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Socio-cultural Perspectives on Gender Roles in Nepal and Status of Women's Leadership in Academia

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Abstract

This study is mainly concerned with how the gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia and how women leaders in academia deal with gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in their leadership practices. As the study required a detailed understanding of the sociocultural concepts toward women and their status in Nepalese society and the condition of women's leadership in academia, it uses a qualitative approach and demonstrates the phenomenon including the real experiences of women leaders in academia in Nepal. Further, it is focused on finding the experiences and strategies on how women leaders in academia deal with gender-based practices of Nepalese society in leadership practices so it uses in-depth interviews with seven women leaders who were purposively selected from different higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal. The empirical data is coded and developed into different meaningful themes and systematically presented under those themes. Further, the findings are discussed with reference to the related literature in the area and theoretical bases of social constructionism and social dominance theory.

The study shows that patriarchal social norms in Nepalese society have given the way to gender discrimination. The social practice that the man is head of the family has created a clear hierarchy as males are superior and women are the inferior or subordinate group. Socio-culturally rooted stereotypes and male hegemony have restricted women in various social activities and discriminatory gender-role practices limited them in household chores. Further, the study demonstrates that such sociocultural concepts and discriminatory gender-role practices in Nepalese society have challenged women's leadership in academia. As women get fewer opportunities in a male-dominated social setting, the underrepresentation of women's leadership in academia is a crucial issue. Besides, due to the concept of masculine leadership traits, women are considered less capable of leadership roles. The social concept of women as solely responsible for household work and family care has added a burden to their professional development and career goals. Although the challenges, women leaders in academia seemed confident in their leadership roles. Their activities as role models could be an inspiration for other women aspiring to leadership positions in academia in Nepal. Their advocacy for gender equality in the community is significant for bringing a sense of gender equality from the grassroots level. Their involvement in the different professional forums helps them share their experiences and get collective strengths for equal opportunities.

Keywords: women leadership, Academia, gender roles, sociocultural reality

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List of Abbreviations

ADB   **Asian Development Bank**

NSD   **The Norwegian Centre for Research Data**

UGC   **University Grands Commissions**

UN   **United Nations**

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Discussions have been going on globally regarding women's leadership in academia. Studies show that there is a gender gap in academic leadership (Knipfer et al., 2017, p.273). In other words, women still have to face many challenges in breaking the stereotypes and coming to leadership positions in a global scenario although gender equality advocates not only the equal rights of males and females but also an equal representation of males and females in all positions. Moreover, reformations in the laws for women's inclusion and guaranteeing the rights of women for equal status can be taken as great achievements (Bhandari, 2019). Yet, the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership positions is a matter of concern. So, identifying the affecting factors that cause their underrepresentation becomes crucial for the study as the core area of discussion. As the study focuses on the socio-cultural dimension of Nepalese society, it deeply concerns how gender-based social practices challenge women's leadership and how women leaders in Nepalese academia execute their leadership practices in male-dominated social settings.

Gender discrimination is a critical issue in Nepal. Discriminatory socio-cultural norms, gender-based roles, and stereotypical masculine supremacy pose challenges to women's empowerment and social inclusion. In general, the Nepalese patriarchal social structure has restricted women's roles in different social affairs and confined them to household chores. Besides, the patriarchal system is deeply connected to caste, ethnicity, and religious beliefs (Upreti et al., 2020, p 89). As a result, women's status and recognition are different in different social spheres. women's condition varies and gets opportunities and privileges differently based on the socioeconomic status of their family and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, women's condition differs in urban and rural areas (Luitel, 2001). The concept of gender norms has been changed leading to an increment in women's participation and involvement in social and economic affairs in urban areas, but women are still far behind in social inclusion in many rural areas. Haper & George (2020) state, 'women literacy rates have increased over the last decade, but rates remain low, and there are significant gaps between urban setting, with higher literacy and rural setting' (p. 8). Moreover, female leaders are very few in different sectors though there is an increasing trend of women's involvement in education, politics, and the economic sector.

Discriminatory socio-cultural practices still challenge women for self-recognition and identity in society and become barriers to reaching a leadership position (Morley & Crossouard, 2016, p. 807). So, the main aim of this study is to find out how gender-based social practice and socio-culturally defined roles challenge women's leadership in academia in Nepal and how women leaders in academia deal with gender-based roles in male-dominated social settings in their leadership practice. In the study, the terms female and women are used interchangeably and women leaders in academia refer to women having executive or leading roles in higher educational institutions in Nepal.

1.2 Socio-cultural Perspectives on Women in Nepal

Nepalese society is a patriarchal society. Patriarchy in a wider sense is an institutionalization of male dominance over women in the family as well as in society (Sultana, 2010, p.3). In the context of Nepal, 'patriarchy is systemic across political, economic, social and cultural systems and it encompasses multiple intersecting axes of discrimination in addition to gender' (Upreti et al., 2020 p. 88). Though the constitution has granted equal status to women and prevents all types of discriminatory practices based on gender, traditional stereotypes are still existing in Nepalese society.

Many social norms and religious values favour male supremacy and suppress the identity of females. 'Discrimination against women in Nepal is related to the traditional culture and deeply rooted in the society; that establishes the hierarchical relationship between male and female' (Pokharel, 2008, p.2). Generally, a male is the head of the family and the decision-maker of household affairs. The same rule applies to society as well. Male superiority confines women to household chores preventing them from participating in social issues. Females are considered inferior and are always put under male members' supervision although the males are junior to females in the family. Such practices of gender domination have prevented women from taking part in education, economics, and socio-political sectors.

Gender discrimination is deeply rooted in Nepalese society as social practices and norms that are in practice in the family and society are the major factors of the discrimination and cannot be overcome with legal provisions (Lawoti, 2010, p. 21). Giving birth to a baby boy is still prestigious for a woman in society so there are practices of abortion of fetus if identified as a girl or giving birth to many girls in the wish of giving birth to a baby boy. The concept of a boy as a caretaker in old age has not changed in many parts of the country although the tradition has been changing in urban areas among the educated people.

Nowadays, women have stepped out of the home and are employed in different sectors (Harper, & George, 2020, p. 13). The studies show that there is increased involvement of women in wage employment. From 18.9 percent in 1990, there was an increased share of women's employment reaching 44.8 percent in 2013 (Upreti et al., 2020 p. 88). Though women started doing jobs in different sectors, it is considered their duty to do all the household chores and take family responsibility and management. In such a scenario women have dual roles and the burden of house and office. This means, there is still male superiority in the family as well as in society despite some substantial changes in the condition of women in Nepal.

1.3 Socio-cultural Concept of Gender-Based Roles in Nepal

It is already discussed that patriarchal social norms are dominant in Nepalese societies. Further, there is also a socio-cultural concept that society expects certain roles of males and females in the family and in society. As Blackstone (2003) states, gender roles are the prospects of an individual from a society that is attached to values and beliefs about gender. For simple understanding, gender roles are discussed here as the socio-culturally defined activities in that males and women perform their duties in the family and in society.

As the patriarchal norms consider males the head of the family, it also gives decision-making roles too. So, males play the role of decision maker in the family as well as in society as they exercise supreme power and authority (Poudel, 2011). Males are brought up as a privileged group, so they enjoy all sorts of freedom. On contrary, patriarchal social norms that are prevalent in Nepalese society consider women as the inferior group and do not allow them in decision-making roles. They have to accept the decisions of the males as the respect given to their power. Women in Nepal are still living under the burden of a patriarchal society (Upreti et al., 2020) as a result women are considered less capable of leadership roles.

In Nepalese society, the traditional mindset is that the main role and responsibility of males is to earn money for the living of their families (Luitel, 2001). In other words, males are brought up with the concept that they are the food provider to their families, so they have to earn money working in different sectors. As a result, they get the special privilege of getting an education, developing technical skills and also good food. On the other hand, women are considered most responsible for household chores, raising children, and caring for elderly people in the family (Bhushal, 2008). Additionally, the social concept of giving preference to sons is that sons are considered of having economic values, as well as the security of parents in their old age, and their roles are also expected in a similar way. As a sociocultural practice, girls

go to their husband's houses after marriage. So they are not considered reliable sources of economic support for their parents. Because of such concepts regarding sons and daughters, parents assign different roles to their children. Parents perceive the daughter's roles as household chores and childcare (Rothchild, 2007, p.8). As a result, they are confined to houses without any roles in social spheres. However, we see gradual changes in the status of women in certain urban areas. But most of the women in rural areas are still living in measurable conditions, suppression and male domination and struggling for getting opportunities for education and other life skills.

In Nepalese society, women have to play different roles as per the hierarchy in their family network. 'All the women play their roles associated with a particular relation to each individual. Thus, a single woman would be playing multiple roles relevant to the relation with the particular individual.' (Luitel, 2001, p. 101). Before marriage, the daughters get some sort of advantage in the family. But after marriage, she has to obey the family and social boundaries and work as per the decision of the family to fit in that family. Daughters-in-law get less freedom but have to bear more family responsibilities. So, daughters are taught in such a way that they can fit themselves into the new family after their marriage (Luitel, 2001). So, they are given importance to get knowledge in household work and family responsibilities. Giving education is considered worthless to daughters as they have to involve in household chores and caring for the family for their entire life.

1.4 Research Questions:

This study is mainly concerned with gender-based social practices of Nepalese society that pose challenges to women's leadership in academia in Nepal. The socio-cultural reality of Nepalese society shows the perception of gender-based social practices in Nepal. So, emphasis is given to elaborating the gender-based social practices and their connection to the status of women in society as well as women in leadership positions in academia. Further, it intends to reflect the experiences of women leaders in academia on tackling the social practices of gender-based roles in leadership practices. Thus, the main research questions of this study are:

a. How do gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia?

b. How do women leaders in academia deal with the gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in leadership practices?

1.5 Women's Leadership in Academia in Nepal

Women's leadership in academia is a global issue. Many scholars have indicated the absence of women's leadership in higher education. There is a scenario of male prevalence as well as dominance in senior leadership positions in countries with diverse policies and gender equality legislation (Morley, 2013, p. 121). It is a great concern and challenge for the advocacies of inclusive leadership and proportional representation of females in all positions in developing countries like Nepal.

Gender discrimination is a widely discussed issue in the Nepalese context. Reformation in the legislation and changing concepts regarding gender roles have brought some changes in the stereotype concept. However, 'Girls' education is still limited in some areas by the unequal division of household labour, as well as early marriage that causes girls to drop out of school and restrict girls' mobility' (Harper, & George, 2020, p.8). Voices have been raised and there are constitutional reformations for equal opportunities for women in different sectors. Such reformations have given excess to women in different sectors although some socio-cultural barriers are still prevalent and posed challenges to gender equality. There are increments in women's participation in education, politics, and economics, but very few women are in academic leadership positions.

It is a matter of concern that there are very few women leaders in academia in the context of Nepal. The involvement of female teachers is also very few as compared to males in the school system. As per the report of the Department of Education (DOE) (2014), there are only 17.4% of female teachers at the secondary level and 15.5% at the higher secondary level, and only 13.1% are in a leadership position in school (cited in Bhattarai, & Maharjan, 2016, p.221). Due to the socio-cultural setting female teachers are not given priority for the leadership position and the female teachers themselves also do not wish for such positions further, political influence and other preferences also prevent women from leadership (Bista,2008, p.101). Overall, the minimal involvement of the female teacher in academia in comparison to the male ratio has somehow affected the lower number of women leaders in academia. Regarding women's leadership in higher education, specific data is unavailable. However, it is seen that women's leadership is neglected in academia in Nepal.

1.6 Significance of the study

Many studies are carried out about gender issues in Nepal. Gender discrimination is considered one of the biggest challenges in Nepal for equal and inclusive social practices. Gender discrimination is socio-culturally rooted in Nepalese society. However, we can see some changes in the concept of people about gender roles so that women nowadays are getting access to education, politics, administration, and other areas of social affairs. Moreover, a little portion is getting the advantage of this changing concept. The overall scenario is not inclusive in nature. While talking about women's leadership in academia, their presence is very critical. There are a few females in leadership positions in academia. Though there are many studies on gender discrimination, there are very few concerns regarding women's leadership, and almost none of the studies are carried out on women's leadership in academia in the context of Nepal.

As this study mostly focuses on the status of women in Nepalese society and women's leadership in academia, it intends to find out how the socio-cultural perspectives on gender-based roles pose challenges to women's leadership in academia and how women's leadership in academia deal with the challenges in a male-dominated social setting. As gender discrimination and women's leadership are explained from a socio-cultural perspective, it explores the status of women leaders in masculine supremacy. Thus, this study can be a new venture for those who work for gender rights, women empowerment, and women's leadership to better understand the causes and challenges of socio-cultural perspectives on gender-based roles and women's leadership in the context of Nepal, especially in academia.

1.7 An Overview of Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one gives the background of the study. It establishes the research question and gives a brief overview of the sociocultural perspectives on women and shows the status of women leadership in academia in Nepal. Further, it states the significance of the study in the area of socio-cultural context and women's leadership in academia in Nepal.

