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Women's Inherent Power and Educational Transformation in Nepal

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Abstract

Religion, culture, and societal norms often impose constraints on women's educational and social mobility within patriarchal structures and gender roles. This research explores women's inherent power in Nepal, focusing on how religious narratives, alongside social restraints, influence women's educational aspirations and achievements. Using in-depth life-story interviews with six women from three generations in a rural village, the study examines their lived experiences and roles in formal and informal education. Through generational narratives, this study examines themes of empowerment, resilience, and women's intrinsic agency within patriarchal contexts. It engages with the *Durga Saptasati* and the *Manusmriti*, which present contrasting representations of women's roles and social positions, to trace changes in educational opportunities and social mobility in Nepal. The study adopts qualitative methods, including life story interviews and thematic analysis, from the perspective of feminist theory, gender studies, and cultural and religious frameworks. The findings highlight the substantial yet often underrecognized role of women, particularly mothers and grandmothers, in supporting social and educational transformation across generations. Despite enduring structural constraints, women's contributions to education have expanded over time, positioning them as key agents of change. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for further research and policy initiatives that acknowledge and strengthen women's role in promoting educational equity and broader societal development.

Keywords: cultural heritage, patriarchy, women's empowerment, educational mobility, intergenerational transformation

Women's Inherent Power and Educational Transformation in Nepal

Women's experiences in Nepal are shaped by diverse social, cultural, economic, and familial contexts, within which gender roles and educational opportunities are continuously negotiated across communities and generations (Acharya & Bennett, 1981; Bennett, 1983). Feminist scholars argue that women's agency is socially constructed and negotiated within systems of power and cultural expectations (Gilligan, 1982; hooks, 1994). Despite women's significant contributions to family and society, their role in educational transformation has often remained underrecognized within the broader intersection of cultural traditions, religious narratives, and deeply rooted patriarchal structures. This study, *Women's Inherent Power and Educational Transformation in Nepal*, examines how culturally mediated forms of feminine agency influence women's educational aspirations, intergenerational mobility, and social transformation within rural Nepalese society.

The study draws on qualitative data from unstructured interviews with six women across three generations from the remote village of Gorkha District. It adopts religious socio-cultural analytical framework to examine how women negotiate agency, resilience, and empowerment within restrictive social systems. By foregrounding lived experiences, the study reveals women not merely as passive recipients of tradition but as active agents facilitating educational mobility, particularly through their roles within the family. Nepal's predominantly Hindu socio-cultural context has historically shaped gender norms through canonical texts such as the *Manusmriti*, which have contributed to institutionalizing gender hierarchies and limiting women's access to education and public life. However, these same cultural frameworks also contain counter-narratives of feminine power embedded in religious and mythological traditions. This duality creates a contested ideological space where subordination and empowerment coexist.

To interrogate this paradox, the study employs the *Durga Saptasati (Chandi)* as an interpretative framework. The text's representation of the Nava Durga symbolizes multiple dimensions of feminine power, including knowledge, courage, resilience, and transformation. These symbolic constructs are analytically mapped onto the lived realities of women across generations, enabling a critical exploration of how cultural imaginaries of divine femininity intersect with everyday practices of gendered limitation.

The findings highlight a persistent contradiction: while feminine power is culturally admired in symbolic and religious forms, women's autonomy in education and decision-making remains constrained by patriarchal norms. Despite these structural limitations, women demonstrate significant transformative capacity by prioritizing their children's education, thereby enabling gradual yet substantive shifts in educational access and social mobility.

This study contributes to the literature by bridging cultural-religious discourse with empirical narratives, offering a nuanced understanding of how women's agency is negotiated within, rather than outside, dominant socio-cultural frameworks. It advances the argument that women's empowerment in Nepal is not solely a function of modern institutional reform but is deeply embedded in, and continuously reshaped through, cultural and intergenerational processes.

Literature Review

The relationship between women's cultural capital, traditional cultural narratives, and educational transformation remains insufficiently explored in the Nepalese context. While existing scholarship has addressed women's social status, cultural representation, and educational participation, less attention has been given to how culturally embedded narratives shape women's educational experiences and intergenerational contributions to social change.

Research on Nepal consistently identifies patriarchal norms and entrenched gender roles as key factors shaping women's access to education and public life. Although educational reforms and expanded schooling opportunities have improved female participation, persistent socio-cultural and institutional barriers continue to limit substantive gender equity (Kuteesa et al., 2024). This suggests that increased access to education alone is insufficient to transform deeply rooted structures influencing women's empowerment.

