Decolonial Rhetoric of Indigenous Tharu Homestays in Nepal

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Abstract

The Tharus, indigenous people residing in the southern plainland region known as the Terai in Nepal, have a historical memory of marginalization, displacement, and internal colonization. In the past decade, the emergence of homestay businesses among the Tharus has not only provided economic opportunities but also played a crucial role in promoting their indigenous identity. Building on this phenomenon, this article investigates into Tharu homestays in Nepal, with the aim of assessing the ways in which they embody indigenous decolonial rhetoric. Using a qualitative e-research method (Salmons, 2022), this article collects, analyzes, and interprets digital sources such as websites, online newspapers, YouTube videos, Facebook updates, and official reports. The interpretation is grounded in the theoretical framework of indigenous decolonial delinking (Mignolo, 2012; Smith, 2021). The article elaborates on how indigenous Tharu homestays function as decolonial spaces through six distinct lenses: their portrayal in national news coverage, their cartographic presence on Google Maps, their web-based territoriality, indigenous settings, the embodiment of indigenous culture and culinary traditions, and their amplified presence in the socio-digital media. In conclusion, the article finds that indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal embody decolonial rhetoric by creating an amplified presence of indigenous Tharu identity across multiple spaces. This research contributes to the discourse of indigenous rhetoric advocating for the protection and promotion of Tharu homestays in Nepal and emphasizing their role in the process of indigenous decolonization.

Introduction

Figure 1

A glimpse of welcome

Source: Shrestha (2019)

What do you see in the figure? What is the setting? What about the attires of the females and their smile? The image in Figure 1 captures a moment of welcome at indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal. The Tharu women, the thatched-roof hut in the background, their traditional attire, and the gesture of greeting with joined palms collectively perform the aura of indigenous Tharu homestays. Tharu people constitute one of Nepal's indigenous identities, possessing their own language, culture, costumes, religious beliefs, cultural practices, and worldviews. According to the 2011 Census, Tharu population in Nepal was recorded at 1,737,470 individuals, constituting 6.6% of the total population (Government of Nepal, 2018). The Population Census of 2021 reports that Tharu population as 1,807,124 (880,513 males; 926,611 females), accounting for 6.2% of the total population (29,164,578) (NSB, 2023). Geographically, the Tharu are concentrated in the southern plains of Nepal, known as the Terai. Their history is marked by marginalization, linguistic and cultural suppression, and the journey toward ethnic consciousness and activism (Gunaratne, 1998, 2018). In the last decade, the homestay business gained popularity in Nepal, with indigenous Tharu people actively participating in this service-oriented enterprise. The document "A Report on Impact Evaluation of Homestay in Nepal" (Government of Nepal, 2020) highlights how homestays effectively contribute to the revival and promotion of traditional culture, culinary

heritage, attire, and cultural identity. Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore Tharu homestays as spaces for decolonial rhetoric, playing a role in reviving Tharu identity markers through multiple spaces that facilitate global exposure.

Conceptual Framework

This study undertakes an analysis and interpretation of Tharu homestays as decolonial spaces. It is because indigenous Tharu resurgence is facilitated by both globalization and the Tharu community's process of distancing from non-indigenous influences. Consequently, globalization and homestays have positively contributed to the resurgence of the indigenous Tharu identity. The study's conceptual framework can be visualized as shown in Figure 2.:

Figure2

Conceptual framework
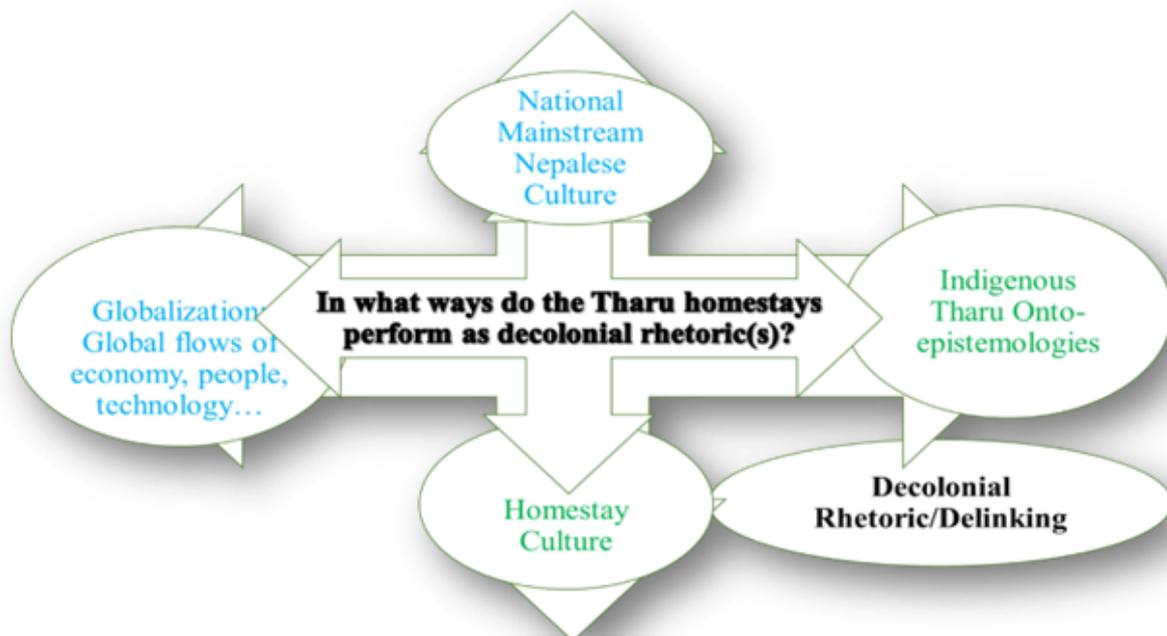
The article is situated within a broader research context encompassing globalization, non-Tharu mainstream identity, and the indigenous Tharu identity within Nepal. However, the specific focus of the article is to address the question:

