proud reminder of Nepal's rich heritage. Traditionalists viewed the structure as a sacred emblem of the country's historical resilience and resistance against colonial influence.

However, a modern narrative emerged that sought to commodify the tower as part of Nepal's tourism economy. With the country increasingly reliant on tourism, Dharahara became a key destination for visitors. As a result, the tower was often marketed as a symbol of Nepal's blend of history and modernity. This tourism-driven narrative sometimes clashed with the more heritage-focused view, as commercialization raised concerns about the authenticity and preservation of such historical monuments.

Thus, before the earthquake, Dharahara stood at the intersection of various narratives: it was a place of historical pride, a symbol of national unity, but also a tool for economic development, raising questions about the balance between preserving national identity and embracing globalization.

5.2 Impact of the 2015 Earthquake on the Symbolization of Dharahara

The destruction of Dharahara in the earthquake and its symbolic implications.

The devastating earthquake that struck Nepal on April 25, 2015, reduced Dharahara to rubble. The collapse of the tower was one of the most visible and heart-wrenching symbols of the widespread destruction caused by the disaster. The fall of Dharahara was more than just the loss of a historical building—it represented the fragility of national pride in the face of natural calamity. As the tower crumbled, so too did a part of the nation’s historical narrative.

The sight of Dharahara’s ruins became a poignant reminder of the precariousness of heritage, and its loss evoked widespread feelings of vulnerability and grief among the Nepalese. The destruction challenged the notion of permanence that the tower once symbolized, calling into question the ability of historical monuments to withstand the test of time and nature.

Public reactions and the initial discourse on reconstruction.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, there was an immediate outcry for the restoration of Dharahara. Public sentiment was driven by a deep sense of loss, with many feeling that the fall of Dharahara had diminished the nation’s historical standing. Calls for reconstruction were widespread, fueled by the belief that the tower’s revival would symbolize national resilience and recovery from the tragedy.

However, the discourse surrounding the reconstruction was complex. While many advocated for an exact replica of the original Dharahara as a tribute to the past, others saw the disaster as an opportunity to modernize and reimagine the tower for the future. The debate reflected the broader tensions within Nepalese society regarding tradition and progress—whether to hold on to the past or to embrace a forward-looking vision that acknowledged contemporary needs.

Despite these differing perspectives, the overwhelming public desire to see Dharahara rise again speaks to the tower’s deeply entrenched place in Nepalese culture and consciousness. It became clear that Dharahara was more than just a historical artifact; it was a symbol of hope, resilience, and national unity in the face of adversity.

5.3 State-Led Reconstruction Efforts

Government tool initiatives to reconstruct Dharahara as a symbol of national resilience.

Following the 2015 earthquake, the government of Nepal made it a priority to rebuild the Dharahara as a symbol of national resilience and renewal. The government's framing of the

reconstruction effort emphasized the importance of restoring a monument that had become emblematic of the nation's unity and ability to recover from disaster. Dharahara's reconstruction was incorporated into the broader National Reconstruction Authority's (NRA) mandate to rebuild damaged heritage sites, infrastructure, and private properties affected by the earthquake. Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli inaugurated the reconstruction of Dharahara in September 2018 (Pandey, 2072), declaring it a symbol of hope and the "Nepali spirit," linking it directly to narratives of national pride and recovery.

For the government, the reconstruction of Dharahara was more than just a heritage project. It was a political statement, underscoring the state's capacity to rebuild and its commitment to preserving Nepal's cultural legacy. The new tower, which would be taller and more modern than the original, was portrayed as a fusion of history and progress, thus serving as a metaphor for the new Nepal that the government aspired to build in the post-disaster context.

The involvement of political leaders in the reconstruction process.

Political leaders played a significant role in shaping the public discourse around Dharahara's reconstruction. By spearheading its development, they associated themselves with a project of national significance, hoping to garner public support. The project became a focal point in political rhetoric, often referenced in speeches by high-level officials as a testament to the state's efficiency and vision. However, this politicization of the reconstruction process was not without controversy. Criticisms emerged regarding transparency in awarding contracts, the involvement of private firms, and concerns about the government's prioritization of monumental reconstruction over addressing urgent post-earthquake needs, such as housing and education.

5.4 Civil Society and Public Engagement

The role of civil society in advocating for or contesting the reconstruction.

Civil society organizations and cultural activists became vocal stakeholders in the reconstruction of Dharahara. Many civil society actors advocated for a reconstruction that respected the historical authenticity of the original structure (Bajracharya, New Dharahara is not Dharahara, but view tower without use, 2021). Groups such as heritage activists, architects, and urban planners argued that the new design should reflect the original Mughal-inspired architecture, maintaining a connection to its historical and cultural roots.

