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Constructing cultural integration through rhetoric in Modi's speech in Lumbini, Nepal

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This article reports how the rhetorical devices and logical argument utilized in the speech of Narendra Modi, the prime minister of India, delivered in Lumbini, addressing the 2566th birth ceremony of Lord Buddha, assisted him to establish his purpose by persuading the audience. I adopted the concept of rhetoric developed by Aristotle and the notion of argument advanced by Toulmin as a theoretical perspective to analyze his speech. The findings reported that Modi used rhetorical devices and layers of argument to establish religious and cultural relationships between Nepal and India; however, he focused on religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, and excluded the religious and cultural sentiments of people belonging to other religious and cultural backgrounds living in both countries. The finding further revealed that Modi's seemingly religious rhetoric was directed towards the political mission of promoting relations between Nepal and India by expanding cultural nationalism and establishing the supremacy of Hinduism and Buddhism. This study has greater significance because it adds new insights into the existing literature on rhetoric and communication and provides a clear direction for further analyzing the rhetorical strategy in Modi's speeches.

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Introduction

Narendra Modi, the prime minister of India, at the invitation of the prime minister of Nepal, Sher Bahadur Deuba, made an official visit to Lumbini on May 16, 2022, on the auspicious occasion of Lord Buddha's 2566th birth anniversary (India 2022). He delivered his speech as a distinguished guest, addressing the gathering of dignitaries, Buddhist scholars, monks, and ministers of the government of Nepal, focusing on Buddhism and Hinduism to establish cultural and religious relations between Nepal and India (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, N (2022); Modi 2022a). The existing scholarship reflected that he focused on improving relations with neighboring countries, including Nepal, since he was appointed prime minister of India in 2014 by concentrating on culture, connectivity, and cooperation among the countries (Gupta and Rashid Wani 2016; Yhome 2019). However, some studies reported that his attempt to establish harmonious relations with his neighboring nations, particularly Nepal, failed as he could not implement the promises, mainly related to developmental and mutual understanding in problem-solving among the neighboring countries, made in the Neighborhood First Policy (Das 2023; Lamichhane 2023). In addition, some literature revealed that Modi adopted Hindu nationalism and promoted international relations with the support of Hindu religion and culture (Huju 2022; Singh 2019). However, the existing literature almost ignores how Modi utilized rhetorical devices and logical structure in his speech in Lumbini, Nepal, to establish a cultural connection with Nepal. Rhetorical analysis of Modi's speech during his Nepal visit has always been significant in exploring the relationship between Nepal and India. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze Modi's speech delivered in Lumbini to find out the answer to the research questions, such as what message Modi delivered in his speech, what rhetorical devices and logical organization he utilized to deliver his message, and how his rhetorical devices and logical organization used in his speech helped him establish a cultural and religious relationship between Nepal and India. I analyzed Modi's speech from a rhetorical perspective, as this study was highly motivated to explore rhetorical elements and logical organization in the speech.

Literature review

Promotion of Hinduism and Buddhism. Some existing studies (Chauhan 2015; Scott 2016) reported that Buddhism has served as a powerful diplomatic tool in many ways for historical reconstruction and building strong attachments among Buddhist countries almost all over the world. Further, after exploring two thousand years of the history of Buddhism and its influences in the Himalayan region, Zhang (2022) concluded that there was high competition between India and China about utilizing Buddhist diplomacy for their national interests. Likewise, in the present context, Balakrishnan (2019) claimed that Modi utilized cultural diplomacy based on the spiritual strength of Hinduism and Buddhism to promote the national power of India in the world. In doing so, Modi multiplied a trend of high-profile international visits, including to his neighboring countries, to advance Indian cultural influence and promote India's image in a new global context (Jain 2014).

