

THE SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY (MHS)

THESIS TOPIC:

**CULTURAL CONCEPTION AND SILENT ACCEPTANCE OF
STEREOTYPES: A CRITICAL STUDY ON NEPALESE WOMEN'S
SITUATION**

THESIS FOR

MASTER OF GLOBAL STUDIES

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MAY 2013

DEDICATION

For My Husband Binaya, for everything

ABSTRACT

This study provides an insight on the real situation of Nepalese women. It aims to examine how women's freedom and empowerment are restricted due to embedded patriarchal values. Prevailing culture and religious ethos are highlighted as crucial factor that impact gender equality in Nepal.

Nepalese women face cultural, religious and political constrains. These factors keep women in the position of inferiority. They don't have equal access to property, education and social mobility. As a result, women are suppressed by males since long ago. Additionally, women in Nepal are victims of several gender based violence like sexual abuse, trafficking, polygamy, child marriage and abandonment.

This research concludes that women must be provided equal access to education, health and employment in order to privilege them. Likewise, discriminatory cultural and religious practices must be abandoned along with the reforms in existing unfair policies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor Milfrid Tonheim whose encouragement, guidance and support from the initial to final level enabled me to give this work a complete form. I am heartily thankful to all my lecturers in the MA program of Global Studies at Misjonshøgskolen, Stavanger, who provided me with enriching insight throughout my studies. Many thanks to Rune Skagestad, Sissel Gjøvikli and Inger Brit Tunglund Haugen for their co-operation and support since the very beginning of my day at MHS and also in Norway.

I am grateful to all the respondents and members of Nepalese society in Stavanger who actively participated in this study. Without their collaboration, openness and intense interest, this research wouldn't have been so reproductive.

I am ever obliged to my parents who have supported and encouraged me wholeheartedly at every step of my life.

Last but not the least, I offer my regards and blessing to all of those who supported me in any respect during the course of this research

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May, 2013.

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ACRONYMS

CA: Constituent Assembly

CBS: Central Bureau of Statistics

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CEFA: Centre for Education for All

HDR: Human Development Report

HERAF: Health Right Advocacy Forum

INGOs: International Non-Governmental Organization

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNIFEM: The United Nations Development Fund for Women

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

WHO: World Health Organization

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

My concern for gender biasness in Nepalese patriarchal society was stimulated by my own experience of being born as a female child. The traditional and culturally created roles have confined my freedom as thousands of other females. Since the early childhood, females are taught to be submissive and obedient. I became slowly aware of the socio-economic relation, cultural practices, power dynamics, and religious predicaments and so on after I became independent adult. My interest in this area was more intensified after I came to Norway as an international student at MHS because I see equality for women in Norwegian societies.

To explain the situation of Nepalese women is difficult and problematic because many factors like geographical situation, economic condition, culture, caste variations, and religions and so on influence and determine the role and position of Nepalese women. One can easily distinguish the hierarchy between male and female in patriarchal society of Nepal. Patriarchal values of domination and subordination confine the roles and freedom of a woman in Nepali society. Women hardly get liberty of choice in the work or in their personal life. The situation of women in poor families of rural area, moreover, appears to be different and harder than the women of urban areas.

1.2 Research Questions

Patriarchal societies in Nepal has relegated women to the lowest rank and to submissive role, confined to home and farm. They are often discouraged and prevented from taking part in public life actively. “Women in our societies are taught to be what they ‘ought to be’ rather than to develop their own unique selves. Consequently, they lose their spontaneity and even their identity” (Subedi, 1993:5). As I see it, the main obstacle that continues to hinder women’s reorganization and empowerment is culture and religion that share narrow concepts regarding women. This research is aimed to address the following questions:

- ❖ How and to what extent do culture and religion impact on gender equality in Nepal?

- ❖ What stereotypical representations of women are created by the Nepalese society?

This thesis will address two determinants of women's inequality in Nepalese society, mainly culture and religion and how these two aspects of the Nepalese society impact on women's current situation with regards to gender equality and non-discrimination. It, moreover, looks at whether or not Nepalese women view any improvements and if so, what have caused such developments.

1.3 Background of Nepal

Nepal is an underdeveloped landlocked nation of enormous cultural and ethnic diversity. It is bordered by People's Republic China in the northern part, and rest by India. It is located between latitudes $26^{\circ} 22'$ and $30^{\circ} 27'$ N and longitude $84^{\circ} 4'$ E to $88^{\circ} 12'$ E. Nepal is divided into three diverse ecological zones: the terai (plain), the hills and the mountains (Regmi, 1999). Mountains and hills accounts for about 83% and terai accounts for 17% flat land (ibid). It is the land of eternal beauty. Nepal characterizes diversities in climate and topography from plain areas to hilly areas and ends in mountainous region with lots of natural resources and biodiversity. Nepal comprises only 0.1% of land mass on the global scale but possesses a disproportionately rich diversity of flora and fauna. It is in 25th and 11th position of biodiversity in world and Asia respectively; and it is 2nd world largest in water resources (Sherpa, 2005).

There is a great variation in cultures, castes, and language, religion and belief systems too. 2001 census identified 102 caste and ethnic groups, 92 languages and dialects (Sherpa 2005). The government of Nepal legally recognized 59 indigenous nationalities (Adivasi-Janajati) consisting of 39.9% of total population basic on district language, customs, culture, religion, knowledge, ancient territory and so on (Roy and Henriksen, 2010)¹.

1.3.1 Nepalese society

In Nepal, socio-cultural norms dictate the social behavior towards women. Gender based discrimination is widespread which limits women's access to resources, mobility, educational opportunities and overall cultural status. Despite the increasing policy and attention given to women's empowerment in Nepal, the situation of women's in patriarchy societies of Nepal

¹ See:http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---normes/documents/publication/wcms_123847.pdf

haven't been improved notably. Through an exploration of the theoretical concepts of gender and women's empowerment along with the prior concern on women's experiences and their perspectives, I aim to contribute with knowledge about Nepalese women in different ways. Firstly, this research will explore the Nepalese women's situation with regards to gender equality. Secondly, the priorities, concerns and responses of Nepalese women from different contexts will be analyzed under several detrimental factors like religion, educational attainment and culture.

In poor developing countries like Nepal, females often suffer from gender-based violence and discrimination. Religion and patriarchy restricts the opportunities and freedom of women. Gender based violence is a crucial issue in Nepal where thousands of women are yearly victims of domestic violence like rape, abuse, exclusion and physical harassment. Gender based violence is worse in rural areas where 81% of women experience recurring domestic violence (Fernández, 2011). Political instability, a decade long civil war and extreme poverty have overshadowed such shameful issues in Nepal (Yami, 2007). Gender based discriminatory practices such as early marriage, dowry, seclusion, limited mobility, inequitable access to economic resources and educations limited Nepalese women for their equal rights. Society segregates girls in a negative way; girls are apt to be teased, harassed and victimized (Subedi, 1997). Society confronts women roles and identities in opposition to males. Many stereotypical identities are created about women in Nepalese societies. Women are often generalized as satanic, unintelligent, weak, materialistic and distrustful (ibid). By creating such fictions imageries, males impose rule and control over women at home and in society.

Though the constitution of Nepal has secured equal rights to males and females, it's not implemented strictly in all levels. The world Conference on women in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action and agenda for women empowerment and formulated National Plan of Action (HMG/ MWCSW, 1999) to implement all twelve commitments including- women's poverty, increasing access of girls to education and health resources, affirmative action and support programs to bring women in decision making level and so on (Subedi, 2010). However, the situations of Nepalese women have not undergone significant progress. The existing patriarchal society continues to pose barriers for women to be empowered.

A woman in Nepalese society is under male's control and domination since birth. First by father, second by husband and third by sons at the old age (ibid).

1.3.2 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which male dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990). Patriarchy is based on power relation which creates hierarchy between male and female and where male control over women's sexuality, production and reproduction. Acker (2006) writes that "patriarchy is structural relation between women and men roots in male dominance which is found primarily in family" (p.22). In Nepal, patriarchy within a particular caste differs in terms of their religious and regional variations. Nepalese women experience extreme forms of discrimination throughout their whole life. The international Nepalese youth Forum (2008) said that Patriarchy is ingrained in the minds of many people in Nepal, with a male-dominated society that manifests in the form of gender inequality, discrimination and violence against women. The legal system in Nepal is based on patriarchy with an inheritance system that does not give women and ethnic and minority groups access to resources. They are always marginalized and denied from basic human rights. The new constituent assembly can pave the way for equal rights between man and woman in Nepal; however, it won't be an easy way that challenges patriarchal structures and its treatments of the poor, ethnic and minority groups. Bhumika Ghimire, a freelance reporter and writer on Nepali issues, says "The constituent Assembly" has a sizeable number of women representatives from across the country. I believe that this diversity and representation will help formulate a more inclusive, open and progressive constitution and lay ground work for better laws regarding women and their rights². In Nepal many women are suffering from domestic violence. In the absence of laws against the domestic violence, the perpetrators face little or no punishment, patriarchy defines men as having the right to control over women.

² From an Interview with Bhumika Ghimire, a freelance reporter and writer on Nepali issues in West Lafayette, Indiann, who has writer for nepalnews.com, American Chronicle, Journal and courier, ACM Ubiquity, Suite101, OhMyNews.com and New front Weekly.

1.3.3 Gender Discrimination

The underdeveloped country like Nepal stands for transformation in different sector through gender equality. Compare to past, last few decades, the empowerment of women is slowly changing. There are many factors in society which influences gender roles like religion, culture, education, tradition and beliefs and so on. Prativa Subedi (2010) includes Hombergh ideas that “Along with factors such as caste, age, race and ethnicity, gender is a fundamental concept in understanding human behavior and the social process.”(p.3). In Nepal, attitudes towards women are based on traditional beliefs which have remained the same over long periods of time. Gender stereotypes interprets that men must be the head of family and women are responsible for household work. In Nepal, it is hard to identify a woman who has not experienced any forms of discrimination; women are restricted from public lives, economic sector, political participations and decision making. Currently, the process of socialization and the education system does not teach people to analyze the world around them. Nepali women easily and blindly accept the discrimination since they do not understand that these practices can be changed. In the same way men also accept the situation that they have been born into their roles as the dominant sex. So, both men and women need to understand that the things are changing day by day and it can benefit both genders.