However, there were also voices contesting the reconstruction, questioning whether rebuilding Dharahara in its pre-earthquake form was the best course of action. Critics from the civil society sector emphasized the need to focus on more pressing socio-economic challenges in the post-earthquake context. There were arguments that the massive funds required for the Dharahara project might be better spent on rebuilding schools, hospitals, and homes. Thus, civil society played a dual role: both advocating for a historically authentic reconstruction and challenging the very necessity of prioritizing a symbolic structure over more immediate need.

Public debates on the Tower's design, location, and meaning.

The design of the new Dharahara became a focal point of public debate. While some wanted a faithful reconstruction of the original tower, others saw an opportunity to modernize and reimagine the structure in a way that could reflect contemporary values and aspirations. The government's decision to build a taller and more modern Dharahara raised questions about authenticity versus innovation.

For many, the original Dharahara was not just a physical monument but a repository of memories, representing a bygone era of Kathmandu's history. The new tower, however, represented a future-oriented vision that some felt disconnected from the past. Moreover, debates emerged about whether the new Dharahara should be built on the same site or elsewhere, given its seismic vulnerability. These discussions reflected broader concerns about how Nepal balances heritage preservation with modernization in a rapidly urbanizing society.

5.5 Competing Narratives in the Reconstruction

Analysis of the different narratives surrounding the reconstructed Tower.

The reconstruction of Dharahara has been a site of competing narratives, reflecting broader social and political tensions within Nepal. On one hand, the government's narrative of Dharahara as a symbol of national unity and resilience has dominated official discourse (Bajracharya, *The tale of two Dharaharas destroyed by two earthquakes at a 100-year interval*, 2021). On the other hand, there are counter-narratives that challenge this vision, questioning the priorities of the state and the politics behind the reconstruction (Bajracharya, *New Dharahara is not Dharahara, but view tower without use*, 2021).

Some critics argue that the new Dharahara represents an exclusionary vision of national identity, one that prioritizes monumental projects over the everyday needs of citizens. Others

see it as a project that reinforces the centralization of power in Kathmandu, marginalizing the needs of rural and earthquake-affected communities. Furthermore, the tower has become a site of political symbolism, with different political factions attempting to claim ownership of its narrative for their own gain.

The symbolism of the new Dharahara in the context of contemporary Nepali politics.

In the context of contemporary Nepali politics, the reconstructed Dharahara has taken on multiple layers of symbolism. For the state, it represents the government's ability to restore order and stability after the chaos of the earthquake. For some citizens, it is a reminder of resilience, a testament to their ability to rebuild and move forward. However, for others, it is a symbol of misplaced priorities, a monument that reflects the state's focus on grandeur rather than addressing the structural issues that continue to plague post-earthquake Nepal.

The competing narratives surrounding Dharahara illustrate the broader struggles within Nepali society over how to define its identity in the post-earthquake period. Is the new Dharahara a symbol of national pride or an example of political opportunism? Does it represent the resilience of the people or the failure of the state to address deeper socio-economic issues? These questions remain central to understanding the significance of the reconstructed tower in Nepal's political and cultural landscape.

5.6 Political controversies associated with the Dharahara

Dharahara and its status as a national symbol is not without political controversies.

Post-Earthquake Reconstruction

Controversies Over Reconstruction: After the 2015 earthquake, which devastated the original Dharahara, the government's decision to rebuild the tower became a focal point of controversy. Critics argued that the funds allocated for the tower's reconstruction could have been better used for more urgent humanitarian needs, such as housing and infrastructure for those affected by the earthquake.

Privatization and Commercialization Concerns: The reconstruction project, undertaken by a private company, raised concerns about the commercialization of a national symbol. Some critics argued that the new Dharahara, with its added commercial features (like shopping areas), detracted from its historical and cultural significance.

Symbol of National Unity vs. Division

Representation of National Identity: While Dharahara is seen as a symbol of national unity, it has also been criticized for primarily representing the history of the Kathmandu Valley and the elite ruling classes, rather than the diverse ethnic and regional identities of Nepal. Some argue that the emphasis on monuments like Dharahara reinforces a centralized, Kathmandu-centric view of national identity, sidelining other cultures and histories.

Political Exploitation

Use in Political Propaganda: The tower has been used by various governments and political parties as a symbol of nationalism, especially during times of political instability or crisis. This has sometimes led to its appropriation for political gain, which some see as a manipulation of cultural heritage for political purposes.

