

Abstract

Author - Shubham Sapkota

Title - Seeing the Unseen: Bridging Realities of Experience through Dependent Origination

Advisor – Dr. Benjamin Nourse

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Overall, this project looks into the problem and history of colonialism, the impact of it on the people and knowledge coming from South Asia, and offers an alternate view to understand our world. The notion of seeing the unseen acknowledges that there are facets of our day-to-day reality that we are often unaware of when thinking about our communities and ourselves. Yet, being able to fully acknowledge and understand the seen and unseen aspects of our community is necessary if we are to work towards improving our communities for the long run. By relying on the Buddhist teaching and discourse of dependent origination, also known as teaching of emptiness as it evolved in the Mahayana tradition, I intend to frame this wisdom as a research method and an approach that we should be actively using when teaching in the academic sphere, and when working with our communities for civic engagement. Though this teaching is relevant and found in myriad of forms throughout South Asia, in forms of interdependence with God and nature in Hindu communities, and especially in communities that practice and live by Buddhist values, I hope to advocate for it in the realms of academics and public policy. I hope to advocate for it because the colonial impact in South Asia undermines such knowledge, and I believe that this wisdom is valuable when thinking about our contemporary communal and planetary challenges. This teaching gives us an alternate lens at looking at our community and ourselves. It also moves away from the hegemonic knowledge systems based upon our shared colonial history, which continues to impact communities worldwide. Through this, I apply the approach that I am advocating for in field research in my home country of Nepal. The field research explores the seen and unseen

aspects of the district of Mustang, with implications on how these facets manifest into the lived experiences of those living there.

When talking about seen, I simply mean aspects of our lived experiences that are visibly seen, while unseen means facets of our lived experiences that are not usually visible to our naked eyes. Here, the seen aspects pertain to dynamics of the communities that are physical, material, and reflect our natural surroundings as well. The seen aspects relate my dissertation to the teaching of the first aggregate within Buddhism, which is form or physicality. The unseen aspects here pertain to spiritual and mental dynamics of the community, that relate to the teaching of the later four aggregates of Buddhism, which is sensations/feelings, perceptions, mental volitions, and consciousness. I try to engage with the teachings of the aggregates to build up my own argument about how we can better understand our communities and challenges if we understand them through the seen and unseen aspects of our communities.