1.3.4 Women’s status in Nepal

It is said that “male and female are two wheels of a cart” (Subedi, 1997). But it is only limited in slogan. The nation is made up societies and societies are made up male and female. If society is not getting rid from violence and discrimination, we can not even imagine ideal prosperous nation. Female are still not allowed to go alone outside from home. Nepali culture advocates that females are born only to serve males (Subedi, 1997). According to Nepali culture and societies, it is not good (symbol) to speak with female in public places. Widows are behaved as unusual citizens, if someone’s husband died, they have to change their dress and live in a very different way. If the wife died then man can easily remarry. But if the widow marries a second man then she will face many problems like exclusion from family, social exclusion, mocked, hatred and so on in Nepali societies. In Nepal, still there are not equal wages between man and woman even their work nature is same. There are many forms of violence and discrimination of women:

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Psychological violence
- Economical violence

Socio-cultural status between man and woman are very different in Nepalese societies. Patriarchy persists and dominance of Hindu religion and culture has treated women as a second class citizen (Subedi, 2010). Hindu scripture also suggest that fathers, husbands and even sons should control over women. All the women’s natural expressiveness is suppressed by rules and social norms. Prativa Subedi (1997) includes popular Nepali poet Bhanu Bhakta’s “Instructions to a daughter-in-law”.

“Women should not laugh, only whores do so.

And the housework will never get done” (p 5).

The situation for women is characterized by low level of access to education, healthcare and economic, social and political opportunities. Nowadays, despite increasing efforts from government, non-government organization’ and international development agencies in Nepal there has been little improvement in the socio-economic status of women at the grass roots level. To judge how much a family, society and country is capable, education can play a vital role. Men and women are regarded as two sides of the same coin should equally educated and participate for the development of society. Due to the lack of education, superstition and lack of awareness has been deeply rooted in Nepali society. If a woman is educated in family, whole family could take benefit from her. Because of the lack of education women cannot afford themselves and need to depend on men for survival.

Male and female literacy percentage of different censuses (2009-2068 B.S)

Year	Male	Female	Total
2008	59.5	0.7	39.3
2018	66.3	42.8	58.9
2068	73.6	49.9	74.6

Source: Population census, 2068 B.S. CBS

Nepal's whole male- female's education status informed only after 2009 B.S. Empirical data from above table shows the substantial progress in women literacy rate in recent years. However, the educational attainment varied from one ethnic group to another. Not only in educational participation, Nepalese women are lagging behind in health, income generation, self-confidence and access to policymaking and human rights.

1.4 Scope and limitation of the Research

The purpose of this research is not to portray Nepalese women as helpless and victim of patriarchy society but to portray the realities in which the majority of Nepalese women find themselves. Therefore, the prime focus of this study is to emphasize and highlight the socio-cultural norms created by culture and religion which generate stereotypical representation of females such as submissive, weak and of lower rank. In this thesis, Nepalese women's situation will be reflected and understood through their own perspectives, experiences and concerns. This thesis will focus on the experiences and perspectives of Nepalese women who have suffered and revolt against dominating cultural and religious dogmas.

The existing culture and Hindu religious ethos will be critically examined to depict the real situation of Nepalese women. Though, some of the women in urban areas have succeeded in life and have blurred the gender based discrimination but it is very less. This study is fully dedicated to women who are victims of gender violence and discrimination. Therefore, it may ignore the realities about rich and educated women of urban areas.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduced the thesis and presents some of the major issues it addresses. Beside these, this chapter also includes the brief

introduction on key terms like patriarchy, gender, stereotypes and women status in Nepal. Chapter two presents the research design and methodology of the study. It includes every detail on the procedure and method of data collection along with the research site. Similarly, chapter three explores the theoretical concepts relevant to this thesis. Mainly, theoretical tools like gender and power, culture, women's empowerment are discussed. Chapter four presents analysis of data collected through fieldwork in Stavanger and Oslo of Norway. Personal experiences of interviewees along with their opinions and narrations have been presented to illuminate the Nepalese women's realities and condition in this chapter. Chapter five includes the analysis of findings. Finally chapter six summaries the main conclusion of the thesis and highlights its implications.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

“A methodology involves presenting rules of procedure about matters such as collection of data and their analysis” (Clive, 2012:13). This section of my research includes brief description about the selection of research site and informants, method of data collection, data analyzing procedures and theoretical aspects of research ethics. There is no hard core rule for qualitative research process. Therefore, a researcher must move backwards and forwards between different sequences in order to answer his or her research problem.

2.2 The Research Design

According to Bryman, “Research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data” (2008:31). It helps to develop conceptual structure which is relevant to the research issues. Research design also acts as guidelines for the researcher for the data collection and data analysis. It is therefore a conceptual structure on the basis of which the entire research is conducted.

The main motif of this research is to analyze the situation of Nepalese women by exploring the situation of Nepalese women. To answer the research questions, I have employed primary and secondary data. Qualitative research method has been used as a fundamental tool for primary data collection because it is appropriate for explorative and descriptive studies that portray the social world of ‘real experiences’. Among the several methods approved within qualitative method for data collection, I have employed semi- structured interviews as a chief source of primary data. Necessary data for answering research questions were collected by doing field work in Norway

2.3 Justifying Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research method is a dynamic process which allows the researcher to generate deeper understanding and meanings of human experiences. Qualitative and Quantitative methods are equally useful to conduct research in social sciences. However, the purpose and subject matter of a particular research presuppose the method to be applied. Qualitative method allows the researcher to generate deeper understanding and meanings of human experiences. Unlike this, quantitative method verify hypothesis or emphasize accuracy. As noted by Roes, “ the aim of qualitative research is to portray the reality of the area under investigation, and to enhance

understanding of the situation and the meaning and the values attributed to this by individuals; it does not involve the qualifications of facts” (1994:39). Qualitative methods primarily explore and highlight the meanings participants hold rather than the meaning brought in by the researcher. So, a researcher interprets what he sees, hears and understands while acting as an active actor in the field. Rossman and Rallis (2003) affirm, qualitative researchers do research in natural setting in order to learn about some aspects of social world and to generate new understanding. Therefore, they become a part of process, continually making choices, testing assumptions and reshaping their questions (P 4-5). What the researcher saw, heard and understood while acting as an active agent in the field help them to justify and answer the research questions.

Considering the insinuation of qualitative method, I prefer to do qualitative research rather than quantitative method because the chief purpose of this research is to see the social world which is constructed through the interaction of social, cultural, economic and political processes. This method also paves a better way to understand the lived experiences of Nepalese women which take account of the challenges they face in every steps of their lives. The flexible and informal nature of qualitative method allows the participants to give in-depth, detailed answers. The data based on experiences and perceptions of participants were collected through field work in Norway.

2.4 Data collection Methods

A researcher can construct social reality by interpreting and analyzing the social phenomenon in qualitative method. To do so, interviews, context observations, narrations, etc are applied as fundamental tools to collect data for further analysis of meanings. Data collected from fieldwork provide an evidence for their description about the context. Considering the research questions of this study, the researcher has applied semi- structured interviews as an entire source of primary data.

2.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher has employed semi-structured interview as a method of collecting primary data that are related to Nepalese women's experiences, practices and struggles. Basically, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly, open and informal framework that allow both researchers and participants involve in two-ways conversation. Interview guide with open-ended questions were developed prior to fieldwork. The purpose of interviewing was to understand the meanings of what the interviewees share. Mainly, 'why' and 'how' questions were developed in order to explore a deeper insight about Nepalese women's situations and perceptions. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) say that, "semi-structure interview generally beneficial for interviews to have an interview guide prepared, which is an informal, grouping of topics and questions that the interviewer can ask in different ways for different participants" (P-195). Kvale (1996) states that a qualitative interview is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meaning of the subject's everyday world (P-70). Semi-structured interview allows the subject to convey their situation and experiences from their own perspectives and with their own words.

Semi-structured interviews are very useful in research questions where the concepts and the relationship between them are easily and well understood. In this research, ten key informants were interviewed and the interviews were conducted in Stavanger and Oslo in Norway. Nepalese women residing in Norway were the targeted respondents of this research. The interviewees were above 20 years. One of them was above fifty. She had come Norway to meet her daughter and son-in law for a short time. It was a great pleasure and opportunity for me to talk and interview her. The participants were from different parts of Nepal. They belonged to different location, culture and social background. They have been living in Norway as student, employee or permanent resident of Norway. During the time of interview I began interviewing with more general questions or topics to specific one. Interviewees were asked questions related to Nepalese women's situation, male domination, religious and cultural biasness etc. At the beginning simple personal questions were asked to draw their interest in interview process. The particular context and participants' responses pre-determined the subsequent questions to ask.

2.5 Sampling Method

The criteria of sampling informants were mainly focused on Nepalese women in Norway and belonging to Hindu religion only. At first, Nepalese women in Stavanger and Oslo were contacted to whom I was familiar before. They gave me information about other Nepalese women who are living in Norway. By this way I reached to other's women in Stavanger and Oslo. Among all ten informants, some of them were very frank some of them were hesitate to tell me about their life style. All informants were different ethnic groups but they all are belong to the Hindu religion.

Snowball sampling method had been applied in this study to reach the target group. Snowball refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects. Because this procedure also results in samples with questionable representativeness, it's used primarily for exploratory purposes (Earl Babbie, 2011: 208). Snowball sampling method is a technique for finding research subjects; one subject give the contact address of other subjects, who in turn provides a name and other information about third and so on. My sister-in-law, living in Oslo helped me to get in contact with other Nepali women from Oslo. She was one of the respondents of the study. She gave preliminary information and phone number of the two other Nepalese women. The second gave the information of the third and so on like a chain.

2.6 Secondary Data sources

Secondary data refers to the statistical materials which are not originated by researcher himself or herself but obtained from someone else's records. Secondary data can be used in both qualitative and quantitative method. Secondary data is generally taken from magazines, newspapers, reports, journals, books etc. The information taken from the secondary data can be very useful to conceptualize and confirm findings the issue of the research.

In this study, the governmental website of Norway, government website of Nepal, related books, and journal papers have been used as secondary data. Country map has been taken from Google map. Journal, papers on ethnicity and nationalism, and identity issues have been reviewed to get an insight in to knowledge on culture and religious belief. Similarly, previous studies on various cases regarding the issue of gender, culture, tradition and the way of life in Nepal have been reviewed to gain insights for both methodological and theoretical purposes.

2.7 Fieldwork

There are no straight rules for qualitative fieldwork. Every new researcher must discover his or her own framework to fulfill the research objects. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in Oslo and Stavanger of Norway to collect primary data. It was held from November 15 to mid of December 2012. Having approval letter from NSD in November 2012, I began to contact my expected participants in Stavanger. Out of six interviews in Stavanger, three were contacted through face book and two were contacted directly in mobile whereas remaining one was met at her room apartment. All the respondents were Nepalese women, over 20 years and living in Norway. Prior to conducting interview, researcher had sought their permission by handling a letter of consent. Every detail like the purpose of research, rights and freedom of participants, researcher's right to publish whole or part of the interview and confidentiality of participants were clearly mentioned in the letter handed to them.