Debate Over Modernization

Modern vs. Traditional Values: The reconstruction and modernization of Dharahara have sparked debates about the balance between preserving traditional values and embracing modernity. Some argue that the modernized Dharahara, with its new design and features, compromises the authenticity and historical value of the original structure. These controversies highlight the complexities of using a historical monument as a symbol of national identity, particularly in a country with diverse cultural and political landscapes like Nepal.

5.7 Key political discourses surrounding the reconstruction

The reconstruction of the Dharahara Tower after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal has been surrounded by several key political discourses. These debates and discussions reflect broader issues in Nepali society, including questions of national identity, governance, heritage preservation, and the role of the state. Here are the main political discourses that have emerged:

National Identity and Pride

Symbol of Resilience: The reconstruction of Dharahara has been framed as a symbol of Nepal's resilience and the nation's ability to rebuild after a disaster. Politicians and government officials have often used the reconstruction as a metaphor for the country's recovery and progress, tying it to a broader narrative of national pride.

Continuity vs. Change: There has been debate over whether the new Dharahara should replicate the original structure or incorporate modern elements. This discourse reflects broader tensions between preserving traditional aspects of national identity and embracing modernization.

Heritage Preservation vs. Modernization

Authenticity Concerns: Many heritage conservationists and cultural critics have expressed concern that the reconstructed Dharahara might not accurately reflect the historical and cultural significance of the original tower. They argue that the new structure should respect the original design to preserve its authenticity.

Modernization Advocates: On the other hand, some political leaders and developers have advocated for a modern interpretation of the tower, suggesting that the new Dharahara should include modern amenities and be more resistant to future earthquakes, symbolizing Nepal's forward-looking aspirations.

State-led Reconstruction vs. Public Involvement

Government's Role: The Nepalese government has taken a leading role in the reconstruction, positioning itself as the guardian of national heritage. This has led to debates about the efficiency and transparency of state-led reconstruction efforts, with some critics arguing that the process has been marred by delays, corruption, and lack of public consultation.

Public and Private Sector Involvement: There has also been discussion about the role of the private sector and civil society in the reconstruction process. Some argue that greater public involvement and private sector investment could lead to a more inclusive and efficient reconstruction effort.

Political Symbolism and Legitimacy

Political Capital: The reconstruction of Dharahara has been used by various political parties as a means of gaining political capital. Leaders have used the project to demonstrate their commitment to national development and to align themselves with the sentiments of the people. This has led to accusations of politicizing a national symbol for partisan gain.

Competing Narratives: Different political groups have sought to influence the narrative around the Dharahara reconstruction to align with their own ideologies, whether focusing on traditionalism, modernization, or a mix of both. This has created competing discourses around the symbolic meaning of the new Dharahara.

Economic and Social Implications

Tourism and Economic Development: The government has promoted the reconstruction of Dharahara as a boost to tourism and local economic development. This discourse focuses on the potential economic benefits of the tower, including job creation and increased tourist revenue.

Social Justice and Inclusion: Some voices have raised concerns about whether the benefits of reconstruction will be equitably distributed among different social groups, particularly marginalized communities. This discourse intersects with broader debates on social justice and inclusion in Nepal's development agenda.

Cultural Heritage vs. Commercialization

Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Cultural purists have argued that the focus should be on preserving the cultural heritage of the Dharahara without turning it into a commercialized tourist attraction.

Commercial Interests: On the other hand, there is a discourse around leveraging Dharahara as a commercial hub to attract both domestic and international tourists, which some fear could overshadow its historical and cultural significance.

In summary, the reconstruction of the Dharahara Tower has sparked a variety of political discourses that reflect broader issues in Nepali society, including questions of identity, heritage, governance, and development. These debates highlight the complexities involved in rebuilding a national monument that carries deep historical and cultural significance.

Chapter Six

Dharahara as a Symbol of Identity and Power

6.1 Symbolization of Dharahara and it evolve Historically

The Dharahara Tower, also known as Bhimsen Tower, has held significant symbolic value in Nepali politics and society. Its symbolism has evolved, reflecting shifts in political regimes, national identity, and cultural heritage. Here's an overview of how it has been symbolized and how these symbols have evolved over time:

Symbol of National Pride and Unity

Initial Construction (1832): The Dharahara was originally built by Mukhtiyar (Prime Minister) Bhimsen Thapa in 1832 during the reign of King Rajendra Bikram Shah. At that time, the tower symbolized the strength and stability of the Shah dynasty and the political power of Bhimsen Thapa. It stood as a representation of a unified Nepal, especially after the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816) when Nepal's territorial integrity was threatened.

Monarchical Era: During the period of the Shah kings, the tower continued to symbolize national pride and unity. It was seen as a monument that represented the resilience of the nation, surviving various earthquakes and political upheavals. The tower's presence in the capital, Kathmandu, was a constant reminder of Nepal's independence and sovereignty.