Chapter two deals with the context of the study, it presents an overview of higher education in Nepal and the involvement of women in academia. It also elaborates on the legislative provisions in Nepal for gender equality and provisions made for women's empowerment. Further, it systematically presents the studies carried out in the area of women's leadership in academia.

Chapter three gives details on the theoretical framework. As the study discusses the findings on the theoretical groundings of social constructionism and social dominance theory, it gives the theoretical concepts that are embedded in the context of socio-cultural reality of Nepal and the status of women's leadership in academia.

Chapter four is methodology. It describes the methodological procedures adopted for the study. It describes the logic behind using the qualitative approach for the study and presents the methods and techniques that were employed in the study. It also justifies the sampling procedure and in-depth interview as a tool for data collection. In short, every procedural detail is described in this chapter along with the ethical considerations taken during and after the study.

Chapter five systematically presents the data that was collected through in-depth interviews with seven women leaders from different higher educational institutions in Nepal. In this chapter, the data is presented under different meaningful themes.

Chapter six deals with the discussion. The findings of the study are discussed with reference to the related literature in the area and the essence of social constructionism and social dominance theory in order to answer the research questions.

Chapter seven is the conclusion and recommendations. It briefly concludes the findings and gives recommendations for the betterment of the situation of women leadership in academia in Nepal and points out further possibilities for the study in the area.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEXT

2.1 Nepal: At a Glance

Nepal is a south Asian country that covers an area of 147181 square kilometres. It is a country with geographical and social diversity. According to the National Census Report (2021), the total population of Nepal is 2,91,92,480. Among them, 142,91,311 (48.96%) are males and 1,49,01169 (51.04%) are females. Nepal ranks in 147th position among 189 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a score of 0.579. Likewise, it stands in 115th position among 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a score of 0.476 (UN Women Nepal, 2021). Such indicators show the gender disparity and demands for effective legal intervention for the social inclusion of women and require efficient measures for women's empowerment.

2.2 Status of Women on Legislation

Nepalese women have played a significant role in different social and political movements and soughed their rights, equality, and recognition in social and political affairs. The struggle of women for their rights in the country has paved the way for legislative recognition after the advent of democracy in Nepal. Nepali women got recognition for their political and social rights which were formalized in the constitution of Nepal in 2015 (Upreti et al., 2020, p. 81). Women started getting 33 percent reservations in public services. Likewise, the provision of 33 percent of women's participation in all state operations is an indication of social inclusion and a good step for women's empowerment. Such reformations have given opportunities for women to be a part of the social, political, and economic affairs of the nation. As a result, Nepal has the first female president, Bidhya Devi Bhandari (2015), the first female chief justice of the supreme court, Sushila Karki (2016), the first female speaker of the house of representative, Onsari Gharti Mahar (2015). These are some of the examples of females in the higher position of the state and this became possible due to the rigorous women's struggle and organized movement for their rights and equal status in society.

The present constitution of Nepal which was promulgated in 2015 has clearly legislated equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their caste, gender, and class. The constitution of Nepal (2015) states that all citizens are equal by law. It gives more emphasis to women and

other underprivileged people for equal access to education, health, and empowerment. It guarantees (under the fundamental rights and right to equality) non-discrimination on the basis of sex, physical condition, marital status, and so on for the protection of women's rights and their social dignity. It also guarantees protection against physical, mental, and other types of violence under fundamental rights. It prohibits the suppression of women on the basis of religious, cultural, and social practices. (Constitution of Nepal, 2015)

Different commissions and acts have been enacted for gender equality and women empowerment. National Women Commission 2002 was mandated to work for the welfare of women and recommend making policies to address the existing barriers to gender equality. Besides, the Gender Equality Act, of 2006, the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act of 2007, and the Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act of 2009 were some of the initiatives by the government for gender equality and women Empowerment (Bhandari, 2019, p. 65).

It seems that there have been efforts for equal access to women in different state affairs and focused programs for women's empowerment. However, various reports show that gender disparity is prevalent in education, employment, and leadership. Nevertheless, the status of women has changed to some extent because of the legislative provision of gender equality and the priority of women's empowerment.

2.3 Higher Education and Women Faculties in Nepal

Education impartment after the higher secondary level that is 12 grade is considered higher education in Nepal (UGC, 2014). The development of higher education in Nepal started with the establishment of Trichandra college in Kathmandu in 1918 (ADB, 2015). The establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1959 as the first university of Nepal was a remarkable step from the government for the development of higher education in Nepal. As the government gave emphasis on developing different higher educational institutions, Nepal Sanskrit University was established in 1986. Gradually, other universities and institutes for higher education were open. They are listed below:

Name of Higher Education Institutions	Establishment year
Kathmandu university	1991

Purbanchal University	1993
Pokhara university	1997
Lumbani Buddhist University	2004
Far Western University	2010
Mid Western University	2010
Agricultural and Forestry University	2010
B. P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences	1993
National Academy of Medical Sciences	2002
Patan Academy of Health Sciences	2013

Source: (ADB, 2015)

According to University Grands Commissions Report (2012), there are nine universities and 1087 campuses in Nepal. Among the campuses, 83 are university constituent campuses, 302 are affiliated community campuses that are publicly funded and 702 are private campuses affiliated with different universities. This report further states that the total number of faculty members working in different universities of Nepal and their constituent and affiliated community campuses was 15,365. Among them, only 1,322 were female faculties working in different positions in different higher educational institutions. This data symbolizes the critical condition of female faculties regarding their representation in academia.

2.4 Studies on Women's Leadership in Academia

Many advocacies are carried out globally regarding gender equality. However, the problem still exists in different sizes and shapes and shows different dimensions when we talk about gender inclusion and equal opportunities for women. In this scenario, gender discrimination is a global issue, and it is persistent differently in different parts of the world. Thus, discriminatory gender role practices have challenged women for getting leadership opportunities.

In some parts of the world, women still struggle for their equal rights to education and property. For those women leadership opportunities are far behind. However, some women are exercising leadership in different sectors, but the result is only partial. It is not that efforts have

not been put into gender equality. Different provisions are made for women's rights. Despite the equal legal provisions, the social tradition of male hegemony suppresses women and prevents them from getting equal opportunities. Women's underrepresentation in top leadership positions is a result of biases in the hiring process and limited opportunities for their professional growth (Dean et al., 2009, p. 2). This means that only legislative provisions do not bring changes in the situation and guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women. It is important to note that the socio-cultural perspective undermines the capabilities of women and prevents them from leadership roles. Rhode (2016) states, 'as to leadership effectiveness, most research reveals no significant gender difference. Success in leadership generally requires a combination of traditionally masculine and feminine traits, including visions, ethics, interpersonal skills, technical competence and personal capabilities such as self-awareness and self-control' (p.6). Regarding women's leadership in academia also, studies have shown that sociocultural perspectives on women and social norms have posed challenges to women in getting opportunities as well as in leadership roles.

Many researchers have shed light on women's leadership in academia. Studies are carried out incorporating various dimensions of women's leadership. Socio-cultural perspectives and leadership identities and styles of women leaders are seen to be the most concerning aspects of the studies of women's leadership. Mostly related to the area of this study and selected literature in the area of women leadership in academia are reviewed below:

Morley, & Crossouard (2016) have studied the issue of women's leadership in higher education in South Asia. Their study entitled 'Women's Leadership in the Asian Century: does expansion mean inclusion?' is concerned with the absence of women leaders in higher education in South Asia. The study showcases the women's leadership condition in higher education with the help of documents and statistics available in the area and the interview data collected from 30 academics from six South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In the study, they found out that gender was not a matter of concern in the higher education policies and prioritized areas of study and analysis in the region. The study points out the effects of patriarchal social structure and gender-based socio-cultural practices and how these concepts have limited the opportunities for women for leadership positions. They have concluded that leadership was not a matter of interest to women. Moreover, the absence of statistical data regarding women's leadership in higher education suggests that there is less concern in the study of gender and leadership relationships in South Asia including Nepal. They have analyzed the statistical data from six south Asian countries

and found out that the enrolment of women in higher education is increasing but there are few women representing the leadership position. This means that there is not a justifiable representation of women's leadership in academia. Finally, they concluded that women are not characterized and prepared for leadership positions.

In general, the concept of masculinity in the leadership position and the presence of masculine hegemony play role in limiting the opportunities for women's leadership (Morley, 2013, p.123). So, it is important to study how women are perceived and how their roles are legitimized in the social setting to find out the holistic picture of women's status in leadership positions and their challenges and opportunities for their role execution. In this sense, the suggestion of Morley& Crossouard (2016) about the necessity of structural and systemic reformation for the promotion and comfortable adjustment of women in leadership positions is considerable. Criteria for appointment and promotion and gender preferences for the leadership position in educational institutions also determine the chances of women being chosen for the leadership position.

Walsh & Turmbull (2016) in their study 'Barriers to women leaders in academia: tales from science and technology' with in-depth interviews of twenty women faculties in three universities in the UK, drew the conclusion that male-dominated culture excludes women from the network, as a result, women get less opportunities for career advancement. Further, the perception of people as well as individual confidence regarding their ability also play a crucial role in women not being selected for senior leadership positions in academia. Additionally, informal working hours has also a negative impact on women in their leadership roles.

Cultural norms and social practices are seen as the influencing factors in the status of women's leadership, and they have somehow affected the leadership style as well. Bhati & Ali (2021) have carried out a study on the identities of women's academic leadership in Pakistan. They have identified cultural and masculinity intervention in the leadership style. However, gender was not found as the determining factor for leadership identities in the empirical data. Women leaders were found to be more concerned with their own attributes in their role execution than being influenced by the dominant masculine leadership style.

Further, Ali & Rasheed (2021), from in-depth interviews with twelve women leaders of universities in Pakistan studied the challenges and opportunities of women's leadership in Pakistani universities. The study concludes that male-dominated networks and stereotypes pose obstacles to leadership opportunities for women. The study states that females are given less priority in leadership positions due to gender stereotypes. Further, the study point outs that

family support, good socio-economic status and good networking can be helpful for women reaching leadership positions.

Likewise, Shah & Shah (2012) argue that cultural and belief system determines women's participation in education and their involvement in leadership positions. Their study shows that social context and family interest play a crucial role in taking leadership positions for women. They stated that women seemed more concerned about the family role than professional responsibilities.

In the study of women leaders in theological institutions, (Campbell, 2016) states that women leaders have to struggle with the work-life balance. Besides such challenges, women leaders in theological educational institutions encounter various gender biases due to different gender role boundaries.

In the context of Nepal, there are very few studies carried out on women's leadership. The lack of gender-related statistics especially in women's leadership in academia indicates that it has not got due concern in the administration, and it has been neglected in academic studies. Talking about the barriers to women employees regarding their career development, Adhikary (2016) identifies that individual, organizational and societal structures hamper the career development of women in Nepal. Marriage during the career development period is specified as one of the major obstructions for women in their career development. Likewise, work and family balance appeared to be the subsequent challenge (p. 27).

Bista and Carney (2004) studied on women's representation in leadership positions in the education sector. According to the report, female head teachers constituted only 3.4 percent, 1.3 percent and 3.7 percent in primary, lower secondary and secondary levels respectively. It showed that women were in a small minority as well as a lower level in the hierarchy. It showed a glass ceiling which is the socio-cultural concept of limiting women as a barrier to getting women into leadership positions (Bista, 2006, p.21).

Further, Bista (2006) states in the study of female teachers in Nepal that male teachers get more opportunities for upgrading their qualifications and professional growth than women. The report states that women get cultural, institutional and family obstacles in their progression.

The literature in the area of women's leadership in academia depicts that women are lagging in academia and the status of women's leadership is very critical in the sense that very few women have got leadership opportunities in academia. Their underrepresentation in leadership is a matter of concern in developed countries also and it is a serious issue in developing countries like Nepal where gender disparity is wide and sociocultural practices pose challenges to women for leadership roles.

CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is mainly concerned with the socio-cultural perspective on gender-based social practices focusing on the status of women's leadership in academia and how they deal with the challenges of gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in executing their leadership roles. For a clear reflection of socio-cultural dimensions and gender-based social practices in Nepalese society and their connection to women's leadership, the empirical data is analysed on the basis of the theoretical groundings of social constructionism and social dominance theory.

3.1 Social Constructionism

Sociologists Berger and Luckmann in their book 'The Social Construction of Reality (1966) have made a great contribution to the sociological influence of social constructionism theory. According to them, human beings make and maintain social phenomena with social interaction. The three main symbolization processes are externalization, objectification, and internalization (Burr, 2003, p.185).

Berger and Luckmann, (1966) state, 'Human expressivity is capable of objectivation, that is, it manifests itself in products of human activity that are available both to their produces and to other men as an element of a common world' (p.49). So, social constructionism believes in the socially constructed reality that is derived from social interaction through language on the grounding of historically and socially pre-existing understanding of meaning and concepts.

