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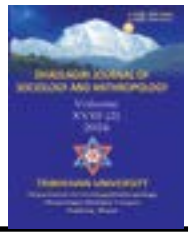

Exploring Gender Construction within Families: A Study of the Socialization of Muslim Girls in Kalaiya, Bara, Nepal

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Abstract

This paper explores gender socialization using the social construction of gender theory and integrates it with intersectionality theory, focusing on the existing positioning of Tarai Muslim girls. The study internalizes the existing heterogeneity among Muslims of Nepal and focuses on the Tarai Muslims with its research site in Kalaiya, Bara. The qualitative study employs in-depth interviews, key-informant interviews (KIIs), and focus-group discussions (FGDs). By using purposive sampling, participants were selected, and an in-depth interview of 20 parents (10 males and 10 females) was carried out, which was followed by two FGDs: five male parents in the first round of FGD and five female parents in the second round of FGD. This also involved conducting KII with five participants from each group of religious scholars and Muslim girls enrolled in government schools. The research findings suggest that gender socialization results from social factors prevailing within the family, influenced by religious, local, and national contexts. The social norms contributing to gender socialization involve widely held beliefs within the family that perceive the daughter as *ijjat* of the family and consider them as 'other house property.' Similarly, existing practices where females are nurtured to be inherently reliant on males and the beliefs of allocating binary roles to males and females contribute to gender socialization. Moreover, the contradiction of the religious values of Muslims with the local context influenced by the Nepali state is another factor supporting the gender socialization of Muslim girls.

Keywords: gender, intersectionality, socialization, Tarai Muslims of Nepal

Introduction

The positioning of Muslim women in Nepal results in multiple layers of exclusion due to their membership in different marginalized categories (Upadhyay, 2017; Seddon, 2017). Muslim women face disadvantages because of their distinct identity and status influenced by their religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which have historically exposed them to various forms of discrimination: firstly, as women; secondly, as Muslims; and thirdly, as Muslim women (Seddon, 2017, p.245). This research specifically focuses on Tarai Muslims, which adds another layer to their disadvantageous belonging due to their cultural affiliations as Madhesis (Deysarkar, 2015; Hachhethu, 2007; Dahal, 1996).

The disadvantaged status of Muslim women is evidenced in various secondary sources of data. Seddon (2017) highlighted that the literacy rate of Muslim girls and women is among the lowest in Nepal overall, including their lower rate of even primary school attendance, with high dropout rates with their increment of age (p.146). Similarly, the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of 2022 indicates that Muslim women had lower levels of contraception knowledge and use. According to this NDHS survey, married Muslim women utilize contraceptives at the lowest rate (33%) compared to other ethnic groups (Ministry of Health and Population [Nepal]

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et al., 2023).

The previous studies emphasized several interlinked causes for the inferiority and poorer positioning of Muslim women (Seddon, 2017; Upadhyay, 2017). For instance, Seddon (2017) mentioned that a woman within a Muslim family faces discrimination due to restrictions on education, early marriage, the dowry system, limited involvement in household decision-making, purdah, easy divorce by husband, and the unequal inheritance system. Furthermore, Upadhyay (2017) has also argued that the in-group exclusion of Muslim women in terms of education, employment, access to resources, and decision-making roles places them in one of the most vulnerable categories in Nepal and that this exclusion is due to religious beliefs among Muslims.

To understand the process that resulted in the poor positioning of Muslim women, this paper makes a small effort. The paper's main focus is on the socialization of girls within the family and aims to explore the unequal nurturing process of daughters. It raises the following research questions: What societal factors within a Muslim family contribute to gender socialization? And how does the ongoing process of gender socialization impact the lives of Muslim girls? Utilizing the framework of the social construction of gender (Beauvoir, 1949/1953; Lorber, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987), this paper employs an intersectionality lens to shed light on the gender socialization process of Tarai Muslim women.

The subsequent subsection provides an overview of the Tarai Muslims of Nepal. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the research study's theoretical framework.