Within Nepal's cultural and religious landscape, feminine divine figures such as the Nine Durgas represent powerful symbolic constructions of strength, wisdom, and agency. Rooted in Hindu traditions and texts such as the *Durga Saptashati*, these representations reflect culturally embedded ideals of feminine power and leadership, as interpreted in Hindu goddess traditions (Kinsley, 1986; Hawley & Wulff, 1998). However, while such symbolic frameworks construct positive ideals of womanhood, limited empirical research has examined how these representations translate into women's lived educational trajectories and social participation.

Recent scholarship further highlights women's dual roles in cultural preservation and socioeconomic transformation. Women actively engage in sustaining cultural practices while simultaneously pursuing educational and professional aspirations, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in shaping gender roles (Bennett, 2005; Leve, 2007). Similarly, research across South Asia suggests that cultural norms operate not only as constraints but also as potential resources for women's empowerment and educational mobility (Nanda, 2020).

Despite these insights, a significant gap persists in understanding how religious and cultural narratives collectively shape women's educational pathways across generations. Existing studies tend to treat women's empowerment, educational attainment, and cultural symbolism as separate analytical domains. Moreover, insufficient attention has been given to the contrasting ideological narratives embedded within Hindu textual traditions, particularly the empowering symbolism of the *Durga Saptashati* and the prescriptive gender hierarchies articulated in the *Manusmriti*. The ways in which these competing narratives influence educational aspirations, opportunities, and intergenerational transformation remain underexplored.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts an intergenerational analytical framework to examine how cultural and religious narratives shape women's roles in educational transformation in Nepal. By integrating cultural capital theory with gender and education discourse, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how culturally embedded symbolic resources may both enable and constrain educational equity and social change.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study adopts a localized feminist theoretical framework to examine how women in rural Nepal negotiate educational experiences within patriarchal socio-cultural contexts. The framework draws on symbolic narratives associated with the *Durga Saptasati* and the *Manusmriti* to analyze how gendered meanings, expectations, and power relations are culturally constructed and negotiated in everyday life. Rather than treating these texts as deterministic, the study approaches them as culturally embedded discursive systems that shape social imagination and gendered subjectivities in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

The study conceptualizes agency from a feminist perspective as relational and contextually produced through everyday practices, caregiving roles, and intergenerational responsibilities rather than solely through individual autonomy. Through life-history narratives

across three generations, the study explores how women negotiate, reinterpret, and reshape dominant gender expectations within educational contexts in rural Nepal.

Methodology

The study involved six women from a remote Brahmin community in Nepal, representing three generations: two aged over 60 years, two aged 30–60 years, and two aged 18–30 years. Participants were purposively selected to explore intergenerational experiences of education, caregiving, resilience, and gendered social norms. Older participants were married with children and had limited formal education, whereas younger participants were unmarried and formally educated.

Data were collected between September and October 2024 through life-history interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were supplemented by informal conversations. Data from observations, interviews, and document analysis were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation of life stories, textual evidence, and observation revealed women's resilience, inherited power, and the constraints imposed by patriarchal norms across three generations in rural Nepal. Focusing on a single community enabled an in-depth examination of intergenerational change within a shared socio-cultural context. While the study does not seek generalization of findings to the Nepalese context, it provides context-specific insights into women's educational experiences. Limitations include the small sample size and focus on a single caste community.

Findings and Discussion

The study was conducted in a rural village in Nepal, where a significant portion of the population remains uneducated. Men often seek employment abroad, primarily in India, or work in the local tourism sector, leaving women to manage households independently. Single women frequently assume full responsibility for the education, health, and well-being of their children, shouldering multiple domestic and caregiving tasks. This gendered division of labor significantly shapes the village's social and economic dynamics. To explore women's transformative roles, the study adopts a generational perspective, analyzing life stories to understand how women navigate evolving responsibilities and societal constraints. For instance, Kanchiaama (pseudonym), a 67-year-old participant from the first generation, recounts her experiences as:

...We needed to keep our husband happy. As daughters-in-law, our duties were limited to household chores such as cooking, cleaning, collecting grass and water, and caring for animals. A woman's main role was considered to be childbirth, and only then was life seen as complete. We lived in constant fear of failing to satisfy husbands, in-laws, and family expectations. We were not allowed to go out freely, speak openly, or even raise our heads. Our lives were confined within the household, with obedience and silence expected. In contrast, the younger generation is seen as fortunate, educated, free, and able to work and move outside unlike our time, when even a kind word from a husband or in-laws was considered a rare moment of happiness.