3.1.1 Construction of Knowledge and Undertesting of Reality

According to social constructionism, social behaviour and conduct are the bases for the knowledge and formation of meaning in the reality. 'Social constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interaction between people and how they use language to construct their reality' (Andrews, 2012, p. 44). Most importantly, socio-cultural norms and values influence the recognition and identification of personal realities. In other words, the role a person plays and the behaviour that is reflected in the activities are socially constructed as 'people are self-defining and socially constructed participants in their shared lives' (Lock &Strong, 2010, p.8). Thus, the social setting, situation, and circumstances shape the role of individuals and that is perceived as the reality and role of individuals in society.

Social constructionism becomes critical to taken-for-granted knowledge and understanding of the world. Berger & Luckmann, (1966) argue, 'the world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conducts of their life' (p.33). The facts we think are the product of social and cultural values specific. All truths are relative, for example, the earth was considered a flat planet until it was discovered as round. Burr (2003) Says, 'Social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be, this means, the categories with which we as human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions' (p.3). This means our visions of existing things go on changing in course of time as there is no absolute truth and reality. Additionally, the concepts and categories we use for our understanding are historically and culturally relative. They are the product of the socio-cultural setting of a particular time. This is also a big concern of social constructionism.

The concepts and categories the people make are due to the language they use. This means language helps us to make our thoughts and understand reality. Berger and Luckmann, (1966), say, "the common objectivation of everyday life is maintained primarily by linguistic signification" (p.51). Thus, the way we understand the world is a result of pre-existing culture and language that the people in the society use and practice not from the objective reality of the world.

Social constructionism focuses on meaning and understanding of the world as the core part of human activity which is the shared agreement on social interaction. In this connection, Hacking (1999) states, 'It is urged that a great deal of our lived experience and, and the world we inhabit, is to be conceived as socially constructed' (p.6). The way of understanding and making a concept or meaning is embedded in the socio-cultural process of a particular time and place. Social interaction plays a vital role in making meaning and understanding reality. There can be shared agreement on how symbolic forms are to be considered for meaning and understanding the concept. Additionally, meaning-making undergoes the socio-cultural process of a particular time and place so that our understanding can be different over time in different situations. People construct between them through social interaction on which different versions of knowledge can be fabricated and can have an agreement on the currently accepted way of understanding the world that is regarded as the truth of current reality.

3.1.2 A critical overview of Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is often criticized for its relative understanding of meaning. If everything is relative and there is no objective fact, the question arises of the truth or reality. It lacks on giving proper guidance towards the truth. So, Gergen, (2009) says, "if everything we consider real is socially constructed, then nothing is real unless people agree that it is" (p.4). Thus, It neglects the objective facts made by physical and biological sciences.There is a problem with the relationship between an individual and society and the direction of influence. Burr, (2003) states,

If individuals logically pre-exist society, that is if society arises from and is based upon the nature of the individual, then the notion of human agency is preserved. Society becomes the product of all the individual choices and decisions that people have made (p.82).

Another problem is that social constructionism has not addressed the emotional aspects of human expression as it says knowledge is constructed through human interaction. Burr, (2003) states, "Social constructionist accounts run into is how to explain the desires, wants, hopes and fantasies of a person and there in the choices that person makes in their lives…that their subjectivity formed by discourses says nothing about how these processes are supposed to operate" (p. 180). Further, Berger and Lukmann, (1966) have argued that human action and interaction construct the objective social world. An individual and society can operate in both directions as Burr, (2003) says, 'human beings continually construct the social world, which then becomes to which they must respond. So that although human beings construct the social world, they cannot construct it in any way they choose' (p. 185).

To link the theory to the present study, we can find certain behaviour of male and female that is perceived by the social norms and practices prevalent in society and determines gender roles. Social practices create the demarcation of male and female behaviour and the role that is carried out in society in the name of social norms and values. In this connection, social constructionism emphasizes human behaviour as a by-product of social interaction instead biological identity as male and female. This means women perceive their role as determined by social norms and cultural values and reflect them in their behaviour. In Nepalese society, women are behaved as inferior members of society and are considered weaker in power positions. Gender discrimination in education, social activities, and economics has affected

female recognition and self-identity in society. So, social constructionism theory provides the theoretical groundings to better describe how the socio-culturally constructed gender-based roles and behaviour give way to discriminatory practices in Nepalese society.

3.2 Social Dominance Theory

The emergence of social dominance theory is traced back to the 1990s as an effort to evaluate discrimination and prejudice in society (Kattari, 2015). Social dominance theory believes that there is group-based discrimination in a society that creates a hierarchy in the social system where the dominant group gets privilege due to power influence and subordinate groups live in suppression. Further, such discrimination becomes systematic as the social perception helps in embedding the actions of social institutions and individual behaviour. (Sidanius, et al., 2004, p. 847).

Originally, the social dominance theory explained the three distinct social systems that enforced the group-based hierarchy they are (a) age system- adults are dominant over children, (b) gender system- males hold more power and dominate women, and (c) an arbitrary set system- these concepts are made based on the abilities as a result group of abled characteristics suppress the people with disabilities (Kattari, 2015 p. 377). In such group-based discrimination, there is a clear demarcation of power exercises and preference for a role that is socio-culturally defined, for example, gender (male and female), cast, colour, and ethnicity. Members of dominant groups get more privilege, prestige, and recognition than the subordinate group because of the unequal cultural and social practices and power exercises (Sidanius, et al., 2004, p. 864). In other words, in such a group-based social hierarchy, dominant groups disproportionately get more benefits from positive social values such as higher positions in a job, whereas the subordinate group comparatively shares a larger amount of negative social values such as unemployment (Malatyal, et el., 2017, p. 689). Further, ' social dominance theory builds on the perspective that cultures of structural inequality tend to reproduce and reinforce the inequality that exists within them by proposing a psychological mechanism through which inequality is maintained' (Schmitt et al., 2003, p. 161). Basically, social dominance theory is concerned with group-based social hierarchies. To be specific on gender inequalities, in general men exercise more social and political power than women in a society that creates a social hierarchy and promotes gender inequality.

According to social dominance theory, a gender system is a socially constructed group-based hierarchy where a male is considered at the top because 'conceptualizing women as

warm, caring, and pure limits them to their traditional gender roles' (Malatyal, et al., 2017, p. 689). Social dominance orientations are taken as important components in social dominance theory. The tendency of people to believe in a certain social system such as patriarchy gives preference to male supremacy and leads to group-based discrimination as a result females live in subordinate suppression. Besides systemic prejudice, social dominance theory emphasizes both individual and structural characteristics that are the bases for various group-based operations. (Sidanius, et al., 2004, p. 846). The social system that is influenced by the preferences of certain dominant characteristics clearly demarkets the social roles of privileged and inferior groups. The privileged group enjoy opportunities and the inferior and marginalized group live in suppression. Thus, 'social dominance theory argues that group-based hierarchies reproduce and reinforce themselves via individuals who have a general preference for hierarchal structures over egalitarian ones' (Schmitt et al., 2003, p. 162). So, the social practices that favour male superiority and consider females inferior give way to gender-based social discrimination.

We can see a clear hierarchy in Nepalese society where a male is in the top position as a dominant group getting the privilege of power and supremacy, whereas women are subordinate groups suppressed from male-dominated social and cultural practices. As social dominance theory explains that gender discrimination is a result of male supremacy of power exercises and unequal legitimacy of social recognition of gender roles, it presents the groundings for the discriminatory gender roles in Nepalese society and discrimination and challenges in an institutional setting in getting opportunities for women leadership and exercising power in male-dominated social structure.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides information about the methodological procedures that were adopted for this study. It presents a rationale for choosing a quantitative approach for the study. It also gives the justification for selecting purposive or judgemental sampling procedures and in-depth interviews as a tool for data collection. It describes the entire data collection process along with ethical considerations. Further, it discusses the data analysis process and gives a brief description of the participants of this study.

4. 1 Qualitative as a Research Approach

This study used the qualitative approach as it provides the researchers with ways to present the existing situation and phenomenon in a descriptive way. In general, qualitative research attempts to find out people's understanding, characteristics, behaviour, and concepts and focuses on in-depth investigation. It focuses on in-depth studies of a small group of people for a detailed description of the situation. It employs a descriptive way of presenting and analyzing data as a social reality is constantly shifting and become subjective (Bryman, 2016 p. 33). As the study required a detailed study of women's leadership in Academia in Nepal and the socio-cultural perspectives of gender roles that pose the challenges in women's leadership, particularly in academia, the qualitative method better suits the explanatory description and analysis of personalized opinions. This study intended to explore the personal experiences, and perception of the people towards the gender role and women leadership, for that subjective justification of reality, is essential for the characterization of human behaviour and identities that are better explained with the qualitative method.

4.2 Sampling

The purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of respondents in this study. This means that the respondents were judgementally selected according to the objectives and purpose of the study. Seven women leaders were selected from different universities and their constituent and affiliated colleges in Kathmandu, Nepal. In this study, women leaders in academia refer to women having executive or leading roles in higher educational institutions in Nepal.

Importantly, the purposive sampling technique helps in the selection of respondents as per certain features and characteristics that are integral parts of research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016). Additionally, this sampling technique was employed because 'purposive sampling can be very useful for situations where you need to reach the target sample quickly and where a random process of selection or proportionality is not the primary concern' (Singh, 2007, p. 108). It means that the purposive sampling procedure helped in the selection of the informants as per the purpose of the study and the predetermined characteristics of the informants for this study. As the study focuses on finding how gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in Nepali academia and how they deal with the gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in leadership practices, women leaders in higher educational institutions are considered the most reliable source for the information as they have first-hand experience of such challenges and can reflect the social reality vividly. A question may arise why the male faculties are not selected for the study. The simple answer is that as the study aims at finding the challenges of gender-based social practices for women's leadership and how women leaders in leadership positions tackle those challenges, women leaders' perspectives and their experiences of leading educational institutions are significant to address the objectives of the research and answer the research questions. Additionally, the study presents an overview of the status of women's leadership in academia in Nepal from the viewpoint of women leaders in academia. Thus, the selection of women leaders in academia becomes logical.

4.3 Research Tools

The study used the in-depth interview as a tool for data collection. The interview helps to explore peoples' opinion, and experiences, so help to investigate how actually people perceive and hold value and attitude in a real-life situation (Silverman, 2014, p.169). It is the best tool to get detailed information regarding peoples' attitudes, understandings, experiences, and opinions. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used in a constructionist way. A semi-structured interview guide was prepared that focused on the socio-cultural perspectives on gender roles and challenges of female leadership in academia in Nepal and was used for seven women leaders of universities and colleges in Kathmandu Nepal. Collected data from the interview was analysed on the theoretical grounds of social constructionism and gender dominance theory.

4.4 Interview Process and My Role as a Researcher

Seven women leaders, who were in leadership positions, were purposively selected from different higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal. As the study is focused on finding how gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women leadership in academia and how women leaders in academia deal with the challenges while executing their roles as leaders, it is important to get detailed information on the social reality of Nepalese women in general and women leaders in academia in particular. In the beginning, it became difficult to get information about women leaders in higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal. I searched the website of the universities and colleges in Kathmandu, Nepal and got some information about women leaders. But there was no information about women leaders on the website of some of the universities and colleges. I also took help from my teachers who are the faculties at different colleges and universities in Kathmandu, Nepal to reach the women leaders in Nepali academia. I collected information of women leaders in higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal with the help of the websites of educational institutions and my teachers working in different higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal and contacted them via email and social media also. I emailed a short description of the research project and requested them to be the participants in the study. Some of them responded in a short period of time and became ready for the interview. But some of them took a long time to give a response and some of them did not respond et all. So, it took a long time to recruit the informants for this research work. I was in touch with the women leaders in academia who wore ready to participate in the study through social media. Consent was taken orally as well as in writing. Time was fixed for the online (zoom) interview with each of the informants. It took around 35 to 45 minutes for each of the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used during the interview process to keep the interview on track. However, there were other questions asked besides the interview guide that were relevant to the context. In the interview process, first, the purpose of the study was made clear, and they were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provide for the research. I also clarified to them that their involvement is voluntary, and they can withdraw from the process at any time without any clarification. The interviews were taken in a conducive environment keeping in mind the socio-cultural value and respecting individual dignity. During the interview, I did not interfere the respondents but played the role of mediator to get detailed information about the overall condition of women leadership in Nepali academia and their experiences of leadership. Some of the interviews were taken in the English language but some were taken in the Nepali language

as per the convenience of the respondents. All the interviews were recorded so that I could listen to the recording several times during transcribing and analysing the data. Consent was taken from the respondents for the audio recording.

4.5 Data Analysis

In this study, empirical data were analyzed thematically. As thematic analysis helps in identifying patterns of meanings, it supports interpreting systematic observations in the empirical data. Victoria Clarke & Virginia Braun (2017, p. 297). Most importantly, it gives flexibility in deriving meaning from the data set so that the researchers get detailed insights. As thematic analysis is considered a suitable and systemic procedure in qualitative research design, it makes this research valid and trustworthy. According to Nowell, et al., (2017, p. 4), Thematic analysis follows the five stages: familiarizing yourself with your data, gathering initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and renaming themes. In this study also all the stages of thematic analysis were followed.

