

	Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences			
	ISSN: 2583-2034			
	Abbreviated key title: Glob.J.Arts.Humanit.Soc.Sci			
	Frequency: Monthly			
	Published By GSAR Publishers			
Journal Homepage Link: https://gsarpublishers.com/journal-gjahss-home/				
Volume - 6	Issue - 4	April 2026	Total pages 269-276	DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19663896

Economic, Socio-Cultural Alienation and Social identity in Nepal:

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Article History

Received: 11- 04- 2026

Accepted: 18- 04- 2026

Published: 20- 04- 2026

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Abstract

This article applies of socio-cultural alienation as one of the most prominent sociological consequences resulting from Nepal. It seeks to understand how Nationally transformations particularly those related to cultural diffusion through media and technology contribute to the destabilization of individuals' and local communities. Socio-cultural systems of values and identity shaped individual socio-cultural identity., The article is grounded in a central research question: Is Nationally a major factor in the emergence and exacerbation of socio-cultural alienation? The theoretical framework of the study draws on several intellectual approaches that interpret alienation from a sociological perspective. We are going to examines the different dimensions of socio-cultural alienation including feelings of powerlessness psychological estrangement, normlessness and social isolation.

Keywords: Economic, Social Identity, Socio-Cultural Alienation, Social Alienation, Cultural Alienation,

Introduction

This research article applies sociological perspectives to understand how cultural alienation shapes social identity, how individuals negotiate cultural expectations, and how broader structural forces influence this process. By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to highlight how societies can foster a sense of belonging while navigating social change. This process can generate cultural alienation—a condition where individuals feel detached, marginalized, or emotionally distanced from their cultural roots. Such alienation not only affects personal identity but also influences how individuals interact with their communities and the broader social world. In contemporary societies, especially those experiencing dynamic social change, people may struggle to maintain a coherent social identity. Cultural alienation often emerges when traditional norms fail to align with modern expectations, leading to confusion, marginalization, and weakened social bonds. For young people, minorities, migrants, and urban populations, competing cultural demands may further complicate identity formation.

Cultural identity forms the basis of how individuals understand themselves, interact with others, and situate themselves within society. However, rapid globalization, urbanization, migration, technological expansion, and shifting value systems have contributed to a growing sense of cultural alienation where individuals feel detached, marginalized, or distanced from their own cultural roots. This condition affects personal identity, social belonging, and community cohesion.

As societies become more interconnected and culturally diverse, individuals often find themselves negotiating between inherited cultural values and emerging global influences. Rapid social transformation, globalization, migration, and technological expansion have significantly altered traditional cultural norms and social structures in many contemporary societies. These shifts have reshaped the way individuals perceive their cultural belonging, identity, and social position.

Within this context of socio-cultural alienation has emerged as one of the complex sociological phenomena that reflects the tension between traditional culture which dominates local environments



and the global cultural values and symbols imposed by globalization through digital media consumerist models and Western lifestyles that have infiltrated individuals' everyday lives especially those of the youth, This alienation is manifested in individuals' sense of detachment from the group marginalization from active social roles and a loss of identity and self-confidence leading to a symbolic estrangement from their surrounding social and cultural environment.

While previous research has explored aspects of cultural change, identity, modernization, and globalization, although change is a natural sociological process. The speed and intensity of modern transformations have intensified the challenges related to social identity formation. The direct relationship between cultural alienation and social identity remains insufficiently theorized, particularly from a sociological perspective. Many studies focus on sociocultural interpretations, but fewer examine how structural forces, power relations, cultural hierarchies, and social inequalities contribute to feelings of alienation and identity fragmentation.