Symbol of Political Power and Authority

Rana Regime (1846-1951): The tower also came to symbolize the authority of the ruling class, particularly during the Rana regime, when Prime Ministers held more power than the kings. The Ranas maintained and sometimes modified the tower, using it as a symbol of their rule and the stability they claimed to bring to the country.

Panchayat Era (1960-1990): During King Mahendra's Panchayat regime, the Dharahara was often portrayed as a symbol of the king's direct rule. It was used in various state-sponsored imagery to represent the centralization of power under the monarchy.

Symbol of Resilience and National Identity

Post-1990 Democratic Movement: After the restoration of democracy in 1990, the Dharahara began to symbolize the resilience and democratic aspirations of the Nepali people. It became a

part of the broader national identity, representing not just political power, but the collective spirit of the nation.

2015 Earthquake and Reconstruction: The tower's collapse during the devastating earthquake in April 2015 further intensified its symbolism. Its destruction was seen as a national tragedy, and the subsequent efforts to rebuild it came to symbolize the resilience and determination of the Nepali people to rebuild their country. The reconstruction of the tower, which was completed in 2021, was a significant event, symbolizing hope, renewal, and the unbroken spirit of Nepal.

Contemporary Symbolism

Modern Political Symbolism: In contemporary Nepal, Dharahara continues to be a powerful symbol, but its meaning has diversified. It now represents a blend of historical legacy, cultural heritage, and modern resilience. Politicians and leaders often evoke its image when discussing national unity and the need to preserve Nepali heritage. The tower is also a symbol of the challenges Nepal has faced and overcome, from political upheavals to natural disasters.

Tourism and Heritage: In the 21st century, Dharahara has also been embraced as a symbol of cultural heritage and tourism. It is often featured in promotional material aimed at attracting tourists, symbolizing the rich history and the cultural depth of Nepal.

Evolution of Symbols Over Time

The symbolism of Dharahara has evolved from a representation of political power and authority to a broader symbol of national pride, resilience, and cultural heritage. It has transitioned from being a symbol tied to specific regimes to becoming a symbol of the Nepali nation itself, reflecting the changing political landscape and the enduring spirit of the Nepali people. The tower's reconstruction has also added a layer of contemporary meaning, as it now stands as a testament to the nation's capacity to recover and rebuild in the face of adversity.

This evolution of symbolism mirrors Nepal's own political and social transformations, making Dharahara not just a historical monument but also a living symbol of the nation's journey.

6.2 Role of Dharahara in Shaping National Identity in Nepal

The Dharahara Tower plays a significant role in shaping and reinforcing national identity in Nepal. Its influence extends beyond its architectural presence, deeply intertwining with the cultural, historical, and emotional fabric of the nation. Here's how the Dharahara Tower contributes to the formation and expression of Nepal's national identity:

Historical Legacy and National Continuity

Symbol of Historical Continuity: Dharahara, originally built in 1832, stands as a tangible link to Nepal's past. It symbolizes the continuity of Nepalese history, connecting the present generation with the country's formative periods, particularly the era of Bhimsen Thapa and the Shah dynasty. This historical continuity is a crucial component of national identity, as it anchors the collective memory of the people in a shared past.

Monarchical Symbol: During the Shah dynasty and the Rana regime, Dharahara symbolized the power and authority of the ruling class. Its presence reinforced the idea of a unified Nepal under a central authority, contributing to the concept of a singular Nepali identity tied to the monarchy.

Representation of Resilience and National Strength

Endurance Through Adversity: Dharahara's survival of multiple earthquakes and its reconstruction after the 2015 earthquake have turned it into a symbol of Nepal's resilience. The tower represents the strength of the Nepali people in the face of adversity, reinforcing a national identity rooted in perseverance and collective fortitude.

Reconstruction as a National Project: The rebuilding of Dharahara became a national project, symbolizing the country's recovery and the people's determination to preserve their heritage. This reconstruction effort has helped shape a modern national identity that values resilience, solidarity, and the capacity to rebuild from ruins.

Cultural and Emotional Symbolism

Cultural Heritage: Dharahara is more than just an architectural landmark; it is a symbol of Nepal's rich cultural heritage. It represents the artistic, engineering, and architectural achievements of the past, contributing to a sense of pride in the nation's cultural identity.

Emotional Connection: For many Nepalis, Dharahara is a symbol of their personal and collective identity. Its image evokes feelings of nostalgia, pride, and belonging, making it a key element in the emotional landscape of the nation's identity. The tower's iconic status in Kathmandu's skyline makes it a familiar and cherished symbol of the capital city and the country as a whole.