Tarai Muslims

Muslims are commonly recognized as a socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged religious minority (Seddon, 2017; Sijapati, 2012). According to the Nepal Human Development Report 2014, it is evident that Muslims are in a poor and disadvantaged position, with the Human Development Index (HDI) values for Muslims being the next lowest after Dalits in the Tarai (0.422) and significantly lower than that of hill Dalits (NHDR, 2017, as cited in Seddon, 2017). The literacy rate among Muslims, according to NSIS 2018, is 65.5%, which is lower than the national average of 71.6% and also lower than that of hill Dalits, which is 67.8% (Central Department of Anthropology, 2020).

The Muslims of Nepal comprise 5.09 percent of the country's population, making them the second-largest religious minority after Buddhists (Government of Nepal, 2021). Seddon (2017) states that the Muslim communities of Nepal are not Hindus; they have, nevertheless, been very much affected by their status as a religious minority in the long-stayed Hindu Kingdom. In the *Muluki Ain* [Civil Code] of 1854, Muslims were placed in the caste order sanctioned by the Nepali state as 'impure but touchable' (Hofer, 2004). Similarly, Nepal's national census of 2001 designates Muslims as an ethnic group even though there is no racial, ethnic, or linguistic uniformity among them that would mark them from others in ethnic terms (Sijapati, 2011).

There is a belief in Hindu society that generalizes Islam as *ulto dharma,* a reversed religion (Gaborieau, 2007, as cited by Sijapati, 2011), and there is a marking and labeling of Muslims as a religious group with cultural orientations that are unique and distinct from Hindus (Seddon, 2017). However, there are alternate arguments as well, which state that Muslims of Nepal are not a uniform category but rather a heterogeneity persists within them (Seddon, 2017; Sijapati, 2011; Upadhyay, 2014), and the variations among Muslims are also identified in terms of caste, linguistics, *maktabi fikr* (school of thought) and geographic lines (Sijapati, 2012). The geographical/regional divisions are the predominant feature that differentiates the various groups of Muslims. Based on regional distinctions, Muslims in Nepal are categorized into groups like Kathmandu Muslims (Kathmandu Muslims comprise categories like Kashmiri Muslims, Hindustani Muslims, and Tibetan Muslims), Hill Muslims, and Tarai Muslims (Seddon, 2017; Sijapati, 2011; Sijapati, 2012; Upadhyay, 2014).

The study primarily focuses on Tarai Muslims, who comprise about 97 percent of Nepal's Muslim population (Seddon, 2017; Sijapati, 2012). It is believed that most Muslims living in the Tarai are Indigenous to the area, and culturally, they ally with the locality of their residence (Sijapati, 2011; Seddon, 2017). In this regard, Seddon (2017) noted that Tarai Muslims have largely adopted the local language of the Indigenous population of those particular areas, for while the majority of Muslims in the mid-west speak Awadhi, the majority of those in the central Tarai speak Bhojpuri, while those in the eastern Tarai mainly speak Maithali (p. 58).

Moreover, many scholars classify Tarai Muslims as Madhesi due to their social and cultural connections (Deysarkar, 2015; Hachhethu, 2007; Dahal, 1996). In Deysarkar's (2015) definition, Madhesis are non-Nepali-speaking individuals who live in the Tarai region of Nepal and primarily communicate in languages like Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Tharu, Hindi, Urdu, and various local dialects. The closer alignment of the Tarai Muslims to the local culture also fits with the conceptual frame of Madhesi, as suggested by Deysarkar. Similarly, scholars like Hachhethu (2007) and Dahal (1996) have included all communities, such as the plain's Hindu castes, the plain's janjati groups, and Muslims, except for those of hill origin, under the Madhesi category. This cultural alignment of Muslims with Madhesi also merges them into another layer of socioeconomic deprivation and discrimination due to the domination of the Pahadi-dominated Nepali state, as reflected in several factual data. Deysarkar (2015), like other scholars, also presented the facts to show the deprivation of Madhesi from enjoying many facilities

like poverty alleviation programs, health infrastructure, unemployment benefits, and a high growth rate, which sidelines them from the mainstream of national economics and politics.