First of all, interviews were transcribed and the interviews taken in Nepali languages were translated into the English language. After transcribing, the interview data was read and reread to make familiarize me with the data. After reading and rereading, the initial codes were made from the raw data. After identifying the codes, they were combined with different themes and sub-themes. Although the study was guided by the research questions, an inductive approach to thematic analysis was mostly used as the themes were derived from the data. In this study the following themes and sub-themes were created from the data set:

- Socio-cultural reality of Nepalese society
    - Patriarchal system
    - Discriminatory gender roles
- Challenges for women leadership in Academia
    - Underrepresentation
    - Considering women as less capable
    - Dual responsibility
- Leading experiences

As the themes are reflective of the research questions, it would be easier to get the real scenario of women's leadership in Nepali academia, and the issue gets a critical overview

as it is further discussed through the lens of social constructionism and social dominance theory.

4.6 Ethical Considerations and Challenges

The researcher may encounter various ethical challenges while carrying out a research project. It is one of the most important duties and responsibilities of a researcher to keep in mind the ethical considerations and follow them throughout the research process. It is also important for the researcher to follow the guidelines of the concerned research committee, department, or authority. Those guidelines help to tackle the ethical challenges during the research process. For this study, NSD was notified about the research project and was taken confirmation and approval of carrying out the research and strictly followed its guidelines.

Various scholars have indicated the ethical challenges in the research process. Ryen (2016) states that the important ethical considerations are 'codes and consent, confidentiality and trust' (p. 32). While Silverman (2014) talks about exploitation, deception, and other ethical pitfalls and suggests that researchers be more concerned and sensitive while dealing with the people during the data collection process. Likewise, Brinknann & Kvale (2015, p. 93) are concerned about whether the respondents are familiar with the purpose of the study and their role as informants in the research process. In other words, it is important to give the informants information about the objectives of the research and the possible risks and benefits of their participation in the research process. This means that the researcher should maintain trustworthiness and make the respondents comfortable that is 'participants should not feel deceived, intimidated or otherwise uncomfortable with the research' (Bos, 2020, p. 251). Signing a written consent can be the formal procedure for assuring the respondents are confident and secure in the research process, however, the researcher should keep in mind the contextual setting of the informants. The researcher should protect the identities of the respondents and respect the socio/cultural values and personal opinions.

Regarding this research process, the qualitative approach was followed. In-depth interview was the tool used for data collection from seven women leaders of higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal. Ethical guidelines of NSD were fully implemented during the data collection, data processing, and data presentation stages. Detailed information about the research process and purpose of the study was provided to the respondents. Written consent was signed with the informants, and they were assured of the confidentiality of the informants

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and the information they provided. The collected data was stored and handled very carefully and will be destroyed upon completion of the project. More importantly, the soc-cultural values, privacy, and identity of the informants were given due respect and handled sensitively for personal dignity and harmonious relations during the interview process and data presentation.

This means that there were ethical challenges in the research process. Some ethical challenges were common that all the researchers in social sciences face during the research process. But I had to keep in mind some contextual ethical considerations throughout my research process. I intended to get information about the socio-cultural values and norms of Nepalese society. Additionally, data material contained information about the perception of gender roles in social practices. Such information about the culture, social norms, and values is very sensitive to handle in the research process. So that it was a challenge for me as a researcher to maintain a respectful environment for all the cultural and social practices during the data collection and data presentation stages. Further, all the respondents were women leaders in educational institutions and the information intended to get from them was about gender roles and their professional achievement as women leaders. This may address the sensitive issue of gender roles in society and the personal opinions of the respondents regarding the prevalent gender-based social practices and the impact of those practices on their professional life. As the women in Nepalese society are in a vulnerable condition, there can be an ethical challenge for me as a researcher to protect their personal identity and privacy as well as the professional values for maintaining trustworthy relationships. Keeping this in mind, I presented myself unbiased on any socio-cultural norms and values. Respondents were free to withdraw from the interview process at any time If they were unwilling to be a part of the research. They were assured to keep their identity secret so that their names and their details are not revealed in the presentation of data.

Overall, ethical issues are very important aspects that are to be dealt with standard ethical considerations throughout the research process. Ethical standards make the entire research process smooth and lead to success in the research process. Ethical considerations make the researchers more sensitive and responsible in the data collection process and honest while presenting the collected data. This means the entire data collection and data presentation becomes trustworthy as the ethical standards shape the research strategies and the researcher can be more confident in the procedure and the outcome of the research. Moreover, ethical values help to make the research process more systematic and improve the research strategies and determine the responsible role of a researcher.

4.7 Practical Considerations for Validity

Validity in qualitative research is a growing concern. 'Traditionally, validity in qualitative research involved determining the degree to which the research's claim about knowledge corresponded to the reality being studied (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 1). Simply, validity is conceptualized as trustworthiness in the qualitative paradigm (Golafshani, 2003, p.604). The difficulty to establish validity in qualitative research is due to the subjectivity in the research process (Whittemore et al., 2001. P.1). However, it is equally important for qualitative studies to be more credible as well as trustworthy and it is possible with the use of practical strategies in the research process. In this study, importance is given to establishing the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. For this, significant effort has been made to prevent the bias of personal values and ideologies from the side of the researcher. The informants were not imposed on any personal values of the researcher during the data collection process. They were unconditionally free to express their opinions on the issue of women in Nepal and women's leadership in academia. It was beneficial for me as a researcher to get a detailed understanding of the study area because I was familiar with the socio-cultural condition of women and women leadership in academia since I was also brought up in the same socio-cultural setting. However, I remained unbiased and collected detailed information and the experiences of women leaders in academia as a result I can assure the authenticity of the data. Adequate time was given to get the real essence of the information while coding and analysing the data set. Additionally, an inductive approach was used while coding and developing themes so that the data tells the accurate and authentic view of the informants. Further, the findings are discussed adequately with reference to the relevant literature on the area and on the theoretical bases of social constructionism and social dominance theory that enrich the findings' relevance and maintain the study's trustworthiness.

4.8 Information of the Participants

For this study, seven women leaders working in leadership positions at different higher educational institutions (universities and colleges) in Kathmandu Nepal were purposively selected. The study demands more information about the socio-cultural perspectives toward women and gender-based social practices that are prevalent in Nepalese society and the status of women's leadership in Nepali academia. Further, it deals with how gender-based social practices pose challenges to women's leadership in academia. Thus, the study presents the experiences and overview of women leaders in academia. With due respect to ethical

considerations and protecting the privacy of the participants, the educational institutions and their positions in the institutions are not revealed because there are very few women in leadership positions in academia in Nepal and are vulnerable so, their little information may also reveal their identity. However, all the participants in this study are in leadership positions and executing their leadership roles as dean, campus chief, assistant campus chief, department head and programme coordinator. The participants are coded as informants A, B, C, D, E, F, and G to protect their identity. The duration of time of each of the informants for the in-depth interview is presented below:

	Informant	Time
1	A	45 minutes
2	B	35 minutes
3	C	40 minutes
4	D	43 minutes
5	E	38 minutes
6	F	42 minutes
7	G	44 minutes

CHAPTER FIVE
PRESENTATION OF DATA

As the study is mainly focused on how gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia and how women leaders in academia deal with such challenges in leadership practices, it intends to find in-depth information about the socio-cultural reality of Nepalese society regarding gender-based roles and the experiences of women leaders in educational institutions on dealing with the challenges they face while executing their leadership roles. For the data collection, seven in-depth interviews were conducted with the women leaders in higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal. Here, the collected data is systematically presented in different meaningful themes.

5.1 Socio-cultural Reality of Nepalese Society

In order to get information about the socio-cultural perspectives on gender-based roles and get to know the overall status of women in Nepal, the selected women leaders in educational institutions were asked some questions that were related to a general overview of the social practices and how the women are treated in the society. The informants said that there is a patriarchal system in Nepalese society where the male is considered the head or plays the executive role in the family. They believed that due to such a social system, discriminatory gender practices still exist, however, some changes have been seen in the perception of women and their roles in society. For example, the increasing number of female enrolments in education and their involvement in professional jobs have played a positive role in their upliftment.

The responses of the selected women leaders in educational institutions have indicated that there are some changes in the perspectives of the people in society toward women and their roles as well as their importance in social activities. In this connection, it seems that some efforts have been made for women's empowerment and recognition of women in society and it has made some impact on the status of women in society. However, the question is whether such efforts are sufficient to bring substantial changes in the status and life of women in society and to what extent they have got representation in social affairs. To get the real picture of women in Nepalese society, the researcher discussed the socio-cultural practices related to gender-based roles and the status of women in society with the informants as they were brought up in the same society so that they could share their experiences regarding socio-cultural practices and attitude of people towards women. Additionally, they were educated and have been

performing leadership roles in educational institutions so that they could connect social reality to professional practices and showcase the real picture of women's leadership in Nepali academia. In the discussion of socio-cultural aspects, the informants labelled Nepalese society as patriarchal. Their understanding was that due to such a system, discriminatory gender practices pose challenges to women's recognition and their involvement in social affairs.

5.1.1 Patriarchal System

The prevalence of male supremacy in Nepalese society is a general understanding of the informants in this study. The male member is the head of the family and plays the decision-making role. Women are still considered inferior members of the family. However, the respondents observe some positive changes happening in society and women gaining some sort of identity in the family as well as in society. Moreover, they believed that patriarchal norms are still dominant in Nepalese society in different shapes and sizes.

Informant A said:

Patriarchal social norms are dominant in Nepalese society. Males are dominant in the family as well as in society and they are the decision-makers.

The informants also stated the changing scenario of Nepalese society regarding the perspectives of gender roles and the gradual upliftment of the status of women in society. Informant E said:

Although the patriarchy, we observe some changes in the traditional perspective. Gender equality is more in practice in urban areas among educated people.

However, their understanding was that it is more important for women to be more vocal and break the patriarchal social norms and values to come forward in the social spheres more vividly. Informant C said:

We can see some changes in the attitude of people. However, there are still patriarchal social norms dominant in society. In my opinion, women should raise their voices for their rights and recognition in the society.

According to the informants, patriarchal practices hinder more in rural areas and the people from the marginalized community where such a system is more dominant, and the people are illiterate. Additionally, they also pointed out that there is some sort of discrimination among women as their identities and roles are placed in a hierarchy in Nepalese society. For example,

daughters and daughters-in-law are treated differently. Daughters get some sort of privilege than daughters-in-law in the same family. Daughters-in-law are more restricted in social affairs in the name of social norms and traditional stereotypes, so they are confined to household chores. This is interesting that discrimination exists among females according to their status in the family. In this regard, informant F said:

Women themselves treat daughters and daughters-in-law differently. Such practices are more in rural areas than in urban areas. Most families in Nepal live in a joint family. The old generation brought up with traditional socio-cultural beliefs wants to stick to traditional norms and values, so it is still a challenge for women to overcome discriminatory socio-cultural practices.

According to the informants, the joint family system where family members of different generations live together also gives space for gender discrimination. The older generation has a strict belief in patriarchal social norms. Although the younger generation has a different perspective, they cannot bring a complete change. In this connection, informant G said:

Most of the people in Nepal live in joint families and the discriminatory concept is more in the older generation. So, women in the joint family suffer more from gender discriminatory practices.

As it is already presented, discriminatory gender practices are seen comparatively less among the younger generation who are educated. This could be a positive change and gateway for equal access for women in different sectors. However, the informants explained the social concept in a different way. Their understanding was that the increment of female enrolment in education has a different ground reality. The intention of giving daughters equal access to education has different motives. In this connection, informant D said:

We can see some changes in the attitude of people toward women. For example. Nowadays parents send both daughter and son to school, the same school (In the Nepalese context, private schools are considered good than public schools. Nowadays, parents send their daughters also to private schools bearing the financial burden). Girls can also get higher education. However, the reason for educating girls is just for getting a good family and groom for their marriage.

On the other hand, informant B expressed her opinion as:

In my opinion, only giving educational opportunities does not make women equal in society. Financial empowerment is essential to make women recognized in family and society. Otherwise, highly intellectual and educated women are also limited to household work.

Overall, the reflection of the informants was that the patriarchal social system challenges women for their identity and equal representation in society. According to them, such socio-cultural practices pose challenges to the equal status of women in society.

5.1.2. Discriminatory Gender Roles

It is also noted that the stereotypical gender roles prevalent in Nepalese society are a great challenge for women's empowerment and maintaining equality in society. The informants indicated that discriminatory gender roles have suppressed women and their capabilities. Limiting women in household chores and neglecting them in family and social affairs has given the way to male hegemony. Informant G explained the situation as:

Discriminatory gender roles have given the way to male supremacy. Women are expected to do household chores, raise children, and manage families. Women have to perform such family duties even if they do other jobs. Man's duty is just earning money for a living. If he does not earn, he is not expected to do household work because that is a women's duty. Such discriminatory practices have limited women's potential. Most importantly, women have not got acceptance in decision-making roles due to the social perception of male supremacy.