National Unity and Pride

Symbol of Unity: Dharahara has come to symbolize national unity, serving as a common point of reference for all Nepalis, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic, or regional differences. It embodies the idea of a cohesive national identity that transcends individual differences, promoting a sense of belonging to a larger Nepali community.

National Pride: As a prominent national monument, Dharahara instills a sense of pride in the Nepali people. Its image is often used in state functions, national celebrations, and even in the media, reinforcing its role as a symbol of national pride and the unique identity of Nepal as an independent and sovereign nation.

Modern Identity and Global Recognition

Tourism and International Symbolism: In the modern era, Dharahara also contributes to Nepal's identity on the global stage. As a recognized symbol of Nepal, it attracts tourists and represents the country in international forums. This global recognition enhances Nepal's national identity by situating it within a broader international context, where Dharahara serves as an emblem of the country's history, culture, and resilience.

Contemporary Relevance: The tower's role in shaping national identity continues to evolve. As Nepal modernizes and engages with the global community, Dharahara remains a relevant symbol that connects the country's rich past with its aspirations for the future. It is a reminder of where the nation has come from and a symbol of where it aims to go.

Political Symbolism and National Dialogue

Platform for National Dialogue: Dharahara has also been a platform for national dialogue, particularly in the context of its reconstruction after the earthquake. Debates over how to rebuild it, how much of the original design to preserve, and what it should symbolize in a new era have all contributed to discussions about national identity. These conversations reflect broader questions about what it means to be Nepali in the 21st century.

Political Symbolism: Historically, Dharahara has been used as a symbol by various political regimes to assert control and authority. In modern times, it continues to play a role in political discourse, representing different aspects of Nepal's identity depending on the political narrative. Whether as a symbol of monarchical power, democratic resilience, or national unity, Dharahara is deeply embedded in the political symbolism of Nepal.

In summary, the Dharahara Tower is a multifaceted symbol that has shaped and continues to shape Nepal's national identity. It represents the historical continuity, resilience, cultural heritage, and unity of the Nepali people, serving as a powerful reminder of the nation's journey through time. Whether viewed as a historical monument or a modern symbol of recovery and pride, Dharahara remains a central element in the expression of what it means to be Nepali.

6.3 Use of Dharahara to advance their agendas by different political Regimes

The Dharahara Tower, also known as Bhimsen Tower, has been a significant symbol in Nepal, not just architecturally but also politically. Different political regimes in Nepal have used the Dharahara to advance their agendas, often manipulating its symbolism to align with their ideologies and objectives. Here's how various regimes have done so:

The Rana Regime (1846-1951)

Symbol of Power and Authority: The original Dharahara was built in 1832 by Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, but it was during the Rana period that the tower became a symbol of their power. The Ranas, who were de facto rulers of Nepal, used the tower as a demonstration of their architectural prowess and their dominance over the country.

Legacy of Rana Rule: The tower stood as a representation of the autocratic Rana regime's engineering achievements and was seen as a mark of their enduring legacy.

The Monarchy (1951-2008)

National Identity and Unity: After the fall of the Ranas, the monarchy sought to redefine the tower as a symbol of national pride and unity. King Mahendra, in particular, promoted the Dharahara as a national monument that represented the continuity of Nepalese identity through various political changes.

Tourism and Nationalism: The monarchy capitalized on the tower's historical significance to boost nationalism and tourism, presenting it as a must-visit site that epitomized the spirit of the Nepali people.

Democratic Period (1990-2006)

Cultural Heritage Preservation: With the restoration of democracy, the Dharahara became a focal point for discussions on cultural heritage preservation. Political parties promoted the idea that safeguarding such monuments was essential to maintaining Nepal's cultural identity amidst political changes.

Symbol of Resilience: During this time, the tower also came to symbolize the resilience of the Nepali people, enduring political upheavals and natural disasters alike.

Post-Monarchy and Federal Republic (2008-Present)

Reconstruction as National Renewal: After the devastating earthquake in 2015, which reduced the Dharahara to rubble, the reconstruction of the tower became a metaphor for national renewal and resilience. The government used the rebuilding process to show their commitment to rebuilding the nation and preserving its cultural heritage.

Political Legitimacy and National Pride: The current government, under the federal republic system, has emphasized the reconstruction of Dharahara as a project that unites the nation. By linking it to the broader narrative of national pride and identity, political leaders have sought to legitimize their rule and demonstrate their dedication to national progress.

Public Sentiment and Symbolism

From Elite to People's Monument: Over time, the Dharahara has transitioned from being a symbol of elite power to one that represents the resilience and unity of the Nepali people. Each regime's attempt to co-opt the tower for its agenda has also contributed to this transformation.