In Nepal, these concerns are especially relevant due to the country's rich multicultural composition, ethnic diversity, linguistic plurality, and rapid social transition. These changes influence how people define their identity, belonging, and cultural loyalty. Yet, empirical studies linking cultural alienation to social identity in Nepal remain scarce. Policymakers, educators, and social institutions therefore lack adequate knowledge to address issues related to cultural disconnection, social cohesion, and identity conflicts. Urbanization, internal and external migration, federal restructuring, exposure to global cultures, and intergenerational value gaps have all contributed to changing cultural patterns. Secondary data helped the researcher to review relevant literature, frame the research objectives, develop the conceptual framework, and design the questionnaire. It also provided comparative insights and background information about the sociocultural context of Nepal, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Secondary data were collected from existing sources books, Journals and other related documents to provide contextual and theoretical support for the article. These sources included books, academic journals, research articles, theses, policy documents, government reports, and online resources related to cultural alienation, social identity, modernization, globalization, and migration. Kalekin-Fishman (1996) emphasized that cultural alienation emerges when modernization disrupts traditional meaning systems faster than individuals can adapt. This disjunction weakens cultural continuity and creates identity confusion, especially among younger generations navigating conflicting value systems. Schacht (2011) argued that cultural alienation is intensified in plural societies where individuals are exposed to competing cultural narratives without adequate mechanisms for integration. Such conditions produce fragmented identities and a sense of cultural displacement.

Empirical studies on cultural alienation and social identity reveal that rapid social transformation driven by modernization, globalization, migration, and digitalization has significantly

influenced individuals' sense of belonging, cultural attachment, and identity formation. Scholars across different sociocultural contexts have examined these relationships using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research approaches. Several empirical studies highlight the impact of modernization and globalization on cultural alienation. Giddens (1991), through qualitative sociological analysis, demonstrates that modernization weakens traditional social structures, leading individuals to experience identity uncertainty and cultural dislocation. Similarly, Tomlinson (1999), based on cross-cultural empirical observations, finds that global cultural flows often marginalize local traditions, producing feelings of alienation, especially among youth and marginalized communities.

In the Nepali sociocultural setting, limited but growing empirical research addresses cultural alienation. Acharya (2018), using qualitative interviews, finds that rapid urbanization and exposure to global culture have altered traditional value systems, leading to intergenerational conflict and identity tension. Similarly, Sharma (2020) reports that youth in urban Nepal increasingly experience cultural ambiguity as they struggle to balance traditional expectations with modern aspirations. Overall, empirical studies consistently indicate that cultural alienation acts as a critical mediating factor between structural social changes and social identity outcomes. However, most existing studies focus on either migration, globalization, or identity in isolation. There remains a clear research gap in integrated sociological analyses that examine cultural alienation as a mediating process influencing social identity within Nepal's rapidly changing society. The present study seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive empirical examination of cultural alienation and social identity from a sociological perspective.

Objective and Methodology

These are the main questions of this article. What specific cultural changes contribute to individuals feeling alienated? How does modernization reshape identity differently across social groups and What forms of cultural alienation are emerging in Nepal's changing society? To examine the relationship between cultural alienation and social identity from a sociological perspective. To identify the specific cultural changes that contribute to individuals experiencing cultural alienation. To examine how modernization reshapes identity differently across various social groups. To explore the emerging forms of cultural alienation within Nepal's rapidly changing sociocultural context are there main objectives. This article aims to identify the main causes of social alienation among Nepali youth under the influences of and to explore its various manifestations. In addition, it examines the relationship between certain social variables such as gender, educational level and specialization and the youth's feeling of social alienation. To achieve these objectives a social survey methodology was adopted. This article aims to provide an analytical reading of the phenomenon of social and cultural alienation within the context of transformations imposed by Nepal. Identifying the main dimensions of social and cultural alienation as manifested in the contemporary experiences of individuals and societies. Analyzing



the manifestations of social and cultural alienation and their reflections on individual and collective identity as well as patterns of belonging within the local community. Exploring the relationship between globalization and the growth of alienation feelings particularly through the imposition of Western cultural values and practices via media and digital technologies. Highlighting the groups most vulnerable to social and cultural alienation and understanding the mechanisms through which they are affected by Nepal. Contributing to enriching the sociological discourse on the impact of Nepal on the cultural and social fabric of local communities.