Moreover, several studies (Jaffrelot 2021; Kaul 2017; Singh 2019) reported that Modi promoted Hinduism by demarcating Hinduism and non-Hinduism, particularly separating Muslims. In addition, recent scholarships (Saleem 2023a; Yilmaz and Morieson 2023) revealed that Modi promoted Hindu nationalism in India by dividing the total population into three categories: pure Hindus, disloyal elites, and risky Muslims. Hindu nationalism indicates the idea of Hinduism, which claims that all the citizens living in India belong to a Hindu religion-based

civilization and that their national identity is related to Hinduism (Saleem 2021; Shani 2021). Therefore, Saleem (2021) reported that the promotion of Hindu nationalism increased the threat to non-Hindu religious people, more precisely to Muslims. As Modi envisions threats from the Islamic religion, he attempts to minimize such threats by erasing Islamic history through his economic policy of development (Waikar 2018). Thus, research (Das 2023) claimed that Modi's Hindu nationalism is embedded in his popular development programs, which is against the spirit of the world's largest democratic country, India.

Modi's art of communication. Moreover, focusing on Modi's communication skills during the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly via television and radio broadcasts, and adopting the discourse analysis method, Sambaraju (2022) argued that Modi had skills in the special use of language by understanding the context that assisted him in establishing mutual relations with the audience as if he was their family member, which made him successful in implementing the order of government and maintaining the crisis. However, focusing on the relationship between Modi's speech and the context, that study almost failed to explore how Modi utilized rhetorical devices and logical arguments to persuade the audience. Further, by investigating Modi's address on the radio to the nation and adopting the motivating language theory, Sharma and Dubey (2021) claimed that Modi's use of motivating language, which included meaning-making, direction-giving, and empathetic language, made him an effective leader. However, the context of language use and the theoretical perspective of language exploration remained prominent concerns. In addition, exploring the power of leaders emulating ordinary people's language, Martelli and Jaffrelot (2023) reported that Modi imitated ordinary people's language, which helped him be close to the public and become a popular leader. Likewise, Sen (2016) claimed that Modi utilized various powerful symbols and images from the Hindu religion in his public speeches and communication more often than previous prime ministers of India, which made him an effective and influential leader in India. In addition, while exploring the visual rhetoric of Modi, Price (2015) reported that Modi's age, physical appearance with gray hair and a beard, and his glasses made him a fashion icon. By investigating Modi's political rhetoric on Twitter, Martelli and Jumle (2023) argued that Modi identified himself as a democratic, multidimensional, supportive, and peace-establishing leader, which helped him win public support. However, the above studies almost remained silent about how Modi used a chain of arguments and various rhetorical devices and how such devices helped him establish his claim by persuading the audience in his public speech.

Indo-Nepal relation. Indo-Nepal relations have always remained a prominent concern to explore, as Nepal is a landlocked country covered by India from the east, south, and west. Although Nepal and India are close neighboring countries, they have faced challenges in their relations because of open borders, Nepal's excessive dependency on India for trade and transit to other countries, and Nepal's negligence of India's security risk (Upreti 2003). Focusing on Indo-Nepal relations, some studies (Anupam 2020; Bashyal 2019) reported that India's "big brother" concept, territorial conflicts on the border, and unequal diplomatic contracts have added to the challenges in their relations. On the other hand, anti-Indian sentiment has been growing in Nepal because of the border disputes between the two countries (Aryal and Pulami 2023; Tripathi 2019). Moreover, Nepal revised its map, incorporating Limpiyadhura, Kalapani, and Lipulekh Pass in Sudurpachhim Pardesh (Far-Western Province); however, it became

contested (Ethirajan 2020). Although Modi promised to strengthen relations between Nepal and India by promoting cooperation and initiating new projects of development in Nepal (Bhattarai 2014), in Nepal, it was realized the gap between the promise and delivery of Modi because of delays in the implementation of the agreements and India's interference in Nepali internal politics by blocking the border in response to the promulgation of the new constitution of Nepal (Das 2016; Muni 2017). Thus, research (Giri 2022) reported that Modi frequently visited Nepal to improve the relationship between Nepal and India. In this context, exploring Modi's speech delivered in Lumbini, Nepal, would have great significance for understanding the relationship between Nepal and India.