After receiving the formal consent from respondents, interviews time and location were fixed. Interviews were held in different contexts like at their apartments, restaurant and my own room. Though I had allocated one hour for interviewing each participants, many of them lasted more than that due to enthusiasm and interest of participants. The data collection tool (pen, paper, notebook) were used to keep record of participants responses. All of the interviews were written cautiously on notebook at the time of interview. Researcher had edited each recording attentively after the interview on the same day. Interviews were not tape recorded as all the participants didn't prefer it. Some of the interviews were conducted in native (Nepali) language in order to facilitate conversation. I found it necessary because most of them answered more comfortably and frankly in Nepali rather than in English.

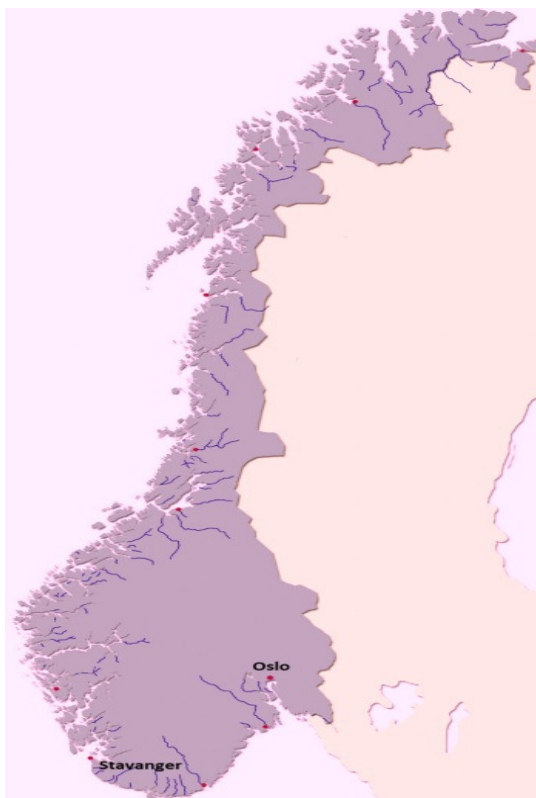
An interview guide was developed in advance and used it as major framework for interviewing. 15 questions were included in interview guide. All the questions were open-ended in nature. Questions were organized from general to complex and about Nepalese women's situation and experiences. At the time of interview, I paraphrased questions in simple words if the participants find it tough. It was the first experience of my life to work as a researcher. I also belong to the same culture of these research interviewees. In that sense, I am insider to the group I was studying about. Only three of the respondents were my close friends since earlier. Rests

seven were contacted through snowball sampling method. Interview with the intimate friends were more informal.

Nevertheless, I was always cautious about the purpose of interviewing. No other external factors could motivate or influence me during the time of interview. It was because the objective of interview was to collect ample primary data. With blend of fear, excitement and intense curiosity, I began my work. Finally, it ended up with lots of new experiences, sharing, data and cordial relationship. All the hardship during the data collection was overcome by the explanatory merits of substantial and constructive data for my research project.

Map of Norway Showing the Research site:

Figure: 1



Source: Google Map

2.8 Reliability and Validity of the Research

Reliability means the degree to which a measurement remains the same in the repeated actions; the stability of a measurement over time; and the similarity of measurement within a given time period (Kirk and Miller 1986: 41-42). Reliability in simple words means consistency and trustworthiness whereas validity means truthfulness and accuracy. Joppe (2000) defines reliability as:

....the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study referred to as reliability and if the results of the study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable (P-1).

Validity refers to the fact that “you are observing, indentifying or measuring what you say you are” (Mason 1996 in Bryman 2008: 376). In qualitative research, validity shows that the research is well grounded, sound enough, justifiable and logically ordered. Sarantakos has rightly asserted that validity is ‘a methodological element not only of the quantitative but also of qualitative research’ (1994: 76). Some scholars have used the same labels and contents of validity in quantitative strategy to evaluate the validity of qualitative research. Joppe (2000) provides the following explanation of validity in qualitative research.

Validity determines whether the research truly measured that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In other words, do the research instruments allow you to hit “the bull’s eye” of your research subject? Researchers generally determine validity by asking a series and will often look for the answer in the research of others. (P-1)

The interdependency between reliability and validity is “there is can be no validity without reliability; a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the later” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:316). Lecompte and Goets (1982) mention two forms of validity in relation to qualitative research; internal validity, meaning a sound contest between researcher’s observation and the theoretical ideas they develop and external validity, as the amount of generalizability of the findings. To make the study trustworthy, the researcher should consider the aspects like credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility and internal validity ensures that researcher has studied what she or he has actually intended. It means to answers the question of how congruent is the findings with reality? Lincoln and Guba suggest researcher to develop the confidence that the researcher has clearly recorded the phenomenon under scrutiny. Transferability and external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. Dependability and reliability means if the research is repeated in the same context, same participants and same method, the result would also the same. This process emphasizes the researcher needs to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. The researcher must be responsible for explaining the changes that occur in the field and how these changes affected the research study. And at last, conformability is concerned with the degree of neutrality. It invokes that the outcome of the research is the product of respondents' opinions and responses rather than the researcher's personal biasness, motivation and interest. The researcher has presented herself much objectively throughout the research in order to delimit the outward influence in research findings.

Lawrence Neuman maintains that validity means 'truthful' referring to the bridge between construct and the data (2003: 185). This study has explored a detail description of phenomenon and used enough background data. To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Since the preliminary stage of my research, I had given prime focus on the purpose and goal of my findings. By doing that I needed to check the soundness of theoretical supposition of my study. I was much dedicated to my project work to find something unexplored. Though, many researchers have done thesis or research about women issues I have deviated from them by confining and targeting my research to unrevealed the cultural influences and its impacts on women situation. My research questions deal with vital issues. Beside these, throughout the time of interview, I was constantly emphasizing on the importance and reliability of data. I had seriously examined on what the participants had said. Being more conscious in the transcribing phase, I had accurately noted down what they exactly said; in spite of thinking and writing later. But, while analyzing data, I have logically corrected, interpreted and examined whether the meaning and sense have been explicit and accurate or not.

In this research, all of the above mentioned criteria are used to reduce the risk of systematic biases due to specific method. For this qualitative data collection interviews, governments and other websites have been used to support and check one another's validity.

2.9 Ethical reflection

Ethics are codes and rules that govern the practices of a profession. Research ethics helps to establish the moral standard for the conduct of research. For exploring truth, avoiding errors, building public supports, respecting social responsibility, highly honoring human rights and values research ethics must be followed. The research process can create tension between the aim of researcher and the right of participants to maintain privacy. According to Kvale (1996), "explicit rules or clear solution to ethical problem that may arise during an interview study can hardly be provided, but contexts will be suggested for the researcher's reflection on the normative and value themes involved" (p.109). From the starting point I valued research ethics. Neglecting research ethics ruins the value and dignity of the work as well as researcher. The moral qualities I strongly followed in this research are: informed consent and anonymity and Justice.

2.9.1 Informed Consent and Anonymity

In qualitative study, the principle is honored by informed consent, which means making a responsible balance between over- informing and under-informing (Kvale, 1996). Prior to interviewing, I handed a letter of consent to each participant. The purpose of interviewing, usefulness of data and the rights of interviewees were clearly mentioned in it. It helped the participants to exercise their rights as autonomous person in accepting or refusing to participate in the study.

In this research, the researcher has replaced the participant's names with pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. Beside it, I assured the participants about how the results of interviews will be published in final thesis. Since many of the participants responses address personal crucial matter their identities mustn't be revealed in any means. All the participants involving in this research were assured that data will be anonymized along with the completion of thesis. No other persons will have assessed to the collected data.

2.9.2 Justice

Throughout the field work, I was cautious about the possible exploitation and abuse of the participants. In order to promote a clear understanding of the researcher's role during data collection, I gained border ideas about it through relevant text and discussion with my professors. In order to gain trust from the participants and develop their interest in the research project, I presented myself as a frank and intimate person. I respected their rights and freedom in every step.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

3.1 Gender and Feminism

“Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women’s labor, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the work place and in society in general and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation” (Bhasin and Khan, 1999:3). It is a struggle to get equal rights, dignity, and freedom for women to control their lives and bodies at home and public sphere. Feminism began after women realized their subjugated position in patriarchal societies. The control men had over women was examined and this established the ground on which women stated their concerns about being subjugated to men (Lerner, 1993). Thus, feminism enhances the growing consciousness among women regarding the oppression and exploitation upon women. “Feminist consciousness includes a commitment to end all forms of domination, oppression and privilege that intersect with sexism and gender bias, including racism, classism, colonialism, heterosexism, ethnocentrism, white supremacy, and ageism” (Enns, 2004: 8).

Bell Hooks (2002) writes that “feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has power to transform in a meaningful way all over lives” (P-28). Feminism advocates that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially, and views women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most of the societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between men and women, with the understanding that gender always interacts with other social hierarchies (Freedman, 2002:7).

Feminist theory which emerged from the feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women’s social roles and lived experience (Chodorow, 1989). Feminist theories pay attention to how gender is constituted and experienced in societies that have been suppressed, unarticulated or denied by patriarchy.

Gender refers to socially constructed differences between men and women as distinct from sex. Sex generally refers to biological feature. Gender is a ‘fluid’ variable which is altered

by different factors like time, context and perceptions. Bulter (1990) defines gender as a performance; it's what you do at particular times, rather than a universal that you are. Judith Bulter (1990) describes, being a woman is likely to have more challenges, owing not only to the society's viewing woman as a deprecating category but also to feel sense of self as culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity.

Gender theory describes how individual and groups create their social reality. Gender roles determine how men and women think, speak and interact within the society. In the context of Nepal, parents teach their children according to gender roles. Traditionally, fathers teach sons how to fix and build things and mothers teach daughters how to cook, sew, how to care for other and how to keep home clean. In this way, children receive parental approval when they conform to gender expectations and adopt culturally accepted their roles in society. Gender is an accomplishment – the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities and activities appropriate for one's sex category (West et al., 1987).

Thus, gender theory is a way of understanding the socially created roles functioning in the society. Socially constructed roles and norms on the basis of sex are inherited within the society as a natural culture (Subedi, 2010). So, gender works as a main principle for society because of the cultural meanings given to being male or female. In this study, I assume that there is strong relation between gender and culture and somehow these are influence by religion in society and one's life. Cultures change over time but some cultural practices and beliefs remain unchanged and are seen as necessary for maintaining identity especially male-dominated or patriarchal society.