Results and Discussion

Alienation: Alienation precisely comes from every types of domination and this process leads to a state where social norms may be present but the individual feels unable to help him in achieving culturally defined goals. He conceptualized this state as anomaly which necessarily results in alienation. Anomie is often considered a post-industrial phenomenon (Durkheim, 1976). As observed, industrialization and urbanization of modern society have 'destroyed the normative structure of a more traditional society up rooted people from the local groups and institutions which had provided stability and security (Blauener 1964). When people feel themselves unstable and insecure, they become socially isolated. 'In social psychological terms, this variant of isolation seems to stem from the frustration of social and security needs, the need to belong to groups for social approval and social comparison' (Festinger 1954; Maslow 1954).

As the alienation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, the need for disentanglement of its varied meanings has always been craved. To fulfill this need, Seeman (1991) proposed six major variants of alienation (powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, and cultural estrangement) in order to integrate various meanings of the concept. Durkheim's concept of anomie was further refined by Merton (1976). He described anomie as 'breakdown in the social structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them' (Merton 1957). He identified five modes of individual adaptation to this ends means dilemma: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreating or withdraw, and rebellion. The ultimate resultant of innovation, ritualism, retreating, and rebellion is more likely to be the alienation. Innovation and rebellion lead to establishment of a new normative system and, consequently, to social isolation. Similarly, ritualism and retreating results in self-estrangement. In the contemporary sociological thought on the subject of alienation, there is a long list of social scientists who have made very precious contributions to various aspects of the concept, theoretically as well as empirically. For example, Miller (1967) conceived of alienation in terms of 'the lack of intrinsic pride or meaning in work'. Likewise, Blauner (1964) suggested that 'alienation exists when workers are unable to control their immediate work processes, to develop a sense of purpose and function which connects their jobs to the overall organization of production, to belong to integrated industrial

communities, and when they fail to become involved in the of work as a mode of personal self-expression'.

Structural Functionalism views society as a system composed of interrelated parts institutions, norms, and roles—that work together to maintain order and stability. Émile Durkheim (1976) emphasized that the cohesion of society depends on shared values and collective conscience. In traditional societies, mechanical solidarity binds people through shared beliefs, whereas in modern societies, organic solidarity emerges from interdependence arising from specialization. Durkheim also highlighted the concept of anomie, a condition of normlessness in which individuals feel disconnected from collective values, often leading to alienation.

Social Identity: Social Identity theory offers a framework for understanding how individuals define themselves through group memberships such as cultural, ethnic, religious, or national groups. This theory posits that identity is shaped through three interconnected processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Through categorization, individuals classify themselves and others into groups; through identification, they internalize group norms and values; and through comparison, they evaluate their group in relation to others to maintain positive self-esteem. Henri Tajfel's (1971) minimal group experiments demonstrated that even trivial group distinctions can create in-group favoritism and out-group bias, highlighting the psychological basis of cultural boundaries. John Turner (1987) expanded Social identify through Self-Categorization Theory, explaining how group membership becomes a salient component of self-concept, especially during identity threats or intergroup conflict. Social identity theory is highly relevant to cultural alienation, as individuals may experience weakened social identity when their cultural group loses recognition or prestige within broader society. For marginalized or minority groups, cultural alienation can produce identity crises, leading individuals to negotiate alternative identities such as assimilation, hybridity, or alternation. SIT thus offers a lens to understand how changing cultural hierarchies and globalization influence identity construction and feelings of belonging.

Nepali Context: Research in Nepal and South Asia indicates that urban migration, changes in educational systems, language shifts, and exposure to global media have contributed to weakening traditional cultural ties. Subedi (2014) highlights how youth increasingly navigate between traditional expectations and modern lifestyles, which often results in identity tension and cultural displacement. These dynamics are pronounced in Nepal's rapidly transforming sociocultural landscape, making the study of cultural alienation and social identity both timely and essential. powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Although originally applied to industrial societies, later scholars expanded this framework to cultural contexts, suggesting that alienation occurs when individuals lose meaningful connections to shared cultural norms and symbols. Kalekin-Fishman (1996) emphasized that cultural alienation emerges when modernization disrupts traditional meaning systems faster than



individuals can adapt. This disjunction weakens cultural continuity and creates identity confusion, especially among younger generations navigating conflicting value systems. Schacht (2011) argued that cultural alienation is intensified in plural societies where individuals are exposed to competing cultural narratives without adequate mechanisms for integration. Such conditions produce fragmented identities and a sense of cultural displacement.

