



# An Epistemological Crisis in the Hilly Elite People Culminating in Persistent Hatred against Madheshis of Nepal

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**Abstract**— This research article has little to do with the text, emphasizing the discourse on the epistemological crisis [EC] studied in elite class Nepalese society. The epistemological crisis [EC] is a state devoid of logic, reasoning, and evidence. People lack when they create discourse for the manipulation of the circulation of power. This is analytical work based on the power abuse of one group over others through manipulated social discourse. The purpose of this research is to highlight how dominated groups, especially Madheshis, resist such abuse. The method employed uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) exclusively in line with the concepts of Van Dijk, Derrida, and Foucault. The discourse was analyzed to detect and analyze whatever hidden ideologies that might lie behind the use of language in different contexts and situations. The main finding is how Madheshis, a marginalized community in Nepal, are the victims of the false ideologies created by the elite class society through false public discourse against them and how they perceive those discourses and the power exercised upon them. It also highlights how the epistemological crisis [EC] fosters hate culture in the elite class against Madheshis.



**Keywords**— epistemological crisis, discourse, perception of social discourse, and power exercise

## I. INTRODUCTION

An epistemological crisis [EC] can also be called an epistemological fallacy, by which it is generally understood that knowledge one has acquired lacks any solid evidence. Tschaep & Grillo (2022) define it as *a blurring of facts and falsehoods to the degree that blatant and obvious propaganda holds sway over large segments of the population, resulting in truth decay. This phenomenon contributes to a deeply divided society where opposing groups perceive each other with increasing hostility* (p.41). In the definition above, Tschaep & Grill focus on propaganda that kills reality, smears facts, and deviates the masses to such an extent that they create a sort of permanent division in society. It prevails in each society irrespective of the level of their education-more often, the more

advanced a society is, the greater victim they are. It is detrimental in a culturally and socially divided society. Generally, people in politics misuse it. They victimize the mass through power-centric tools, such as the media, which circulate only those messages that the concerned people wish to believe. They sensitize the society, divide it, and rule over it. Mostly applied in politics-elections, campaigning, and policy formulation, it sensitizes when ideological differences divide society as unreachable poles, causing people to lose civic sense.

— In Nepalese society, the hilly elite group, the so-called hilly Brahmin, is the victim of epistemological crisis/ fallacy [EC]. The whole nation has been under their control for more than two centuries. They are accused of misusing money,

muscle, and mandate to maintain their supremacy over other communities. For this, the ruling group in that community makes false propaganda about national unity, sovereignty, and religion, which incapacitates the community members from knowing what is right and what is wrong. For example, almost all national media is under the control of a hilly elite group. When a national issue arises, almost all media circulate the same message. Let me be a bit clearer about how the epistemological crisis [EC] in the hilly elite group has sown the seed of hate culture against the minority community, especially against Madheshis in Nepal. When the minority community raises their voice for any issue, equality for example, all media relate this issue to the breakdown of national unity. This message is disseminated in a way that compels everyone to believe so. Tentatively, the whole hilly elite group tries to collectively believe one thing. When it is about other communities, they have only one voice. They do not incorporate any other voice. Almost every member of that community believes that everything, like language, culture, dress, and others, is superior. Barack Obama, the former president of the US, sensitizes this terminology in relation to the essentiality of a democratic country with people having a higher degree of civic sense. Marietta (2020) quotes Obama's speech on an online page. *If we do not have the capacity to distinguish what is true from what is false, then by definition, the marketplace of ideas does not work. And by definition, our democracy does not work. We are entering into an epistemological crisis [EC].* The idea is plain enough to understand how important it is to be aware of the epistemological crisis [EC] for a harmonious society.