Furthermore, Modi made his second foreign visit to Nepal (3rd and 4th August 2014) to endorse the Neighborhood First Policy of India (Aryal and Bharti 2023). The diplomacy of the Neighborhood First Policy is committed to promoting a foreign policy of India, regional cooperation in the sectors of education and health, and promoting security cooperation among the neighbors (Muni 2017). In addition, Modi modified the Neighborhood First Policy based on his government's ideology, interests, and domestic political calculations (Ganguly 2017; Jacob 2022). He attempted to improve relationships among the neighboring countries by implementing the Neighborhood First Policy; however, some studies (Das 2023; Kaura and Rani 2020; Muni 2017; Singh 2016) reported that his diplomacy of the Neighborhood First Policy ceased to function well by showing India's complex regional relations, particularly with Nepal and Pakistan. However, Modi advocated Buddhism and Hinduism in Lumbini and used them to establish age-long harmonious religious and cultural relationships between Nepal and India.

The departure of the study. The above literature depicted various themes related to Modi, such as his skills in using ordinary people's language, his motivating language power, and his skills in utilizing various religious, cultural, and mythical references in his speeches. However, existing studies have almost failed to explore Modi's speech from a rhetorical perspective. Therefore, this study explores Modi's message in his speech, the rhetorical elements he utilized to deliver it, and how the rhetorical devices and arguments used in the speech supported him in achieving his purpose. I hope this study can add significant value to the existing literature on rhetoric and communication by depicting how the special use of rhetoric can endorse the mission of establishing religious and cultural relationships between Nepal and India.

Methods

This study is based on an interpretative research design. Modi's speech in Lumbini on the occasion of Lord Buddha's 2566th birth ceremony was purposefully selected as the primary text of this study. As I argued that Modi used special rhetorical elements and arguments to achieve his goal of maintaining a religious and cultural connection between Nepal and India, I adopted Toulmin's notion of arguments and Aristotle's rhetorical ideas as theoretical perspectives to analyze his speech. Aristotle's concept of rhetoric helped me understand how he used rhetorical devices such as logos, ethos, and pathos to persuade the audience. Toulmin's idea of argument helped me further analyze his speech, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of his arguments. Further, the English script of his speech was retrieved from his website (Modi 2022a), and the video of his speech in his original language was obtained from YouTube (Modi 2022b). The secondary data were collected from various reliable printed and online resources, such as theses, journal articles, books, and magazines. He delivered his speech for 20 min (Modi 2022b), addressing a gathering

of distinguished guests, dignitaries from different parts of the world, ministers of the government of Nepal, Buddhist monks, and scholars (Ministry of External Affairs 2022). He mostly used Hindi; however, sometimes he switched to Nepali and Sanskrit. I watched and listened to his speech repeatedly, mainly focusing on his message, rhetorical devices, and arguments utilized in his language. I recorded his rhetorical devices, such as similes, metaphors, images, and symbols, to name a few, and the components of his arguments, such as claims, data, conclusions, and so forth, in my diary. In addition, I observed in the video his dress, gestures, level of confidence, and audience response during his speech. Finally, I analyze all the collected information by adopting the overarching theoretical perspectives of rhetoric and argument, which I elaborate on in the following section.

Rhetoric and persuasion. As a theoretical framework, I utilized the concept of rhetoric developed by Aristotle since my research explored the rhetorical elements used in Modi's speech delivered in Lumbini. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the art of using language to influence and persuade others (Garver 1994). He further discussed three types of rhetoric: ethos, pathos, and logos, to effectively establish an idea by convincing the audience (Braet 1992). Moreover, Rapp (2002) argued that Aristotle's concept of rhetoric has three ways of persuading the audience: the speaker's ethos, the audience's emotional state, and the arguments used in the speech. Further, defending Plato's charges against rhetoric, Aristotle argued that rhetoric established the link between "private and public, passion and reason, individual interest and the common good" (Nichols 1987, p. 657). In addition, Hühn and Meyer (2023) claimed that Aristotle's concept of rhetoric and the idea of leadership are inseparable, as rhetoric supports establishing the connection between the leader and the public and persuades them to achieve the purpose. Likewise, Agatta (2023) concluded that Aristotelian rhetoric contributed to improving the art of public speaking by supporting the effective delivery of messages. In the modern context, rhetoric was considered an effective means for persuading and influencing the audience to achieve the desired goal as it employed a more comprehensive range of linguistic and stylistic devices, such as metaphors, similes, repetition, images, paradoxes, religious and historical references, and ironies (Andrews, 2013). Thus, the above-discussed concept of rhetoric developed by Aristotle assisted me in analyzing Modi's speech to explore the rhetorical elements he used and how such rhetorical devices supported him in establishing the religious and cultural connection between Nepal and India.