In what ways do indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal perform decolonial rhetoric(s)?

The entirety of this article explores the various manners in which indigenous Tharu homestays enact and embody decolonial rhetoric.

Limitations, Delimitations and Terminologies

This article focuses only on an onto-epistemological exploration of indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal, specifically examining their decolonial performance. One noteworthy limitation of this study pertains to its data sources. Employing an e-research methodology, the research primarily draws upon available online sources and information. It is important to note that this study does not encompass data from all Tharu homestays across Nepal. Furthermore, the gathered documents

are approached and analysed through the lens of decolonial rhetoric. Consequently, this article delves into what the homestays articulate, rather than what might be overlooked or sacrificed in the process. Throughout this article, specific terms are recurrent. The term 'Tharu' denotes an indigenous ethnicity in Nepal. While indigenous Tharus can be categorized further, this paper employs the term in a more general sense. 'Homestay' refers to paid accommodations and services offered by Tharu communities, providing insights into Tharu ways of life. The terms 'decolonial' and 'delinking' in this study signify how the indigenous Tharus have distanced themselves from non-indigenous mainstream culture and reconnected with their indigenous culture by means of their homestays. The term 'space', appearing frequently, represents both physical and cultural location, encompassing tangible and intangible aspects of indigenous Tharu identity.

An Overview of the Article

This paper is structured into six sections: introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, discussion, and conclusion. The current section, introduction, presents necessary information about the onto-epistemological paradigm of the study. Literature review offers background information, contextualizing this study within the realm of indigenous Tharu decolonial rhetoric through homestays. This section justifies the significance of this article, laying the foundation for subsequent discussions. The theoretical framework delineates the theory of decolonial delinking, while the methodology section outlines the methods employed and their rationale. The discussion, the central segment in this article, addresses the research question by distilling key insights from the interpreted data. The conclusion summarizes the entire discussion, emphasizing the article's significance and its implications for future research.

Literature Review

The exploration of Tharu identities and their homestays in Nepal has garnered significant scholarly attention. The historical trajectory of the Tharu community in Nepal is characterized by a series of transitions, evolving from landowners to landless laborers, to reasserting their indigenous identity after facing marginalization (McDonaugh, 1997; Giri, 2009; Guneratne, 2018). While historical records prior to the 1950s remain scarce, the nationalization campaign of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s further marginalized Tharu traditions (McDonaugh, 1997).

Scholarly works have shed light on the instrumental role played by organizations in shaping the trajectory of Tharu communities. McDonaugh's (1997) comprehensive review traces the emergence of organizations such as Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha and BASE, which have significantly contributed to the empowerment of Tharu communities (McDonaugh, 1997). Similarly, Guneratne (2018) explores the nexus between ethnicity, culture, and landownership, highlighting the challenges posed by the eradication of malaria and the nationalization process (Guneratne, 2018). The question of landownership emerges as the central issue in the Tharu experience, underscoring its significance in shaping their identity. The historical accounts of the Tharu in Nepal depict their centuries-long presence in the Terai region. The Tharu community has undergone several historical shifts that trace their journey from being landlords to enduring periods of bonded labor and ultimately rediscovering their indigenous identity amidst marginalization (McDonaugh, 1997; Giri, 2009; Guneratne, 2018). Notably, historical records pertaining to the Tharu identity became more prominent after the 1950s, coinciding with significant shifts in nationalization policies (McDonaugh, 1997). This period, characterized by nationalization campaigns, resulted into the marginalization of traditional Tharu ways of life, further accentuating the complexity of their historical narrative. Jones (2007) delves into the intrinsic relationship between indigenous Tharu identity and their engagement with the environment. The Tharu livelihood practices, such as fishing and herb collection, underscore the symbiotic interplay between the Tharu community and their natural surroundings within buffer zones of national

parks (Jones, 2007). Giri (2009, 2010) deepens this ecological perspective by examining the historical context of bonded labor systems among the Tharu, highlighting the displacement caused by migrations and its consequential impact on demographics and ecological dynamics (Giri, 2009).