The informants stated that discriminatory gender roles are in practice in Nepalese society and socio-cultural norms and values are in favour of males. As a result, the male is considered superior and easily gets accepted in leadership positions, but women have to struggle a lot for breaking the stereotypical gender concept and their role division and making their own identities. Informant A said:

Patriarchy has limited women's roles in household chores in Nepalese society.

Further, informant C said:

Our society demands different roles from men and women. Such tradition has confined women to houses and family care.

Further, the respondents put their views strongly against such discriminatory gender roles prevalent in Nepalese society. They argued that such practices are hindrances to women's

equitable representation in social affairs. Here, informant B shared the story of herself and of her colleagues as:

We think that there are discriminatory practices only in rural areas where people are ignorant. This is not the case. We can see such practices in educated families as well. Some women get support from their families, and it becomes easy for them to fight against society. For example, I got the support of my family, and I am in the leading position in the institution. I have seen some of my colleagues become victims of discriminatory gender roles prevalent in society. One of my friends got divorced as she could not give more time to household chores as she has to fulfil her professional responsibilities.

On the contrary, informant E said:

I don't say that there are still traditional practices going on everywhere. Nowadays, especially in urban areas, women are financially empowered so that males are also involved in household work.

In this way, the informants unfolded the social reality and status of women in Nepalese society. The informants argued that despite the legislative provisions, discrimination still exists at the root of culture and tradition, as a result, there is a question of proper implementation. According to them, the stereotypical gender roles prevalent in Nepalese society have created problems for the proper implementation of rules and regulations and women still have to fight to get their rights.

5.2 Challenges for Women Leadership in Academia

To understand the gender-based social practices of Nepalese society, the informants were asked to reflect on the socio-cultural perspectives toward women in Nepal and their reflection is presented above. Here, the focus is more on how those gender-based social practices challenge women's leadership in academia. For this, the informants were inquired about the status of women's leadership in academia in Nepal. They were not satisfied with the present state of women leaders in educational institutions in Nepal. Their concern was that importance is not given to the justifiable representation of women in leadership positions in academia. According to them, female faculties are increasing nowadays in colleges and universities but a few of them are in leadership positions. In this section, more focus is given to including the socio-cultural challenges based on the gender-based social practices of Nepalese society that women leaders in academia have described under different themes.

5.2.1 Underrepresentation

The informants said that it has a lot to do with the proportional representation of women in leadership positions in Nepali academia. There is the provision of 33 percent reservation for women in the selection of faculties in educational institutions. But such a reservation policy is not actually implemented in the selection and appointment of candidates for a leadership position. As a result, there are very few women in leadership positions in Nepali academia. In this connection informant A said:

I don't think the government has done anything for women's leadership in academia. There is a provision of 33 percent reservation for women in the recruitment of government organizations. We get some sympathy towards women in media, but the actual scenario is different in the field. A lot has to be done for proportional women leadership in academia in the context of Nepal. We see some positive changes in hiring women in academic institutions. However, when it comes to leadership positions males are given priority.

Another informant, informant F challenges the 33 percent reservation policy and questions its proper implementation as:

Thirty-three percent reservation for women is biased provision itself. Women should get at least 50 percent representation and equal access to all positions. In our case, there is a problem with implementation even with 33 percent reservation.

The informants blame the socio-cultural perspective toward women in the selection process of leadership and the lack of support and attention of the authority. Informant A said:

There is a research committee in our institution, and I am the only female member there. I raised a question about the gender inclusiveness and proportional participation of females. Male members did not take it seriously. They just diverted the topic.

Some informants had a different view regarding the smaller number of women in leadership positions. Informant E said:

For equal participation of women in leadership positions, they should also put effort into professional development and have a strong motivation to grab the opportunities.

Another informant, informant C talked about the women lacking certain criteria for the leadership position and said:

Due to various factors, many women have to struggle to meet the criteria required for the leadership position. Another factor is that there are more male members in educational institutions, and it is obvious that there are more males in leadership positions.

The informants also talked about the less number of women enrolment in higher education. The trend of early marriage and dropout of women in higher education also causes fewer women involved in the teaching profession and ultimately leads to their underrepresentation. In this regard, informant D explained this as:

We have to struggle to pursue higher education. We see comparatively fewer females completing higher education. Unless we make sure that more females pursue higher education and are involved in the teaching profession, the problem of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in academia remains the same.

The informants emphasized on government's role in the promotion of women in leadership positions. According to them, the concerned authority should prioritize women and give them opportunities for their professional development as women are marginalized in Nepalese society and should have some provisions for their upliftment. Informant B says:

Women are to be encouraged in academic research activities. Women are to be prioritized for Ph.D. and given scholarships. Our socio-cultural system has marginalized women and confines them in the house. We should get support from the government to overcome discriminatory traditions and make our social identity.

Another interesting thing that some of the informants said was the political influence in the appointment of leadership in colleges and universities, especially in government universities. As males get privileged in Nepalese society and have a good political network and can exercise power as a result women are dominated and marginalized. In this connection, informant G said:

It is difficult for women to get leadership positions in educational institutions because of backward thinking in general. However, political influence in the appointment of leading positions has created obstacles for women on the other hand male are being more dominated because of the power supremacy and good political network and favor.

One of the informants, informant B gave the following example and expressed her opinion regarding the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions as:

There was just one woman registered at Tribhuvan University, the oldest university in Nepal, in its long history. This is just one example of women in top leadership positions. The appointment of women as campus chiefs is also very rare. It does not mean that women are incapable. Various factors play a role but the socio-cultural perspective that women are inferior and cannot lead the institution poses a significant challenge. In my opinion, this is the extreme level of gender discrimination in the area where all educated and intellectual people work and advocate for gender equality.

Overall, the informants pointed out the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Nepali academia. Some of them said about women's lack of criteria for deserving the leadership position. However, there exists a discriminatory concept toward women in the selection of leadership positions. It is already discussed in the previous chapter that women have come across socio-cultural barriers, so they need motivation for their professional development. Their justifiable representation in the leadership position helps them create a dignified identity and can impact the movement of inclusive social practice. According to them, it is sarcastic that male is leading women's colleges (For example, Padhma Kanya Campus). In such cases, they strongly demanded the concerned authorities for the selection of capable women leaders in such institutions.

5.2.2 Considering Women as Less Capable

As it is discussed before, the patriarchal social system has posed challenges to the active involvement of women in social affairs in Nepal. In social practice, man is considered superior and holds the power. Women are considered inferior and powerless. In such a social scenario, it is difficult to gain trust as well as support for women in leadership positions. The present scenario of Nepali academia having a few women in leadership positions could be connected to the socio-cultural belief that women cannot hold leadership positions or the thinking that women are not for leadership. In this connection, informant B explained the situation as:

There are many women in our university who are professionally capable and eligible, but they are not appointed to higher leadership positions thinking that women cannot lead the institution.

In the same tone, another informant G said:

Due to the male-dominated socio-cultural practices, women in academia also face challenges. Although, a highly intellectual sector, Nepali academia is not gendered friendly. There are very

few women leaders. In some universities, there are no women leaders at all. This is due to the biased attitude as well as male hegemony that gives the way for discriminatory practices even in the educated circle.

In Nepalese society, males and females are expected to perform certain roles. Women's duties are allocated within households on the other hand man has to perform duties outside the house. Such traditional practices create problems for women who wish to overcome such stereotypical gender roles and practices in Nepalese society. In this regard, informant D said:

It is considered that leadership duty does not suit women as it needs more time as well as fieldwork. Giving more time to professional duties and going to fieldwork away from home are considered difficult or challenging for women. Such a discriminatory concept regarding gender roles greatly affects the appointment of women in leadership positions.

Regarding the inquiry about the interest of women in leadership positions that were made to reflect the nature of women involved in academia and their career goals, the informants said that women are willing to the leadership position in Nepali academia. Here is a response from informant F:

Women want to grab opportunities and want to become a leader in the institution as they have struggled a lot in their career development. Most of them are committed as well as confident. Some women may be unwilling to come into a leadership position, but this is an exceptional case.

The participants pointed out that there have been positive changes in women's leadership in other sectors for example politics and corporate. According to them, women are visible in Nepali politics. But it is strange that in the educational institutions where we talk and teach about gender equality, and inclusiveness, there is a problem with inclusiveness, especially in leadership positions.

5.2.3 Dual Responsibility

Nepalese society has clearly demarcated the gender roles for men and women that have cultural roots. Traditionally women's role was confined to household chores and men were responsible for income generation. Nowadays there is a change in the situation. Women have started working in different income-generating sectors and professions. Although women involve in different professions, women are still solely responsible for household chores. Such

dual responsibility has challenged women in their professional growth. In this connection, informant C said:

It is a challenge for women to balance family and professional life. Our social practices demand women more in household chores. Most importantly, women have a vital responsibility in childbearing and raising. So, she has to spend more time fulfilling family responsibilities. Such gender-based roles affect women in their professional growth.

The informants stated that women have to sacrifice their careers in order to maintain their family life. However, some informants said that they manage both family and professional responsibilities putting the work on a priority basis. They also explained some positive scenarios toward the changing attitude of families and especially spouse and their support in household activities that have contributed women to set their career goals. Here is the expression of informant A:

The concept that women are solely responsible for household chores has slightly been changing. Nowadays, male members also cooperate and share family responsibilities. Such a change has played a significant role in women's empowerment. However, all women do not get such a privilege.

The informants believed that dual responsibility has created problems for women in their professional growth. This is also a strong reason that some women though they are capable and eligible for the leadership position do not wish to get the position as they have to be more responsible and give more time in the execution of their professional duties.

One of the informants shared how difficult it was to complete her PhD due to her various responsibilities at home. Her story illustrates that it is challenging for women to pursue higher education and fulfil the basic criteria for professional growth. Informant B said:

It is challenging for women to pursue higher education. After marriage, it becomes even harder. To talk about myself, I struggled a lot to complete my PhD. My daughter was just four years old at that time. I had to take care of her and take care of other family members as well. Although my husband was supportive and encouraged me to the PhD, it was the most difficult time.

As reflected in the empirical data, it is difficult for women to handle dual responsibilities. The joint family system also makes such responsibilities more complicated.

Performing the role of daughter-in-law, wife, and sister-in-law at home according to family relations and fulfilling professional responsibilities put burdens on women if the family is not supportive and does not understand her professional responsibilities.

5.3 Breaking Stereotype: Leading Experiences of Women Leaders in Academia

As the study also focuses on finding the personal experiences of female leaders in academia and ways of making their identities and dealing with discriminatory gender practices. They showed their concern in encouraging more women faculties in educational instructions. Most importantly, they have realized that they are role models for all women, and they are truly committed to professional responsibilities. According to them, it was difficult for them to break the stereotypical concept and challenge the established values in society. Informant C said:

It is not easy for women to be appointed to leadership positions. In Nepalese society, leadership qualities are seen as associated with male characters.

Some of the informants shared their bitter experiences and their struggle to come into leadership positions. Their hard work and dedication to their qualification and their effort for professional excellency is one challenge. Besides this, their struggle was immeasurable to deal with socio-cultural challenges that have shaped the mindset of people in society and give ways for discriminatory gender practices. Informant E explained as:

I have never thought that there can be discrimination based on gender in the educational institutions which most educated people are associated with. When I started working in an educational institution, I realized that gender discrimination exists among educated people as well. In my opinion, this is a serious issue. Women should be vocal and work to change the mindset of people.

The informants also pointed out that political interference in the appointment of senior leadership position challenge women as they don't have a strong political network. Males as the privileged group have had a strong connection to power politics for a long time so it is a challenge for women to break such a power chain and maintain a healthy and competitive environment in Nepali academia. Informant B said:

It was not easy for me to be appointed to a leadership position. Truly speaking, I took the political support of my professional union to get this appointment.

The informants said that it has been a challenge for them to change the mindset of people and gain trust that women can also be good leaders. They have also talked about the discriminatory concept toward male and female leadership in academia. In this connection, informants A said:

We see discriminatory perceptions toward male and female leadership. If a male leader is not performing well then it is considered that he might have some problems and it is taken easily. On the other hand, when a female leader for some reason not doing well, people start mocking her, and they interpret the performance in relation to gender.

Regarding the attitude of male co-workers, the informants had mixed experiences. Some of them said that they have a good relationship with male co-workers. According to them, if women are qualified and competent, it is easy to work with male co-workers as well. However, some of them have experienced the dominating nature of their male co-workers. In this regard, informant F said:

We cannot generalize that all male colleagues do not cooperate. Some male colleagues support well, but some do not tolerate women in leadership positions.

They again linked the male hegemony and supremacy in Nepalese society as a result women have to struggle to gain trust and prove themselves that they are equally deserving of leadership positions. Sometimes, they have to tackle the arguments of males that are not gender-friendly. Such arguments indirectly hamper their self-identity and reflect the image of social perception towards them. Informant A shared her experience as:

I want to share my experience I recently have. This reflects how females are perceived by male colleagues. I was having my lunch at the school canteen. One of my male colleagues came by and said, 'you are having lunch here and who is preparing food for your husband and children.' I was not expecting such a question from him. I could have asked him the same question who was preparing food for his family? It shows the mindset of people that women are still recognized in their typical roles. Such a concept also poses a challenge to women in making leadership recognition.