In addition, I adopted Stephen Toulmin's notion of arguments as a theoretical perspective for analyzing the logical organization of Modi's speech in Lumbini. Toulmin discussed various elements of arguments such as claim, backing, warrant, ground, qualifier, and rebuttal, and such elements of the argument need to function together appropriately to make the communication argumentative, convincing, and persuasive. Thus, Verheij (2005) claimed that Toulmin's idea of components of argument has been widely used for analyzing the basic foundation of arguments used in communication. Similarly, Toulmin et al. (1984) claimed that the notion of Toulmin on argument assisted in finding the trains of reasoning in the arguments and provided the critical process for evaluating the arguments. Thus, Toulmin's mode of argument would be valuable for modern rhetoric because it enhances the power of generating new ideas for constructing sound arguments (Karbach 1987; Trent 1968). In addition, Toulmin advanced the concept of arguments by refining and replacing "the traditional concepts of 'claim' and 'premise' with new concepts of 'claim', 'data', 'warrant', 'qualifier', 'rebuttal', and 'backing' (Racharak and

Tojo 2022, p. 1). Further, Toulmin et al. (1984) clarified that the claim has just been a hypothetical idea and has been transformed into a conclusion after receiving support from the ground, warrant, and backing. In the same way, Toulmin et al. (1984) added that ground refers to data that explicitly supports the claim, warrant indicates the general rules that implicitly support the claim, backing for the warrant makes the claim stronger by interconnecting with the chain of supporting, and qualifier indicates the degree of certainty and strength of the conclusion in the argument; however, the rebuttal shows the exceptional case of the argument, where the chain of arguments goes wrong. Therefore, I adopted Toulmin's notion of argument in analyzing Modi's speech, as it assisted me in exploring how Modi used elements of argument in his speech to persuade the audience to achieve his purpose.

Analysis and discussion. This section analyzed Modi's speech delivered in Lumbini to answer the research questions of what message Modi delivered in his speech, what rhetorical elements he utilized to deliver his message, and how his rhetorical devices and arguments supported him in achieving his purpose, with the support of the theoretical perspective discussed above.

Rhetorical analysis of Modi's speech

Modi's rhetoric of cultural integration. Establishing cultural integration between Nepal and India based on religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, served as one of the predominant themes throughout Modi's address to the 2566th birth ceremony of Lord Buddha in Lumbini, Nepal. He claimed Nepal and India have an age-long religious and cultural relationship (Modi, 2022a). In doing so, he adopted rhetorical devices such as ethos, pathos, and logos, as discussed by Aristotle Rapp (2002), and components of argument elaborated by Toulmin et al. (1984). To set the foundation for his claim, throughout his speech, he provides the ground, which refers to specific evidence and facts (Toulmin et al. 1984), to support his claim by referring to various religious and cultural connections based on Hinduism and Buddhism between Nepal and India. For instance, he said, "Whether it is in Pashupatinathji, Muktinathji, Janakpurdham, or Lumbini, Nepal gratifies me with its spiritual blessings" (Modi 2022a, p. 1). His possible reasons for sharing his spiritualism enriched by Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal depicted not only his unshakeable faith in Hinduism and Buddhism but also his special interest in setting religious and cultural connections between Nepal and India. He added that "this common heritage, common culture, common faith, and common love are our greatest assets" (Modi 2022a, p. 1). His remark showed that he seemed to expand cultural nationalism by establishing a similar religious and cultural atmosphere between Nepal and India. Consistent with the finding of Balakrishnan (2019), Modi's Lumbini speech revealed his political motive of expanding India's national power in Nepal with the support of religion and culture. At the same time, his rhetoric of religion and culture to establish the connection between Nepal and India served as the tools to carry out his political mission of improving and promoting relationships with neighboring countries, particularly with Nepal. Since he was appointed prime minister of India in 2014, he has focused on improving relations with his neighboring countries (Gupta and Rashid Wani 2016). In this regard, he added ground for his claim by unfolding cultural and religious evidence, particularly from Hinduism and Buddhism, to exhibit how Nepal and India have cultural connections and harmonious relationships. In doing so, he connected his speech with his previous speech delivered in Nepal: "In Janakpur, I had said that "Our Ram is also incomplete without Nepal." I know that today, when a grand