Kanchiaama's narrative highlights how patriarchal family structures confined women to domestic roles, with expectations of obedience, caregiving, and limited mobility. Her experience reflects broader gender norms associated with the Manusmriti, which simultaneously acknowledge women's symbolic importance while reinforcing male guardianship and dependence. Together, these contradictions illustrate how women in Nepal have been historically valued in principle but constrained in practice, shaping enduring patterns of gender inequality and limited autonomy. Further, she remembers:

...I got married while I was 7 years old. I did not know what marriage is. I still remember my mom asked me to take care of my husband. Do whatever they ask me to do, eat what they give me to eat, not speak in loud voice, nor raise a question. Also ordered me to work all household chores. So, I entered the new house with fear. I am always scared with my husband and in law. I had to carry water in big pot from far. It was bigger than me. If I could not do or refused to do, I would have scolded. So, I used to do as I was taught to do. I always follow better to remain quite rather than to speak.

This life story illustrates how women in the past were constrained by patriarchal norms, with their pivotal roles often underrepresented in historical records. Nepal's educational system continues to exhibit gender disparities, despite progress in female enrollment at various levels (UNESCO, 2019). Disparities are particularly pronounced at secondary and tertiary levels, where girls' enrollment and retention rates remain lower than those of boys. Cultural norms and religious beliefs strongly influence women's access to education, while safety concerns and gender-based violence further restrict participation. Early marriage, household responsibilities,

and societal prioritization of boys' education contribute to higher dropout rates among girls (UNESCO, 2019).

In this context, second-generation participant Sita (pseudonym, 42 years) narrates her experiences:

I was at the end of class 9, meanwhile my parents were looking for a groom for my marriage. I liked to read further since I was good at studying. But my father asked me what if daughter studies. My mother, who was in my support, also said that though she had not seen the school and made me able to read. So according to her I needed to follow what my father wanted me to do. So, I got married. I left my study.

In the question of why she did not continue her study. She replied as:

I once thought about continuing my studies, but my husband was busy earning, so I focused on cooking and supporting him. Later, I became a mother and also took responsibility for my children, niece, and nephew. Over time, I became fully devoted to family care. Years passed quickly, and my children grew up well-educated and successful. My daughter is pursuing a doctorate, my elder son is an IT engineer, and my younger son is also doing well. I feel proud of their achievements. Although I did not pursue my own career, I believe I contributed by raising capable children, and I have no regrets.

This narrative illustrates how educational experiences and values have evolved across generations, highlighting shifts in women's empowerment and their navigation of societal constraints. The *Manusmriti*, an ancient legal text, presents a restrictive view of women's roles, particularly in chapter nine, codifying conservative gender norms and limiting women's autonomy. Historically, its prescriptions have shaped societal attitudes toward women's education, labor, and decision-making, reinforcing traditional patriarchal structures. Meanwhile, other participants from the first generation, Rita Aama (Pseudonym), share their stories as:

...recalls... I was only 12 years old when I got married. At that time, there was no emphasis on education for girls, we did not know why to school though we see some boys go school. And early marriage was common. I faced immense challenges as a young mother, shouldering the responsibility of raising children without the support of my husband was beyond the imagination. The struggle was further compounded by the deeply ingrained patriarchal laws and practices that limited her rights and opportunities.

But I worked hard and struggled. Over time, things began to change, and more people started sending their children to school.

She further recounts the pain of being denied educational opportunities, stating:

I saw literate men providing for their families, and it made me determined that my children should have the opportunity to go to school. However, my in-laws were reluctant to send my daughter to school. They were silent when it came to sending my son to an English-medium school, but they questioned the need to educate a daughter, saying, 'Why send her to school, when she will eventually be married off and go to another house?' Despite this, I fought hard for my daughter's education. Although I couldn't ensure she completed all her schooling, I at least succeeded in teaching her the basics, and she became able to read and write.