Another interesting fact that some of the respondents said was that it is more difficult for women from the ethnic minority group to come into leadership positions. Informant A stated:

It is more difficult for women from minority ethnic backgrounds as they have a limited network, and they have to work harder to make space and recognition. There is some sort of double discrimination against women from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Despite the challenges, the women leaders who were the informants of this study seemed confident and determined in the execution of leadership roles. Informant E said:

I am confident that I can executive my roles effectively. This helps me present myself effectively among my colleagues.

The informants were found very serious regarding the status of women leadership in Nepali academia. According to them, it is an irony that academia where most of the movements and advocates are carried out for gender equality does not make the proper representation of women in leadership positions. Informant G stated:

We should be vocal to get our rights. Gender discriminatory practices in academic institutions are intolerable. I take a strong stand against any type of discrimination toward female faculties in my institution and encourage others also to speak for their rights.

As discriminatory gender role practices are socio-culturally constructed in Nepal, the informants also gave importance to work from the communal or societal level. In this connection informant A said:

Not only in educational institutions, but I also reach out to the community for the advocacy of gender equality and work to change the concept of people that women are not for leadership roles.

The women leaders in academia showed their concern to change the stereotypical concept and be role models for all women. Regarding leadership role execution, women leaders said that they give topmost priority to cooperation and teamwork. In this connection, informant G said:

I give the topmost priority to teamwork. I encourage both male and female faculties to work in the vision of our institution. Teamwork develops a sense of belongingness and helps to create a respectful environment for all.

The informants believed that the concept of male supremacy and the willingness to see men in leadership positions can be changed if they set good examples of leadership practices. Informant D stated:

I know that it is challenging for women to get leadership positions in the context of Nepal. As there are very few women in leadership positions in academia, it is our responsibility to set an example that women can be good leaders. Our examples can encourage other women to overcome stereotypes and make them eager for leadership positions.

Informant E said:

I encourage other women faculties to be prepared for leadership roles in academia. Further, I strongly draw the attention of the concerned authority to make gender-inclusive policies. For this, I actively take part in policy dialogues and put my opinions on gender equality in academia.

Taking about the discriminatory mindset of people and measures to tackle discriminatory practices, informant C stated:

To change the mindset of people and belief that women are not for leadership, we ourselves should be confident in our roles and work to enrich our qualifications. First of all, we should outstand our leadership qualities to change the social concept regarding women.

Informant A shared her experience as:

One of the programmes in our university was about to phase out. When I was given the responsibility, I worked out different strategies in a team and now we are able to rescue the programme. Now it is one of the important programmes in our university with a good enrolment of the students.

Some of the informants said that their families were supportive of their professional life. They think that family support is the most important tool to deal with social challenges. However, they said that gaining confidence and commitment to career goals play the most important roles in their professional development. Informant D said:

Women themselves should step out and be confident and competent in leadership qualities. Most importantly, women should get family support that helps in balancing their personal and professional life so that they can come forward into leadership. I am working as a leader in educational institutions and working for professional responsibilities. It is being easy for me to do my professional duties because I get support from my family for my household work.

Informant F talked about the importance of time management in order to balance their personal and professional life. She said:

It is not easy for women to balance their personal and professional life. In my case, I work on a priority basis. It is not easy for women to totally ignore family responsibilities. I take the help of my family members to share my family responsibilities and allocate time for professional duties of academic planning and leadership strategies.

Further, informant B emphasized the involvement of women in professional organizations for their professional development. She stated:

I involve in some professional organizations. I believe that the involvement of such organizations helps to make a good network among professionals and also gives broader perspectives for professional development.

In this connection, informant F also gave importance to the professional network. She stated:

In my opinion, a professional network helps to get ideas for leadership and keep updated on contemporary issues. I personally give importance to such networks where we can share ideas and work for the betterment of women's positions in the institution.

Again, the informants emphasized that it is important to arouse a sense of equality in society and it is possible only in cooperation with both genders. Their concern was bringing a sense of gender equality and breaking the stereotype for that they seemed determined and committed to leadership roles and proof that women can play effective leadership roles.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

As the study mainly concerns exploring how gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia, firstly, it presents an account of gender-based social practices in Nepalese society and further, connects to the challenges they pose to women's leadership in academia. Additionally, it explores the experiences of women leaders in academia on how they deal with the challenges of gender-based discrimination in their leadership practices. The findings of the in-depth interview are presented in the previous chapter systematically under different themes. Here, the findings are further discussed on the theoretical groundings of social constructionism and social dominance theory to address the research questions of this study; how the gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia and how women leaders in academia deal with the gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in leadership practices.

6.1 A Synopsis of Findings

The interview data from seven women leaders in different higher educational institutions in Nepal and the literature on women leadership in Nepali academia show that women in Nepal have to deal with different socio-cultural barriers and discriminatory gender role practices that are prevalent in society. Such conditions for women in socio-cultural and gendered role practices pose challenges to women for the achievement of leadership roles in academia.

Gender discrimination is a serious issue in Nepal. It has a serious impact on women as it is deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms and practices of Nepalese tradition. However, the data gives some sort of hope regarding the slightly changing scenario, especially in urban areas. Moreover, the changes in the perception of people regarding gender roles are seen in limited areas and only within the limited group (educated) as a result it is seen difficult to bring effective changes in the life and status of women. The patriarchal social system has made women subordinate and male supremacy has become the reason for the unequal treatment of women in society.

Because of the patriarchal social norms and gender-based role division, women are limited to household chores. Due to such challenges, limited women have got access to higher education. The empirical data of this study also indicates that the increasing trend of enrolment

of girls in education has different motives. Such a trend is not guided by career orientation. It is somehow guided to getting a good husband and family for their marriage. This reflection represents the close connection to the elements of patriarchal social norms and values of Nepalese society.

To talk about women's Leadership in academia, we cannot ignore the social status of women in Nepal. To reach the main challenges of women's leadership in academia, this study systematically analyses the condition of women in society and finds its connection to how sociocultural norms and gender-based roles division affects their upbrings as well as their professional development. It is already discussed that patriarchal social norms have restricted women in different social affairs. Such a system has also affected women's leadership in academia. Their underrepresentation in leadership positions in academia is one example. The informants stated that women are underrated in leadership positions as Nepalese society is guided by male hegemony. Additionally, leadership traits are considered associative with males. Women, though they are equally capable and qualified, do not get trust in leadership positions. Besides, women have dual responsibilities that are managing family life and professional responsibilities. Due to such discriminatory practices also, women have to struggle to gear up their professional careers to leadership. Thus, the study shows that the socially constructed gender-based roles and social practices of Nepalese society as well as group-based domination as males are considered at the top of the hierarchy in the social system have posed challenges to the overall status of women in Nepal and affected the situation of women's leadership in Academia.

The informants said that they are the few women in leadership positions in academia, and they wanted to be role models and inspirations for other women willing to work in academia. They encourage all women to come up from social barriers and be vocal against gender discrimination. According to them, changes in the stereotypical concept regarding women's roles only be sustainable when women realize themselves as capable and efficient. According to the informants, collective effort from a professional forum that works for the professional development of women and enriching their scholarship can be an effective way for making women capable to deal with discriminatory social perception. So, women leaders in academia have given importance to self-confidence in leadership qualities, teamwork, and professional growth of other female faculties to combat the socio-cultural challenges and discriminatory gender role practices that are the outcome of socially constructed gender-based social practices and the hierarchal social system in Nepalese society.

6.2 Gender-based Social Practices: Challenges for Women's Leadership in Academia

This section is more focused on answering the first research question; how do gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia? To cover its scope, the socio-cultural construct of gender role practices and the status of women in Nepalese society is systematically presented. Further, how those gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia is discussed in a meaningful way.

6.2.1 Considering Women as a Sub-ordinate/ Inferior Group: A Socio-cultural Construct

Women's status in society and their role constructions are taken as the background and the meaningful linkage to the socio-cultural challenges to women's leadership in academia. Taking into consideration the related literature on the socio-cultural traditions and gender role practices in Nepalese society and the description the selected participants have given regarding the status of women in society, it is reflective that Nepalese society is male-dominated, and women are subordinate or inferior. (Upreti et al., 2020) state, 'The women of Nepal are still not freed from the burden of living in a patriarchal society' (p. 90). The patriarchal worldview legalizes the values of masculinity more preferably and makes women subordinate in several ways (Bhandari, 2019, p. 69). Patriarchal norms are transforming from ancient times to the present generations. Such a socialization process further promotes the patriarchal structure in society (Paudel, 2011, p. 30). It is already stated in the data presentation and analyses section that the informants expressed their understanding and experience of male supremacy and privilege in Nepalese society. Such a patriarchal system has constructed the mindset of people and is reflected in socio-cultural orientation (Upreti et al., 2020). People make their understanding of their roles and their identities based on the traditional values and the practices going on in society. Such social norms shape the perception and determine social identities. Further, the concepts are constructed through social interaction, and reality is socially defined from subjective real-life experiences (Andrews, 2012, p. 40). To be specific, the patriarchal system in Nepalese society exposes the social value of male supremacy and leads to discriminatory social practices for males and females.

The sociocultural construct of male supremacy and female inferiority has resulted in challenges to gender inclusion and equal opportunities for women. Further, Social practices and norms that are originated from the family and societal levels have a greater impact on discrimination and marginalization of women and cannot be ended by legal endorsement (Lawoti, 2010, p. 21).

The male image is constructed as the head in the patriarchal system. Such a concept among the people in Nepalese society has challenged women to gain trust in their leadership capabilities. Further, the patriarchal system that gives priority to males and set examples of masculinity hinders women in their upbringing. It institutionalizes the norms that subordinate female traits and excludes them in social affairs. 'As the entire structure is patterned after the patriarchal worldviews, to argue theoretically, all institutions, including educational, patterned after this mindset that does not support and encourage women' (Bhandari, 2019, p. 70). So, educational institutions where most of the advocacies are done regarding gender equality are also under the influence of patriarchal social norms.

It is also important to discuss discriminatory social practices of Nepalese society against males and females because of social hierarchy. The interview data of this study that was taken from the seven participants reveals that males are given priority in Nepalese society, and they are the privileged group. In contrast, female is considered as an inferior or subordinate group. As the informants (A, G, B) said, the male is given priority in the family and gets easy access to all social affairs, they also enjoy their superiority in family, society even in education and politics. This clearly indicates that there is group-based discrimination based on gender as reflected in gender dominance theory. Male as the privileged group has systematic domination against female. Some examples given by the informants that could be reflective of the dominant nature of males could be; a male as the head of the family, a decision-maker in family and social matters. This means that the male holds supreme power in Nepalese society as a result females live in suppression. As females are considered inferior, they are deprived of getting education as a result their suppression starts with the family. The traditional belief of the parents that sons are for the elderly care and their support in their old age also makes them more privileged and get importance in the family (Luitel, 2001). The Male, although junior in the age group, is the head of the family, and the female is considered the inferior member. Likewise, they are not given importance in social affairs as well. Such discriminatory practices have created a huge gender gap in education, employment, and leadership positions.

As quoted earlier (informant F), there is a discriminatory concept among women as well. Such deeply rooted discriminatory social practices widen the problems and make inclusion more difficult. Morley, & Crossouard (2016) point out that patriarchy makes such a socio-cultural belief that describe the appropriate behaviour of male and female in society, as a result, women face challenges going beyond the socially prescribed boundaries. The empirical data and the

related literature on this area show that the patriarchal system that is prevalent in Nepalese society leads to discriminatory practices.

The informants (C, B) observed some positive changes happening in the social scenario regarding the perception of people toward males and females because of legislative provisions of equality and gradual change in the mindset of people due to rigorous gender-inclusive movements. However, the impact is not seen on a larger scale. Although some positive changes in the concept have appeared, more efforts are essential for erasing the concept of male supremacy and making society inclusive in a real sense. The inclusive practices noticed in the urban areas can be described as the gradually changing social concept as the nature of knowledge construction is relative (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). However, based on the interview data, it can be stated that traditional social norms have played a crucial role in the construction of the social reality of males' supremacy and females' inferiority in Nepalese society. More importantly, the patriarchal social system has set the different identities of males and females and their expected role execution in society. Such demarcation in the social setting has challenged even the educated women in Nepalese society.

6.2.2 Discriminatory Gender Roles: A Socio-cultural Practice

Here, gender roles are described as the expectation of the people in society regarding the activities of an individual. Hence, it is important to note that gender roles have sociocultural influence and are perceived as the expected behavioural performance in society. Further, 'gender roles are based on the different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender' (Blackstone, 2003, p.335). In other words, gender roles are defined from the social belief as the interaction of individuals as it is perceived in a certain social setting.