temple of Lord Shri Ram is being built in India, the people of Nepal are feeling equally happy" (Modi, 2022a, p. 1). Likewise, he added, "India and the people of India have looked at Nepal with this vision and faith for thousands of years" (Modi 2022a, p. 1). By exposing long-standing relationships between Nepal and India and depicting the common religious and cultural sentiments by bringing references from the epic 'The Ramayana' related to Hinduism, he not only attempted to promote mutual relations between Nepal and India but also reinforced his political motive of expanding cultural relations based on the religions Hinduism and Buddhism by stimulating the cultural and religious sentiments of the audience, particularly Hindus from Nepal and India.

Moreover, as Aristotle suggested, ethos, pathos, and logos assisted the speaker in persuading the audience to establish the claim (Braet 1992; Rapp 2002; Wisse 1989); Modi effectively adopted them to persuade and influence the audience. For instance, he said:

Nepal means the country of the world's highest mountain, Sagarmatha! Nepal means the country of many holy pilgrimages, temples, and monasteries in the world! Nepal means the country that preserves the ancient civilizational culture of the world! [...] When I come to Nepal, I have a different spiritual experience than any other political visit (Modi 2022a, p. 1).

The above excerpt of Modi's speech depicted repetitions such as "Nepal means the country..." which indicated his particular focus on Nepal by reflecting Nepal as a land of ancient civilization and spiritualism. Further, the repetitions he made in his speech have, in many respects, greater significance, as, on the one hand, they helped him to create pathos, particularly in the Nepali audience, by highlighting and glorifying Nepal, and on the other hand, such pathos supported him to establish his claim by influencing his audience, mainly from Nepal. As Aristotle claimed that rhetoric is the art of using language to persuade the audience (Garver 1994), Modi used various rhetorical devices in his speech, such as similes, metaphors, and various images, which helped him persuade and convince the audience of his purpose. For instance, he said, "The relationship between India and Nepal is as stable as a mountain and as old as a mountain. We have to give a new height to our instinctive and natural relationships as much as the Himalayas" (Modi 2022a, p. 1). As Andrews (2013) claimed, Modi's use of figures of speech, such as similes, metaphors, and images, in his speech served as a powerful rhetorical strategy. This strategy assisted him in persuading the audience by strengthening his logical argument that Nepal and India have had ancient cultural and religious connections and, therefore, needed to be maintained in the same spirit. As Sen (2016) reported, Modi utilized various powerful symbols and images from Hinduism and Buddhism to establish his claim. Apart from this, his sentence structure was average and lucid so that even a general audience related to Hinduism and Buddhism could understand it, and his frequent code-switching from Hindi to Nepali and Sanskrit helped him persuade the audience of his claim.

In addition, Modi showed his ethos by sharing his affinity with Buddhism and Hinduism. He added, "This has been the specialty of India, and therefore you also know my affinity with Sarnath near Kashi. From Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, and Kushinagar in India to Lumbini in Nepal" (Modi 2022a, p. 1). He further continued, "I also have another relationship with Lord Buddha, which is also a wonderful coincidence and which is also very pleasant. The place where I was born, Vadnagar in Gujarat, was a great center of Buddhist learning centuries ago" (Modi 2022a, p. 1). Moreover, he shared his experiences of visiting divine places related to Buddhism. For instance, he said, "In the past as well, on the day of Vaishakh Purnima, I have been getting the opportunities to

visit the divine places associated with Lord Buddha for events associated with him. And today, I have had the privilege of visiting Lumbini, the holy birthplace of Lord Buddha, in Nepal” (Modi 2022a, p. 1). Ethos, as a mode of persuasion to the audience in Aristotelian rhetoric, refers to the reputation and authority of the speaker, which make speech believable (Halloran 1982). Thus, Modi’s frequent opportunities and experience of visiting places related to Hinduism and Buddhism and the information that he has had about them depicted his ethos in the speech and helped him to promote the reliability and credibility of his narrative.