The intersectional positioning of Muslims, due to their disadvantaged categorization as a religious group intersected by their alignment with Madhesi identity in the state with Pahadi domination, creates an opportune space for carrying out the study of gender with the application of intersectionality theory. Literature finds a gap in the study due to little attention being paid to the issues of Muslims in Nepal in general and Muslims of Tarai specifically. Moreover, there is little literature that examines the gender play within Tarai Muslims, followed by their intersecting belonging to disadvantageous categories. This paper is an input in the line of addressing the research vacuum.

Theoretical Framework

Gender, Socialization Process, and Role Learning

The popular statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949/1953, p.273), directs to the meaning that a woman is not born but made. The proposition of Beauvoir pointed out the distinction between "natural sex" and "cultural sex roles," creating a ground for the theories of sex and gender (Luintel, 2018, pp.1-3). In day-to-day life, the terminologies 'sex' and 'gender' are used as if they are the same. However, from the sociological (or social science) perspective, there are distinct meanings of sex and gender that make the terms non-exchangeable (Little & McGivern, 2013, p. 1). In the debate of differentiating sex and gender, sex is linked to biological, anatomical, or physiological differences between males and females, while gender is denaturalized by linking it with the sociocultural construct (Flax, 1990; Little & McGivern, 2013). Gender sets an identity of hierarchy more than just biological differences between sexes, where one is influenced by varying degrees of masculinity or femininity (Diamond, 2002).

Lorber (2006) is one of the prominent scholars who discussed the social construction of gender. She has broadened the meaning of gender by categorizing it as a process, stratification, and structure (p. 113). Gender as a process means that gender is constantly created and recreated out of human interaction, which becomes the order of social life (West & Zimmerman, 1987, as cited in Lorber, 2006). Here, differences are created between men and women through interaction, where individuals learn the expected way of life according to sex differences. Similarly, as a part of the stratification system, gender contributes to hierarchical positioning where man ranks higher in order despite the same race or class (Lorber, 2006, p.114). Moreover, gender as a structure divides the work at home for females and work in economic production for males, and accordingly legitimizes authority and defines sexuality as well as emotional life (Connel, 1987, as cited in Lorber, 2006). In this context, the paper keeps itself in the line of discussion, showing gender as a process operating through socialization within a familial context. While dealing with the process of gender construction, the research study also incorporates Mills's fundamental idea that a person's features are socially patterned and must be understood in close and continual reference to the social biography and the social context (Mills,1959, p. 166).

Commenting on the socialization process, Little and McGivern (2013) argued that learning social and cultural scripts took place through socialization, which teaches people to behave following social norms (p.7). To understand gender construction, the term 'socialization' is one of the important tools that make gender so routine. In this line, Eagle (1988) argues that socialization is such a powerful, common, and yet subtle process, that the members of a given society come to accept the values and norms of their society as 'natural' or biologically-determined (p.68). Similarly, Richardson (1981) claims that socialization is the pathway that enables a person to learn cultural values, which they unquestionably consider natural. For this reason, socialization into male or female roles separates biological sex from gender, but it also leaves room for sex and gender to be confused. (Friedman & Wilkes, 1987, p.57-58, as cited in Eagle, 1988).

The different agents contributing to gender socialization are family, education, peer groups, mass media, religion, and the workplace (Little & McGivern, 2013, p.8). These agents mediate gender roles by creating and maintaining gender-normative expectations and behaviors. These roles are based on sociocultural norms, values, and beliefs. Repetitive exposure to the agents within the context leads to false naturalization of socially constructed roles between males and females. Among the agents, according to Little and McGivern (2013), family is the first agent contributing to gender socialization due to different ways of treatment for sons and daughters.

Integrating Intersectionality

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberle W. Crenshaw to show how the intersection of gender and race limits black women's access, resulting in their marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). Hankivsky (2014) argued that intersectionality as a process helps to study interdependent forms of privilege and oppression due to the interaction of different social locations like–race/ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, and religion–in a person's life within a context of power relations. This theory has gained popularity and is used to analyze multiple forms of discrimination affecting women.