Gender study is a theory as well as an academic field. This field encompasses the studies related to gender, feminism, women, men and politics. In this master thesis, gender and sexuality and its implication in Nepalese societies is minutely observed. I have applied it as a tool for theoretical conception to investigate the gender politics which have been hegemonies in patriarchal societies of Nepal. Gender study closely examines the roles designated by society to oppositional sex 'male' and 'female'.

To be more precise, I have given more priority to radical feminism in this research. The ideas and theory produced by Judith Lorber are discussed in order to provide a deep insight on the concept of gender performativity. She has opined that the performance of gender inequality is related to power in society.

Radical feminism is based on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex relationship based on the assertion that male supremacy (Wills, 1992: 117). Radical feminists view the cause of women's oppression in patriarchal hierarchical society and seek to abolish them. The ideology of motherhood subjugates women and perpetuates patriarchy, which not only forces women to be mothers but also determines the conditions of their motherhood (Bhasin, 1993:8). For radical feminist, patriarchy divides feminine and masculine between public and private and it restricts women's mobility and support male dominance. A society is formed in a complex way with multiple subgroups. These subgroups are structured on the basis of caste, gender, religion, race, age etc. within every division; some possess more authority than other and therefore, dominate the opposite groups belonging to subordination (Lerner 1986).

Lorber (1994) argues that gender is an institution that is embedded in the social process of everyday life and social organization. She further argues that gender difference is primarily a means to justify sexual stratification. She presents much cross-cultural evidence to show that the gender difference is socially constructed and universally used to justify stratification. She writes that "the continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group to be subordinate to men as a group" (P. 33).

Gender inequality takes many different forms, depending on the economic structure and social organization, the particular society and on the culture of any particular group within that society (Lorber, 2010:5). Since 19th century, feminist have been fighting for women's rights out of a liberal political philosophy which said all human being should be equal under the law, that no one should have special privileges or rights (Lorber, 2010). Lorber further gives an example by referring to the 19th century Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*:

Nora forges her dead father's signature because she cannot legally sign her own name to the loan she needs to save her sick husband's life, and she works at home in secret to pay it back. When her husband finds out, he does not thank her but rather condemns her as immoral and dishonest and not a fit mother for their children. He eventually forgives her, but Nora refuses to continue to live a doll-wife, and she leaves him, slamming the door of the doll's house behind her (Lorber, 2010:1-2).

From this example of Nora, we can analyze how women are suffering from male dominated society and they are fighting for their rights but our society and cultural values do not let them be equal to men. In the context of Nepal, the situation of women is very similar to that of Nora. Nepalese culture is deeply set in patriarchal norms and values which does not allow women to be free. Lorber further writes "Gender inequality as embedded in the social construction and maintenance of gender social order through doing gender as individuals, in interaction and as part of families, work organizations and throughout cultural and knowledge productions" (Lorber, 2010:7).

Lorber has also discussed on unequal payment of men and women at jobs. Women often receive lower pay than men for the same work. Gender is as deeply implicated in organizing human societies as any other facet of human life, perhaps more so, as it has survived from foraging to agrarian, and to past industrial societies (Lorber, 1994). Every society is deeply rooted with gender structure. The structure may be patriarchal, traditional with male power and privilege lodged both in and outside the family. She also talked about imbalance condition of housework and childcare responsibility compared to men. Gender inequality can also take the form of girls getting less education compared to boys of the same society (ibid).

To radical feminists, patriarchy is the system that creates social inequality and promotes suppression and violence against women. Feminists suggest that certain changes with regards to how we think about women are necessary. These changes may enable women to recognize their value and power in societies as a result they can revolt against patriarchy. Existing political and social systems are opposed by radical feminists because they believe it is inherently tied to patriarchy.

3.1.1 Position of Women in Patriarchal societies

Socialization process teaches the norms and values to every men and women. Human beings tend to adapt the norms of society to which it belongs. Male dominated societies provide less scope for female to assert their personal identities because women are often identified in relation to males. Female are marginalized from different sector with regards to social opportunities, poverty, and legal protection and so on. Majority of communities in Nepal are patriarchal. According to Gerda Lerner, family plays an important role creating a hierarchal system as it not only mirrors the order in the state and educates its children but also creates and constantly reinforces that order (Lerner, 1986:127). Therefore, family plays a vital role for socializing the next generation in patriarchal values. A woman's life is strongly influenced by her father and husband as reflected in the practice of paralegal residence, patriarchal descent, and by inheritance system and family relations (Vidya, 2008:51). The marriage determines the life of almost all women. According to Hindu religion and tradition, marriage is essential for all. In such societies, marriage is not only for an individual but it is a social contract between two clans. In patriarchy society, women rarely have opportunity to choose the life partners of her choice.

Patriarchy is an ideology- an unquestioned set of values and beliefs held by a social group. Patriarchy favors men over women and confers maximum power to men and dependency to women. Patriarchy shows women as powerless and in a marginalized position. Patriarchy separates human beings in different categories such as gender, class, economic status and political power. In every general case, patriarchal system benefits men, so it basically oppresses all women without considering to which class they belong to.

3.2 Women's Empowerment

Empowerment is a process which relates to the power of an individual to redefine her possibilities and options and to have the ability to act upon them (Eyben et al., 2008:5). Kabeer (2001:19) defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". So, empowerment is individuals' capabilities to make differences around them which are related to their life. Self-empowerment is influence by individuals' social and cultural norms. In every society, power is used between people and group in cultural, political, social and economic sector. Power itself can

simply be defined as control over resources and control of ideology. The word empower indicates a process of giving power to those who are powerless (Prativa Subedi 2010).

Within the frame of women's domination and oppression, there are many aspects of inequalities in our everyday life. Only elite women who have access to power, knowledge and economy (very few) are benefitting from globalization and gender knowledge. In the context of Nepal, patriarchal norms and values have extensively limited Nepalese women's chances for mobility and economic participation. Traditionally, women in Nepal have been contributing more actively than men mainly in domestic works and agricultural sector. But most of the Nepalese women are suffering from unequal power relation. Nepalese women, particularly those who belong to lower class and rural areas are much discriminated, exploited, neglected and forced to live insecure life due to orthodox traditions and discriminatory laws (Subedi, 2010).

3.2.1 Problems for women Empowerment in Nepal

Women in Nepal remain powerless to improve their situation because they are burdened by household responsibilities and deprived of public participation. Male dominated family system provides fewer opportunities to assert their identity and get empowered. Women's gender inequality in Nepal stems from a traditional culture that defines the formal and informal roles for women's participation in relation to opportunities, access to resources and decision making (HDR, 2009).

Women are marginalized from economic and social opportunities due to illiteracy, poverty and conservative social dogmas. After the restoration of multi-party system in 1990, policy makers have been given more attention to uplifting women's status. As a result, a separate ministry was established to look after the women's welfare. Despite increasing effort from government, non-government organization and international development agencies there has been negligible improvement at women's status at grassroots level (Mahat, 2003). Gender-based violence is often reported in domestic as well as public spheres and is largely attributed to derogatory attitudes towards women, which is reinforced by low socio economic status (Subedi, 2010).

Women in Nepal are not totally disempowered in a patriarchal society; as a mother and wife they have some power to control over household resources. However, it restricts and limits their power to control over resources, which are barriers to their empowerment (ibid). Women need to be encouraged to have confidence in themselves and to question the patriarchal institutions that subordinate them. This can only happen when both men and women have equal access to the tools power, education and knowledge. In Nepal, male and female literacy gap is vast difference. “There is considerable evidence that access to education can bring abrupt changes in cognitive ability, which is essential to women’s capacity to question, to reflect on, and to act on the conditions of their lives and to gain access to knowledge , information and new ideas that will help to them to do so”(Kabeer 2005:16). Without educated women, the risk increases for society as a whole that the next generation of children will be similarly prepared.

3.2.2 Women Empowerment in the constitution of Nepal, 2007

The equality between men and women in every aspect like access to property and resources, participation in policy making level, representation in various state structures has become like a dream in Nepalese context because they are limited to words (Malla, 2007). However, we cannot ignore the progressive results in women empowerment during the last few years. After people’s revolution in 2006, women’s empowerment and equality became the topic of great discussion. The Interim Parliament passed a resolution on 30th may 2007, ensuring 33% women’s representation in all state structure (ibid). Similarly, women’s fundamental rights have been secured through Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007). Important women’s rights have been emphasized, for instance:

- ❖ There shall be no discrimination because of being women.
- ❖ Every woman shall have right to reproductive health and reproduction.
- ❖ No physical, mental or other kind of act of violence shall be done against any women.
- ❖ There shall be equal rights to parental property for son and daughter.

That was the first time in Nepali history where women rights were guaranteed constitutionally in separate heading under fundamental rights. That was the first time women’s right and different agendas were included in the provisions on the right to equality, right to justice and social security (Rai, Usha Kala 2011). The interim constitution mentions under

‘obligations of the state,’ the progressive restructuring of the state to address the problems of backward classes and religion, including women (Rai, Usha Kala 2011:10).

3.3 Cultural and Religious conception about women in Nepal

A complex society like Nepal with a multiple religious and cultural traditions does not easily allow us to generalize about the status of women in Nepal. But it can be stated without reservation that Nepalese women from different communities are exploited and oppressed. Nepalese women are perceived as daughters, wives and mothers but they are not recognized as individuals with their own identity, despite the fact that they are as human being as men. Prativa Subedi (1997) writes that, “ woman’s emotional growth is suppressed by values imposed by family and society until she is emptied of her most natural human qualities, a girl without a personality or the capacity to think independently” (p-1).

Nepalese society is made up many cultures and sub-cultures, but Hindu culture is the most influential, especially with regards to defining the role of women. In Hindu epic Ramayana, the wife of Ram called Sita embodies chastity, endurance and wifely devotion. The story of Sita echoes the patriarchal nature of Nepalese women life. The shadow of Sita lies among those passive and helpless Nepalese women who are victimized by male exploitation.

In Hindu religion, goddess Dhurga receives high reorganization among both Nepalese men and women. Dhurga is the goddess of power and strength. She has power in the blending of the three gods: Brahmin, Vishnu and Shiva. Dhurga is reflected as goddess possessing all the traits possessed by males such as courage, power and strength for victory (Majupuries, 2008). Dhurga can be seen as reflected in the Nepalese culture’s affirmation of the greatness of motherhood.

Another figure Laxmi is the goddess of wealth and fortune. Laxmi is associated with light, color, music, dance and so on. In Nepal, people celebrate ‘Laxmi Puja’ to welcome Laxmi by cleaning house and setting up lights to brighten the night. In Nepalese societies, Laxmi is reflected in young brides who bring wealth to the family of the groom in accordance to dowry the system (ibid).