Furthermore, by setting proper grounds, as discussed above, Modi further strengthened his argument to establish his claim. As Toulmin et al. (1984) suggested, warrants in the arguments linked the ground to the claim and strengthened the argument. In the same way, Modi’s ground for his claim was warranted by the religious and cultural sentiments of the audience, which strengthened his claim by connecting the ground with it. The above warrant of Modi’s arguments was backed by the assumption that harmonious relationships between and among the countries have been considered far better than confronting and having aggressive relations, and such relations among the countries, in many respects, helped to minimize the various kinds of problems faced by those countries. Therefore, as Toulmin et al. (1984) suggested, Modi concluded by providing adequate evidence, warrants, and backing for his claim. Although he did not draw his conclusion by using specific qualifiers such as “definitely,” “certainly,” “probably,” etcetera, as discussed by Toulmin et al. (1984), his beginning of concluding sentences like “I am satisfied...” and “I am confident...” singled out the reliability of his conclusion and his level of confidence in drawing conclusions from the ground, warrant, and backing, as discussed above.

Further, the conclusion of Modi’s argument has been drawn, assuming that most of the people living in Nepal and India are Hindus and Buddhists, and they are aware of and devoted to promoting and expanding their religious and cultural values. In this case, people’s reduction of faith in religious and cultural values functioned as a rebuttal to his arguments. As these conditions were not met, his claims and arguments proved wrong. However, as Karbach (1987) discussed, Modi seemed to have been careful in drawing his conclusion, which assisted him in persuading his audience.

Modi’s rhetoric of exclusion. Although Modi adopted various rhetorical devices and components of argument as discussed above to establish cultural integration based on the religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, between Nepal and India, it posed serious challenges as it seemed exclusive as it ignored the spirit of the multi-cultural and multi-religious ground realities of India and Nepal. For example, he said:

The ever-strengthening friendship between India and Nepal and our closeness will serve the benefit of humanity. And in this, the faith of both our countries towards Lord Buddha, the boundless reverence for him, unites us in one thread and makes us members of a family (Modi 2022a, p. 1).

Modi’s rhetoric of narrative revealed that he adopted the religions Hinduism and Buddhism and culture based on them to strengthen the mutual relationship between Nepal and India; however, his attempt lacked an inclusive vision by ignoring other religious and cultural communities from both countries. Moreover, Modi’s rhetoric of exclusion has become much clearer from his further remarks, as he said, “From Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, and Kushinagar in India to Lumbini in Nepal, these holy places symbolize our shared heritage and shared values” (Modi 2022a, p.

1). Modi’s remarks revealed that he attempted to promote a common religion and culture in Nepal and India based on Hinduism and Buddhism. He further showed his desire that “this common heritage, common culture, common faith, and common love are our greatest assets. And, the richer these assets are, the more effectively together we can bring the message of Lord Buddha to the world and give direction to the world” (Modi, 2022a, p. 1). Modi’s above remarks reflected the purpose of his speech, as he wanted to establish a common culture not only in Nepal and India but also all over the world with the vision of providing a new direction to the world. He again added, “Today, we have to work for the whole of humanity. With this spirit, we have to strengthen the spirit of friendship in the world. I am confident that India-Nepal friendship will continue to work together to fulfill this humanitarian resolve” (Modi 2022a, p. 1). His rhetoric of promoting common culture and religion, mainly based on Hinduism and Buddhism, to resolve the problems related to humanity worldwide reflected how Modi aimed to establish the supremacy of Hinduism and Buddhism by excluding other cultures and religions. As Yilmaz and Morieson (2023) discussed, Modi’s Lumbini speech attempted to establish the superiority of a civilization based on Hinduism and Buddhism worldwide. In the same spirit, the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India’s press release shared, “Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Lumbini also emphasizes the deep and rich civilizational connection between India and Nepal and the contribution of people on both sides to foster and promote it” (Ministry of External Affairs 2022, p. 1). The above press release revealed the underlying purpose of Modi’s Lumbini address. In addition, similar practices have almost been done in the world, for example, in Pakistan (Yilmaz et al. 2023), Israel (Saleem 2023b), Sri Lanka (Gamage 2023), Poland, France, and the USA (Morison 2023), to promote and expand their civilizations based on their religions in the world. Therefore, his rhetorical strategies of promoting Hinduism and Buddhism excluded the other religious and cultural people’s sentiments living in both countries by exposing as if Nepal and India are only Hindu and Buddhist countries. As Yilmaz and Morieson (2023) reported, Modi attempted to establish the superiority of Hinduism and Buddhism by separating them from other religions in Nepal and India.