Homestay tourism emerges as a pivotal force shaping and revitalizing the indigenous Tharu identity. Tharu (2022) in his ethnographic case studies reveals that the involvement of the indigenous Tharu community in the homestay business has yielded socio-economic upliftment and the preservation of their unique way of life. The exchange of cultural practices and traditions between Tharu families and visitors serves to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the Tharu identity (Tharu, 2022). The immersive experiences offered by homestays provide both domestic and international tourists with indigenous insights into Tharu customs, facilitating the dissemination of the Tharu identity. The empowerment of Tharu communities through community-based tourism and homestays stands as a significant theme in research. Acharya and Halpenny (2013) underscore the transformative potential of homestay tourism in empowering women within rural areas, challenging traditional gender roles (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Similarly, KC (2021) investigates community-based homestays in the context of ecotourism, wildlife conservation, and sustainable livelihoods, emphasizing the uniqueness of Dalla homestay and its role in promoting Tharu culture (KC, 2021). Sapkota (2020) provides a comparative analysis of homestay tourism's transformative impact on host community. The positive changes brought about by community-based homestays extend across economic development, social empowerment, psychological well-being, and political empowerment (Sapkota, 2020). Through fostering a collaborative relationship between tourists and hosts, homestay tourism emerges as a catalyst for holistic change within Tharu community.

Despite the substantial body of research on Tharu identities and homestay tourism, a notable research gap exists within rhetorical and decolonial frameworks. The present study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing Tharu culture within the context of homestay tourism, offering a fresh perspective rooted in decolonial rhetoric. This approach intends to illuminate previously unexplored dimensions of Tharu identity representation in the tourism landscape.

Methodology

The theoretical frameworks integrated within this paper encompass the rhetoric of indigenous and decolonial delinking as conceptualized by Smith (2021) and Mignolo (2012). The notion of rhetoric, in this context, diverges from the conventional understanding of language utilization and persuasion as elucidated in classical rhetoric: "One of the pivotal matters in Greco-Roman rhetoric was the rhetorical or oratorical use of language" (Bhusal, 2023, 69). In this article, rhetoric signifies the verbal and non-verbal methods through which indigenous Tharu individuals express their identity via their homestays.

The theory of decolonial delinking serves as an alternative to the prevailing dominant colonial culture. The foundational premise is that the "first decolonial step is delinking from coloniality and not seeking alternative modernities but alternatives to modernity" (Mignolo, 2012, xxviii). This concept characterizes delinking as an endeavor to explore alternative epistemological and ontological worldviews distinct from Western modernity. According to Mignolo, "decolonial thinking… aims to delink from coloniality of knowledge" (208), making delinking a prerequisite for decolonizing knowledge and establishing non-imperial/colonial democratic societies (118). Delinking involves dismantling colonial epistemologies and reconnecting with ancestral and historical memories, signifying "epistemic disobedience and delinking from the magic of the Western idea of modernity" (120). Mignolo asserts that "decolonial thinking... starts from epistemic delinking: from acts of epistemic disobedience" (139), representing a departure from Western cognitive frameworks. Delinking is framed as a departure, an act of epistemic

disobedience that paves the way for alternative ways of knowing, sensing, believing, and living (161). Indigenous revivalism embraces a return to nature and the natural environment as a form of decolonial rhetoric: "Indigenous struggles to protect... nature... challenge settler domination over nature and... advance decolonization" (Dhillon, 2018). When decolonial delinking becomes intrinsic to indigenous lifestyles, it constitutes a decolonizing act, according to Smith (2021). Unlike Mignolo's emphasis on delinking as De-Westernization, Smith's (2021) focus lies in indigenous decolonization. Smith challenges the Western or colonial epistemology by contesting stereotypes: "Ideas about what counted as human... were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses" (28). This viewpoint suggests that the Western perspective was limited, unable to comprehend indigenous epistemologies. Smith counters this by presenting evidence of indigenous engineering, design, aesthetics, and creativity that were disregarded by colonizers. Smith contends that indigenous epistemologies entail creative problem-solving, challenging colonial perceptions. To counter this, Smith advocates for indigenous self-determination and self-articulation through decolonial delinking, offering "a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism" (259).