Hindu women cannot be understood in isolation from Hindu culture. It is so important for defining how women perceive the world and how they are perceived by others. Lynn Bennett (1983: X) maintains that “Hinduism’s attachment to male and female and to sexuality and reproduction is embedded deeply within the culture as a whole- it’s symbolic idiom, its value system, and its social and economic structures.”

As in other many male-dominated societies, women in Nepalese society are taught to be what they “ought to be” rather than developing their own unique selves (Subedi, 1997:5). Culture and religion is a part of human life. Religious values and belief motivate human action. According to Nepalese context, culture says that women are born for household work and keeping the family together. They have to do all the household activities like cooking, taking care of children, caring husband as well as the whole family of her husband without expecting anything from them.

3.3.1 Hinduism

Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world. It is philosophical, cultural and practices which is originated from India. Manjupurias (2008) includes Slusser ideas that “Hinduism is not a religion but a complex combination of faiths with hundreds of sects and sub-sects together with a body of traditional social observances of Hindu in India” (p.46). Hindu religion believes in reincarnation, multiple manifestations, path of righteousness and the cycle of birth and deaths. It has its own beliefs, tradition, rituals, philosophy and theology.

Hinduism is a multinational of diverse beliefs and tradition in which the main themes are Dharma (ethics and duties), Samsara (rebirth) and Karma (right action) are included. The basic scriptures of Hinduism are called ‘Shastras’, a collection of spiritual laws. Hinduism believes that there is only one supreme power, ‘Brahma’. There are thousand of gods and goddesses in the Hindu religion. The most fundamental of Hindu deities is the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva- the creator, the preserver and the destroyer respectively. Hindu people worship animals, plants and even planets. Hinduism believes that Buddha, the founder of Buddhism is the ninth avatar of Vishnu and some Hindu identify that Christ as the tenth avatar and that the final avatar Kalki who is yet to come. These avatars are believed for peace, order and justices. Hinduism is known for its tolerance of other religious faiths and beliefs. In Hindu scriptures, the *Bhagawat*

Gita Lord Krishna, one of the incarnation of Lord Vishnu says, “whosoever follows any faith and worships me under whosoever denomination in whatsoever form with steadfastness, his faith shall I indeed reinforce” (Manjupurias, 2008:46).

Hinduism was originally called Sanatana Dharma, meaning “righteousness forever.” It was Muslim invaders from the east who gave it the name Hinduism (Regmi, 1999). Hindu scriptures are written in Sanskrit. Hinduism is more a way of life than a specific religion. Hindus believe in one, all-pervasive Supreme God, through she or he may be worshipped in different names and by different forms.

Hinduism is rich in scripture, and scripture is an extensive collection of ancient religious writings which is based on external truths which have been revealed by god and realized by ancient sages and enlightened wise men. Such truths were passed on for generations through oral tradition; include the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Epics, including Bhagwat Gita and Ramayana, law books and many other philosophical texts (Manjupurias, 2008).

In ancient time, women have got very important position, in fact superior to men. It is a culture whose only words for strength and power are feminine- “Shakti” means “Power” and “Strength”. Ancient evidences suggest that all kings and towns were destroyed because a single woman was treated wrongly by the state. For instance, Ramayana teaches us that Ravana was wiped out because he abducted Sita. Hinduism is unique among all world religions in its rich tradition of Goddesses worship; there is an obvious difference between respect paid to these Devine females and the reality of the daily lives of Hindu women (Diesel, 2005: 35).

3.3.2 The Caste System

Until 2006, Nepal was a Hindu kingdom. However, it legitimized the Hindu caste system in the state, which codifies illegal in 1963 and it continues to define interactions between social groups (Human Development Report, 2009). Nepal has 102 caste and ethnic groups and 92 languages. Caste and language remain the major source of identity (ibid). A caste system is a complex social system that combines elements of occupation, culture, social class, tribe affiliation and political power.

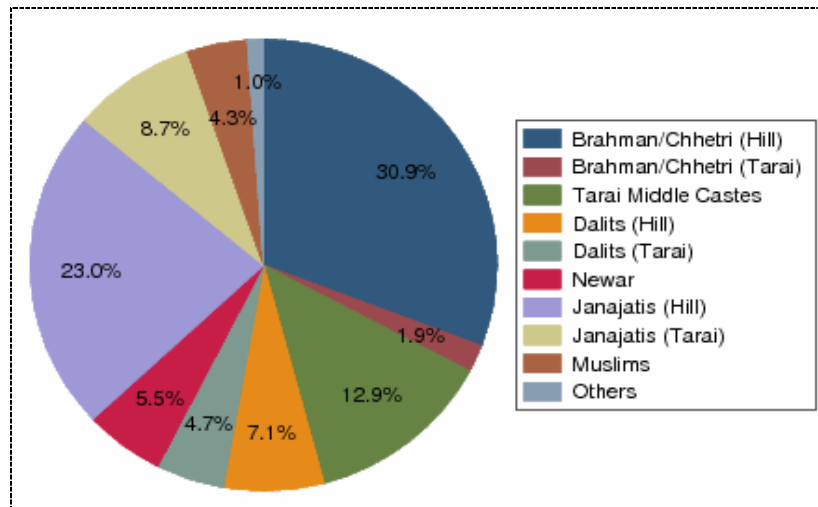
In Nepalese caste system, marriages occur only within caste and caste is fixed by birth and each caste is associated with a traditional occupation. People inherited caste from their parents and passed it on to their children. In case of inter- marriage which is rare, children inherited the caste of their father.

Nepal consist of four social classes; Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. There are other (many) ethnic indigenous groups which do not belong to caste system. Brahmin includes *Khas* people who mainly comprising Vedic Priests, scholars and educators. Second, Kshatriya mainly comprising soldiers, governors and kings, Vaishya mainly belongs to merchants, farmers, cattle-herders and artisans. These people are also called Janajati (ethnic groups; Gurung, Magar, Newar, Rai, Limbu etc). Sudra is mainly laborers, artisans and service providers (Manjupurias, 2008).

The people who sew clothes is called Suchikar, those who play musical instrument like damu (damaha), hudko and devbaja, especially in wedding procession are referred to damai³. Caste system is deeply rooted in Nepalese society. When Brahmins and Chetris come to touch with Sudras, they used to bath or they sprinkle water on their body. This system is still remaining in Nepal (Regmi, 1999).

³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/caste%2C_Nepal

Figure: 2



Source: World Bank and Department for International Development (DFID), 2006

In figure above, the compositions of the population of Nepal on the basis of caste system is shown. It is based on the data from census 2001.

3.4 Gender roles for Nepalese women

When a young girl once married, she has to defer to other family members of the family whether male or female in terms of social, economic and personal or mobility (Regmi 1999). The oldest family member controls the whole family. The mother-in-law holds power and authority; the junior wife has to obey her in-laws. The social system in Nepal is based on patriarchal Hindu philosophy that empowers men over women. Women are seen as weak and dependent on men and derive their social status (property and other rights) from male member of her family (Luitel, 2001).

Due to the inferior position of women, wife- beating trend is considered to be acceptable (Poudel 2007). In 2005, a survey on domestic violence was conducted in two district of Nepal by Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC) with 205 adolescents and youths. The survey revealed that more than four-fifths (81%) had heard about violence and more than one-third (35%) had experienced themselves at their home and society (M. Puri et al., 2011). The types of violence experienced by Nepali women in most of the rural areas were physical, psychological,

economic and sexual (Poudel, 2007). The major forms of physical violence experienced by Nepalese women were kicking and slapping, beating with sticks or brooms, pulling hair, punching, scratching and burning and so on. Psychological violence comprised mainly mental torture.

Sexual violence consisted of sexual abuse and forced sex committed by men against their wives (ibid). The main reason behind such violence are low income, low level of education or no education, alcoholism, not bringing home a large number of dowry and so on (Ministry of Health and Population et al., 2011; Poudel, 2007). From childhood, family prepares girls and boys for different roles. In many societies, sons are sent to school while daughters will stay home and learn about household work. It is deeply rooted in religious customs and traditional beliefs. If a woman's first born child is to be a girl, she may have to give birth too many children waiting for a boy to come. Home is supposed to be the first school for children but in Nepalese homes; children learn their lessons based on structural patriarchy. Prativa Subedi (1997) writes that, "according to Hindu religious custom, it is the son who must look after his parents in old age or in infirmity and it is he who offers prayers and rituals after their death in order for them to be assured a place in heaven" (P-9). Nepal's patriarchy has resulted in injustice and discrimination against women.

3.4.1 Stereotypes about Women

Stereotypes are created and perpetuated by the society. In Nepali socio-cultural context women are socially defined as more emotional, weaker, more patient, and more obedient than men and so on. These social definitions of women are highly valued, adopted and transmitted by family to their children. Such types of socially constructed ideals of how women are expected to be and behave strongly lead women to marginalization.

Gender stereotypes in Nepali culture present many characteristics. Firstly, they are mainly related through language. There is direct correlation between the way speakers of Nepali languages use gender nuances in their everyday speech such as, '*bichara aaimai*' (a weak woman) clearly reflect the stereotypes that women are weak in physically and mentally. The stereotypes function as social reminders of how women need to behave and how men need to treat them. Secondly, stereotypes in Nepali socio-cultural context are may be both explicit and

implicit. These stereotypes highlight the ambivalent thinking of society in general and attitude towards women (Vanzant 2008). For instance, men can show a positive attitude towards mothers and wives, but negative attitude towards a “female leader”. An explicit stereotype is openly exposed and has close relationship between women and their home and struggle towards public sphere. Implicit stereotypes operate in a way which often escapes conscious control and ends up by constituting some kind of symbolic law for the member of a community. For example, women are weak advisors; women are poor public leader, etc.

Another stereotype about Nepali women is the fact that about “evil eye” through their speech. The “evil eye” refers to illness and misfortune that a person’s language or presence causes. For example, if a person gets hurt, loses something or hears bad news after having met or spoken to women, he or she will think that the women is the cause of misfortune. Poor women, old women, divorced and widows women that are particularly considered as a source of evil eye. This stereotype neutralizes the power to these categories of women in Nepali culture (Bennett, 1983).

With the rise of media industry, the advertising has also grown up. Today advertisements take up more than half the space in successful daily magazines and newspapers. Internet has also become another crucial space for advertisement. Women are shown as a housewife, doing household work in family while men are always shown working in public sphere and earning money. We often see advertisements that feature beautiful or desirable girl models. Culture plays a vital role in advertising. According to the demand of culture, media also presents women as subordinate and submissive, emotional, weak and so on. Nepali people want to see women as a good house wife, good mother and daughter, so media are also portraying the same stereotypical image of women.