### Causes of Epistemological Crisis

Epistemological Crisis [EC] is a long-rooted issue in a society where a game of power play is apparent. Where trivializing the minority and over-prizing the majority are common and where a sense of supremacy overwhelmingly dominates the elite class. This is both a misconception and a misperception developed culturally and socially. It is a state of brainlessness where members of a society acquire their social construct without modifying it. The knowledge-acquiring mechanism itself is guided by self-assumed, self-centered perspectives. They take everything for granted. They develop wrong perceptions about others. They generalize the specialized concepts and specialize the generalized concepts. In the Nepalese context, generally, this happens with elite-class people who think of

themselves as superior to others. Moreover, so-called intellectual snobbery keeps falsifying precepts and justifying itself. They make themselves superior and others inferior. They develop tools to rule over others by creating lots of false myths about others. They capture all mechanisms that control society and the psyche of the masses. They take help from the issue of religion, nationality, and sovereignty, which is interpreted as they wish, thereby keeping themselves in the center of the light. The religious reference often works as the surest weapon to manipulate the mass. The next tool that is often used is the false propaganda of nationalism. They make up false propaganda about nationality- the nascence of exploitation goes unnoticed, culminating in double marginalization of the minority communities throughout society.

An epistemological crisis [EC] occurs when a person or group encounters a fundamental challenge to their way of understanding knowledge, truth, or reality. This crisis can arise when new evidence, experiences, or arguments contradict deeply held beliefs or assumptions, leading to doubt, confusion, and the need to reassess one's understanding of the world (Kuhn, T.S. 1962). Kulm blames deeply held beliefs or assumptions for the cause of an epistemological crisis [EC], and at the same time, he suggests reassessing one's understanding. In the same way, Snyder (2017) seems to have a similar opinion to Kulm. He stresses diverse groups' self-assured opinions as the main cause of the epistemological crisis. He also blames the news and social media for such. According to Arendt (1951/1973), the cause of the epistemological crisis [EC] is the common acceptance of lies by the general public—and worse, the willing adoption of lies as Truth, which is the death knell of a free democratic society. He warns us that in a safe democratic society, there is a prevalent fallacy like such. Further, he puts forth his opinion that an important element in this epistemological crisis [EC] is a diminishing of the possibility for dialogue because this requires at least some shared epistemic principles. He also offers a solution. To address today's epistemic crisis [EC], we must insist that Truth exists and honestly strive to approximate it as best we can—even if our conceptions of Truth are held tentatively, as only current approximations of what omniscience would allow (ibid.)

To be specific, in my view, in the Nepalese context, 'cultural shift' seems to be the main cause of the epistemological crises. By cultural shift, it can be

understood as long-held worldviews challenged by societal developments. The other cause can be contradictory evidence; that is, the new information undermines what someone previously believed to be true. Hence, in this work, I have worked on the following questions:

1. How do the elite class people in Nepal get trapped by the epistemological crisis [EC] at the cost of social harmony?
2. What factors contribute to the perpetual hatred against the Madheshi community in Nepal by the elite-class hilly people? And
3. How do they respond to and react to this issue?

Here, in this context, my point of focus is how an epistemological crisis [EC] plays the role of a fueling tool to inharmonise a society, how an intellectual group gets trapped by it, and how cunning people use it as a ladder for upward mobility. The intent of my research work is to explore the baselessness of misperceptions about the Madheshi community among hilly elite-class people in the hill, culminating in social division. It also tries to shed light on the lack of willpower to come out of it.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To justify the claim forwarded by this research work, the researcher has taken some evidences of epistemological crisis from different research works that are available physically or online.

### *Elite vs Mass: A Power Politics*

Elite is a selected and small group of citizens and/or organizations that controls a large amount of power (Vergara, 2013). He gives the reference to Daloz in his writing, shedding light on social division as higher and lower strata, where most of these selected groups are constantly searching for differentiation as well as separation from the rest of society. This has been a long phenomenon. Irrespective of geography and civilization, the masses have always been controlled, suppressed, and manipulated by the minority elite. Further, he defines elites as a group possessing a marked degree of qualities of intelligence, character, capacity, or whatever kind. Having different clusters in them, like governing and non-governing, they all subdue the mass this way or that. Mosca (1939) classifies a society as a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The former contains a few numbers of people and possesses all political power and privileges, whereas the latter consists of a large number of people and is subjected to the rule of the former and provides essential instruments for political organization

(p.50). A large group from the masses is created to support the ruling class and the system (ibid.).