The theories of indigenous and decolonial delinking find relevance in this paper as it primarily examines the decolonial rhetoric of Nepal's indigenous Tharu population. Despite not experiencing Western colonization, Tharu people faced internal colonization and marginalization within Nepal. Their language, culture, and epistemologies were marginalized and labeled unscientific. More recently, Tharu homestays serve as platforms for articulating and performing Tharu identity, signifying a detachment from the mainstream culture and a revival of their own cultural heritage.

Research Design

This paper is a qualitative e-research as theorized and discussed by Salmons (2022). This study is based on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative data from various socio-digital media: Website, news reports or articles, official reports. This research method has been very popular after the pandemic even though it has some challenges (Roberts, Pavlakis, & Richards, 2021). I chose qualitative e-research methodology because a "qualitative e-research is an umbrella term used to describe methodological traditions for using information and communications technologies to study perceptions, experiences or behaviors through their verbal or visual expressions, actions, or writings" (Salmons, 2022, 8). This article, as qualitative research, seeks to explore the voice of indigenous Tharu people as articulated in their homestays through different e-media. The method of data collection in my research is the use of extant data. In a qualitative e-research, extant data refers to "posts, discussions, and archives on websites, blogs, social networking sites including written materials, drawings, graphics or other images, photographs, and/or recorded audio or audio-visual media" (Salmons, 2022, 43). This paper, drawing upon these ideas has used both online texts and images as the sources of data or information. The digitally online data inform us about the way indigenous Tharu homestays have claimed the digital space. In this article, there are no direct Tharu participants; it is something like a traditional document analysis. But, unlike traditional document analysis, this paper works with the documents available, particularly as e-resources.

I must share that I do not belong to the indigenous Tharu ethnicity in the context of Nepal. That is, my perspective in the study is etic rather than emic. Therefore, I believe that I have tried to respond to the questions: "Did you discuss whether you are a known insider in the selected research setting? If so, are you transparent about ways status or prior knowledge add potential risk for researcher bias – and how will this risk be mitigated?" (Salmons, 2022, 68). That is, the question of ethical considerations and positionality comes to be a crucial issue in this article. To avoid or minimize any possible research biasedness, I have collected data that are available online to everyone. My analysis and interpretation are based on decolonial lens. While doing so, I have tried

to be as reflexive as possible by analysing and interpreting the Tharu homestay culture honestly, without distortion or stereotype (Denzin and Lincoln, 2014). In sum, the research stands on constructivist and interpretivist paradigm, that is research finding is a construction, and a version of interpretation.

Discussion

Indigenous Tharu homestays have been the space where a multitude of identity performances take place. In this section, I am going to analyze and interpret the qualitative data from a decolonial delinking perspective. This section contains five sub-sections that strive to answer the research question: In what ways do the indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal perform decolonial rhetoric(s)?

Decolonial space: The Tharu homestays in Nepalese Media

In the past, the Tharu identity hardly got space in the news media. In the context of the Tharu homestays, Nepalese mainstream media have covered a very positive reflection on the Tharu homestays. Shangraw (2023, July 1), a Fulbright scholar documenting the impacts of the pandemic lockdown on community-level tourism in Nepal, reports a very vibrant picture of post-covid homestay culture in Nepal. The author gives interviews to the authorities from Community Homestay Network, Nepal; Homestay Federation, Nepal; Gabhar Valley homestay, Dalla homestay, Thini Village homesyay and many others. The news report shows that the Tharu homestays have played a very influential role both in the national and local economy. However, the growing competition and lack of investment are some challenges for Shangraw. Shangraw concludes that it is "the time to build a more resilient tourism industry that shares benefits at the community level. Promoting and supporting homestay tourism may provide one path forward" (2023, July 1). Therefore, even though there may be some challenges within the opportunities of homestay business, the voice of indigenous Tharu have been heard in the national as well as international media due to their involvement in homestay business. Homestay business has delinked the Tharu identity from the non-Tharu way of life and revived their indigenous voices.

Moreover, one of the mainstream national daily newspapers, *My Republica,* wrote about Meghauli Tharu homestay as one of the destinations for the domestic and international tourists: "The eight homestay facilities in the village can provide services to around 45 guests at a time, according to Somlal Mahato, chairperson of Tharu Samudayik Homestay Meghauli. In a year, 3,714 domestic tourists and 95 international tourists have arrived in the homestay facilities" (Shrestha, 2019, October 1). Thus, the Tharu homestay has made the Tharu culture travel across. Moreover, in the far Western part of Nepal, the Tharu homestays have attracted the attention of the government of Nepal. As appeared in the news, "The village of Bhada was selected as a model for a community homestay back in 2010 by the government of Nepal in an effort to promote tourism in the far western plains of Nepal. . . . Bhada [Tharu Homestay] has transformed itself into a popular homestay destination in Kailali, with 20 homestays currently in operation" (Taylor, 2023, March 17). There have been many positive narratives about the Tharu homestays in Nepal. Likewise, when we type 'News about Tharu Homestay in Nepal', the goggle search engine displays many news reports about Tharu homestays. As shown in the following screenshot, the news reports cover the Tharu people, their home stays, the locations, and some distinctive achievements.