It is reflected in the interview data (informants G &B) of this study that Nepalese society expects different roles of males and females. The social tradition has clearly demarked the roles of men and women. Women are considered responsible for household chores and man's man responsibility is earning living for the family. Such discriminatory gender role practices are given priority in the family and the children are nurtured accordingly. 'From childhood, the family prepares girls and boys for different roles' (Paudel, 2011, p. 30). The family teaches daughters the household chores more importantly while sons are given freedom from the household chores and emphasized better education.

The interview data indicate the mixed understanding of the participants regarding the gender role practices in Nepalese society. Some informants (for example, informant E) have argued that the situation in urban and rural areas is different. Educated families in urban areas have less effect on discriminatory gender role practices. Males are also supportive of household work and women also involve in different income-generating activities. However, this is not the overall scenario of Nepalese society. In general, females are taught to behave in a certain way that socio-cultural norms permit them from their childhood. Traditional gender role orientation (Blackstone, 2003) which is the social concept that women are for raising children and caring for and managing families prevents them from equal access to education and their social and professional upliftment. Females have to play different roles in different spans of life. They have to fulfil their responsibilities as daughters, sisters, daughters-in-law, wives, and mothers. The demands of their household performances are different as the roles are changed according to the relationship they have with the family members. This means that women are expected to play different roles to maintain their family relationships. As a result, they are confined to household chores and live in extreme suppression. Morley, & Crossouard (2016) said that the gendered division of labour that is giving household responsibilities to women distracts women from professional development even if they are single and child-free. Such gendered division of labour originated from socio-cultural practices are seen as a hindrance to the upliftment of women socially and professionally.

The reflection of the participants demonstrates that the social construction of gendered role practices has limited most women to household chores. Further, it is also observed that women in Nepal are deprived of education in societies where patriarchal norms are dominant as education is not considered important for their role execution. More emphasis is given to teaching household chores to daughters because they have to perform such roles after their marriage, and they can impress their in-laws, and becomes easier to manage their family life. Due to such stereotypical challenges, very few women could get opportunities and make strong representations in academia as well as in research activities.

The overall discussion demonstrates that discriminatory gender role practices are the socio-cultural construct that Nepalese society has set up among the people in the society. As Berger & Luckmann, (1966) state social construction of reality is the outcome of the interaction of people in society or the reality is socially constructed, gender roles in Nepalese society are also the reflection of patriarchal social norms that are dominant in the society. And such perception is transferred through social interaction and passed on to different generations.

Additionally, the roles of individuals are perceived based on the contextual environment as determined by sociocultural values (Lock &Strong, 2010). Thus, the socially constructed gender-based roles and practices in Nepalese society are the reflections of social behaviour as per the social norms and values in Nepalese society.

6.2.3 Women's Leadership in Academia: Challenges from a Socio-cultural Point of View

The discussion of the overall status of women in Nepalese society and the perception of people regarding gender roles that are in practice in Nepalese society gives the background for the discussion and explanation of the challenges that women face for leadership in academia. The above discussion on considering women as an inferior/subordinate group and discriminatory gender role practices shows the social status of women and how socio-culturally constructed gender-based roles discriminate against women in Nepalese society. Here the discussion is more focused on how gender role practices in Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia.

The data shows that the concepts of people about gender-based roles and discriminatory social practices based on gender have a direct impact on the involvement of women in academia and getting leadership opportunities. The informants not only raised the question of the unjustifiable underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Nepali academia but also discussed other serious socio-cultural factors that pose challenges to the upliftment of their career in academia and reach into leadership positions. While talking about the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in academia, there is no specific data available on gender details (Morley, & Crossouard, 2016). However, only 7.9 percent of female faculties in comparison to 92 percent of male faculties in the universities in Nepal (UGC, 2012) give validation of their underrepresentation in leadership positions. Additionally, the overall representation of women in management positions (13.2 %) and senior and middle management positions (13.9%) (UN Women, 2021) indicates the exclusion of women in leadership positions. This means that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is a serious issue in Nepali academia.

An important factor that should not be forgotten is the accessibility of women to higher education. The traditional belief that excluded women from education also restricted them to involve in academia. In the present scenario, the increment of girls' enrolment in education (Haper & George, 2020) in comparison to the previous practices indicates the positive attitudes of parents toward educating girls. However, the concept of educating girls for getting good

families and grooms as told by the participants in the interview is a matter of discussion when we talk about the absence of women in leadership positions in academia. This means that the socio-cultural concept of Nepalese society is still ignoring women's roles in social spheres and giving more importance to their family life.

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions questions gender-inclusive policies and legislation. Rhode (2016, p. 3) state, 'women's underrepresentation in leadership positions poses multiple concerns. For individual women, the barer to their advancement compromise fundamental principle of equal opportunity and social justice.' It can also be seen that regarding women's empowerment, efforts have been made for the inclusion of women in formulating rules, but effective implementation is always a problem. Bhandari, (2019) states, 'It is not that nothing has happened. Policies have been formulated, laws have been enacted and some institutions have also been created aimed at empowering women. However, their implementation has been dismally minimal' (p. 70). The provision of 33 percent of reservations for women in recruitment has increased the number of women faculties in colleges and universities. However, such a policy does not exist in the selection of women in leadership positions in academia. Reservation policies for women have somehow contributed to the entry of women into educational institutions. However, such reservation policies do not seem effective for the justifiable representation of women in leadership positions in academia. So, 'the absence of women in the highest and most visible positions is a significant issue, particularly because women have now become visible and valuable contributors to the workforce (Adhicary, 2016, p. 17). Thus, the 33percent reservation policy itself is questionable as it has not contributed to the justifiable representation of women in leadership positions in Nepali academia.

Further, discussion on the issue of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in academia, references of the related literature, and the interview data for this study imply the socio-cultural values of Nepalese society where discriminatory gender practices are prevalent and male supremacy undermines women's status in society. This means, gender segregation still prevails in Nepalese society resulting in the discrepancy of male and female representation being questionable at senior and executive positions (Adhikary, 2016). The strong reason that the informants of this study observe is the social construction of leadership identities. As they refer, leadership traits are constructed on male personalities in the Nepalese patriarchal social system considering women inferior members of society. Such understanding regarding gender roles and identities in a societal setting has challenged women to come

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forward to break the stereotypes and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in academia is a reflection of the social construction of male hegemony in Nepalese society. In other words, in the interview data of this study (informants B, D and G), we can observe that a general belief in Nepalese society is made in such a way that males and females have different capacities and males are for leadership roles. The social perception that believes women lack fit into the traditionally male gender-typed positions influences the way women are recognized in society (Heilman, 2012). Such a social construction of leadership traits has also discriminated against women for their leadership potential. Rhode (2016, p.96) states, 'some male-dominated administrators and boards of trustees doubt women's ability to lead large and complex institutions.' As a result, women are not prioritized in leadership positions. 'No enabling environment exists yet for Nepali women's professional growth to the point that they are able to reach a leadership position and demonstrate that they can be as good as men' Bhandari, 2019, p. 69). It has been seen as a serious issue and has to work on changing the negative attitudes toward women's leadership. Morley, & Crossouard (2016) say that women are not identified as leaders and if they wish for the leadership they are rejected. Such stereotypical thinking that women are not for leadership has challenged women to get opportunities for leadership in Nepali academia.

Besides the social construction of leadership traits, women have to struggle with managing their dual responsibilities. The informants of this study (for example, informants C, B) explained that household chores are the sole responsibility of women in Nepalese society. However, there is a growing tendency for family support. Moreover, all the women who work in different educational institutions are not privileged. They have to balance both family life and professional responsibilities. In this regard, Rhode (2016, p. 101) states, 'women's unequal family responsibilities make it harder for them than for their male colleagues to achieve tenure, to assume leadership roles and complete performances.' Due to such obstacles, many women cannot be committed to their professional upliftment. The informants have given some examples of women's challenges that are mentioned in the data presentation section as divorce due to family conflict while prioritizing professional responsibilities, difficulties to pursue Ph.D. and other research activities due to childcaring, and other family responsibilities. These examples clarify that it is challenging for women to pursue higher education and prioritize their professional roles after getting marriage. It is already discussed that women in Nepal have to perform different roles in their lifetime as their roles are accepted differently as per the family relationships. The role of the daughter-in-law has considered the most difficult and challenging

in which women feel the most inferior because 'a daughter-in-law has to compromise with the interest of her in-laws to fit in their system in the new family' (Luitel, 2001, p. 102). Such scenarios depict the discriminatory socio-cultural construct prevalent in Nepalese society and rooted in the mindset of the people. In the wise discussion of women's inclusiveness in leadership positions in academia, such dimensions of discriminatory practices are to be taken into prime consideration.

The influence of power politics is another factor that the informants have stated as the challenging practice for women leadership in Nepali academia. It is more important to discuss the issue from the basic understating of social dominance theory as group-based dominance is observed in Nepalese society. Male supremacy and their privileged social orientation subordinate women and make the concept of women inferior. In the observation of the Nepalese context, males as the privileged group have a strong connection and network to power politics, as a result, they are benefitted from the appointment of different positions. To be specific to the selection of leadership in Nepalese universities and their affiliated colleges, the informants have given clear examples of political power influence in the appointment. According to the informants, all the top leadership positions are appointed politically. Giving the example of Tribhuvan University, the oldest university in Nepal, the informant B said that just a single appointment of women in a top leadership position in its long history shows the situation of women in the university. The situation of other universities is even worse. This indicates group dominance based on power privilege. As 'chronic group-based operation is driven by systematic institutional and individual discrimination (Sidanius et al., 2004, p. 847), males as the powerful group with a strong political network and socio-culturally advantaged group have strong domination over females that are always an underprivileged group in Nepal. Such critical conditions of power exercises in Nepalese society have also challenged the proportionate representation of women's leadership in educational institutions in Nepal.

It is also an important issue to discuss the discriminatory practices of ethnic minority groups in Nepalese society. The interview data for this study also showed up such issues in practice. The informant A said that women from ethnic minority groups suffer much as they are subordinated on various grounds as a result they cannot compete with privileged groups. In this connection, Research for Common Grounds (2017) states, 'the problem is compounded for women from poor and marginalized communities, such as Dalits, Muslims, and Madhesis as they are more marginalized and excluded as the intersecting of discrimination multiply the existing patriarchal discrimination' (p.3). Additionally, capable candidates from the ethnic

minority group do not get the opportunities because of the limited network as 'cast-based nepotism has often side-lined competent persons of other groups' (Lawoti, 2010, p.24). Such practices are strong evidence of group-based discrimination in Nepalese society that poses challenges to women's empowerment and creates obstacles to reaching leadership positions. As Sidanius et al.(2004) state that social dominance orientation arises from a different process of socialization and social context, women in the less privileged position in the social hierarchy are suppressed in the Nepalese social context.

Overall, the discussion, based on the interview data taken for the study draws on the socio-cultural and discriminatory gender practices of Nepalese society and also demonstrates that socio-culturally constructed gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia in Nepal. As the studies have shown and the informants in this study have stated, the underrepresentation of women faculties as well as fewer women in leadership positions has a connection to the socio-cultural practices that give more importance to men as the privileged group, as a result, they get more opportunities. On the other hand, women as an inferior group have to struggle to get opportunities and equal rights. This clearly indicates the group-based domination of men over women. Continuous suppression of males has made women inferior in society. The same social construct of gender-based roles is further seen in academia as well. Considering women as less capable of leadership roles has also restricted women from getting into leadership positions and gaining trust for leadership. Because of such discrimination, women have to struggle to get leadership opportunities in academia in Nepal. Besides, women have to compete with male faculties and outstand among all to reach leadership positions where masculinity is the sociocultural construct of leadership traits. So, it is also quite challenging for women to meet the criteria set in a male-dominated cultural setting. Further, dual responsibility has added a burden on women for their professional growth.

6.3 Dealing with the Challenges: Discussion on the Reflection of Women Leaders in Academia

Here the discussion is concerned with answering the second research question; how do women leaders in academia deal with the gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in leadership practices? In this section, the discussion is more focused on the reflection of women leaders regarding their leadership roles in the male-dominated social setting of the Nepalese context. It is already discussed that women have to tackle multiple barriers to reach leadership

positions. The informants believed that breaking the stereotype is their achievement as they consider their struggle and commitment to social reformation can be a milestone for gender equality as well as the justifiable representation of women in leadership positions in Nepali academia.

It is already discussed that male supremacy and domination are prevalent in Nepalese society. The socio-cultural practices have made such constructs in the mindset of people that males are considered all in all and enjoy a privileged life. It is difficult for women to come forward in the social sphere in such a socio-cultural setting. However, some women have challenged the stereotype and reached leadership positions. To be specific on women's leadership in academia, the experience of women leaders explains the challenges they face in the appointment of leadership positions and obstacles during their role execution. Although some of the informants found the male co-workers supportive and respectful of their leadership positions, the case was not the same for all. Some participants have also experienced the discriminatory attitude of male co-workers. Such a scenario of Nepali academia shows that it is challenging for women in the working places as well. It is observed that hegemonial male nature that believes the males in the top hierarchy do not accept women in leadership roles. In other words, some of the women leaders in academia (informants C, E and F) experienced the discriminatory attitude of male co-workers and their understanding was that male hegemony is still in existence in the mindset of people even though they are educated and work in the education sector which is the most sensitive area for the awareness of social justice and gender equality.