This chapter builds the conceptual framework about Nepalese women’s situation. The crucial factors that like religion and culture which influence women’s role and freedom are discussed in brief by borrowing general ideas from relevant literature. Basically, the theory of feminism has been discussed as a theoretical tool. To portray the Nepalese women’s situation and to advocate for sudden social as well as cultural change for women’s empowerment are discussed in brief above. Similarly, the assigned gender roles are discussed in order to show how

patriarchy affects the situation and empowerment of women. The stereotypical representations of females in male dominated societies are explained to show how they may be barrier for women's over all prosperity.

3.5 Placing the Problems within the Acknowledged frames of Gender studies

Women's status in Nepalese societies has been analyzed in this research. Gender based discrimination is often perpetuated and institutionalized within the family, community and political spheres. Discrimination based on class, caste and gender have traditionally and until recently by law, resulted in unequal rights in certain religious groups (Janajati, Muslims etc), lower caste (Dalits) and women without the endorsement of a male family member (RajBhandari 2008: 230-232). Women and girls have low status in patriarchal societies of Nepal, which position them in greater risk of socio- economic disadvantages compared to males.

Social norms and values are stereotyping and constraining females behaviors, which results in the absence of rights to self- respect, social dignity and self-determination (Samarasinghe 2008: 64). According to CBS (2011), 51.44% of the total populations are females in Nepal. Despite this fact, social and cultural practices are affecting women's identities and freedom in several ways. Women have insignificant representation in state mechanisms and other topmost levels. They are deprived of possessing equal rights to males.

Women and girls are in more disadvantaged position in Nepal. This applies to all caste, ethnic and economic groups. Patriarchal societies encourage females to be more oriented towards marriage and household duties. Similarly, restricted mobility and patrilocality contribute in shaping girls' self- perception and their roles (and images) which prevent them from getting access to education, power and freedom (Subedi 2010). Despite women's hard labor and contribution at household levels, they are marginalized and discarded. Gender roles and lack of power in patriarchal societies of Nepal affect the over all well-being of females (ibid). Feminists believe that it is an immediate need to deconstruct the societal discriminatory norms and privilege women by increasing their access to education, health, poverty, governing roles etc.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the qualitative data on “Cultural conception and Silent acceptance of Stereotypes” on Nepalese women’s situation are presented in descriptive way. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the situation of Nepalese women focusing on the social, religious and cultural domains.

The presented data is about Nepalese women and it covers a number of related research questions which are presented in introduction chapter: like, what are the measures determinates of gender inequality in Nepal, what measures should be undertaken in order to privileged women from subordination, what are the factors that the women interviewed see as major hindrances of women’s equality in societies and so on.

Most of the Nepalese women whom I interviewed have already completed their university degree and some are students who are going to finish their university degree. Among ten interviewees, six women are living in Stavanger and four women are from Oslo. Among them one woman I interviewed in Stavanger was old women over fifty years and she is from Nepal to visit her son and daughter.

All of them are belong to Hindu religion. Although many of them mention that they officially belong to Hindu religion, they equally respect other religion. In Nepal, every people equally celebrate all religious ceremony. They explained that there is no much difference in Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal. According to them, Nepal is poor country but rich in cultures, traditions and festivals and they also participate in all festivals in Norway by gathering all Nepalese people. I saw and also participate in cultural programs of Nepali festival with Nepalese people in Norway.

In their daily life, they are not much discriminated and subordinated like many other women in Nepal. Some women are living with their family and some are alone. They feel freer in Norway compared to Nepal. Their daily life is vast difference from Nepali life. It does not mean they are not following Nepali tradition and culture but the way is different. Nepal has

many ethnic groups and casts. Some interviewee come from *Brahmin* family, some from *Chhetri* and some from indigenous group like *Magar, Gurung, and Rai etc.*

Table No-2

No. of Participants	Age Groups		Gender	Qualifications	
	10	23-30		5	Females
35-40		4	Post Graduate	6	
Above 50		1	Illiterate	1	

4.2 Cultural and Religious Belief

All of my respondents respect their culture and religious tradition. In Nepalese societies, cast and gender based hierarchies' plays a dominant role in everyday lives of people. There is much discrimination between different castes. For instance, the lower caste people are not allowed to enter higher caste people's house. Violence and abuse against women of all low caste women are deeply embedded in Nepalese culture. Lower caste women are freer than higher caste women because they are indifferent towards social status and prestige. Most of the higher caste women are limited only in household works because higher caste people think that if women get freer and work outside the home, their reputation in society become low. Higher caste women should be reserved and limited. In my query on caste practice, participant N2 said that:

There is a wide gap in the opportunities and freedom that women get based on ethnic group and caste. Women who belong to higher caste are more restricted to different things like public mobility, communication and other than the women from lower caste because reputation and caste honor for them is a very critical thing. The lower caste women are freer, open and mostly involve in wage earning at public spheres.

On the other hand, all of my participants explained that low caste women are mostly illiterate and they therefore suffer discrimination in innumerable ways in terms of health,

education and jobs. They are barred from entering the temples and forbidden to use common water sources. Participant N4 expressed that:

.... mainly marginalized and disadvantaged groups' women are more suppressed such as Damai, Sarki, and Kami etc. These castes women are considered to be hated by the society of upper caste people since long time. They are deprived of various opportunities of the society. Within such castes or groups, women are more suppressed because they are dominated by the male members of their own castes and by other upper castes people. The main cause of this is lack of awareness and education

Women from all Nepali societies are subject to physical and emotional abuse even in their families due to ingrained religious and cultural bias against women (Respondent N2). Nepal has a lot of festival as a part of their culture, tradition and belief. Among all festival 'Teej' is one of the greatest festivals for Nepalese Hindu women. According to this ritual, married women do fast for the long life and prosperity of their husband, and unmarried girls fast in order to get a good husband. According to Hindu mythology, goddess Pravati got lord Mahadev as her husband because she fasted on this day. In this festival woman wear red sari, bangles, red tika and other ornaments. Singing and dancing is the most attractive thing they perform in this day. Women sing a song related to their discrimination at home and societies and also current situation about nation and so on. All of my participants continue to celebrate Teej like in Nepal although they live in Norway. Related to Teej, I asked my all participants whether they celebrate Teej in Norway or not, most of the participants explained that they celebrate Teej in Norway too but in a little bit different way. Participant N6 said:

'Teej' is one of the most important festivals of all women's life. In Nepal I used to go to temple to pray for my husband and family but in Stavanger, here is no Hindu temple for praying. But I always do fast like in Nepal. Every year we all Nepalese women gather together and celebrate like in Nepal for the long life of their husband.

Figure: 3



Source: Provided by participant in field visit

The position and the role of women in society are heavily influenced by culture and religion. ‘Teej’ is only for women. Almost all of the participants explained that it is a symbol of women’s dependence on the whole system of patriarchy. Only women pray for their husband and take fast, they even don’t drink a drop of water for the long life of their husband. Whole day they have to fast and in the evening every married woman needs to wash their husband’s feet and drink the water from feet. But in the case of men, there is no festival where male have to fast or do things for their wives.

In Nepali culture, men are considered to be superior and women are the ones that should please them. Teej is that women need to wear red clothes and adorn themselves with ornaments. This is another symbol of how Nepali women are being perceived as objects and commodities. Although the new generations have strong ties to traditions, they don’t want to follow every cultural practice blindly. Along with growing consciousness and literacy rate, the young girls have begun to celebrate the festivals in new ways. At present, females don’t perform the ways

their parents and grand parents used to. For instance, we find few ladies taking the water from her husband toe on the day of “Teej” to show her devotion toward her husband. My unmarried participant N4 said that:

In the 21st century, fasting to get a good husband is stupid for me. Now I am an educated woman. I can understand the good and bad things from our culture. But I am also grown up such environment and I practiced it from my childhood. So, I can't easily leave it. This practice is deeply rooted in me also. So, being an educated woman, I want to celebrate Teej in different way like enjoying, gathering to all friends, singing and dancing and so on.

Figure: 4



Source: Provided by participant in field visit

4.3 Access to Education

More than half of the total population in Nepal is women. Despite this fact, Nepal has a great difference in relation to men's and women's access to employment and educational sectors. In Nepal, discrimination starts from home itself, parents treat sons and daughters in different ways. Now-a-days, women in western countries have been enjoying their freedom; they are

equally educated as men. But Nepalese women are lacking far behind than western women in relation to freedom and access to education. Almost all respondents expressed that to make women's situation good and independent, education is the first step. Participant N7 said:

The key obstacles are the prevailing social discrimination due to the lack of awareness that girls' education is vital; many families in Nepal don't send their children at school. Girls education is very important factor which enable females to generate income for their own living, economic independence, take their own decision making and challenge themselves to stand up to their male counterparts both at home , in politics and in professional positions.

In response to my question, "what do you think are the main obstacles to reach equality of men and women in Nepal" respondent N1 explained:

....due to lack of education, opportunities to women, women are considered only for giving birth to children and to take care of home and families. They are not given chance to work in administrative section, planning and policy cum decision making sectors. The trend is somehow better in urban areas than for women in rural areas.

In response to the above question, one of the uneducated women expressed her feelings.

When I was child, my brother used to go to the school. At that time there were not many schools. My parents told me that education made girls indulgent and permissive and was unnecessary for daughters, who should be married off to their husbands' homes. Instead of attending school, my parents asked me to look after the household chores and my little brother. At that time I cried about my misfortune for being born female. But I made my daughter and son equally educated. So, they are here in Norway and I am here to visit them.

In Nepali societies, there are many reasons that girls are not sent to school. Participant N8 said:

In Terai area, if a daughter is educated, the parents should find educated groom, it means they need to pay excessive dowry during the marriage ceremony. Therefore, poor parents pull out their daughters from the school and train them in household works.

Many poor families don't want to or are unable to send their daughter to school because poor families give birth to many children and they have scarcity of resources. Participant N6 is from rural area of Nepal and she struggled a lot to get education and move to Norway for further studies. She expressed:

Poor families take their daughters out of the school because they need to look after their siblings at home and help parents in the domestics' works. When I was in village, I also tried to encourage many parents to send girls to school but they never got convinced.

Figure 5



Source: Provided by participant in field visit

4.4 Inequality

Gender inequality is a major hindrance for women's well-being. One can easily experience gender inequalities in several dimensions like health, employment, education and

income. Males in Nepal are much biased towards females at employment sectors and even at the rates of payment.

Nepalese society privileges men to women. Men have more freedom, opportunities and rights than females. Gender inequality emerges from distinctions that are created socially or empirically. Gender roles permeate throughout the life either at home or outside. For instance, women and girls should wake up early morning at around 4am every day and begin the daily chores. This includes cleaning, washing, milking and tending to animals, collecting and buying food and preparing breakfast for the family. This has been practiced since long and it has been internalized as the culture and tradition of Nepalese society. Nepal follows a patriarchal hierarchy that allows men to make all decisions in both household and public sphere. The inequality between men and women can be clearly identified by the roles they are consigned. Responding to my question regarding social-cultural biasness as well as unequal participation of women, respondent N5 said:

In Nepali society, most of the prime decisions about families and societies are made by male. They think that women lack lots of information and potential to carry out important activities.