In summary, the Dharahara Tower has been variously used as a symbol of power, resilience, national pride, and unity, depending on the prevailing political regime. Each era has sought to align the tower's symbolism with its political objectives, thereby embedding the monument deeply into Nepal's national consciousness.

6.4 Implications of the Dharahara's symbolism

The Dharahara Tower, a symbol of resilience, national pride, and historical continuity, has significant implications for contemporary Nepali politics. Its symbolism is deeply intertwined with the narratives of national identity, unity, and the collective memory of the Nepali people. Some major implications of Dharahara's symbolism are discussed below:

National Identity and Unity

Reconstruction as a Symbol of Resilience: After the 2015 earthquake, the rebuilding of Dharahara became a symbol of the nation's resilience and determination to rise from adversity. This narrative is often used by political leaders to invoke a sense of unity and national pride, positioning themselves as custodians of Nepal's heritage.

Political Capital: The tower's reconstruction was heavily publicized by the government, which sought to align itself with the symbolic renewal of the nation. Politicians used the reconstruction as a demonstration of their commitment to national development and heritage preservation.

Historical Continuity and Legitimacy

Connection to Monarchy and Republicanism: The original Dharahara was built during the Shah dynasty, linking it to the era of the monarchy. For some, it represents a connection to the past, including the monarchy's legacy. In contrast, the new Dharahara can be seen as a symbol of modern Nepal, emphasizing a break from the past and the establishment of a republican state.

Competing Narratives: Different political groups may interpret Dharahara's symbolism to either reinforce the idea of continuity with the past or to promote a narrative of a new, progressive Nepal. This can be a source of political tension, especially in debates around national identity.

Cultural Heritage and Political Responsibility

Heritage Preservation: The tower's reconstruction has sparked discussions on the responsibility of the state in preserving cultural heritage. Political actors are often judged on how they handle such projects, influencing public perception of their competence and respect for national culture.

Public Participation and Ownership: The process of rebuilding Dharahara involved public discourse and participation, reflecting the broader political environment where citizens demand

a more active role in decision-making. This has implications for how future projects are managed, pushing towards more inclusive governance.

Tourism and Economic Policy

Economic Symbolism: Dharahara is also a symbol of tourism, a vital sector for Nepal's economy. Politicians often tie the success of tourism-related projects like Dharahara's reconstruction to broader economic policies, using it as a metric of their effectiveness in boosting national growth.

Soft Power and Diplomacy: The tower serves as a cultural ambassador of Nepal to the world, influencing how the country is perceived internationally. This aspect of soft power can be leveraged in diplomatic efforts, where cultural symbols are used to foster goodwill and bilateral relationships.

Urban Development and Political Accountability

Urban Planning and Reconstruction: The rebuilding of Dharahara is also a statement on urban development and planning in Kathmandu. The political implications here involve accountability in managing resources, addressing urbanization challenges, and ensuring that such developments do not overshadow or disrupt the historical fabric of the city.

In summary, the Dharahara Tower's symbolism is multi-faceted, reflecting themes of resilience, identity, continuity, and modernity. For contemporary Nepali politics, it offers both an opportunity and a challenge: to navigate the delicate balance between honoring the past and forging a future that resonates with the aspirations of a diverse and evolving nation.

6.5 Portrayal of the Dharahara in media and public

The portrayal of the Dharahara Tower in media and public discourse has played a significant role in shaping its status as a national monument in Nepal.

Symbol of National Identity and Resilience

Media Representation: The Dharahara Tower, often featured prominently in Nepali media, has been portrayed as a symbol of national pride and resilience. Following the devastating earthquake in 2015, which led to the collapse of the tower, media coverage emphasized the tower's historical significance and the collective memory associated with it. This coverage

contributed to the perception of the Dharahara as a symbol of the country's ability to endure and rebuild in the face of adversity.

Public Discourse: Public discussions, particularly on social media platforms, reinforced the tower's symbolic value by expressing collective sorrow over its destruction and advocating for its reconstruction as a tribute to Nepal's heritage.

Cultural and Historical Significance

Media Narratives: The media has frequently highlighted the tower's historical origins, dating back to its construction in 1832 by Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa. This historical framing in news articles, documentaries, and other forms of media has helped reinforce the tower's importance as a cultural landmark.

Public Sentiment: Public discourse, including debates on heritage preservation, has often centered around the Dharahara's role in representing Nepal's architectural and cultural history. This dialogue has solidified its status as a national monument, with calls for its preservation and restoration reflecting a broader commitment to safeguarding Nepalese heritage.