Figure 3

A Screenshot Displaying News about Tharu Homestays
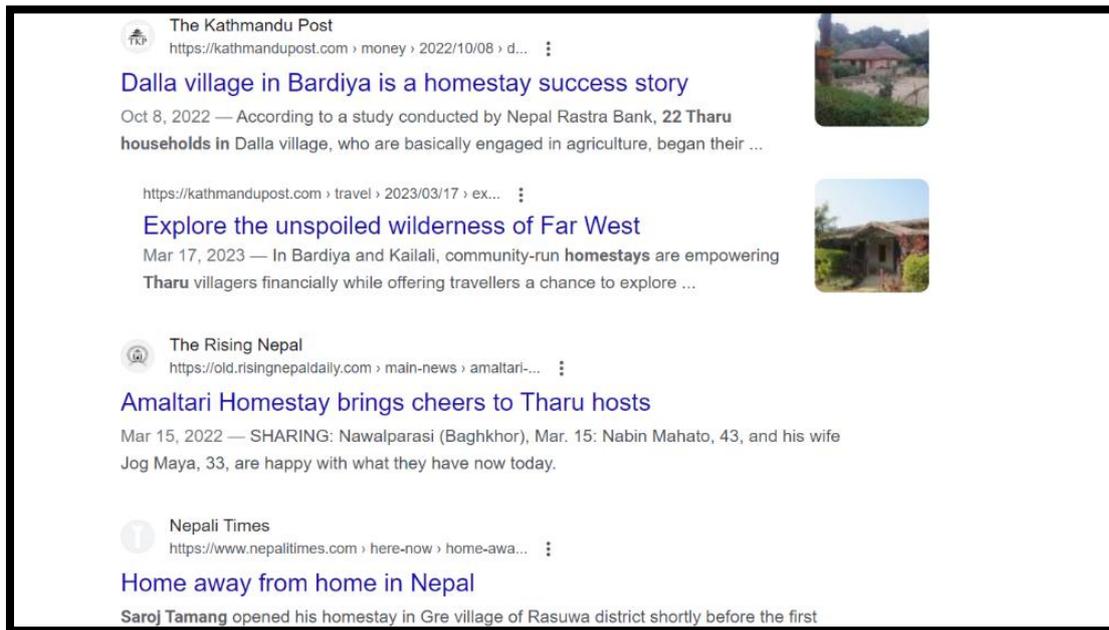
The examples of voice and news reports prove that indigenous Tharu Homestays have been taken as a part of national economy, and they have become one of the places where indigenous identity has been performed. The Tharu voices have been both heard and shown in media through homestay culture.

Decolonial mapping: The Tharu in the artography

The very first decolonial aspect of the Tharu identity articulation is that way it has occupied the digital spaces. In the past, the Tharu were displaced from their own land, and they were even the bonded laborers (Gunaratne, 2018; Giri, 2010), but the homestay tourism has brough them to the larger public as their homestays occupy the socio-digital media. For example, I start simply with google browsing. The google search engine when we click "Tharu homestays in Nepal" shows following indigenous Tharu homestays.

1. Tharu Community Home Stay,

2. Tharu Homestay,

3. Tharu Community Homestay (थारु सामुदायिक होमस्टे),

4. Tharu Community Homestay Meghauli,

5. Meghauli Tharu Homestay, Homestay No 4,

6. Tharu Homestay and Resort,

7. Homestay Tharu Khajaghar,

8. Patalganga Community Tharu Homestay,

9.   Tharu Home Stay Vada,

10.   Tharu Chulho & Homestay,

11.   Namuna Tharu homestay,

12.   Karnali Pradesh Tharu Homestay,

13.   Tharu Herbal Garden Home Stay,

14.   Tharu Home Resort,

15.   Koldada Tharu Homestay,

16.   Tharu Home Stay,

17.   Nannapur Tharu Resort.

18.   Gobrela Community Homestay,

19.   Bardiya (Tharu Culture), Piprahar Homestay Office.

What does the above list indicate? It shows that the Tharu identity has been made visible and audible on probably the most popular or used search engine, that is google. Therefore, homestays have been the decolonial spaces which have made Tharu identity reach the global audience.

At the same time, the google map, one of the most used navigators at present in the world, tracks the stations where the Tharu homestays are in Nepal. The location of the indigenous Tharu homestays have been made visible in the globe; the google map tracks the indigenous Tharu homestays as show in the figure:

The figure implies that indigenous Tharu identities have been able to claim the space on the Google map. Marginalized Tharu people and their indigenous identity has been a part of a global discourse. It basically because of their homestay business. Thus, indigenous Tharu homestays have been a part decolonization and self-determination.