Similarly, participant N7 said:

There are numerous things that shows gender discrimination in both private and public sector. For example, nationality and citizenship right, marriage and family, reproductive health etc. Women are also left out or are lagging behind when it comes to education, professional choice, decision making regarding social aspects of life and so on.

On the current situation related to equality of men and women in Nepalese society, participant N2 explained:

First to mention, Nepal has a male dominated society where men and women are known to have very clear roles according to the distinction made by the society. Male are thought to be the privileged ones in the society. From an early age they

have access to education, health care, and other basic needs. On the contrary, women lack equal opportunity to develop themselves. They are restricted from the basic facilities and are meant to be helping with household works and others. However, the situation of women is slowly changing. The society is getting more awareness due to different national and international agencies working towards women empowerment. Along with growing consciousness and globalization, girls are being sent to schools and are encouraged to be independent. Women are becoming more active and have started contributing financially to the family. Only limited number of females from educated and wealthy background is practicing such changes. However, the greater picture is that most of the women from poor and rural areas are still excluded economically, socially and politically in Nepal.

It was quite surprising for the researcher at this point because most of the interviewee gave similar answers in response to my question. All of the respondents said that because of our socio- cultural practice and traditional beliefs, there is inequality between male and female in every sector of life. Respondent N10 said:

.... On the one hand, women are mostly limited to household work and on the other hand they are not equally mobilized politically and culturally due to some conservative practices.

Most of the interviewees said that they feel freer in Norway. Compare to Nepal, they did not find any distinction between male and female here. In Nepal, smoking and drinking, going to disco, bar, pub, living together before marriage are like a crime for female. If these things are done by female in society, Nepalese society and family never accept her as a good girl or a respected woman. But the respondents found that this is not the case in Norway. Nevertheless, if such activities are performed by male, it is taken normal and acceptable in Nepalese society.

Safeguard

4.5 Household works

Most of the respondents from Brahmin and Chhetri ethnicity expressed that all household work has to be performed by women either in Nepal or in Norway. They are not getting any support from their male members in the family. Even in the case of both husband and wife working outside the home, all responsibilities of house work has to be taken by wife. Married respondents explained that in certain circumstances, if husband is ready to help his wife, other family member and neighbor will not allow him to help. So, even if the husband is cooperative and helpful, the Nepalese society becomes the barriers. Very few participants expressed that both husband and wife are equally participating in household chores.

Although, some of the highly qualified women in towns are engaged in full- time employment, they have to look after all household activities. The women are overburdened by dual work. The patriarchal society identifies men as the sole bread winner of the family. Even the women don't expect male to accompany them in household works because they have strong ties to the prevailing culture since their childhood. Males don't participate in household work just saying it is 'least enjoyable tasks'. One of my participants N9 responded about the importance of sharing every household works by males and females in every family. She said:

Division of labor in the household responsibilities not only mitigate burden upon women but also provides the females reassurance that the home has mutual relation and good understanding among all members. The young children can learn from the elders working co-operatively.

She further shared that women in Nepal have to manage all household activities in order to prove herself as a good wife and good mother. Women are rarely valued for their education and jobs. Women are expected to be a good housewife who can work hard and keep family members satisfied.

4.6 Gender Based violence

Gender based violence is the most generalized form of social exclusion in Nepali society. Most of my participants showed more interest and excitement to talk about the social violence upon women. Women have to perform several roles such as; a daughter, as a wife and as

daughter-in-law. Maximum numbers of woman are suffering from the victim of social and domestic violence in Nepal. Violence against women includes physical, psychological and sexual that accure within the family and community. In Nepal, many people believe in joint family. When one girl gets married, every person in family expects good care from her. Responding to question regarding having ‘personally faced or witnessed any violence to women when you lived in Nepal’, participant N6 explained:

I have not faced or witnessed such violence with my eyes directly but I used to notice it in the news and newspapers frequently.

Similarly, participant N9 explained:

Yes I have witnessed physical violence towards women. Verbal harassment and physical abuse are the examples of abuses that I have seen towards women in Nepal. A lady who used to work at our house was facing different sorts of abuses as her husband use to come drunk and use to hit her. I have also seen that neglect and verbal harassment which is the most common abuses that can be seen in Nepal towards women.

All the respondents agree that women in Nepal are socially and culturally discriminated. Furthermore, they agree that women easily accept their situation and the ideology of male supremacy. If they revolt against their husband, father and son, they have to pay for it. Their life will become very miserable in society. Due to the fear of loosing reputation of family and getting excluded by society, they remain silent. They know that they are dominated and discriminated by the male, even knowing it, their voice is voiceless. Although being an educated woman, they hardly reveal their private lives to others. Participant N1 explained:

I have witnessed such violence. In my society, near my home, there is one big family. They are reputed family in society and are educated also. But they treat their daughter-in-law as an animal. Their elder daughter-in-law is an educated woman and also from good family but her husband always come home being drunk and hit her very badly. Not only this, she is also suffering from her in-laws. Being an educated woman, she is silent. She is accepting all situations upon her. Once I asked with her ‘why you tolerate all? She

answered; I cannot go against my family because if I speak, my family's reputation will be down.

The entire participant explained that Nepali cultural practice is guided by Hindu religion and shaped by the socio cultural values of this particular religion. Legally authorized rights might not be implemented due to these socio- cultural barriers. Domestic violence for instance is seen as a family matter. In case of being reported to the community or society leader, they will ignore it as it is seen as a normal phenomenon and family matter.

Participants who are both working and married explained that they are treating their husband as a life partner because in Nepal marital bond is regarded as lifelong. Doing divorce or marrying again to next person is not easily approved and supported by the society. Even they are living in Norway far from their society and culture; they are not totally free like Norwegian women. They said that a long journey of the life has to pass with him, that's why we have to tolerate small things. They expressed that in some case we are suffering from domestic violence and we have to tolerate it for the sake of children's future.

Among seven married respondents, respondent N10 said:

I feel my husband is like a friend. Both of us are taking the equal responsibilities about the family and other income generating activities. Even then sometimes I feel my husband continue domestic violence. He wants to show male supremacy in some case and I also take it easily because I think he is also from the same society where every male wants to be superior to women. I feel luckier than other women because he is understandable husband.

Another reason for the domestic violence was extramarital affairs of husband. In such cases, husband tends to neglect and mistreat his wife. For the small mistakes of wife, the husband starts to threaten and hit his wife. My respondent N3 explained:

I am unmarried girl but I have seen such kind of violence at my neighbors. After 20 years of marriage, the husband started to mistreat his wife. The interaction between them is

less and misunderstanding started due to his extramarital relation. Mostly their conflict arises regarding that lady with whom her husband has relation.

For most of the Nepalese women, social and domestic violence is a part of their daily life. The form of violence they face differs according to changes in socio-cultural practices, educational background and so on. For instance, Chhaupadi (a tradition to isolated women by keeping them in dark room with no ventilation or window for at least 5/6 days during the menstruation period) is practiced in western region of Nepal. Likewise, dowry-death⁴ is seen in Terai area (the plain region and border side of India) which can be assumed as an impact of Indian culture. Similarly, in Dalit (low caste) communities, one landless group called Badi women are taken by the means of prostitution.

4.7 Suggestion provided by Participants for control violence

It was encouraging to note several suppressed voices at the time of interview. The interviewees also gave invaluable ideas on how to empower Nepalese women and mitigating social and domestic violence. Since the interviewees were matured and educated, their suggestions and perspectives are notable. I have listed some significant suggestion given by participants.

- ❖ Almost all of the participants expressed that to make women as independent as men; there should be equal access to education. From the maternal house, daughters should not be neglected and discriminated with regards to education.
- ❖ Some respondents said that there should be equality for both men and women in the case of property rights, decision- making rights, and human rights and so on. Every member of the society should have followed the rule and order.
- ❖ Unemployment is also the major problem of violence and discrimination. If both men and women are employed in society, there will be the reduction of violence which is caused by the economic problem.
- ❖ Some participants suggest that strict punishment should be put in place for the perpetrators of gender based violence.

⁴ Dowry-death is death of women who are murdered or driven to suicide due to harassment and torture by husband and in-laws because of less or no dowry from her parents' home in marriage.

- ❖ The majority of the participants viewed that domestic violence upon women can be control to some extent after banning alcohol.
- ❖ They explained that empowerment of women can be done by providing equal educational opportunities, avoiding gender discrimination, facilitating for exercise of legal rights and providing equal status in society.
- ❖ Some of them expressed that outdated traditional beliefs must be reformed gradually. It will help to reduce the social crimes and gender based domination.
- ❖ All the participants said that the dowry system should be banned in the society. There should be strict legal provision for the person who demand dowry.
- ❖ Some participants said that the traditional beliefs and practices, and the patriarchal systems are the main factors of domination but it should be change for the favor of women.
- ❖ Some of the participants said that for the change of women's status in society, media can play noteworthy role. So, mass and media should be sensitive for the prevention and control of discrimination against women.

Violence against women exists in several forms in Nepal such as rape, sexually abuse, mutilated, burnt, accused of witch and many others. The burning of women is the fatal form of violence in Nepal. Women have been subjugated to violence in Nepal since infinite time. They must be empowered in order to diminish social violence. Patriarchal system must be subverted by increasing access to education for all women. Beside it, successful and equal integration of women at all levels of government must be done to control the violence upon women. Effective programs by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) can provide crucial aid as well as supporting efforts for empowering women at grassroots level. Education is a strategy to combat violence against women.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The objectives of exploring on impact of culture and religion on gender equality in Nepal and stereotypical representation of Nepalese women are discussed in chapter four on the basis of the perspective and experiences of Nepalese women. Participant's responses illustrate that gender inequality prevail in Nepalese societies since infinite time. Nepalese women are suppressed by males in domestic as well as public spheres. Females don't have equal access to education, property and power like males. Basically, women are encouraged to work at home and remain devoted to family members.

Culture and religion are two major factors adversely affecting women's freedom and empowerment. The cultural norms created by patriarchy limits women's freedom and empowerment. Since early childhood, parents show biasness to daughters. Nepalese societies regard son as inheritor of property and parents safeguard. Since early childhood, sons are encouraged to be courageous, hardworking and studious. In contrary, daughters are taught to assist mother in kitchen, be polite and respectful to others and maintain physical beauty. Patriarchy not only perpetuate gender inequality, it introduces women with several stereotypical representation like women are made for men, women are feeble, women are responsible for household work and women must keep their husband satisfied.