Reconstruction as a National Project

Government and Media Collaboration: The government's decision to reconstruct the Dharahara, widely covered in the media, positioned the tower as a national project symbolizing hope and renewal. The extensive media coverage of the reconstruction efforts has kept the tower in the public eye, reinforcing its status as a key national monument.

Public Involvement: The portrayal of the reconstruction process in media and public discourse has encouraged a sense of collective ownership among the Nepali people, further embedding the Dharahara's significance in the national consciousness.

Tourism and Economic Symbolism

Media Influence on Tourism: Media campaigns promoting the Dharahara as a tourist attraction have linked it with Nepal's broader tourism industry. The portrayal of the tower as a must-visit site for both domestic and international tourists has contributed to its status as a symbol of Nepal's economic and cultural vitality.

Economic Discussions: In public discourse, particularly in the context of post-earthquake recovery, the Dharahara has been discussed as a symbol of economic resilience, with its reconstruction seen as a step toward revitalizing the economy through heritage tourism.

The portrayal of the Dharahara Tower in media and public discourse has significantly influenced its status as a national monument by emphasizing its role as a symbol of national identity, cultural heritage, resilience, and economic revival. These narratives have shaped public perception and ensured that the tower remains a central figure in Nepal's national memory and identity.

6.6 The Dharahara Tower in Post-Reconstruction Nepal

The role of the reconstructed Tower in contemporary national identity.

The Dharahara Tower, originally constructed in 1832 by then-Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, has long been a symbol of Nepal's cultural heritage and historical identity. Its towering presence stood as a proud marker of the Kathmandu skyline until it was tragically reduced to rubble during the devastating earthquake of April 25, 2015. The collapse of Dharahara became an emotional wound for the people of Nepal, symbolizing not just the physical destruction caused by the earthquake but also the shattering of a long-standing symbol of national pride.

In post-reconstruction Nepal, the rebuilt Dharahara Tower has come to represent a renewed sense of resilience and national identity. Its reconstruction, completed in 2021, was viewed as a significant milestone in Nepal's recovery and rebuilding process after the disaster. The new Dharahara, while maintaining the architectural style of its predecessor, also features modern facilities such as elevators, a museum, and a viewing deck, blending heritage with modernity. This reflects Nepal's aspiration to preserve its historical identity while simultaneously striving towards modernization.

The reconstructed tower plays a crucial role in contemporary Nepalese identity by symbolizing the country's ability to rise from the ashes of disaster. It is not merely a reproduction of a historical monument but a testament to the resilience, solidarity, and collective effort of the Nepalese people to restore what was lost. The new Dharahara stands as a metaphor for rebuilding both physically and spiritually—a reminder of the nation's ability to overcome challenges.

Public perceptions of the new Dharahara and its symbolism.

Public opinion regarding the reconstructed Dharahara is varied, with reactions ranging from pride to criticism. Many Nepalese view the new tower as a phoenix-like symbol of national rebirth, aligning it with the country's resilience after the earthquake. It stands as a visible marker of recovery, drawing domestic tourists and locals alike who come to view the tower, not just as a monument of the past but as a symbol of the present and future.

However, there are those who critique the reconstructed Dharahara for diverging from its original function and symbolism. Some argue that the modern amenities within the tower, including commercial spaces, detract from its historical sanctity. They feel that the reconstruction, though essential, has commercialized the monument, reducing it to a tourist attraction rather than preserving it as a solemn site of cultural heritage. Furthermore, the use of state resources for its rebuilding has sparked debates about whether the funds could have been better utilized for other essential infrastructure in a country still recovering from the 2015 earthquake.

The mixed public perceptions of the new Dharahara indicate the complex relationship between national monuments and contemporary identity. For some, it is a proud reminder of cultural endurance; for others, it raises questions about the commodification of heritage in modern Nepal.

6.7 The Politics of National Monuments in Nepal

How the Dharahara Tower fits into the broader landscape of national monuments in Nepal.

The Dharahara Tower stands alongside several other national monuments that define Nepal's cultural and historical landscape, including the Swayambhunath Stupa, Pashupatinath Temple, and Patan Durbar Square. These monuments, scattered across the Kathmandu Valley and beyond, reflect Nepal's rich historical narrative, cultural diversity, and religious significance. Each monument carries its unique symbolism, contributing to the formation of a collective national identity.

However, Dharahara's reconstruction is particularly significant in this broader context, as it represents the intersection of memory, loss, and renewal. Unlike other monuments, which have primarily endured the test of time, Dharahara's destruction and subsequent reconstruction offer a rare opportunity to reconsider the role of monuments in shaping both historical memory and

contemporary national identity. Unlike the ancient monuments which symbolize a continuity of tradition, Dharahara's reconstructed form speaks to a rupture—a reminder of the earthquake's destruction and a narrative of rebuilding.