The figure proves that indigenous Tharu people have been located and tracked by the google map because of their homestays. When we try to locate some other so-called 'elite' ethnicities such as the 'Brahmin and Chhetri', they have not been located and shown. Whose voice is vocal, then? Of course, the voice of the indigenous Tharu has been amplified by the homestays. Hence, the Tharu homestay business has been a decolonial activity.
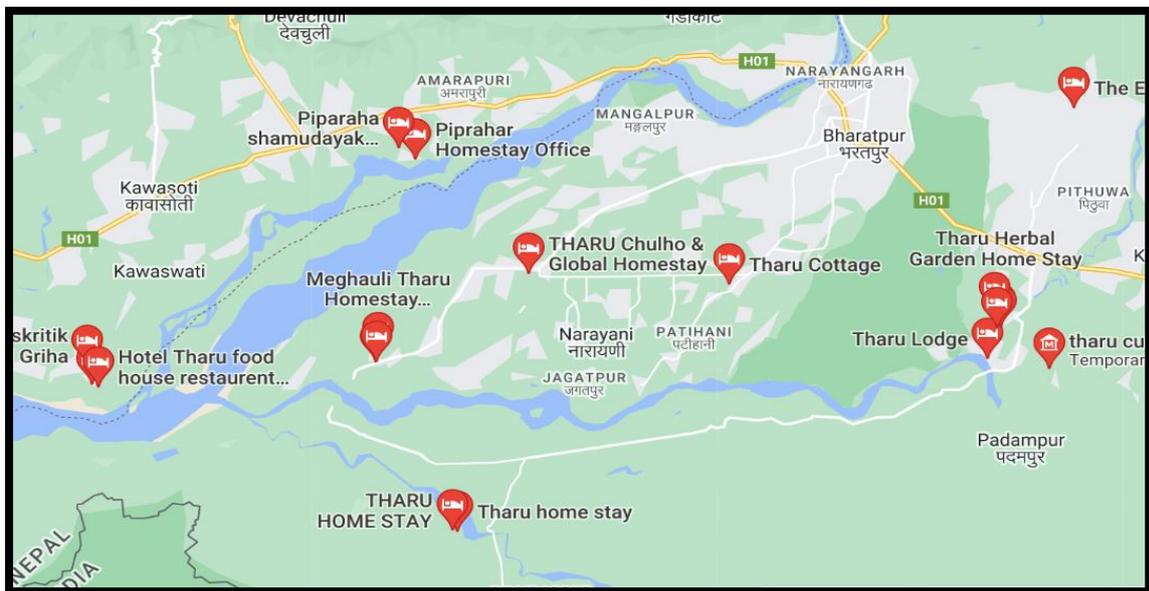
Figure 4

Tharu homestays visible on the Google map (globe

Figure 5

Tharu homestays visible on the map of Nepal (globe)

Decolonial Space: Accessibility through Internet/Websites

Figure 6

An example of the Tharu homestays in digital space

There is an abundance of opportunities for everyone to feel and experience an indigenous Tharu way of life through homestays. Most of the Tharu homestays have their own websites, and they are infused with a bunch of information a non-Tharu requires before deciding to book a homestay. One can book homestays through Airbnb, Booking.com, Hotels.com, TripAdvisor, HopNepal, HolidayNepal.com, Lastminutes.deals, Expedia.com, Priceline.com, Travel House Nepal. Before deciding to book, one can easily go through 'google review' and google star rate.

One of the examples of such socio-digital information is the Community Homestay Network (n.d). The website is one of the spaces which contains several links to explore possible way of feeling the indigenous Tharu homestay through Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. There is also an online chat option for some further inquiry. The website also indicates that it has been designed for the global audience because the price has been shown in dollars.

Tharu identity has been accessible to everyone even in the digital space such as YouTube. When we browse YouTube, we can find hundreds of video clips or records that share very positive feedback about the Tharu Homestays. The image below is one of the screenshots that share many things about the Tharu identities via Tharu homestays.

The figures (6 and 7) show that the Tharu way of living has been a part of the digital discourse. The digital platforms such as websites and YouTube have incorporated the indigenous Tharu experiences. Nevertheless, it the Tharu homestay business that has been presented and promoted through these digital spaces. In this sense, the Tharu homestays have made the Tharu experiences audible and visible across the globe; they have performed the decolonial rhetoric.