As pointed by many participants in chapter four, there are numerous discriminatory roles designated to females in Hindu religion. Women pray for male's success and long life. They take fasting and worship god and goddess for male's sake. Unlike this, males never pray or suffer for women's betterment. Hinduism constrains women's freedom and teaches them to be loyal and devoted to husbands. Husbands are often introduced as incarnation of god Vishnu. Strong ties to religion can be taken as an important factor perpetuating inequality in Nepal. Beside this, prevailing culture restricts women from getting empowered. As opined by respondents, women are victims of problems like early marriage, sexual abuse, trafficking, dowry death etc which deprives females from getting quality education. Education is only the tool that can combat gender inequality and generate awareness in every part of Nepalese societies.

While saying so, I mustn't discard the truth that educated women from urban areas are less suffering from male domination than the poor and illiterate women at grass road level. There have been some positive attempts in promoting gender equality by government and private sector.

5.2 Changing Social Norms and Gender Roles

Before discussing on what sort of changes have taken place, I would like to consider traditional roles and dynamics. In Nepalese patriarchal societies, internalized sexual difference and perception always placed men above women. The dichotomy assigns a role for women in private domain and for men in the public sphere. Females are valued for their beauty, loyalty and incredible roles performed in the households. Since early childhood the girls are raised to be 'caring', 'loving' and 'patient'. They were taught how to be a 'good' wife and make a 'good home' for family. These cultural and religious norms set boundaries for the women's freedom and empowerment.

In this research, many of the interviewees shared that socio-cultural traditions and religious values restrict or prescribe women to act in certain limited ways. According to the interviewees the fundamental underlying causes of female suppression was dependency on males, strict adherence to cultural and religious traditions and illiteracy. Basically, Nepalese women not even perceive gender inequality and tradition to be a choice; rather it is internalized it as natural and indisputable condition.

In Nepalese societies, views are mainly dominated by the perception of men and are always favoring of men. To change social norms and perceptions about women, firstly the society should abandon their proverbs which they use in everyday life. There are some proverbs that society used to insult women which also reflect how society and people perceive women.

- ❖ *Dhilo hos, chhora hos*; (let it be late but let it be a son).
- ❖ *Chhori ko janma hare ko karma*; (a daughter is born with a doomed fate).
- ❖ *Swasni bhaneko paitalako dhulo ho*; (wife is the dust of the foot).
- ❖ *Pothi base ghar nashinchha*; (a female ruled house is sure to be destroyed).

Such proverbs lead to a misconception of women's potential leadership role and capacity of women both in the household and the public sphere. To improve women's situation and bring them in center, it is necessary to change all sorts of patriarchal hegemonic rule over female. All of my participants suggested that the kind of proverbs mention above should be removed from our society. Moreover women's voices should be heard in every decision-making forum. It is impossible to all change social inherited norms and structure at once, but women's basic needs and gender power relation should be addressed simultaneously (Ghimire-Bastakoti, Kalpana 2005).

Social development along with increasing access to education and growing awareness has given way to improvement in Nepalese women in recent days. Education is the major tool that plays an important role in the process of socialization. It helps to widen the level of thinking along with simultaneous reforms in social practices.

5.3 Step of Government in Educational sector

Gender based inequality and discrimination in education is the reality of Nepalese society. It is a part of the deep rooted socio-cultural norms and practice of patriarchal society in Nepal. Nepal has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world (Prativa Subedi, 1997). The past political systems of Nepal are responsible for the slow development of education system.

Compared to the past, there has been marked improvement in the situation of women's education. Now-a –days girls' education has become widespread in most of the Nepalese societies. In this research, most of the respondents were educated women. Personally, they didn't suffer much from gender discrimination although they belonged to the same societies where many women are still suffering from different types of domestic violence. They all admired the step of government in educational and empowerment sector.

Women's education is very important in developing individual personality. The international debate and conferences like CEDAW and world conferences on women especially, Nairobi in 1985, Beijing in 1995 and "education for All" Jomtien in 1990, have focused of equal rights for women in education and declared education as a significant tool to raise women's

status (CEFA, 2003). After this, the government of Nepal has shown its full commitment to such international debates and policies, and acknowledges the importance of education.

In spite of all these efforts, there is still gender disparity in the literacy rate; overall literacy rate is improved but women's literacy rate remains the same. After the *Nepali Jana Andolan* (A Nepali Mass Movement)⁵ in 2006, a constitution assembly elected was held and the unified communist party of Nepal (Maoist) formed government on 16th august 2008. The Maoist government started the campaign as a means to "make the citizens aware of the change and make the general public literate"⁶ (Baral, 2009:1).

Along with the government's efforts, many NGOs and INGOs and other organizations are also working in the sector of education in different parts of the country. Rimal (2003), in his study found that there was continuous increment in the number of literacy programs but decision making is still dominant by males. In Nepal, expectation about attribute and behaviors appropriate to men or women are shaped by culture, tradition and history. Women have less autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, limited power of decision making that effects the social development as well as their own life.

In the context of Nepal, educating girl is one of the powerful tools for women's empowerment. Education provides opportunities of developing knowledge, skills and self-confidence to seek out economic opportunities. Women's education is an important step for the economic, social and political development of the civil society. Being an educated women, women can play a vital role in the social, political and economic improvement of the society and also get conscious about their rights and responsibilities. To improve overall status of women gender transformative policy can be another important factor.

⁵ Nepali mass movement 2006 forced then king Gyanendra to give the power back to the people by reinstating the dissolved House of Representatives. Then, the comprehensive peace agreement 2063BS between the government and the armed Maoist rebels to the constitution process and Nepal was declared a Federal Democracy republic (Arjun, 2010).

⁶ My translation of "*janata lai pariwartan ko pratyabhuti garauna ra aamnagarik lai sakshar banauna*"(Baral 2009:1).

5.4 Gender Transformative Policy

Gender transformative policy examines challenges and ultimately transforms structures, norms and behaviors that reinforce gender inequality and strengthens those that support gender equality (USAID, 2007:1-3). Gender discrimination is the main reason of cultural performance towards son in Nepali society. The challenges experienced by Nepalese women are especially severe. In patriarchal society, mainly widows, women from marginalized communities are the subject of discrimination. So, in such situation, gender transformative policy enhance gender equality by changing the way community view, value and assign roles to women and men.

Gender transformative policy creates condition that increase shared power, control of resources and decision making between women and men (HERAF, 2012). Most of the interviewees asserts on the enforcement of appropriate gender transformative policy which ensure proper rights and conditions for women empowerment. Gender transformative program must be held in order to change the gender norms created by patriarchy and develop fair and just relationship between females and males. Gender transformative programs can change individual as well as social perceptions towards females. An affirmative policy that promotes in increasing support for women's attempt to be independent by any means can be regarded as landmark in women's empowerment. Gender transformative policy questions the different gender norms and roles that affect women and man by providing critical awareness about gender roles and norms.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

The finding of this study are consistent with number of other studies on women's position and their challenging life but also add better understanding on how several factors like patriarchal norms, prevailing culture and religion restrict women from establishing gender equality. Like other previous studies (Sharma, 2007 and Bohl, 2010) socio-demographic factors are found to be important for shaping women's condition. According to this study, the most important socio-demographic factors are educational level, marital status and place of settlement. However, caste and ethnicity are also associated to gender inequality prevailing in Nepalese societies.

Basically, this research asserts that redrawing of patriarchal norms, increasing female access to education and property, targeting women's empowerment program and providing

employment to women in Nepal is necessary to transform. The conditions of poor women in rural areas have not undergone significant changes. The lives of poor women in rural areas are very difficult and hard.

Overall, the result confirm that women's situation in Nepal cannot be improved just by securing their rights and notion of equality through laws and constitution. Different kinds of programs like public awareness about violence, gender training etc must be held in order to uplift women from subordinate position. To mitigate gender based violence and improve the existing situation of women, this research recommends three basic changes. The proposed changes are based on what participants voiced in the interviews.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The principal aim of this research is to contribute knowledge on Nepalese women's situation. This research was conducted with the motif of explore the religious and social conception which confines women's freedom and empowerment in Nepalese contexts. Nepalese women are treated as minorities by patriarchal societies. The stereotypical identities created by male dominated societies of Nepal restrict women from experiencing equal rights to male.

This research also probes the ethos of Hindu religion that enforce women to be always subordinated and puppets of males. In Nepal, even parents pervade daughters from getting educated. Most of them blindly follow traditional beliefs. Parents give high preference to son; therefore the educated son also thought that only son can support them at their old age. The females belonging to dalits ethnicity have more miserable life in comparison to higher cast families. Due to poverty and illiteracy, they are always suppressed by males since child ages. Women from low-caste are mainly victims of domestic violence. Even in this 21st century, they are compelled to live within the household just working as housemaid to make husband and his family satisfied.

This research is descriptive in nature. Qualitative data collections method has been employed as the tool of primary data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Stavanger and Oslo with Nepalese women provided valuable data to answer the research questions. Similarly, theoretical and conceptual approaches like Gender studies, Women empowerment and Culture theories have been applied to analyzed data and provide brief knowledge. During the course of writing thesis, notes provided by professors at MHS, previous thesis have been reviewed to achieve knowledge on methodological and theoretical framework.

Based n the study result, it is concluded that Nepalese women are dominated by males since beginning. Though the condition of literate women in urban areas is quite better but it is too nominal. Women in Nepalese societies are discriminated by males since their birth. Patriarchal dogmas and socio-cultural principles further enhance the discrimination process. Especially, the poor illiterate women from rural areas are extremely victimized by gender discrimination and domestic violence. Patriarchal system, polygamy, dowry and superstitious beliefs widespread contribute for domestic violence against women. Poverty, illiteracy and

strong belief on tradition are hindering women's empowerment in Nepal. The lack of equal rights, proper education, public awareness and good government policies have further hinder women's progress as well as whole nation's development.

It is recommended that the socio-cultural reforms can be held in Nepalese societies by implementing rules strictly and educating every female. Beside this, equal inclusion of females in policy making sectors is inevitable. The trends of depending on males for everything at home have created hierarchies within males and females in societies. Providing equal education, freedom and opportunities can trace the better societies without any gender discrimination. Also, the males' perceptions towards females must be redrawn. Through this research, I set forth some recommendation for Nepalese women progress and equality in societies:

- Elimination of discriminatory laws.
- Rights to parental property must implement strictly.
- Gender sensitization programmer must be conducted widely.
- Proper representation of females in every sector.
- Person engaged in domestic violence must be given harsh punishment by law.
- Equal opportunities to female in education.

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