The intersection of heritage, nationalism, and political power in the symbolization of Dharahara.

National monuments, by their very nature, are inextricably linked to political power and the crafting of national narratives. The Dharahara Tower, as a symbol of national pride, has historically been imbued with political significance. Its initial construction under Bhimsen Thapa, one of Nepal's most powerful prime ministers, was a demonstration of his power and influence. The tower served not just as an architectural marvel but as a representation of state authority and pride.

The decision to rebuild the tower in post-earthquake Nepal was not just an act of cultural preservation but also a political statement. The government's involvement in the reconstruction process highlights how national monuments are used as tools to reinforce nationalistic ideals and assert state power. By restoring Dharahara, the government signaled its commitment to preserving Nepalese heritage, while also using the tower's reconstruction as a platform to foster unity and patriotism. The political symbolism of rebuilding the tower was also evident in the involvement of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, who led the inauguration ceremony, presenting it as a gift to the nation.

In this way, the Dharahara Tower is both a cultural and political monument, reflecting the dynamics of power, heritage, and nationalism in Nepal. Its reconstruction is not only about physical restoration but about controlling the narrative of national pride and resilience, particularly in a politically volatile post-earthquake environment.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The research undertaken in this thesis has explored the political dimensions of the symbolization of Dharahara, an iconic national monument in Nepal. Through an analysis, this study has illustrated how the Dharahara, beyond its historical and architectural significance, has been symbolized as a tool for nationalistic discourse, political narratives, and public sentiment, particularly in the aftermath of its destruction during the 2015 earthquake. The monument's reconstruction under state authority was not merely an act of heritage preservation, but a deliberate political gesture aimed at invoking national pride and resilience, contributing to the broader narrative of nation-building.

One of the key findings is how Dharahara's symbolic value has been shaped by various political regimes, from its original construction under Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa to its reconstruction in post-earthquake Nepal. Each political context has contributed layers of meaning, influencing how Dharahara is perceived by the public. This process has demonstrated how national monuments like Dharahara are never politically neutral; instead, they are constructed, reconstructed, and redefined to reflect shifting political agendas, social ideals, and cultural identity.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the sociological understanding of national monuments by emphasizing the inherently political nature of such structures. National monuments, like Dharahara, serve as sites of collective memory and identity, but they are also shaped by power relations. The case of Dharahara exemplifies how monuments are politicized symbols that can be mobilized to serve state power, forge national unity, or assert political legitimacy.

Moreover, this study expands the theoretical framework around the symbolization of heritage in post-colonial and post-disaster contexts. The interplay between disaster recovery, nationalism, and politics in the case of Dharahara's reconstruction reveals how physical rebuilding can reflect deeper social processes, including political reconciliation and the re-imagining of national identity. By highlighting these dynamics, this thesis contributes to the broader sociological discourse on heritage, memory, and political symbolism in national monuments.

The findings of this research have significant implications for heritage preservation and the management of national monuments in Nepal. First, heritage policies should account for the socio-political contexts in which monuments are embedded. The symbolic meaning attached to monuments like Dharahara makes them critical to the social and cultural fabric of the nation, but also subjects them to politicization. Transparent and inclusive decision-making processes that involve local communities, historians, and cultural experts are essential for preserving both the physical structure and its symbolic significance.

Second, government and heritage authorities should ensure that the reconstruction of monuments after disasters respects historical accuracy while being mindful of their evolving social roles. Dharahara's reconstruction should not solely reflect the state's vision but also accommodate diverse narratives that honor its multifaceted cultural history. Sustainable tourism and educational initiatives that raise awareness of the monument's heritage value without over-commercializing or politicizing it would also be vital steps forward.

While this thesis has focused on Dharahara as a case study, future research could expand the scope to explore other national monuments in Nepal and their symbolic significance across different periods and political contexts. A comparative study of other heritage sites, such as Swayambhunath or the Kathmandu Durbar Square, could yield insights into how political regimes shape national memory through architectural preservation or destruction.

Further research could also explore how public perception of national monuments evolves over time and the role of media and popular culture in constructing or deconstructing their symbolic meanings. An in-depth study on the role of local communities in monument reconstruction processes would also provide a grassroots perspective on heritage politics, an area that this thesis only touched upon.

Finally, the broader dynamics of heritage politics in post-disaster recovery and their intersections with nationalism in South Asia would be an important field of study, offering opportunities to understand the socio-political consequences of heritage symbolization in other countries affected by natural disasters.

This conclusion ties together the political, cultural, and symbolic importance of Dharahara as a national monument, offering a nuanced understanding of how monuments function within political narratives while providing concrete directions for policy and future research.

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