The elite class is often more concerned about its supremacy in society. The elite class follows various ways to protect themselves from the threats of non-elites, such as using force, capital punishment, financial ruin, exclusion from public offices, exile, and ostracism. In his other book – *The Mind and Society: A Treasure on General Sociology*, Pareto claims that the ruling class (which is often the elite one) tries to convince the masses that it is their duty to obey the government. They bring different national policies, of which the hidden motif is to justify their role and status and use of visible force (army) and invisible force (political machine) to control them. Further in this regard, Mosca (1939) claims-

The formation of the ruling classes has a close relation with the level of civilization and the type of society. The ruling class, under every condition, tries to reproduce itself, particularly by the domination of political forces like power and wealth, and the ruling class tends to become hereditary. In fact, descendants of ruling class members have a high chance of having the traits necessary to be a ruling class member (pp. 60-61).

The elites use moral and legal principles to reach the top politically. Mosca terms this strategy a political formula, by which he means both the legal and moral bases on which the power of the political class rests. He clarifies this concept, stating that the formula has a unique structure in all societies based on the special beliefs and the strongest sentiments of the current social group or at least upon the beliefs and sentiments of the particular portion of that group that holds political preeminence (pp.71, 72). Pokharel (2019) supports Mosca's conception of elites. He differentiates the elites from the masses as: .... *the elites are unified, the non-elites are diverged and powerless, the elite's interests are unified due to common backgrounds, and positions and the defining characteristic of power is institutional position.*

### **Knowledge Capital and Political Representation**

Francis Bacon's famous dictum, 'Knowledge is power' encapsulates the essential relationship between information and authority. Knowledge capital has always been the strongest tool for maintaining an existence. Rahman Khan (2012), in his article -*The Sociology of Elites* writes-*Ideas, knowledge, and ideology are seen as central to the maintenance of elite*

power (p.370 ). He further talks about the ground of the elite class that justifies them to rule the masses. Apart from knowledge capital, he claims four more resources, like politic economic, cultural, social (networks), and knowledge capital, (p. 364).

The ruling class (elites) possesses legal and scientific knowledge and constitutes the class of highest intellectual culture (Mosca, 1961). And this gives an easy way to make a big political representation. Pokharel (2016) supports Mosca's understanding of elites' inborn and acquired traits. Here, Pokharel also highlights how the elite class remains successful in maintaining their political representation in a state.

Knowledge solidifies power; hence, it turns out to be a capital. In the case of the elite class, they are adept at mis/using their knowledge capital to manipulate the masses. In this regard, Rahman Khan gives references of different researchers in his work. He writes: *...Elites use culture both to help constitute their own identities (Beckert 2003) and— through boundary-drawing (Lamont 1994)— to exclude others (p.367); elites use cultural institutions to construct themselves as a class—defined by a particular set of tastes, values, and ways of being (Beisel 1998, DiMaggio 1982).* The same concept is there with Pareto (1968), who claims that elites use force and persuasion as two modes of political rule that help them topple down the masses, and they enjoy enormous privileges in society. Harari (2016), in his book- *Homo Deus: A brief History of Tomorrow*, talks about the coordinating quality of an elite community that keeps them undivided and atop. Khan (2012) further explains how it serves their purposes:

Ties to others serve as resources. Much attention in elite sociology has been paid to ties: how connections facilitate information transfers and help either to coordinate action or to produce consistent modes of action because of shared understanding produced through common experiences, (pp.368-369).

Elites' knowledge capital is reflected in the state's policies they formulate to maintain dominance over the masses. Elite dominance, however, does not come automatically; it is not simply 'built-in' to the state. Rather, elites must continuously mobilize in order to exercise the power needed to enact the policies that best suit their interests. (Domhoff, 1990). Further, Domhoff (2006), in his other book, *Who Rules America? Power and Politics and Social Change*, argues that elites organize four different power networks in

order to influence state policy-making, namely (a) the special-interest process, (b) the policy- planning process, (c ) the candidate-selection process, and (d) the opinion-shaping process. Though Domhoff's explanation is mainly centered on how the corporate circle has captured the US, his philosophy seems applicable elsewhere.

Gramsci (1971) puts different ideas about the elite class's knowledge capital and their political representation in a state. He illuminates that cultural knowledge over force works best for the elite class. Their cultural knowledge helps them subdue the masses and compel them to adopt the values of the dominant. For him, hegemony is a process whereby the many are ruled by the few through consent insofar as their interests and values are aligned with bourgeois values. In line with Gramsci, Sartori (1969) writes that elites use ideology to manipulate the masses into particular political mobilizations. Ideology is the key tool of elites for doing mass politics.