Conflict Theory: Conflict Theory views society as a space of ongoing struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. It emphasizes how inequality, power, and domination shape cultural processes and identity formation. Karl Marx's ideas on historical materialism and alienation reveal how individuals may become estranged from their cultural and social worlds when dominant groups control material and ideological conditions. Although Marx primarily addressed economic alienation, these ideas can be extended to cultural contexts, especially when dominant cultural norms, values, or languages overshadow local traditions and identities. Antonio Gramsci expanded Marxist thinking through his concept of cultural hegemony, which explains how dominant classes maintain their power not only through coercion but through the cultural and ideological consent of subordinate groups. When individuals internalize dominant cultural ideals, they may experience cultural alienation and identity fragmentation. Conversely, counter-hegemonic movements arise when marginalized groups resist imposed identities and reclaim cultural autonomy. Conflict Theory helps explain how cultural alienation arises in contexts of cultural domination, globalization, and inequality. It also highlights why identity struggles occur when local cultures are subordinated to dominant representations, making it a valuable theoretical lens for analyzing cultural alienation and identity tensions in Nepal's multicultural society.

Structural Functionalism: Structural Functionalism views society as a system composed of interrelated parts institutions, norms, and roles—that work together to maintain order and stability. Émile Durkheim emphasized that the cohesion of society depends on shared values and collective conscience. In traditional societies, mechanical solidarity binds people through shared beliefs, whereas in modern societies, organic solidarity emerges from interdependence arising from specialization. Durkheim also highlighted the concept of anomie, a condition of normlessness in which individuals feel disconnected from collective values, often leading to alienation. Talcott Parsons contributed to functionalist thought by proposing the AGIL model, which identifies four essential functions of any social system: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency (pattern maintenance). Culture plays a crucial role in maintaining social patterns and transmitting norms across generations. When cultural norms weaken due to rapid modernization or social change, the pattern-maintenance function is disrupted, potentially leading to identity instability and cultural alienation. From this perspective, cultural alienation can be seen as a breakdown of shared values and social integration. As traditional cultural norms lose their centrality in modern societies, individuals may struggle to maintain stable identities, contributing to the weakening of social cohesion.

Self-Estrangement: The next variant of alienation, self-estrangement was most extensively used by Fromm (1955) in *The Sane Society*, 'By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself'. Similar was the description by Mills (1951) that 'in the normal course of her work, because her personality becomes the instrument of an alien purpose, the salesgirl becomes self-alienated. Men are estranged from one another as each secretly tries to make an instrument of the other, and in time a full circle is made. One makes an instrument of himself and is estranged from it also'. Seeman (1971) himself admits that self-estrangement is an 'elusive idea' but he goes on to operationalize the concept. 'According to Seeman, a person is self-estranged when engaged in an activity that is not rewarding in itself but is instrumental in satisfying extrinsic needs, such as the need for money and security' Kanungo(1982). Conflict Theory views society as a space of ongoing struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. It emphasizes how inequality, power, and domination shape cultural processes and identity formation. Karl Marx's (1844) ideas on historical materialism and alienation reveal how individuals may become estranged from their cultural and social worlds when dominant groups control material and ideological conditions. Although Marx primarily addressed economic alienation, these ideas can be extended to cultural contexts, especially when dominant cultural norms, values, or languages overshadow local traditions and identities.

Power and Powerlessness: It is a type of variant of alienation. This phenomenon was at first discussed by Marx in terms of 'lack of control'. Seeman (1976) developed it as 'the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks'. He asserted that powerlessness is a socio psychological phenomenon rather than an objective condition in society. Power is mysterious things comes from mysteriously. In contemporary society power is identity and mass. Every men women and society fell who are we.? This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meaning suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. Generally, it can be said that there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission (Foucault 1982).