Rita Aama's experiences reflect how early marriage, gender inequality, and patriarchal norms shaped women's lives, while also demonstrating subtle forms of resistance through everyday agency. Despite structural constraints, she challenged gender norms by ensuring basic literacy for her daughter, contributing to intergenerational educational change. Interpreted through the Durga Saptasati, her actions symbolize feminine resilience and empowerment, similar to Durga's resistance against oppression. Her role as a mother aligns with broader cultural narratives such as Skandamata, highlighting women's influence as primary educators. Overall, her story shows how women negotiate patriarchy while gradually transforming educational opportunities across generations.

The narratives of Kanchiaama and Sita demonstrate various forms of feminine strength and wisdom, comparable to Shailaputri (stability and strength) and Brahmacharini (knowledge and devotion). These attributes, resilience, courage, knowledge, and maternal guidance, can positively influence educational settings. Women who draw inspiration from these spiritual symbols often play pivotal roles in advocating for educational change. They are not only spiritual guides but active agents shaping educational practices through their leadership and vision, influencing the academic trajectories of their children and others in the community.

Priya, a 21-year-old representative of the third generation, provides an illustrative example. Her academic achievements reflect the values and teachings passed down from spiritually empowered women, highlighting how cultural and spiritual influences can bridge traditional wisdom and modern educational pursuits. Her experience underscores the

intergenerational transmission of empowerment and the transformative potential of combining cultural heritage with educational access.

.... Ya I can get into MBBS...hmm...Going to be Dr. soon. All credit goes to my mom. Ya, no doubt for papa since he has been working hard for money making but all the way our mom is inspiration. She took care of us, forgetting herself. Her inspiration, love and care motivated me to hard work. Not only had that she waited till midnight with coffee cup during my exams and study. Her hair massage during my tiredness lead me to effortless study. And the result is here. I am successful. So, credit goes to her. The interesting thing is that many girls are successful this time rather than boys.

Thus, when analyzing Priya's story and experience from the perspective of Durga from the *Durga Saptasati*, it highlights her mother's powerful role as a nurturing, protective, and empowering figure in her life. Her success as a doctor is not just a reflection of Priya's hard work but also of the strength, love, and wisdom imparted to her by her mother, much like how Durga's strength elevates her devotion to greatness.

Additionally, the study revealed a complicated and vibrant interchange between cultural narratives, gender norms, and women's educational opportunities in Nepal. By analyzing the contrasting portrayals of women, I saw the duality of patriarchal society. The research illuminated how traditional frameworks and social norms both empower and constrain women in their educational roles, especially across different generations. The findings show the power of so-called uneducated women in a society, their silent struggle to fight against the norms of patriarchy and their active participation in their children's formal and informal education. Since the *Durga Saptasati*, with its portrayal of the Nine Durgas, presents a powerful narrative of feminine transformation and divine strength, interviewees, particularly from younger generations, cited the influence of the mother figure as an important source of inspiration in contrast to the *Manusmriti*, which reinforces patriarchal norms and presents a restrictive view of women's roles in society. Women from older generations often spoke about how society limited their autonomy, particularly in areas like education and public participation. Additionally, 21-year-old Riya (pseudonym) narrates her struggle:

... I grew up in a village with my mother, while my father had gone to Dubai in search of better income opportunities. Although he frequently sent us money, my mother was the one who had to look after me and my brother. She managed all the household chores,

ensured there was enough food, and took care of our school clothes, health, and medicines. All these responsibilities fell solely on her shoulders. Despite the challenges, she worked tirelessly, and her hard work has always inspired me to do the same. She is my role model. I am now planning to go abroad to earn money, with the goal of keeping my mother happy and content, providing her with the life she deserves.

While analyzing Riya's story her empowerment comes from within, since Durga is not only a warrior but also a symbol of spiritual and personal strength. In the context of Riya, her mother is a role model, demonstrating the power of resilience and hard work. Just as Durga is a source of inspiration to her devotees, her mother's relentless efforts to keep the family going in difficult circumstances have inspired her. Her ability to take on all the responsibilities of the household, despite the absence of father, shows an inner strength that encourages you to work hard and follow in her footsteps. Durga, as the divine feminine, is a powerful force, and similarly, Riya's mother embodies this power in her own way. In the village women have been historically portrayed. They are walking on the track that are shown by society. The paradox is they are ruling and transforming their society and culture but still they are unknown to inherited power. They think their duties are to keep the family and laws happy since they heard in Purans. The fear of Sin is created among the women. Freedom is constrained

Similarly, though the 56th verse of the Third chapter of Manusmriti narrates "The gods are pleased with the clan where a woman is worshiped, the clan where the woman is not worshiped and respected, the work will be worst and result less in the Clan." But on the 11th verse of the 9th chapter, it is mentioned that women can be appointed as helpers to clean and care for the house. Which means men employ women in the collection of wealth, expenditure, purification of goods and materials, service of laws and husbands, and cleaning of the household chores. This has limited women and their role in society. There is no role for women in leadership, nor in education, and the role provided to females in society, inspired by Manusmriti, can be a restriction for female roles, expectations, and empowerment. The role they are provided with in society does not require any formal education.