This piece of writing is exclusively an interpretation of discourse often created against the Madheshi community, the most marginalized one in Nepal. While doing so, some approaches, such as, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Deconstruction, and New Historicism have been duly acknowledged. Moreover, the focus is on how social discourse created by the elite class of Nepali society against Madheshis manifests in their class's epistemological crisis [EC] and how they exercise power over the marginalized communities.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using discourse analysis, an interpreting approach using some literary theories, like CDA, Deconstruction, and New historicism. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the concept that the application of language is not just a medium of communication, but instead, it is a study that attempts to analyze language as social behavior to determine how power may be transferred via language used in political or social speeches (Bustan & Alakrash, 2020). The data were collected from newspapers, social media, articles, books, and some different online portals. All that data has been critically analyzed applying the critical theories, and their applicability has been evaluated in the Nepalese context.

#### Analysis and Interpretation

**The Elite, the Others, and the Value Determined by the Elite**



Change is natural. Society changes. People change. The environment changes. Attitude changes. Mentality changes. There is nothing that doesn't change. But, in the Nepalese context, the elite class (especially the hilly Brahmin) seem to remain unchanged towards Madheshi communities. Despite having about a half dozen political movements for equality, freedom, and social inclusion, Madheshis have always been excluded from the mainstream of the nation. The hilly Brahmins have always stood against Madheshis and have always tried to *other* them. Dr. Sangita Kaushal Mishra was bypassed for promotion by Dr Bikash Devkota as the Health Secretary. Dr Devkota belongs to the hilly elite class in Nepal (The Republica, 2025). This is one case out of many. Even the nation's statute, that the statute is dictated by them.

Foucault (1977) says that power is not possessed by individuals or institutions but is a relation between subjects, constantly being exercised and resisted. Foucault also emphasizes the close relationship between power and knowledge, arguing that knowledge is always produced in relation to power and can be used as a tool of domination. Parmanand Jha, the first Vice President of Nepal, was sworn in twice because he didn't use their language and their traditional dress while taking the oath. They have developed the value that their language is the nation's language, but the nation's language is not theirs; their culture is the nation's culture, and the nation's culture is not theirs. The masses do not seem to raise questions about the existing situation.

### **Dominance**

A famous quote by Oscar Wilde – “The man who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world”- is widely and often uttered in public discourse. The very scenario replicates in the Nepalese context. Kathmandu, the capital city, has not been able to be the city for all, but rather only the hilly elite class people. Generally, the scholars from the elite class elsewhere in Nepal, who preach about equality and democracy, happen to forget humanity, equality, and democracy. When we talk about mainstream politics, the scenario is even worse. When the government makes a political appointment, it ignores the mandatory inclusive spirit. In 2025, 31 out of 34 ambassadors have been appointed from a single community, though their actual representational share is about 11% only. Even the big scholars, when they create a forum or form a professional organization,

seem to misuse their power. Hardly any organization operated by the elite class exists that has inclusive representation. Van Dijk (1993) says that dominance is a kind of social exploitation of power, lawfully legal or ethically unlawful employment of authority over others in a particular interest, which frequently results in social inequality.

Further, he says that those who possess a greater degree of power and authority may readily impose unlawful effects on others who are placed in a lower position of power and influence by discourse (Van Dijk, 2006). In line with Dijk, McGregor (2003) writes that social dominance and power are regularly organized and institutionalized to facilitate greater significant control and regular mechanisms of power transmission.

The manifestation of dominance can be experienced in many ways. Everywhere, it is the power that gives birth to the sense of dominance. Those who hold power exercise it through dominance.