Bourdieu (1984) introduced the concept of cultural capital, arguing that dominant groups impose their cultural preferences as legitimate. Individuals lacking such capital may feel culturally alienated and socially inferior. Foucault (1980) examined how

power operates through discourse, shaping identities and normalizing certain cultural expressions. Marginalized groups may internalize dominant narratives, leading to identity fragmentation. Fraser (2000) argued that cultural misrecognition produces social injustice, emphasizing that identity struggles are deeply connected to power inequalities. Cultural alienation thus reflects structural exclusion rather than individual failure.

Although the social conditions are important from causal standpoint in the explanation of powerlessness but 'the objective features of the situations are to be handled like any other situational aspect of behavior -- to be analyzed, measured, ignored, experimentally controlled or varied, as the research question demands' (Seeman 1976). This definition of powerlessness resembles Rotter's (1966) conception of the 'externals'. As Kanungo (1982) pointed out, Seeman (1976) recognized this resemblance as useful in creating a closer bond between the learning theory and the theory of alienation but he also indicated a problem that 'these two constructs, though intimately related, are not generally used to understand the same things' (p. 404). Although Seeman's conception of powerlessness seems applicable to all the events but he himself restricted its implication to the socio-political events only. Seeman (1976) said, 'I would limit the applicability of the concept of expectancies that have to do with the individual's sense of influence over socio-political events (control over the political system, the industrial economy, international affairs, and the like)'. Powerlessness, in other words, might be said to be a sensed inability to control events and their consequences.

Rotter distinguishes two types of people, internal and external, on the basis of their differential learning history. Early socialization experiences condition the externals to perceive themselves as pawns controlled by external forces. Internals, on the other hand, are conditioned to perceive themselves as capable of controlling their own environment. Thus, externals would very much resemble people experiencing the powerlessness variant of alienation.

George Herbert Mead (1934) emphasized that the development of the self occurs through social interaction, particularly through the "play stage" and "game stage," where individuals learn to take the role of others. His concept of the "generalized other" explains how individuals internalize societal norms and expectations. Mead argued that meaning arises from gesture-response patterns within communication processes. Herbert Blumer (1969), who coined the term "Symbolic Interactionism," further systematized Mead's ideas, proposing that individuals act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them, that meanings arise out of social interaction, and that these meanings are modified through an interpretive process.

Normlessness: This variant of alienation has its roots in the concept of anomie as conceived by Durkheim (1976) and Merton (1957). Traditionally, 'anomie denotes a situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behavior' Seeman(1976). Merton (1957) asserted that anomie is a failure of institutionally prescribed means or conduct to achieve culturally prescribed

goals. In such a situation 'the technically most effective procedure, whether culturally legitimate or not, becomes typically preferred to institutionally prescribed conduct. As this process of attenuation continues, the society becomes unstable and there develops what Durkheim called 'anomie' or normlessness' (Merton1976). Following Merton's analysis, Seeman (1976) assumed that the anomic situation may lead to low predictability in behavior (meaninglessness) as well as the belief in luck (powerlessness). The idea of normlessness has been used in both the sociological as well as psychological contexts like personal disorganization, cultural breakdown, reciprocal dis trust, and so on. Seeman (1976), while following Merton's lead, defined the anomic situation for an individual as 'one in which there is a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals. According to Seeman this version of alienation is independent of the other two (i.e., powerlessness and meaninglessness). In short, normlessness is a situation in which the individual feels the previously approved social norms no longer effective in guiding his behavior for the achievement of culturally defined or personal goals.