Figure 7

A screenshot of YouTube videos about Tharu homestays in Nepal
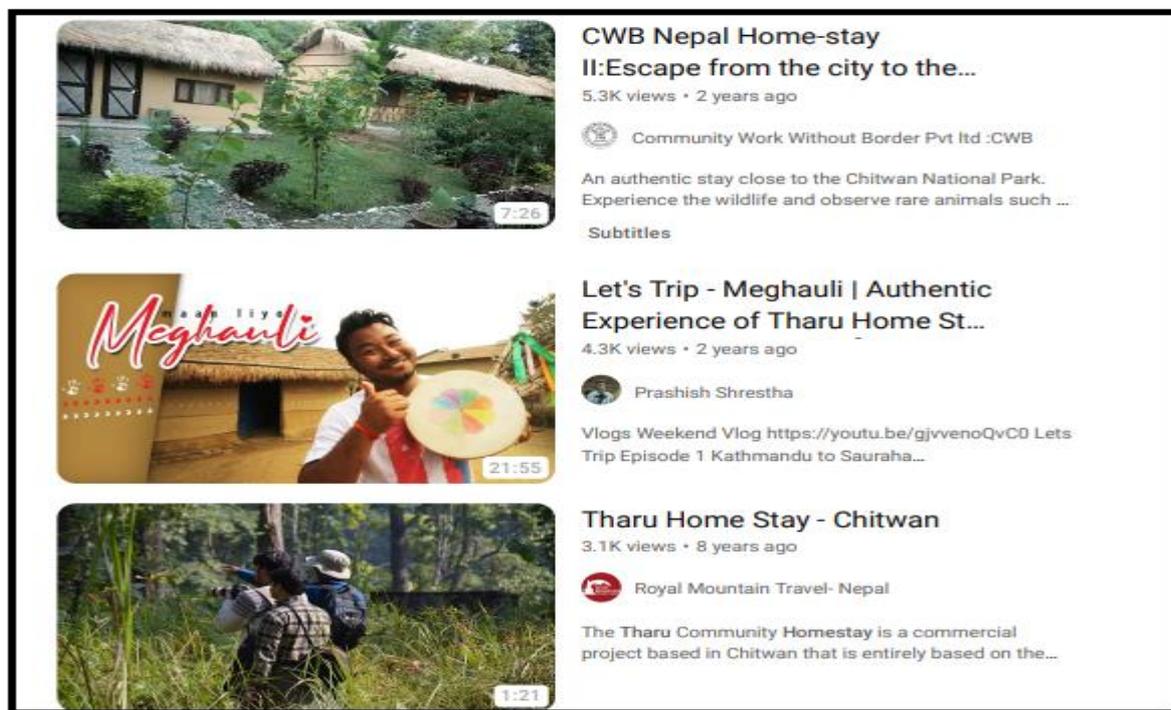
Decolonial Settings through Homestays

Tharu homestays represent the typical Tharu community settings. They have been distanced from the urban area and are close to nature. As mentioned by Nepal Tourism Board (n.d.), the Tharu usually in the middle of a forest clearing and therefore they are very familiar with forest life, fishing, agriculture, and irrigation techniques. The decolonial rhetoric in the Tharu homestays can be observed on various levels. The physical settings of the homestays are truly indigenous in the sense that they seek to recall and revive the traditional Tharu way of living. Firstly, the main attraction of the Tharu homestays is nature. For example, writes its descriptions Amaltari Tharu Village Homestay, Bagkhor, Nawalparasi as "More than 24 houses provide the homestay services facilities in their village including the safari" where the main attractions are: canoe ride, Tharu village tours, elephant safari, jungle drive, elephant breeding center, bird watching (Amaltari Tharu Village Homestay, n.d),). Likewise, some of the key attractions of Namuna Tharu Gaun Community Homestay (n.d) situated in Ghabar in Baijanath Rural Municipality - 1, Banke are hiking and wildlife viewing greenery, the Tharu food, local fruits, vegetables, and wall art. In the same manner, the homestay settingis surrounded by lush-flooded plains, woodlands. According to Tharu Homestay in Chitwan (n.d), Tharu homestays cuisine includes "aquatic animals from the rivers and other bodies of water, such as fish, crabs, snails, and mussels. They also practice eating mice that reside in paddy fields and eat rice, among other things" (Tharu Homestay, n.d.). Therefore, the Tharu homestays have been a part of both nature and culture. One of the significances of the natural setting of indigenous Tharu homestays can be understood with the fact that the Amaltari Tharu homestay has been supported by Terai Arc Land (TAL) project launched in 2001 in collaboration with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal, Department of Forest and Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) (Khatri, 2022)

Figure 8

Dalla Tharu homestay setting (Khatri, 2022, March 15)