This article draws upon these frameworks on intersectionality to capture the gender construction. The paper examines the social construction of gender by developing insight into the socialization process of females within a familial context. The positioning of Tarai Muslim girls demanded the implication of an intersectionality lens

to study the gender construction due to their belonging set by an intersection of women, Muslims, and Madhesi.

Methods and Materials

The fieldwork for this research was conducted in Kalaiya–a sub-metropolitan city and the headquarters of the Bara district, between January 15 and March 13, 2020, while completing an MA dissertation in Sociology from Tribhuvan University. The research site is located in the Madhesh province, with an HDI value of 0.519, lower than the national average of 0.602 and the lowest among all provinces (HDI, 2019). The Bara district, selected as the research site, is heterogeneous due to its diverse religious and cultural composition. In the district, the Muslim population is 14.71%, making them the second largest religious group after Hindus, who comprise 80.90% of the population. The languages spoken as the mother tongue in the district consist of 73.86% Bhojpuri, 8.62% Tharu, 8.57% Nepali, 3.32% Tamang, and 4.24 other languages (Government of Nepal, 2021).

This research is qualitative in nature, employing in-depth interviews, key-informant interviews (KIIs), and focus-group discussions (FGDs). Using purposive sampling, participants were selected, and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with 20 parents (10 males and 10 females). The parents were chosen to gain enriched information about their children's socialization process. This also followed two Focus Group Discussions: five male parents in the first round of FGD and five female parents in the second round of FGD. The parents who participated in the study were a mix of literate and illiterate individuals with experiences in raising both male and female children. Among the participants, the interviewees were Bhojpuri-speaking Muslims from the caste categories Ansari, Dhuniya, and Dhobi. Similarly, this included KII with five interviewees from each category: religious scholars and Muslim girls attending government schools. The religious scholars were selected as key informants to get details on the prevailing religious beliefs and practices. Similarly, Muslim girls attending government schools were selected to bring their experience about gender socialization and inquire about its consequences. Moreover, I have included my experiences and more than 20 years of observation as a part of a Muslim family in Kalaiya, Bara. The researcher's position as a local Muslim and speaker of the Bhojpuri language made the interview livelier and more in-depth, with the advantage of understanding the local slang, which gave cultural and contextual meaning to the topic. However, due to my male positioning, there was early hesitation in interviewing some females; however, it was solved later on after briefing my research intention, where my local religious belonging contributed a major part. After the collection, the data in Bhojpuri was translated into English for data analysis. Following the ethical guidelines, confidentiality is maintained by not using the first names of the interviewees; instead, their surnames, gender, and age are used to locate the participants of the research.

Results and Discussion

The research findings suggest that family plays a significant role in gender construction. The family's social norms, values, beliefs, and practices contribute to gender socialization, which is influenced by religious, local, and national contexts. These prevailing beliefs and practices are in the play to impact the family's perception and priorities of sons and daughters. The differences in priorities result in varying treatment of sons and daughters, contributing to gender role learning and socialization. In the succeeding section, there is a discussion of different societal factors contributing to gender socialization and its impact on Muslim girls.

Daughters' Consideration as the *ijjat* of the Family

Among Muslims, there is a prevailing belief in considering daughters as *ijjat* of the family, that is, prestige or honor of the family. This belief is linked with the indoor placing of daughters with an increment of age and successfully arranging their marriage from the family. The belief is widespread among parents in the area from all religious backgrounds; however, the additional religious practice of purdah within the Muslim community leads to stricter indoor positioning of Muslim girls.

The narration depicting the connection between the daughter's indoor placement and the family's prestige is articulated by Hawari **(**65**)**, a male participant. He says,

> **. . .** We are from an *ijjatdaar pariwar* (prestige holder family). From the beginning, *beti-patoah* (the daughters or daughters-in-law) of our family are not permitted to go out without their guardians. It is the weakness of the guardian if their wives or daughters-in-law leave the home without a guardian. [IDI: Hawari (65); 24 Feb, 2020]

The words of Hawari **(**65**)** represent most of the participants, who also agree that their daughter's indoor placement enhances the family's prestige. The participants linked their daughter**'**s *chaal-chalan* **(**behavior**)** and *sanskaar* **(**culture**)** with the ancestor**'**s prestige, which, according to them, depends upon girls**'** strict dress-up by maintaining purdah followed by minimal outdoor participation.