Social Isolation: When an individual finds that he can no longer share the normative system for the attainment of his goals due to its ineffectiveness, he may develop norms of his own to guide his behavior ('Innovation' in Merton's model). Having his own normative system, different from others, the individual feels himself separate from the society and its normative system. His dissociation from others and overall social system leads to a perception of social isolation ('rebellion' in Merton's model). This concept is more commonly used in the intellectual context 'where writers refer to the detachment of the intellectual from popular cultural standards' (Seeman 1976). According to the reward values perspective, socially isolated individuals 'assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society' (Seeman 1976). From the standpoint of social-influence theories, every individual fulfills his need to belong, to love, and to be loved by others by adhering to the group norms as a member of that group (Jones and Gerad 1967). If the group norms are too restrictive and in conflict with the individual's personal goals (i.e., need affiliation), the group loses its normative influence on the individual and, as a consequence, the individual becomes isolated from the group. Social isolation, like self-estrangement, stems from normlessness and by a cyclic process results in normlessness again.

Cultural Estrangement: This final variant of alienation is characterized by 'the individual's rejection of, or sense of removal from, dominant social values' (Seaman 1991, p. 351). The culturally estranged individual feels that his ideas and opinions about the important as well as Bourdieu (1984) introduced the concept of cultural capital, arguing that dominant groups impose their cultural preferences as legitimate. Individuals lacking such capital may feel culturally alienated and socially inferior. Foucault (1980) examined how power operates through discourse, shaping identities and normalizing certain cultural expressions. Marginalized groups may internalize dominant narratives, leading to identity fragmentation. Fraser (2000) argued that cultural

misrecognition produces social injustice, emphasizing that identity struggles are deeply connected to power inequalities. Cultural alienation thus reflects structural exclusion rather than individual failure.

The Epilogue: Although these all variants of alienation seem conceptually independent of one another but actually they are inter-related in one or the other way. According to Faunce (1981, p. 135) They may form a causal chain in which one or more types of alienation tend to produce another. The combination of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness is very likely to result in isolation: People who have little control over the factors that affect the achievement of a goal, who are unclear about what the goal should be, and who feel that whatever the goal is it cannot be achieved through approved means frequently respond by placing a low value upon achievement of that goal and are consequently alienated from a society in which it is typically highly valued.

Conclusion

This article discussion reviews theoretical development in conceptualization of alienation. The concept denotes alienation as a state of separation from the base of power and alienation from the geographical physical Nepal was appreciable behavior. The German Idealistic school of thought introduced a new dimension to the concept. Alienation was analyzed in terms of a catalyst to change in social order. Early Social Contract theorists like Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, and especially Rousseau supported this version. Hegel, much influenced by German Idealistic Philosophy in his thought, tried to put the concept as analytical tool to society. He perceived alienation as a consequence of social disruption. Marx also promoted the same view but he perceived capitalism as a prime factor to the genesis of alienation. To him non-satiation of individual's intrinsic needs may lead to estrangement from work, from the product, from the fellow workers and even from himself. In other works, individuals get alienated. Contrary to Marx, Weber perceived capitalism as a remedy to alienation. Durkheim (1976) termed normlessness as anomie. To him presence of too many norms to follow and not a single one that individual can relate to his subjective conditions can result in anomic feelings. Merton used the concept of anomie in a different perspective. To him, this condition stems from disharmony between culturally defined goals and institutionalized means to attain those goals. The phenomenon into six variants named powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, and cultural estrangement. He has incorporated various theories given by his predecessors, in order to explain his typology of alienation. There is a great need for identification of factors behind individuals' sense of alienation in order to reveal factors to under-utilization of human potential which consequently affects human development. Seeman's model may be a viable scheme of analysis for the understanding of this potentially disastrous or ennobling socio-psychological dilemma of humans called alienation.

The findings reveal that the groups most vulnerable to such alienation are those with weak cultural resilience or a loss of

collective belonging. This article mostly to analyzed both the theoretical and practical dimensions of socio-cultural alienation and to understand its implications for identity and belonging within Nepalese societies. It concludes that Nepal as a dominant cultural force has deepened the manifestations of alienation turning it into a collective phenomenon closely tied to the structural transformations of the contemporary Nepal. The study therefore emphasizes the urgent need to adopt cultural policies that strengthen identity balance openness with heritage and reconstruct cultural selfhood in the face of the accelerating pressures of Nepal.

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