This comparative and comprehensive analysis has not only shed light on the cultural and religious influences on women's empowerment but also has provided a unique perspective on how traditional values and constraints have evolved over time. The progress and ongoing challenges faced by women in Nepal, particularly in the context of education and societal

participation, promote the transformative perspective of assimilating cultural values into educational practices.

There is a limited understanding of how these traditional portrayals influence contemporary women's experiences, particularly across generations. Specifically, how do the empowering attributes of the Nava Durga manifest in women's lives, and how have historical constraints shaped their educational opportunities and aspirations over time? This study has addressed these gaps by investigating the intergenerational impact of these norms on women's educational trajectories and empowerment. The traditional beliefs intersect with modern realities, influencing women's roles and access to education in Nepal.

Women are ruled through patriarchy. And storytelling is passed throughout the generations. Their roles are limited so the transformation of women's roles in Nepal requires a nuanced perspective that considers the socio-political and cultural shifts across different periods of time. Women's experiences across multiple generations, we can better understand how historical events, policies, and changing social norms have shaped women's access to education, their perceptions of empowerment, and their ability to manifest power within society. In this article, I utilize a generational framework to analyze the educational experiences of women in Nepal and explore how their agency has evolved over time. This analysis is framed around three distinct generations of women.

Through the struggled journeys, women have not only sought personal advancement but have also worked collectively to bring about social change. The interviews conducted with women from each of these generations will shed light on how their educational experiences reflect these shifting patterns of power and transformation. To explore further, these generational shifts, I conducted interviews with women from each of these cohorts for their life stories. Their personal stories provide invaluable insight into how the changing socio-political and educational landscape has shaped their experiences, and how they have navigated and challenged societal expectations. Women in Nepal have historically faced significant barriers to education, with cultural norms, limited access to resources, and patriarchal structures often limiting their opportunities. However, over the past few decades, women's roles in society and education have undergone dramatic shifts, with each generation contributing to an evolving landscape of female empowerment. This article adopts a generational framework to critically examine the ways in which women's access to education and their manifestation of power have changed over time in

Nepal. By analyzing the experiences of women across three different generations this article highlighted the intersections of historical, cultural, and personal forces that have shaped women's educational journeys. These generational cohorts reflect broader social, political, and educational transformations, providing a lens through which to understand how women's agencies and power have been forged, resisted, and reshaped over time. Interviews with women from each of these generations offer deeper insights into these shifts and reveal how educational access has influenced their ability to navigate societal constraints and contribute to the transformation of their communities.

The Manusmriti, one of the oldest and most influential Hindu texts, has long played a significant role in shaping the social roles of women in South Asia. It prescribes a rigid, hierarchical social order that places women in subservient roles, emphasizing their duty to serve their fathers, husbands, and sons. The text explicitly discourages women's education and intellectual development, reinforcing the belief that women's primary roles are within the household as wives and mothers.

In the context of the first generation of older women, the influence of the *Manusmriti* remained palpable. Women of this generation grew up in a society where traditional gender norms, rooted in ancient texts like the *Manusmriti*, restricted access to education and positioned women in secondary roles within both the family and society. When education was available, it was often considered secondary to domestic duties. Women such as Rita Aama, interviewed for this study, recalled: "In our community, girls were taught that their primary purpose was to serve the family, not to seek education. The very idea of a woman becoming educated was seen as a rebellion." Despite these constraints, Rita Aama's efforts to send her children to school demonstrate early forms of resistance against traditional ideals. For first-generation women, education was largely inaccessible, and their agency was constrained by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Many were married at a young age, sometimes before ten, and were taught primarily to fulfill domestic expectations. Nevertheless, they recognized the importance of education for the next generation, particularly for their sons, while their own educational ambitions were often suppressed.