Besides, the incident that informant A shared when she was taking lunch in the school cafeteria and the question her colleague asked about the responsibilities of cooking food for her family (detail is given in the data presentation section), clearly showcases the attitude of males toward their female co-workers. Further, it depicts the hegemonial characteristics of males that undermine the leadership qualities of women and describe as inabilities of women for leadership positions. Different perceptions regarding male and female leadership and the way people evaluate their performance also reflect the intensity of the challenges women leaders face in executing their roles. This means, despite having the same qualifications and professional abilities, Nepalese socio-cultural constructs do not give equal status to females and do not recognize their leadership qualities also. In such circumstances, the determination of women leaders in academia and their confidence in their abilities for leadership roles help them establish women's identities in leadership roles and set the example that women are also

effective in leadership roles. It also helps to break the stereotype and make women dignified and maintain trust in their leadership roles.

Despite the challenges, it is important to notice the determination of women leaders in academia to change the concept of people and proof that women can take leadership responsibilities (informants E and G). 'For successful executive roles, women have to challenge the gender stereotype and work independently as per the situation' (Heilman, 2012, p. 123). The confidence among the women leaders in academia indicates their strength and their eagerness to change discriminatory concepts and establish their identity in academia. Such qualities help them to change the leadership traits that are considered associated with male characters in Nepali socio-cultural perception.

Further, the participants were also concerned about the effectiveness of their leadership role with the coordination of male colleagues. To tackle the challenges that socio-cultural and gender role practices pose, women leaders in academia observed working with male colleagues. Their cooperation helps to establish a sense of equality that gives a good message for gender inclusiveness. Heilman (2012) states, 'gender-neutral leadership strategy reduces the negativity of women leadership in male-dominated workplace setting'(p.124). Further, it also seems helpful to bring changes in the traditional socio-culturally constructed attitude of people regarding leadership traits and it can be easier and socially acceptable for women to get into leadership positions. Additionally, their importance to collaboration and cooperation with the faculties for successful teamwork enhances the trustworthiness among them.

The study shows that it is also important to have family support for women to work effectively and maintain family and professional life. The informants have the understanding that it is difficult to deal with the challenges without family support, so they have given importance to convincing the family members about the significance of their professional duties and their impact on society for gender equality. Most importantly, time management and work division on a priority basis play a crucial role in maintaining family and professional life. Such strategies help women leaders to overcome the burden of family responsibilities and they can be more focused on leadership qualities.

Additionally, the informants also gave priority to their professional network (informants B, F). The collective effort can only give strength to breaking the stereotype of male hegemony in Nepalese society. Thus, the involvement of women in professional unions or groups helps them to be vocal against the discriminatory practices in the institutions, and most importantly

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it helps them build their network that supports each other and be a forum for exchanging experiences and ideas for professional growth. Further, their engagement and connection to the community (informant A) for the advocacy of gender equality seem effective to bring changes for gender equality from its roots.

Here the discussion is more on how women leaders in Nepali academia deal with gender-based discriminatory practices of Nepalese society in their leadership practices rather than the overall leadership strategies of women leaders in academia. It is more reflective of the experiences of the participants of the study on how they deal with gender-based social practices in the execution of leadership roles. It seems challenging for women leaders to break the stereotype and change the mindset of people that is influenced by the social construction of gender roles and male-dominated social settings in Nepal. However, their effort to encourage more women in academia and inspiration for accepting the challenges and support for women aspiring to leadership roles is valuable for making the justifiable representation of women in leadership positions in academia. It is also challenging for women to tackle group-based domination as the males are considered superior and females are believed as the inferior or sub-ordinate group in Nepalese society. The confidence of the women leaders in their abilities and their determination in the execution of their roles demonstrate their active presence to destroy the social construction of male hegemony. Additionally, working in the professional network along with the women strengthen their power and widen their voices for gender equality and equal opportunities and helps them to neutralize the power supremacy of males that the males in Nepalese society benefited from patriarchal social norms. Most importantly, changes are expected to come from the societal level. Thus, the social engagement of women leaders in the advocacy of gender equality and seeking support from family members for managing the work-life balance and coordination with male colleagues in academia seems effective for making the effort for gender equality more sustainable

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

As the study is more focused on how the gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia and how women leaders deal with such challenges, it collects the data from seven women leaders of different higher educational institutions of Nepal through in-depth interviews. The study presents the findings under different themes and discussed them systematically with the support of relevant literature and theories to address the research question. In order to answer the research questions, it discusses the gender-based practices of Nepalese society and connects to the challenges of how those socially constructed gender-based practices pose challenges to women's leadership in academia. Further, it reflects how the women leaders in academia deal with the gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in leadership practices. The study shows that socially constructed gender role practices of Nepalese society challenge women to get equal opportunities for leadership roles in academia as the patriarchal social system associates leadership traits with masculinity and considers women inferior and subordinate group. However, women leaders in academia presented them as determined to tackle the socio-culturally constructed leadership traits and seem confident in leadership roles.

The findings portray that discriminatory gender role practices are culturally rooted in Nepalese society. Such discriminatory practices are seen as obstacles to women's upliftment and equal opportunities for leadership positions. The patriarchal social system in Nepalese society has given privileged to males and added more suffering for women as subordinates. Further, such socio-cultural practices have created a hierarchy in the society where males are considered superior, and women are behaved as the inferior or subordinate group. As a result, women are deprived of equal rights. Due to discriminatory socio-cultural and gender role practices in Nepal, most of the women, though they are educated, are limited to only household chores. However, the scenario of urban and rural areas is different regarding the attitude of people toward women as positive symptoms have been seen in urban areas regarding gender inclusiveness and opportunities for women in professional growth. Moreover, the impact is seen as inadequate.

As the study is more focused on women's leadership in educational institutions in Nepal, it systematically analyses the socio-cultural challenges for women's leadership in academia. The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in academia has indicated the critical state of women in academia, especially in leadership positions. Socio-cultural practices and discriminatory gender role practices in Nepalese society have promoted male hegemony as a result women are considered less capable of leadership roles. Additionally, the mindset of people for leadership traits also undermines the leadership potential of women in academia. Further, other socio-cultural constructs that demarcate the gender roles in Nepalese society as considering the sole responsibility of women for household chores and family caring, have also added a burden to the professional responsibilities of women and pose challenges to achieving leadership opportunities.

Women leaders in academia have to face various socio-cultural challenges while executing their executive roles. As discussed above, the patriarchal system and the consideration of male supremacy have created the mindset of people that women are inferior and are less capable of leadership roles. It is not easy for women to lead the institution in male-dominated settings and bring substantial changes for gender inclusion. However, despite the socio-cultural challenges, women leaders in academia seemed to be determined and committed to leadership responsibilities. They focused on setting the example that women can lead educational institutions challenging the stereotype. Their strategies of giving importance to cooperation and teamwork with both male and female faculties symbolize coexistence and mutual support. Most importantly, the organized effort of women in academia strengthens their voices against socio-culturally rooted gender discrimination and for justifiable representation in leadership positions. Further, their advocacy for gender equality at the societal level plays a significant role in bringing change in the mindset of people that is rooted in traditional stereotype gender roles and supports for better recognition of women in society.

7.2 Recommendations

Since many studies are not carried out on women's leadership in Nepali academia, this study gives some insights into how socio-cultural perspectives of Nepalese society on gender roles pose challenges to women's leadership in academia. It helps to understand the present status of women in Nepalese society and their presence in academia. Although the study is more focused on the issues of women's leadership in higher educational institutions in Nepal, it reflects an overall scenario of Nepal and demonstrates the discriminatory gender practices that

hamper women's empowerment. So, the study can be helpful in getting an overview of socio-cultural challenges that are to be addressed for gender inclusion and justifiable representation of women in leadership positions in academia. Further, the study also contributes to the concerned authorities for making inclusive gender policies addressing the root causes of women lagging and getting effective legislative interventions. The findings indicate that reservation policies for gender inclusion are ineffective, especially for leadership positions. So, attention is desirable on how to address the underrepresentation of women's leadership in academia. Effective measures are pleading for weakening the patriarchy that creates a social hierarchy and makes women subordinate or inferior.

7.3. Limitations of the Study

This study is mainly focused on the socio-cultural challenges for women leadership in academia. Although there are various issues and influencing factors impacting the status of women's leadership in Nepali academia, the study has taken into consideration of socio-cultural perspectives on gender roles in Nepalese society and their influence on women's leadership in academia. To do so, the study tries to incorporate the various socio-cultural issues on women's leadership in Nepali academia, however, it is limited to resources and a data set that was gathered from seven women leaders of higher educational institutions with the help of semi-structured in-depth interviews. For wider perspectives, different stakeholders could be incorporated into the research. As the empirical data is analysed using a qualitative approach and discussed through the lens of social constructionism and social dominance theories, the question may arise about the generalizability of the status of women's leadership in Nepali academia and their representation in the area. For generalizable findings, it requires wider coverage and multiple approaches to data gathering and analysis for validation.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

This study includes a small sampling size of seven women leaders working in executive positions in different higher educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal. The findings from the limited participants and their experiences may not cover the overall situation of women's leadership in Nepali Academia. For detailed investigation, studies of wider scope can be conducted including the women leaders from different parts of the country. Additionally, this study employs a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews as the data collection tools so that the findings may not be generalizable. So, other research with a larger population using a quantitative approach may widen the scope of findings and make them generalizable to the

Nepalese academic context regarding how the socio-cultural practices of gender roles of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia. Further, this study only includes women leaders of educational institutions as the informants, so the involvement of male participants can show how males perceive the status of females in society and leadership positions in academia.

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Appendix I

Interview Guide

Firstly, thank you for being my respondent in the study of 'Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Gender Roles in Nepal and Status of Women Leadership in Academia' as a part of my master's degree in Community Development and Social Innovation at VID Specialized University, Norway. Your responses will only be used for this research purpose and confidentially will fully be maintained during and after the presentation of your responses. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw your participation at any time if you wish to do so without any justification.

Questions

1. How do you describe the status of women in Nepal?
2. Could you reflect on how gender roles are exercised in Nepal?
3. How do the socio-cultural practices of Nepalese society influence gender discrimination?
4. What are the most important efforts by the Nepalese authority for gender equality?
5. How do you evaluate the status of women's leadership in Nepali academia?
6. What should be done for the justifiable representation of women's leadership in academia?
7. In your opinion, what are the main challenges for women's leadership in academia in Nepal?
8. What is the most important effort you have made for the recognition of women's leadership in academia?
9. How difficult it was for you as a woman to get a leadership position in this institution?
10. How do you manage your family life and professional responsibilities?
11. How do you present yourself among other male co-workers? Do male colleagues behave differently to female leaders?
12. How do you as a female leader in academia work to maintain gender equality and promotion of women's empowerment in Nepal?
13. As a leader in academia, how do you tackle the sociocultural gender role practices that came across in leadership practice?

Thank you for your time and information.

Appendix II

Information for the participants about the study on

Socio-cultural Perspectives on Gender Role in Nepal and Status of Women Leadership in Academia

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to find out how gender-based social practices of Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia. Additionally, it would explore how women leaders in academia tackle the concept of gender roles prevalent in Nepalese society in their leadership practices.

In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project
The main objectives of the research are:

    c.   How do gender-based social practices in Nepalese society pose challenges to women's leadership in academia?

    d.   How do women leaders in academia deal with the gender-based roles prevalent in Nepalese society in leadership practices?

Who is responsible for the research project?

VID Specialized University is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

The purposive sampling technique is used for the selection of respondents in this study. This means that the respondents are judgementally selected according to the objectives and purpose of the study. Seven women leaders will be selected from different universities and their affiliated colleges in Kathmandu, Nepal.

What does participation involve for you?

The study will use the in-depth interview as a tool for data collection. A semi-structured interview guide will be used that focuses on the socio-cultural perspectives on gender roles and challenges of female leadership in academia in Nepal. Seven women leaders from different universities and their affiliated colleges in Kathmandu, Nepal are required for the study. The interview will take place on zoom approximately for 45 minutes. The interview can be recorded if required.

Participation is voluntary
Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data
We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end in November 2022. After completion of the project, the collected data will be destroyed.

Your rights
So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with VID Specialized University, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?
If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- VID Specialized University via James Hathaway, Associate professor in the faculty of Theology, Diaconia and Leadership studies, by email: james.hathaway@ vid.no
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

James Hathaway   Khuma Nath Dhakal
Project Leader   Student
(supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project 'Socio-cultural Perspectives on Gender Role in Nepal and Status of Women Leadership in Academia'and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

☐ to participate in the Interview
☐ to audio record the interview.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. December 2022.

(Signed by participant, date)