Decolonial Tharu cultural performances and culinary aroma in homestays

"We have at least six to eight guests at our homestay and hotel in a day and we have a duty to serve them to the fullest, particularly while serving typical Tharu food and performing cultural shows" said the owner of the Amaltari Tharu homestay (Khatri, 2022,). It means indigenous Tharu food and culture have been revived in the Tharu homestays; that is, homestays have become one of the indigenous spaces for the cultural revival (Tharu, 2022). The costumes, dances, and performances have been revived and thrived in homestays. "The local Tharu dance group likes to perform for you anytime in the evening in our garden. The dance symbolizes many aspects of their life in nature" (Bardiya Homestay, n.d.). Similarly, Dalla Homestay (n.d) is popular for "Tharu dishes in the family atmosphere and cultural programs based on Tharu culture including Jhumra, Sakhiya, Lathi for entertainment". The Tharu community homestay in Sauraha, Chitwan, "The dance itself is a delightful sight, Tharu Culture is enriched with its unique set of folk songs and cultural dances. It offers the opportunity for people to express their culture and traditions in a pleasing way. (Tharu Community Homestay, n.d.). Along with cultural performances, the Tharu homestays are popular for their food. It shows that the Tharu identity has been revived and thrived through the homestay culture.

Tharu Homestays in socio-digital platforms

Tharu homestays have also found a presence in the realm of socio-digital media, allowing Tharu identities to resonate with a global audience. Numerous YouTube videos and Facebook Pages have emerged, showcasing the authentic charm of indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal. Notably, the YouTube channel "Nepali Tanguy Dai," managed by a French enthusiast named Tanguy who uploads videos related to the culinary traditions of Nepal, has garnered a substantial following of 80,000 subscribers as of September 19, 2023. Tanguy's channel features captivating videos such as "Living with THARUS (Indigenous Tribe of NEPAL)," where he shares his enthusiasm, positive encounters with Tharu people, and the exquisite flavors of Tharu cuisine. This particular video encapsulates the essence of indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal. In the video's description, Tanguy fondly expresses, "I had the privilege of immersing myself in the Tharu culture, an indigenous tribe of Nepal, and meeting remarkable individuals like Shambhu and Isha, who have left an enduring impression on my memory" (2022, August 31). Tanguy has also disseminated the same content through his Facebook and Instagram profiles. Similarly, Tharu homestays have

established a presence on Facebook, with dedicated pages for nearly all such establishments in Nepal. It is noteworthy to consider how visitors have responded to their experiences at Tharu homestays. In this context, a Facebook update from the U.S. Embassy in Nepal on November 22, 2016, stands out: "During her visit to Banke, U.S. Ambassador Teplitz enjoyed a traditional #Tharu meal at a homestay supported by USAID Nepal's Sajhedari Bikaas small-scale entrepreneurial effort." It has reached a big number of people because the U.S Embassy Nepal has 4.4 million followers. This exemplifies how Tharu identity has been portrayed and celebrated through Facebook, as illustrated in the attached screenshot of the update.

Figure 9

Tharu Dance at the Bhada homestay (Taylor, 2023, March 17)

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Figure 10

Screenshot of a Facebook update (US Embassy, Nepal. (2016, November 22)

Thus, the platforms like YouTube and Facebook have been claimed by indigenous Tharu identities by means of the homestays. That is, homestays have functioned as a space that amplify the Tharu identity markers.

In sum, the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data affirm that indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal perform decolonial rhetoric by utilizing digital and physical spaces. Through websites,

social media, and Google Maps, Tharu homestays have made the indigenous identity accessible to a global audience. The tangible and intangible aspects of Tharu identity are vocalized through the homestay settings, cultural performances, and traditional food, creating an amplified presence in both domestic and international contexts.

Conclusion

Indigenous Tharu identity in Nepal has been through a history of marginalization, exploitation, resistance, and oppression. They have been struggling for their indigenous rights for long. For the last decade, the Tharu homestays have been growing in number and they have been of attraction for both domestic and international tourists. The homestays have made the indigenous Tharu identity visible across the globe in google map due to the homestays. Likewise, most of the digital platforms—websites, news reports, official reports, trip advisors, YouTube, Facebook, etc.—have been the platforms and spaces for the Tharu experiences and stories that have been vocalized through the homestays. Similarly, the homestays have been the space where the indigenous Tharu identity markers—natural settings, cultural performances, and food—have been to their full bloom. Therefore, globalization has been a boon to the indigenous Tharu identities. Had there not been globalization, there would not have been homestays and digital platforms; and had there not been homestays and digital platforms, the indigenous Tharu identity may not have been as audible as it is today.

This study has initiated a dialogue for the future study on/with the homestay culture. Moreover, the study is a qualitative e-research which paves the way to find the possibility of exploring the rhetorically digital space. At the same time, the study applies the concept of rhetoric while studying the area of socio-economic significance, that is indigenous Tharu homestays in Nepal. Therefore, the study contributes to the discipline of rhetoric. One of the pertinent topics for future research can be the 'voice' of the Tharu people. The article also opens an avenue for future researchers to work on some versions of the loss of indigenous Tharu identity markers due to the profit motive of the homestays. There is also the possibility of doing a comparative study between or among different indigenous identities within as well as beyond Nepal.

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