### **Verbal Power Exercise and Mass Hatred**

In 2016, a noted politician from a hilly elite group gave a controversial tweet about the complexion of Madheshi communities without any feeling of regret, even after being accused of fueling racism and hate culture in the country. However, he deleted his post subsequently. (The Himalayan, 2016, September 7). Evidence is huge when a highly intellectual public figure from the elite class is seen to be exercising power and developing a sense of mass hatred in society. The textbook of Grade 7 for a Public school, written by a professor, assigns vocabulary-related tasks asking to match the words with opposite meanings. The word ‘pahaadiya’ (hilly people in this context) is thought to be the opposite of ‘Madheshis’ (people from Madhesh, especially of Madheshi origin) (Nepali, 2074, p. 31). Though the portion was deleted in the new edition, it poses a million-dollar question to the elite class society.

The language is full of deep-rooted meanings and preconceptions, and the deconstruction method should be applied to understand the language and meaning. The deconstruction indeed aims to reveal the concealed and other implicit meanings, not to show the meaninglessness of the text by separating it (Balkin, 2015). It is desirable to search reality to understand the meaning of the text. According to Yegen, C., & Abukan, M. (2014), the emphasis of deconstruction is on the plurality of meaning. ‘Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’ stated Acton (1907). Whatever the above-stated statement might mean, one interpretation is

the essentiality of the checks- and-balances theory in a society. When political power is assumed by a particular group (this happens generally to an elite class), or let's say, when the elite class grabs political power through any means, they activate the conspiracy theory (Obama, 2020) to subdue the others as 'outsiders' and to maintain their single hegemony in a society or in a state. They smear the brains of their own groups in such a way that their own members fall prey to the epistemological crisis [EC]. They are incapacitated of distinguishing what is right from what is wrong. They feel privileged to make false propaganda about others.

### Elite's Construct Imposed on Madheshi

More often, Madheshis, along with other marginalized communities, are expected, asked and forced to accept the construct of the Elite class. The 'OTHER' voice for equal share in the mainstream of the nation becomes a threat to THEIR lion's share.

OTHER voices are misinterpreted and disseminated by dissecting the intent into separate entities. Everything is twisted and related back to the threat of national unity. In 1990 A.D., when Gajendra Narayan Singh, the chairman of the then Nepal Sadbhavana Party, raised his voice for 10,000 Madheshis' entrance to the Nepal Army, it was rumored that he was trying to bring about a civil war. Two reasons were put forth: (1) *Why does Nepal need 10000 more army when it has already about 30,000?* (2) *The second one is how can a country feed such a large number.* Even now, 30 years later, when Madheshi politicians and social activists raise the same voice, the same two questions arise. However, the reality is that the volume of the army has increased to about 90,000, with only nominal representation of Madheshis.

A widely recited Nepali dictum-*Tero khuta, khuta, Mero Khuta charan, Tero boli, boli, Mero boli, bachan* ( *your leg is leg, mine a foot, your voice is merely a sound, but mine is a preaching, translated into English*)- is often expected to be applied to the Madheshi community. When the elite class commits mistakes while speaking something other than Nepali, it is like 'to err is human, to forgive divine'. But when other community members commit the same while speaking Nepali, their bite is trolled and made viral. Generally, people's representatives in the parliament are the biggest victims in this regard.

The elite class's culture of taking Madheshis' day-to-day words derogatorily is witnessed to be an issue of social class. For example, *Daju* and *Bhaiya* are interlingually synonymous words, but mean

differently when used by the elite class. Yadav (2023) writes:

People being positioned as ' Bhaiya' means one becomes an object of legitimate interest who can be scolded, discriminated against, or even punished like a second-class citizen or an outsider, a Bihari or an Indian. On the other hand, being positioned as 'Daju' takes a positive connotation worthy of respect and fair treatment (p.305).

If reality and truth become indiscernible from falsehoods not only in the unobservable but in the observable, we are confronted with an epistemological crisis [EC] not unlike a person who is ill with schizophrenia, but on a mass scale. This has potentially profound effects on human relationships and on how society functions as a whole (Varbelow & Yaworsky, 2023). Yegen & Abukan (2014) write that the Darridian theory studies how the terms are put in binary poles, attaching values to one and detaching the value from others, with one privileged to be considered more true, more valuable, more important, or more universal than its opposite.