While discussing the impact of relating daughters with 'purdah' and *ijjat* (prestige) of the family, the participants shared that these beliefs make schooling for daughters a more arduous journey than for sons. Furthermore, they stated that the practice of purdah becomes sharper when daughters reach adolescence, increasing the risk of losing *ijjat* upon its violation. According to participants, the fear of *ijjat* loss increases parents' stress levels and pushes them to discontinue their daughters' education. Parveen (38),

a female participant who is also a mother of a daughter, highlighted that the threat of *ijjat* loss of the family comes among parents once their daughter reaches puberty, resulting in restricted outdoor visits and earlier marriage than males, affecting their education attainment. Even the Muslim girls selected as key informants shared their struggle to pursue education with their increasing ages.

This issue of girls discontinuing their education is not considered a problem among parents who participated in the interview. Contrarily, the participants are optimistic about ongoing discriminatory educational practices. They reminisced about their childhood when female education attainment was negligible, but now they are optimistic about the current scenario that allows females to access education. This is why the parents are not prioritizing attaining education for daughters as they do for their sons. Therefore, the practice of less prioritizing education prevalent among Muslims is due to the local and religious belief of considering daughters as *ijjat* of the family, complemented by the practice of purdah. The resulting negative impact on the education of Muslim girls, however, is not according to the guidelines of the religion of Islam. The provision in religion recognizes the importance of education and makes it obligatory for all Muslims to acquire knowledge without any discrimination in sex (Patoari, 2019).

Perceiving Daughters as 'other house property'

The existing beliefs and practices contribute to the otherization of Muslim girls. The girls are discriminated against as 'other house property' in the locality. This process of 'otherization of daughter' is further supplemented by different existing beliefs and practices. The belief of considering sons as the support of the elderly phase of parents, the marital practice of sending daughters to their in-laws' houses, and the practice of dowry contribute to otherization and discrimination of daughters within the same family. These beliefs and practices affect the way of treatment and the role learning of daughters in the family from early childhood.

The reflection of one of the participants' statements, who is also the mother of two daughters, shows how the parents perceive their daughter. She states,

> …It is our duty to teach our daughters good behavior that can help them adjust in their *sasural* (husband's home) in the future. Ultimately, daughters are '*paraiye ghar ke sampati*' (another house property), and they have to move to their husband's home, which is their final home… [IDI: Khatun (47), 3 Feb, 2020]

A similar comment about otherizing daughters is found in the words of Mansoor (62), one of the participants who is also a father of two sons and three daughters. He says,

> . . . Daughters are other house property who are supposed to move to their husband's home after marriage. In reverse, sons are the *budhapa lathi*, that is, the support of elderly parents and the entire family. Thus, sons always have a higher degree of preference than daughters among parents. [IDI: Mansoor (62); 20 Feb, 2020]

The way of perceiving sons and daughters defines the differences, which also sets discriminations in terms of priorities. These discriminatory priorities further become rigid due to the prevailing practice of dowry among Muslims. Due to the prevailing beliefs and practices, girls are the second priority in terms of investment in education within the same family. The parents' prior responsibility for their daughters was found to be linked with the successful arrangement of the daughter's marriage along with the management of the dowry. Therefore, the practice of dowry negatively influences the education of girls. In this regard, the sharing of Mansoor (62) highlights the discriminatory priorities of parents. He says,

> Muslim parents with larger families and more children often struggle to invest equally in the higher education of their sons and daughters due to their economic status. As a result, there is a practice to prioritize spending on education for sons over daughters. This means that sons are often sent to expensive private boarding schools, while daughters attend government schools or are provided with only basic Islamic education at home. [IDI: Mansoor (62); 20 Feb, 2020]

The differing priorities and expectations of daughters within the family lead to their distinct socialization from sons. One of the participants divulged how many parents in the locality open insurance or fixed deposit accounts for the future reference of dowry management for their daughters' marriage, as their prime responsibility. In contrast, he admitted that the parents are liable for educating their sons and making them skillful for future purposes to take responsibility for the family.