Among second-generation, middle-aged women, there is evidence of a gradual shift in engagement with cultural and religious narratives. While societal norms remained patriarchal, texts like the *Durga Saptasati* became a source of symbolic empowerment. Women such as Sita

and Radha shared: “I grew up hearing about Goddess Durga and her power. I was taught that, like Durga, women could be strong and resilient. It gave me the strength to pursue my education, even when society told me it wasn’t my place.”

For these women, the symbolism of Durga inspired resilience and offered a framework to challenge traditional gender roles, allowing them to pursue educational opportunities despite societal constraints. This generation exemplifies a transitional phase, where spiritual and cultural narratives provide both guidance and motivation for educational empowerment.

The third generation, represented by younger women such as Priya and Riya, shows a further evolution. Education is increasingly recognized as a right rather than a privilege, and these women embrace leadership roles and societal participation. Riya explained: “Education is a right, not a privilege. It’s something that should be accessible to everyone, no matter their background or gender. I see it as my duty to not just get educated but to help others do the same. I want to be part of the change.” This generation integrates both educational access and spiritual inspiration from figures like Durga to challenge societal constraints. Many drew parallels between their mothers’ sacrifices and spiritual icons such as Shailaputri (foundation of education and nurturing), Brahmacharini (knowledge and devotion), and Skandamata (maternal guidance), recognizing how these forms of empowerment were passed intergenerationally.

The research highlights the dual influence of the *Manusmriti* and the *Durga Saptasati* on women’s role. The *Manusmriti* enforces patriarchal norms, limiting women’s mobility, access to education, and participation in public life, particularly among older generations though it also suggests worshipping the women as goddess. Conversely, the *Durga Saptasati* offers spiritual capital, encouraging women to assert agency, resist societal restrictions, and transform their social roles through education.

This generational analysis reveals a clear trajectory of educational empowerment among women in rural Nepal. For the First Generation, education was largely inaccessible, constrained by strict patriarchal norms, and women’s agency was severely limited. The Second-Generation experienced greater engagement with education alongside spiritual empowerment, as women began to challenge traditional gender roles and navigate new opportunities. By the Third Generation, education is widely embraced as a fundamental right, with women assuming leadership roles and pursuing broader societal transformation, inspired by both formal educational opportunities and spiritual models of empowerment. Despite the progress observed,

rural women's educational journeys remain hindered by societal, familial, and institutional resistance. Educational institutions often perpetuate gender disparities, and family priorities may favor male education. The study underscores the need for policy reforms and cultural shifts to support women's education, fostering an environment where educational empowerment can flourish alongside spiritual and cultural affirmation.

Finally, the research demonstrates that education, interwoven with cultural and spiritual narratives, serves as a tool for individual empowerment and collective societal change, highlighting the ongoing evolution of women's roles across generations in rural Nepal. Religious narratives such as the Durga Saptasati and the Manusmriti play a dual role in shaping women's lived experiences in rural Nepal by simultaneously constraining and enabling interpretations of feminine agency. While patriarchal readings associated with the Manusmriti reinforce gendered expectations around domesticity and limited mobility, symbolic representations of Durga as strength, protection, and resilience provide culturally embedded meanings through which women articulate their roles in caregiving and educational support. Rather than being passive recipients of these narratives, women actively interpret and negotiate them within everyday life, using culturally available symbols to legitimize their educational contributions across generations. From this perspective, feminine agency is not instinctive or essential, but relational and culturally mediated, emerging through the intersection of religious symbolism, social expectations, and intergenerational practices that collectively shape educational transformation in Nepal.

Conclusion

The findings highlight the continued symbolic significance of the *Durga Saptasati* as a cultural resource that embodies feminine strength and resilience. Rather than functioning as a fixed or deterministic framework, it operates as a source of cultural capital through which women interpret, negotiate, and sometimes challenge patriarchal norms. In contrast, enduring patriarchal prescriptions associated with texts such as the *Manusmriti* reflect persistent structural constraints that shape women's educational opportunities and social positioning.

Overall, the study shows that women's agency in education is relational, contextually produced, and continuously negotiated within family, cultural, and intergenerational structures. Education emerges not only as an instrument of individual advancement but also as a collective and generational process of social transformation and gender equity (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

The study contributes to feminist and educational scholarship by integrating cultural-religious narratives with lived intergenerational experiences in rural Nepal. It demonstrates that educational transformation cannot be understood solely through institutional expansion, but must also be examined through everyday cultural practices, caregiving relations, and evolving intergenerational dynamics that gradually reshape gendered possibilities.

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