### Falsifying History by the Elite

Yadavas ( a community from a sect of Madheshis) were the first to formalize a nation, yet were treated as others, the hilly Brahmin never appearing in nation formation, yet appearing as the A+ Nepali. Different historical references, along with the history book written by Babu Ram Acharya, the greatest historian who himself belongs to the elite class, accept that the Brahmin entered Nepal in the 12th century after the Muslim invasion of India. Madheshis, especially the Gopal dynasty and Mahispal dynasty, forefathers of present-time Yadavas, established a nation and ruled for many years in the Dwapara Yuga ( the third stage of world history, according to Hindu scripture) around five thousand years ago. Sita (a Goddess in Hindu culture), Janak ( father of Sita), and Gautam Buddha ( God of Buddhists) were all from the Madhesh geography. They are national luminaries while their descendants are treated as second-class citizens.

### Derogatory Terms Gaining Status: A Reversing Scenario

Power can be 'transmitted' and confined to a certain communal sphere or range, mainly in regard to politics, the media, the rule of law, education, or commercial businesses, leading to more distinct 'institutions' of power and privileged groups that

govern those institutions (Sikka, 2012). When the oppressed group has access to political power in a society, they try to restore their social prestige through 'addressing terminologies'. For example, when 'Madheshis were addressed as 'Madheshis' in the past, they felt humiliated. The same term has gained social status now. The same is applicable to 'Dalit', the people of the lowest social strata, and others too. This happened after the 2007 Madhesh Movement. Before the movement, they often tried to hide their identity as Madheshi or Dalit with Non-Madheshi or Non-Dalit, but now they proudly claim to belong to their respective communities. When studied, there can be the issue of opportunity, power, or something like such. At the end of 2024, the CAN (Cricket Association of Nepal) conducted the NPL (Nepal Premier League), hilly people teased Madheshis at the stadium because they thought the Janakpur Bolts, the so-called Madhesh representation, was about to lose the match. The game, taking a U-turn, when the Janakpur Bolts won the final match, they (Madheshi supporters) shouted- 'Yo jeet kasko, Dhoti ko' (the victory is of Dhoti, Madheshi). Dhoti, a special cultural code of Madheshis was a humiliating term for Madheshis in the past. But now, they sing a song - 'Dhoti kurta pagri hamar pahichan chahi', meaning 'dhoti-kurta', a traditional dress that is our identity.

The political power has given them cultural awareness, too. So the suppressed group has been very much aware of the way they are addressed or referred to in different social dimensions. The issue is related to the sense of perception and the psychology of the addressees, too. A case can be an issue to be discussed. A widely played Maithili song- 'Chamara ke khataba me chhappar chhupar paniya, taahi me nahaae sundar babhane ho Ram', has a reference to 'chamaar', a community of the lowest social strata in the Hindu caste hierarchy system, and 'babhanaa', the highest in the hierarchy. Both of them are addressed with a humiliating tone, yet the Brahmin community takes it for granted, but not the Dalit. In another case, a cultural song often sung during the marriage ceremony of the Madheshi (Maithili) community - 'aklel babhanaa, baklel babhanaa, ek rati dahi laa karaiyakhekhana', Babhanaa (Brahmin of Madheshi community) does not take it otherwise, even when they are humiliated in the song.

Language is subjective; meaning is context-dependent. The real meaning of the text is unknown (Derrida, 1967). Crabtree (2021) writes about the implicit attitude of the social groups who perceive and evaluate the texts based on the social identities of

speakers.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Power is meant to dominate. Power is often controlled by the elite class, who always try to maintain their supremacy. They do not need justification. Their actions themselves are their justification. In Nepalese society, the hilly Brahmins (the elite) are the ruling class people who have been exercising their power against Madheshis, a marginalized community, for more than two decades. They seem to be the victims of the epistemological crisis [EC]. They are adept at creating false social discourse and propagating it. Through their false propagation, they sensitize society, divide it, and rule over it. When they create propaganda, when they create a social discourse against Madheshis, they lack solid evidence about their ideologies, yet they claim to be true. It is the epistemological crisis [EC] that has caused a perpetual division in Nepalese society.

The hate culture that the elite class has adopted against Madheshis is often seen to be a hindrance to social harmony. The scenario is- Nepali societies are constitutionally united but separated by heart. They have been imposing their construct upon others. The social discourse is created in such a way that they themselves are made to be privileged while others are 'othered'.

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