The consequence of otherizing daughters manifests not only in the discriminatory rearing for the educational journey of girls but also on other grounds. For instance, the discrimination starts with the birth of baby children after recognition of their sex. One of the participants shared about a higher degree of celebration with the birth of baby boys in the family, which is almost absent for baby girls. The custom of exchanging mithai (sweets) to celebrate the birth of a baby boy and the associated disappointment among couples when they don't have a baby boy after having a daughter as their first child all highlight the discriminatory perception of sons and daughters within families.

This demonstrates that the prevailing practices of otherizing daughters due to the practice of dowry, the marital culture of moving daughters to their husbands' homes, and the way of perceiving sons as the support of the elderly phase of the parent is setting different priorities for sons and daughters, resulting daughters as the part

of discrimination within the family. The discriminatory belief of otherizing a daughter does not follow religious guidelines. In contrast, all of the religious scholars who participated in the interview mentioned that the religion of Islam recognizes the birth of a son or daughter with equal importance as it considers every child as a "gift of Almighty Allah," regardless of sex. Similarly, there is a prohibition of dowry exchange in Islam by considering it a sin. However, the practice of dowry is the dominant culture in Tarai Nepal, which is also found to be practiced by Muslims living there (Upadhyay, 2023; Yadav & Darshan, 2023). In addition, there is also a provision for the inheritance of property by daughters, entitling them to receive half the share compared to their brothers, without any financial liability towards the family (Patoari, 2019). This illustrates that gender socialization within Muslims does not align with religious provisions in many ways.

Binary Role Allocation and Early Preparation of Girls for Private Spheres and Indoor Works

The underlying beliefs and practices of Muslim families are found to contribute to the early preparation of Muslim girls for private spheres and indoor work. There is the religious belief in allocating binary roles according to sex; that is, males are assigned to public sphere work while females are assigned to private sphere work. Local traditional practices also expect indoor work from girls. Due to religious beliefs and local practices, the parenting of girls is involved in teaching them reproductive roles. One of the key informants, a religious scholar, describes the religious belief of how the work of males and females is different. He says,

> . . . In our religion, men and women have different assigned roles. While both have equal access to education as per the religion, boys are typically assigned outdoor work, while girls are expected to do indoor work. Wives are responsible for managing household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, child-rearing, and caring for the elderly, while husbands are expected to earn and handle outdoor work. Although husbands can assist their wives in the kitchen, wives are not expected to work in public. Additionally, girls are required to practice purdah. . . [KII: 21 Feb, 2020]

The binary allocation of roles and their interpretation significantly impact girls' socialization, as reflected in the words of the parents interviewed. Their words reflected normalcy for their daughters' learning of mothering and reproductive roles, which they also expected them to learn and do. The way Khatoon (52), one of the parents, described the girl's role verifies the influence of belief. She says,

> Girls are meant for kitchen work. It is a well-known fact that girls often have to handle family responsibilities after marriage . . . I have witnessed many girls pursuing their studies before getting married, only to have to give up on their education after marriage. What is the point of providing higher education to girls if they are not allowed to pursue a career in that field? [IDI: Khatoon (52); 17 Feb, 2020]

The experience of learning indoor roles is also reflected in the narration of one of the key informants, Khatoon (14), who attends the modern government school. She conveys,

> It is different to be a boy or a girl in our society. Our surroundings expect that we girls speak softly, be taught cooking and cleaning, focus on their appearance and beauty, and wake up early to manage household chores. . . [KII: Khatoon (14); 21 Feb, 2020]

The words of participants unveil how learning reproductive roles and maintaining beautiful bodily appearances as part of socialization is a common practice that girls are expected to learn and perform. As participants stated, learning such scripts for girls is an important part of their lives and prepares them for becoming good wives and mothers in the future. According to participants, the girls' preparation of a good wife is inquired during marital phase. They shared that the requirement of a girl's marriage involved the inquiries into beauty and specialization in household work as the utmost criteria for the marriage of girls. In contrast, they admitted that the most significant criteria for males to be inquired for marriage are their education, job affiliation, and income.