Moreover, Modi focused on reshaping and updating the relationship between Nepal and India with the vision of expanding and protecting culture by assisting in developmental sectors in Nepal. For instance, he said:

The relationships that we have had for thousands of years, from food, music, festivals, and customs to family ties, now also have to be linked to new areas like science, technology, and infrastructure. I am satisfied that India is working shoulder-to-shoulder with Nepal in this direction (Modi 2022a, p. 1).

Modi’s rhetorical move from religion to the existing world of science, technology, and development indicated that the relationship between Nepal and India needed to transform based on the changing contexts. However, his desire to promote Indo-Nepal relations by sharing and providing developmental aids in infrastructure, science, and technology directed toward protecting a long-standing single culture based on Hinduism and Buddhism and spreading this between Nepal and India has become his rhetoric of exclusion. To some extent, as studies (Das 2023; Sud 2022) reported, Modi seemed to expand and promote Hinduism with the support of economic assistance and development work. Further, Modi added, “I see many more great possibilities for expanding our mutual cooperation in this area. Together, we will realize these possibilities and the dreams of India and Nepal. Our able youth will grow to the pinnacle of success and become

messengers of Buddha's teachings all over the world" (Modi, 2022a, p. 1). Modi's rhetoric of narrative makes much clearer his possible reason for focusing on mutual collaboration on developmental work and his aspiration of spreading a single civilization and religion all over the world, which proved Modi's civilizational mission in Nepal as stated in the Ministry of External Affairs (2022). Moreover, as Modi is the prime minister of India, his rhetoric has become a microcosm of India's strategy of utilizing religion and culture as tools for promoting relations with neighboring countries, particularly Nepal; however, as some studies (Anupam 2020; Aryal and Pulami 2023; Tripathi 2019) reported, Indo-Nepal relations have faced challenges because of territorial conflict, India's big brother concept, and unequal diplomatic contracts yet.

Conclusion remarks

The overall discussion has identified that Modi utilized rhetorical devices and logical arguments in the narrative of his speech to establish religious and cultural connections between Nepal and India, through which he aimed to achieve his political mission of promoting relations between Nepal and India; however, by promoting Hinduism and Buddhism, his rhetoric excluded other religions and cultures prevailing in both countries. Further, this study introduced a significant discussion on Modi's rhetoric of political communication by depicting his political motives behind promoting cultural and religious relations between Nepal and India, which required insightful scholarly concerns on his rhetoric of political communication to grasp his further hidden political agenda. In addition, this study indicated that Modi's political communication, adopting appropriate rhetorical devices and arguments, seemed persuasive; however, this study also revealed that his rhetoric of political communication might equally mislead the audience to fulfill his underlying political mission. Moreover, this study found that Modi's rhetoric of political communication seemed powerful in utilizing economic ads in Nepal to promote cultures and religions, which demanded insightful scholarly concerns about the underlying mission and purpose behind India's economic assistance for developmental work in Nepal. I hope future scholarship on Modi's speech could clarify how the art of deploying rhetorical devices and arguments reinforces promoting and expanding religious and cultural supremacy. Nevertheless, this study can add substantial value to the existing studies on rhetoric and communication by depicting how the special use of rhetoric in political communication can endorse the mission of establishing religious and cultural relationships between Nepal and India and providing a clear direction for further analyzing the rhetorical strategies in Modi's speeches.

Data availability

All data generated and analyzed during this study are retrieved from website and YouTube, which are listed in the references.

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The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not required as the study did not involve human participants.

Informed consent

Informed consent was not required for this study, as it did not involve human participants and utilized publicly available materials for all users.

Additional information

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