Existing differences in preferences for marriage as per sex difference are found to result in separate socialization for sons and daughters in the same family. Girls are nurtured with the importance of their beautiful appearance from early childhood. As one of the participants stated, this starts with the early gift exchange of *paayal* (a silver ornament worn on legs) from parents and relatives when daughters begin to walk. This also included stopping haircuts and using clips and hairbands for their hair. These symbols are supposed to enhance the beauty of girls in society, which girls start learning from early childhood. In this context, one of the schoolgirls conveyed how beauty is essential for girls, which reflects her internalization of gender norms. She expresses,

> . . . Beauty is an asset for girls (*singaar aurat ke gahana*). Ornamentation is very close to us. We, all girls, are well known for the nearby beauty parlor, which we visit frequently. Therefore, there are many beauty parlors here near the market. . . [KII: 1 March, 2020]

The parenting practices shared by participants and nurturing experiences shared by Muslim schoolgirls verify how upbringing as a daughter followed distinct sociocultural prescriptions. These sociocultural scripts, which are also suggested by Little and McGivern (2013), restrict daughters from learning outdoor work and set limits

to their learning due to the allocation of their roles that fit them into indoor and private spheres. This role learning is ingrained in local and religious beliefs, drawing separate lines for gender roles between sons and daughters.

Nurturing of Females as if They are Inherently Reliant on Males

There is a common practice in the locality where females are seen as relying on males. Among Muslims, this belief is reinforced by the practice of linking females' surnames to males for their recognition based on religious belief and practice. Girls in the Muslim community are often given the surname of either "Khatun" or "Parveen," regardless of their caste within Islam. Neutral caste figures influence this naming convention but ultimately signify a silent reliance on their father's surname before marriage and their husband's surname after marriage due to the prevailing practice of relating a girl's identity to their father and husband over time. In contrast, boys typically inherit their father's surname, which defines their caste and recognition throughout their lives. Even in terms of managing their livelihood, the participants shared that the early dependence of girls on their fathers shifts to their husbands after marriage, followed by their elderly phase dependence on their sons.

Therefore, females' socialization involves learning from local and religious beliefs that place them in supportive roles, assisting males. Social norms contribute to the subordination of girls to boys in terms of their naming and livelihood. This has led females to socialization, emphasizing their learning of roles to input their dependent positioning, which constitutes their preparation as daughters, wives, and mothers.

Structural Barriers Affecting the Socialization of Girls

The national and local structures are found to affect the educational attainment of Muslim girls negatively. The contradiction between religious values and structural settings has been a discouraging factor among parents who want to engage their daughters in government schooling. The participants attributed that this anti-Islamic atmosphere demotivates parents from educating their daughters despite recognizing the importance of doing so. In this context, Mansoor (27), a religious scholar, describes why girls lag in education by linking the educational context with the non-Islamic atmosphere. He says,

> . . . The practice of co-education is restricted in our religion, but most government schools here incorporate it. The underlying value of purdah in our religion is not given due consideration in the educational environment promoted by the Nepal Government. The prolonged suppressive policy of the Government towards Islamic education has marginalized this community from benefiting from educational policies. The non-Islamic atmosphere has disheartened parents from engaging with Nepal's Government educational framework. Additionally, dressing norms such as pants, shirts, skirts, or attire without a *dupatta* or *odhani* (shawl-like scarf) in schools or colleges in the major cities also discourage parents from sending their daughters to be part of the current schooling environment. [KII: Mansoor (27); 22 Feb, 2020]

During the interview, the participants agreed with Mansoor's argument (27) that a non-Islamic environment, practicing coeducation with ignorance of purdah, creates reluctance among parents to send their daughters abroad for higher education, similar to what they do for their sons. This concern about parenting daughters of a parent is reflected in one of the participants, who says,

> In the past, it was common for both girls and boys to marry at a young age. However, this practice has diminished over time. It is worth noting that the marriage age for Muslim girls is still lower than for non-Muslim communities. Recently, there has been a trend of sending some Muslim girls to Birgunj (a nearby city) to pursue higher education. Nevertheless, most parents hesitate to send their daughters to distant locations such as Kathmandu for further studies. On the other hand, sons are more easily granted permission to study abroad or pursue distance learning. [IDI: 18 Feb, 2020]

The participants' sharing shows parents' fear of *ijjat* loss, which is why they hesitate to send their daughters for education away from home. Religiously, the same atmosphere is more challenging for daughters than for sons due to the threat of love marriage. It is observed that the parents are more flexible in welcoming non-Muslim daughters-in-law than their sons-in-law. The prevailing belief of positively perceiving daughter-in-law from non-Muslim converted to Muslim makes sons more open to marriage options. However, the space is not the same when the daughter marries a non-Muslim, and it is considered a loss of prestige. This is why the atmosphere is differently acting on sons and daughters, making public participation for girls more challenging.

In this way, it is found that structural settings also contribute to gender socialization, leading to an exclusionary atmosphere for girls. This mismatch between religious guidelines and context makes the parents fearful and concerned about their *ijjat* loss, which permits limited access to public exposure for daughters, further limiting their educational attainment and overall progress.

Conclusion

The study scrutinizing socialization reveals gender construction as a process, which marks the important finding of Lorber's (2006) theoretical framework. This inquiry exposes the false claim of naturalizing women's roles and gives a stronghold for Beauvoir's (1949/1953) argument of how a woman is made a woman rather than being born as such. Investigating the process of construction of gender within Tarai Muslim families unveils the significant influence of cultural beliefs and practices in shaping gender roles. These findings coincide with Little and McGivern's (2013) concept of gender construction, which emphasizes the role of cultural scripts and socialization in shaping gender identities.

The beliefs and practices that impact the socialization of girls within the family include perceiving girls as other house property, defining girls as the *ijjat* of the family, practicing dowry, and connecting girls with purdah and private spheres. These beliefs and practices are found to create a discriminatory atmosphere within the family and restrict girls from equal opportunities for exposure to learning and overall development. It adversely impacts their education attainment process, resulting in early involvement in reproductive roles and comparatively early marriage than males. In addition, these beliefs and practices prioritizing the beautification of girls, in a way, were found to objectify women, as the argument made by Mason (2018), making their identity submissive and dependent on males. The gender socialization of Muslim girls is influenced by their—religious orientation as Muslims, local featuring as Madhesi, and structural positioning as Nepali living in the Tarai region of Nepal—which signifies the importance of consideration of social context while exploring the gender construction as suggested by the framework of Mills (1959).

The overall socialization process of Muslim girls within the family indicates that the operating mechanism of gender construction is peculiar. It neither resonates completely under the religious frame nor fits entirely into the predominant local and national culture. There is an intersection of either, resulting in gender functioning being unique. On the one hand, Tarai Muslims are assimilated into the local and national dominant culture in various ways, as their practices ignore religious beliefs. For instance, going against their Islamic beliefs, the Tarai Muslims treat women like other household property and practice dowries, which strengthen gender socialization. On the other hand, they are also prioritizing some of the religious beliefs and practices, which also strengthen gender norms by contributing to discriminatory socialization of girls. For example, they are restricting females' access to public spheres and education after a certain age, citing religious guidelines of the practice of purdah and restriction of coeducation. Thus, the socialization of females contributing to gender construction is influenced by their intersecting positioning of Muslim girls, which exacerbates gender-loaded discriminatory socialization, and this supports Crenshaw's (1989) argument that overlapping forms of disadvantageous positioning intensify women's suffering.

Declarations

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was conducted as part of my MA dissertation at Tribhuvan University. The research committee at the university approved the study, and consent was obtained from all the participants who participated in the study.

Consent for Publication

Not applicable.

Availability of Data and Materials

Data can be shared.

Competing Interests

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